



*Dawn - Tuesday  
morning at 5am*

## Awakening to Wonder

Some years ago a student friend of mine surprised me one day with a story he had written ..... It concerned a little boy – of about ten – growing up in an orphanage. One night in the large dormitory he wakes up in the dark but knows that the dawn can't be far away. It is summer time and there is a lake in the grounds of the orphanage. He feels a great urge to see the dawn at the lakeside but the rules are rigid: on no account should any child get up before the bell and it is strictly forbidden to leave the dormitory until the proper time. But he decides to risk it. He dresses quickly and creeps out, holding his shoes in his hand so as not to wake the others.

Then there is a long corridor and – a nice touch – all along this corridor are the pictures of the past presidents of the institution along one side and of saints on the other side. So the boy puts his head down and runs through the long corridor: he does not want his eyes to be caught by the disapproving glances of the figures on the walls. He comes to the lake and waits in darkness for the dawn, sure enough, the drama of day begins, and the colours change from orange to red to bright sun. He watches all this reflected in the water of the lake, absorbed by the sheer beauty of it. Then suddenly he remembers the time. They will be up by now. He will be missed. He will be in trouble. So he gets up to return and speaks his last words to the lake: 'I'll go back now. Thank you. I don't care if I'm punished. Because I know something now – I know that

the God of the lake is greater than the God of the orphanage.'

Over the years I have come back to that story as a simple but powerful evocation of where many people are as regards religion. Alas, they may have encountered only the orphanage age with its rules and codes and organisation. The God of the orphanage is worshipped in a religion of ritual. But the god of the lake is encountered in a way that goes beyond that into something of wonder and awe and freedom. More and more I am convinced that this is the most neglected door into faith today. There has been so much of excellent renewal but has it really touched people on any level of depth experience?

A central struggle for us all is to reach the hunger and wonder at the core of each person, or as they say in the East, to get to the cave of the heart where the Spirit dwells .... If I were asked what is the most critical religious need today, I would opt for this experience of mystery, whatever form it might take. Let us get away from rituals and into imagination, into a poetry that can reach people's shy hunger. I call it shy because the orphanage has so often ousted the lake. It is as if the little boy was doing something shameful in seeking out the space which his heart and imagination needed.

*Michael Paul Gallagher: WHERE IS YOUR  
GOD ( pp17-19)*