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Familiarity

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Familiarity

Some families are more close-knit than others, but most of us have expectations that family members will become quite familiar with one another's individual characteristics and will also care for one another. Persons outside of families sometimes develop bonds of familiarity that resemble in some ways the ideal closeness of family ties, yet they are different, no matter how deep the relationships become.

When some of us speak of familiarity with persons, including God, we are talking about ease of communication, not equality, and about unaffected sincerity and spontaneity rather than affected and rigid formality. We can have deep respect for persons (and this can include God) with whom we would never think of sharing an off-color joke, yet in whose presence we can be our most unguarded selves in terms of our feelings and thoughts, our ideals and aspirations, as well as our weaknesses and failings. Trust, in such relationships, is experienced as mutual positive regard more than it is understood as an intellectual definition or a doctrine.

When we consider our familiarity with anyone as a gift, we are unlikely to take such a person for granted. If there is any danger associated with familiarity, it would most likely arise from lack of reflection: never taking a moment to appreciate the value of the person with whom we have a relationship of trust, or to realize the unmerited privilege that is ours in relatively effortless freedom of interaction. Familiarity is not at all the same as perfunctory contact with people we might see every day.

We might more readily believe that a friend can enjoy familiarity with us than we can that God would appreciate such a relationship even more. Who are we that God would even care? On the other hand, if we think about it more deeply, who are we that anyone should be delighted to have ease of access to us? The mystery of friendship is deeper than we can comprehend, though we can appropriately treasure it without fully understanding it. For the "Inventor" both of humans and of the possibility of familiarity, there is no mystery, only a desire that we would freely participate in relationships of ever-deepening familiarity.

Familiarity with God has unique aspects as well having much in common with our experiences regarding all other persons as to understanding and feelings. Friends come to know us gradually, partly through the revelations we make of our inner selves and also through their observations of our words, actions, and appearance. As creator, God knows us better than we know ourselves, so familiarity depends upon the growth of our ease in

making self-revelations, not upon God somehow developing a growing acceptance and appreciation for us.

The “welcome mat” for us is placed, not outside God’s door, as if we need to come in for conversations, but within our hearts, where honesty and willingness to be open to our experience are all that are required for a relationship of familiarity to arise.