



# KNOWLEDGE AND MYSTERY AT THE CENTER OF ALL BEING

SEEING THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

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AN EXPLORATION *of* IDEAS



# OUR JOURNEY TONIGHT

An exploration of knowledge and mystery about...

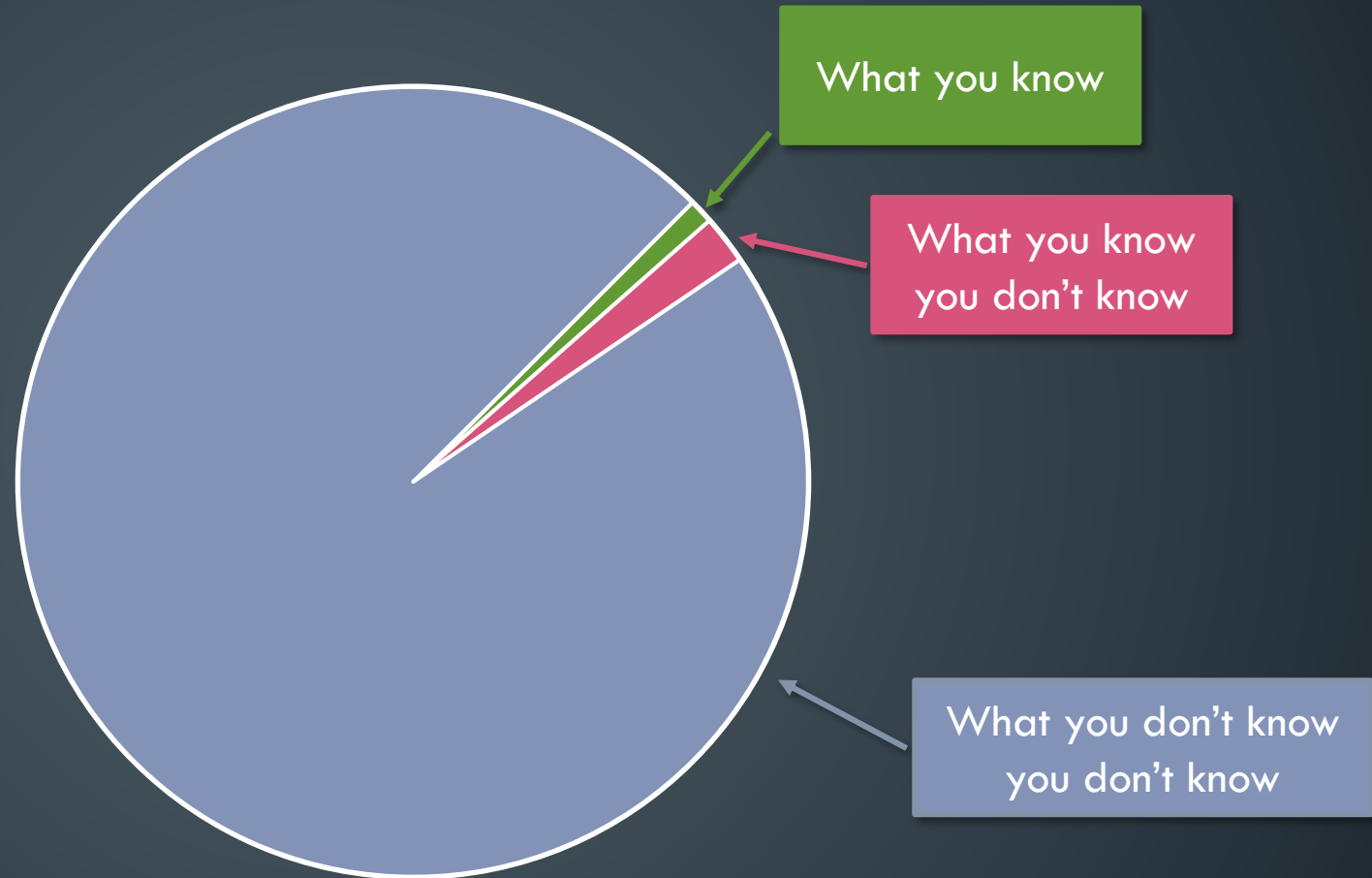
- God
- The Universe
- Ourselves

“All that we know is that nothing can be known.”

- Socrates (400 BC)



# KNOWLEDGE & MYSTERY





PART 1

GOD



GOD IS...

God > ∞  
EXPRESSIONS  
ATTRIBUTES

The only attributes we know of are material  
manifestation, consciousness and love.



GOD IS...



The matrix of our universe

- Material manifestation
- Consciousness
- Love

What we don't know  
we don't know

And we don't even have the  
capacity to imagine most of it.



## WHAT CAN WE SAY OF GOD?

- St. Gregory (4<sup>th</sup> c.):  
We cannot rightly speak of God at all.
- Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (4<sup>th</sup> c.):  
Thought cannot comprehend God.
- Pseudo Dionysius (6<sup>th</sup> c.):  
All those who want to make statements about God are wrong, for they fail to say anything about him. Those who want to say nothing about him are right, for no word can express God.





## WHAT CAN WE SAY OF GOD?

- St. John of the Cross (16<sup>th</sup> c.):  
There are many attributes of God that we know nothing about – we have no concept or experience of.
- Bede Griffiths (20<sup>th</sup> c.):  
All concepts of God are utterly ludicrous.
- Merton (20<sup>th</sup> c.):  
All concepts about God are ‘raids on the unutterable’ (the unspeakable, the unreachable)
- Wayne Teasdale (20<sup>th</sup> c.):  
We can’t even reflect on the other attributes of God.







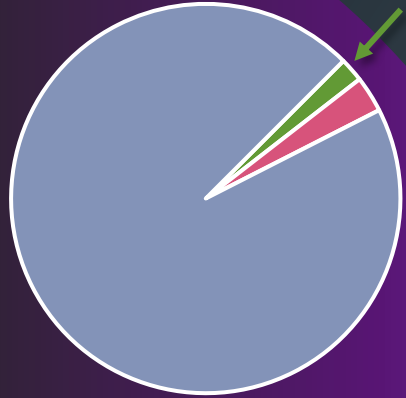
# WISDOM

“All of this sets the horizon on the possibility of our mystical knowledge – of all our knowledge – it says to us “guess what, you’re never going to figure it out.” Therefore, what is the attitude one acquires? Humility. We should have courses in humility.”

– Wayne Teasdale



What we know



# KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

## Divine Revelation

GOD's side  
(objective)

I AM

Our side  
(subjective)

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

GOD in Nature (in All)

GOD as One (Sh'ma yisrael adonai eloheinu adonai ehad)

GOD as Love (total, self-sacrificing, relational)

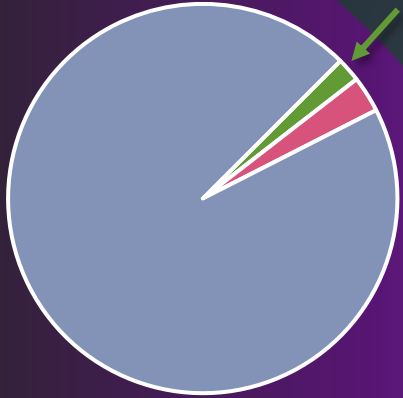
GOD as Divine Indwelling

Revelation: The foundation of religion, theology, dogma, beliefs, arguments, holy wars ... and a lot less than the mystery of





What we know



# KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

## Divine Revelation

GOD's side  
(objective)

Our side  
(subjective)

OM

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

GOD in Nature (in All)

GOD as One (Sh'ma yisrael adonai eloheinu adonai ehad)

GOD as Love (total, self-sacrificing, relational)

GOD as Divine Indwelling

Humility and wonder: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1 Cor 13:12)





## PART 1: GOD

### *I Looked Up*

I looked up and there it was  
among the green branches of the pitchpines –

thick bird,  
a ruffle of fire trailing over the shoulders  
and down the back –

color of copper, iron, bronze –  
lighting up the dark branches of the pine.

What misery to be afraid of death.  
What wretchedness, to believe only in what can be proven.

When I made a little sound  
it looked at me, then it looked past me.

Then it rose, the wings enormous and opulent,  
and, as I said, wreathed in fire.

- Mary Oliver

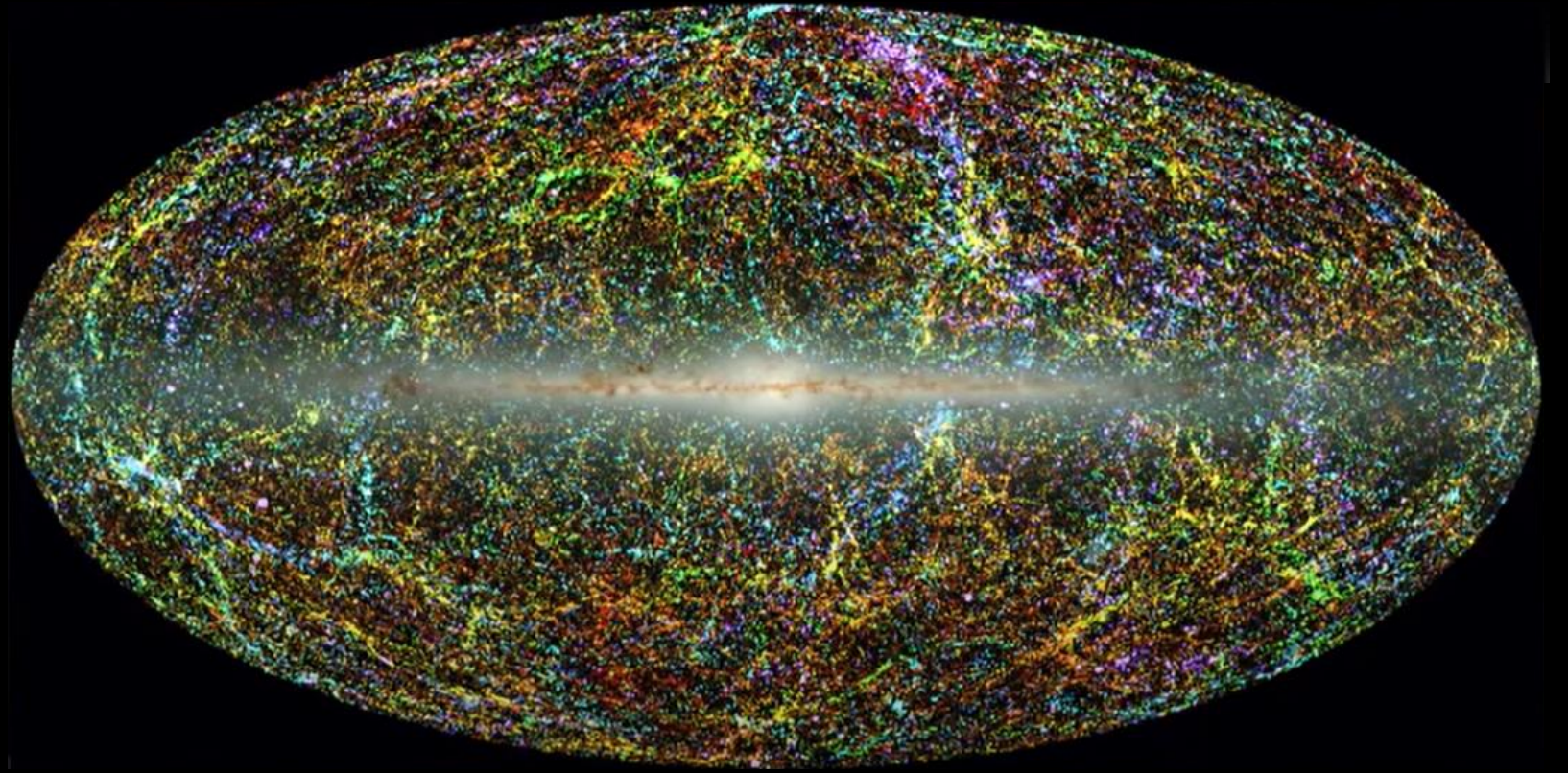




PART 2

# THE UNIVERSE

# THE UNIVERSE





# A BRIEF HISTORY

2000 years ago, stars were...

- The souls of warriors
- Golden nail heads holding up the ceiling of the universe
- Lamps suspended by strings held by angels
- The source of myth & legends

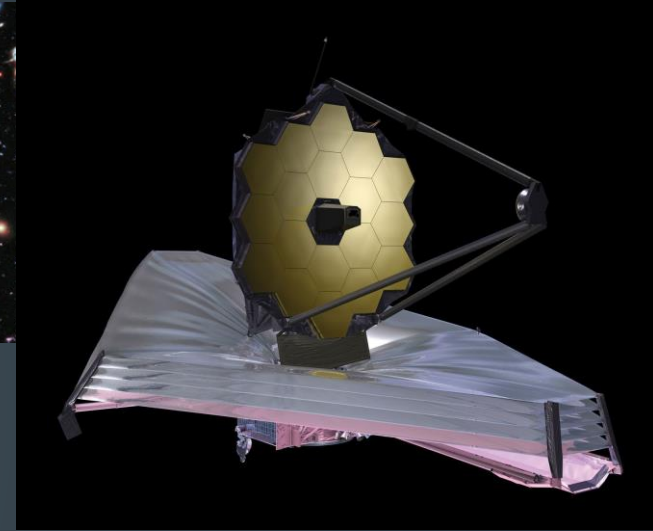
And until 1550's...

- The universe revolved around the earth



# A BRIEF HISTORY

- 1600's: Bruno burned at the stake because 'other solar systems exist'  
Galileo convicted of heresy for heliocentrism
- 1923: Other galaxies exist
- 1995: Hubble deep field image
- 2022: JWST
- 2023: JWST data leads to questioning the Standard Model of Big Bang cosmology

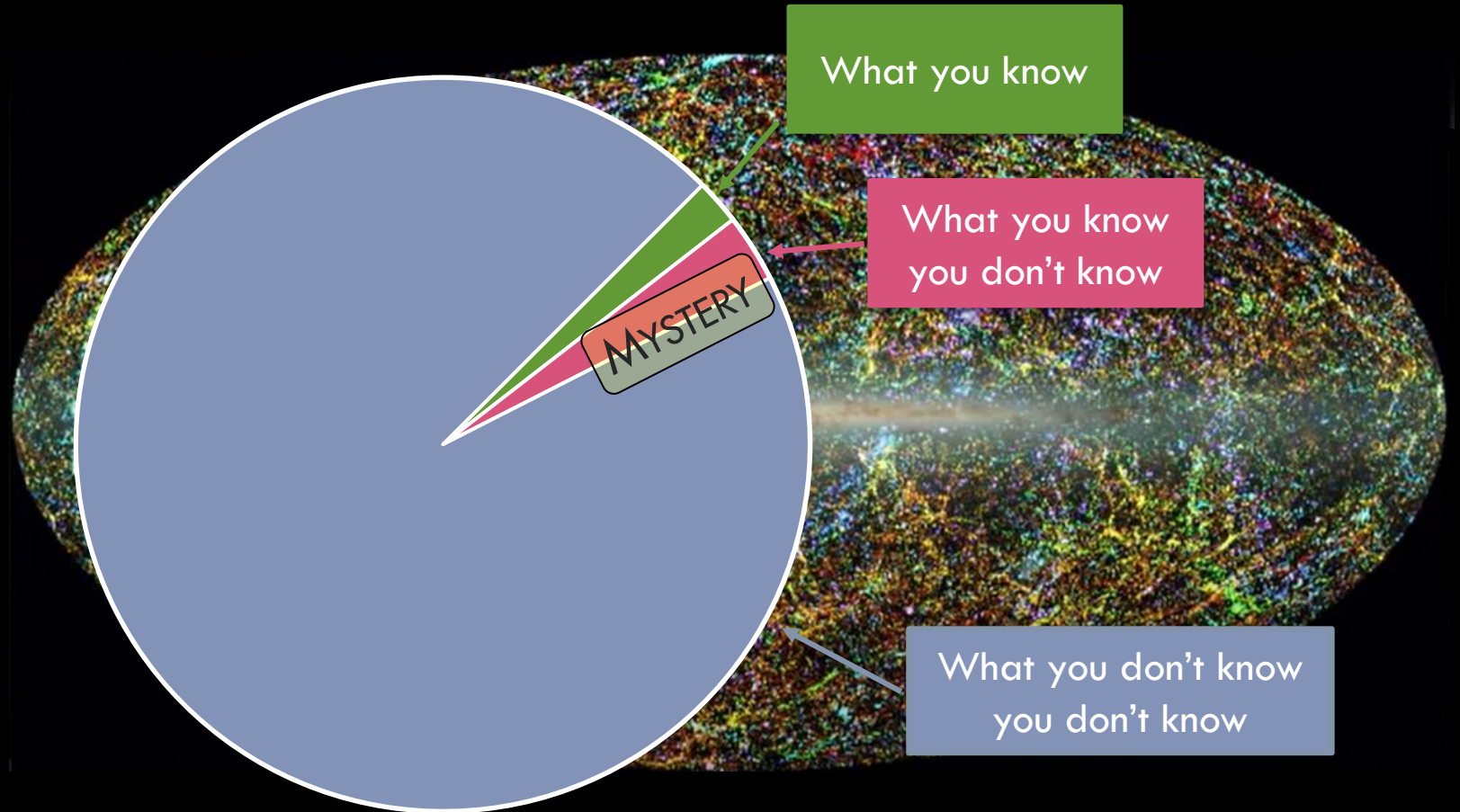


*The God that dwells in the Temple of Astronomy is a God who has created not only our own universe whose immensity we cannot grasp, but millions of such universes, and has sent them all spinning with perfect harmony through everlasting time and space.*

- U. C. Taylor, 1931  
Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada



# THE UNIVERSE ...SO WHAT?



Increasing knowledge doesn't decrease mystery  
(it gives us more, bigger and better questions to ponder!)



Which brings us back to humility



Rho Ophiuchi cloud complex, James Webb Space Telescope, NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI

# AND HOW WE SEE IS IMPORTANT

## *Mindful*

Every day  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less  
kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle  
in the haystack  
of light.

It was what I was born for -  
to look, to listen,  
to lose myself  
inside this soft world -  
to instruct myself  
over and over  
in joy,  
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,  
the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant -  
but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,  
the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help  
but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these -  
the untrimmable light  
of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?

- Mary Oliver

Am I in contact with the mystery?





PART 3

# OURSELVES



# SELF KNOWLEDGE

“For I was conscious that I knew practically nothing.”

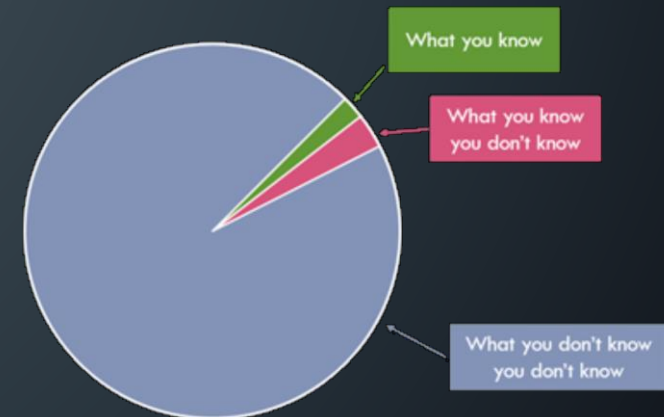
- Socrates (400 BC)



# WHO AM I?

## Know thyself...

- Astrology
- Afflictive emotions & suffering
- Rise of psychology, MBTI, Enneagram
- Energy Centers
- Models of False Self, True Self
- Work: Chief Feature, Self Observation, the Commentaries
- Models of levels of consciousness





# WHAT AM I?

- In life, it's all about what we know
- In God, it's all about what we are
- Knowledge gets us to 499...

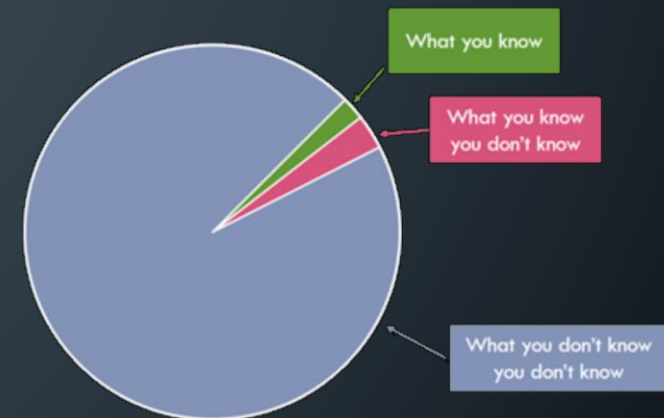
What I know  
I could put into a pack

as if it were bread and cheese, and carry it  
on one shoulder,

important and honorable, but so small!  
While everything else continues, unexplained  
and unexplainable.

From *What is There Beyond Knowing?*  
Mary Oliver

...and then there's letting go into the mystery





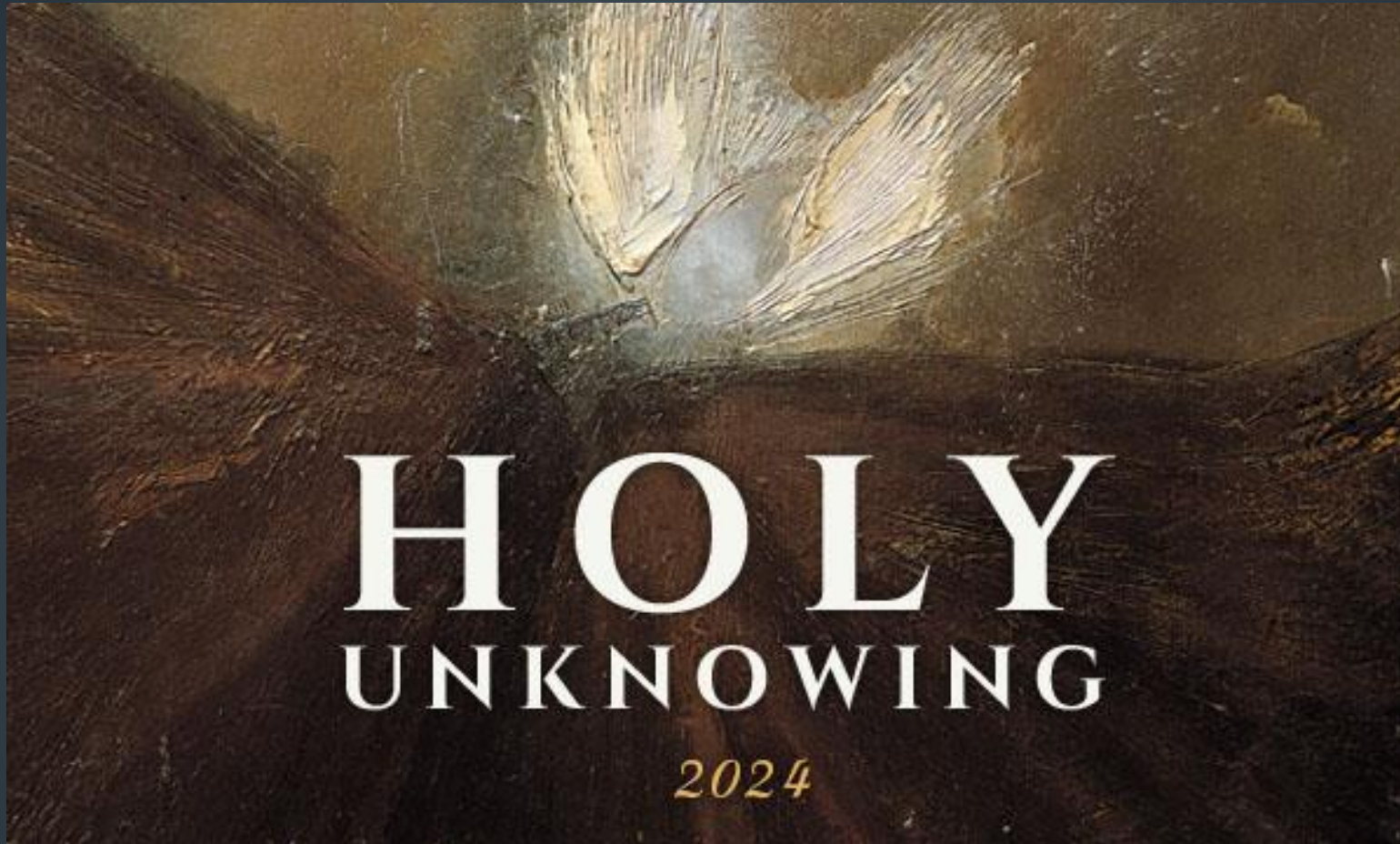
No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with knowledge, but each one, in a different way, can grasp God fully through love. Truly this is the unending miracle of love: that one loving person, through their love, can embrace God, whose being fills and transcends the entire creation.

So I prefer to abandon all that I know, choosing rather to love God whom I cannot know.

- The Cloud of Unknowing, Ch. 4, 6







Read Maurice Nicoll's  
Commentary, "Unknowing,"  
Vol. 5, pp. 1753-1760

# *What is There Beyond Knowing?*

*(Mary Oliver)*

What is there beyond knowing that keeps  
calling to me? I can't

turn in any direction  
but it's there. I don't mean

the leaves' grip and shine or even the thrush's  
silk song, but the far-off

fires, for example,  
of the stars, heaven's slowly turning

theater of light, or the wind  
playful with its breath;

or time that's always rushing forward,  
or standing still

in the same -- what shall I say --  
moment.

What I know  
I could put into a pack

as if it were bread and cheese, and carry it  
on one shoulder,

important and honorable, but so small!  
While everything else continues, unexplained

and unexplainable. How wonderful it is  
to follow a thought quietly

to its logical end.  
I have done this a few times.

But mostly I just stand in the dark field,  
in the middle of the world, breathing

in and out. Life so far doesn't have any other name  
but breath and light, wind and rain.

If there's a temple, I haven't found it yet.  
I simply go on drifting, in the heaven of the grass  
and the weeds.