**STORY: CATHEDRAL OF THE WORLD**

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Imagine awaking one morning from a deep and dreamless sleep to find yourself in the nave of a vast cathedral. Like a child newborn, untutored save to moisture, nurture, rhythm, and the profound comforts at the heart of darkness, you open your eyes upon a world unseen, indeed unimaginable, before. It is a world of light and dancing shadow, stone and glass, life and death. This second birth, at once miraculous and natural, is in some ways not unlike the first. A new awakening, it consecrates your life with sacraments of pain you do not understand and promised joy you will never fully call your own.

Such awakenings may happen only once in a lifetime, or many times. But when they do, what you took for granted before is presented as a gift: difficult, yet precious and good. Not that you know what to do with your gift, or even what it really means, only how much it matters. Awakening to the call stirring deep within you, the call of life itself—the call of God—you begin your pilgrimage.

Before you do, look about you; contemplate the mystery and contemplate with awe. This cathedral is as ancient as humankind, its cornerstone the first altar, marked with the tincture of blood and stained with tears. Search for a lifetime (which is all you are surely given) and you shall not know its limits, visit all its transepts, worship at its myriad shrines, nor span its celestial ceiling with your gaze. The builders have worked from time immemorial, destroying and creating, confounding and perfecting, tearing down and raising up arches in this cathedral, buttresses and chapels, organs and theaters, chancels and transepts, gargoyles, idols, and icons. Not a moment passes without work being begun that shall not be finished in the lifetime of the architects who planned it, the patrons who paid for it, the builders who construct it, or the expectant worshippers. Throughout human history, one generation after another has labored lovingly, sometimes fearfully, crafting memorials and consecrating shrines. Untold numbers of these collect dust in long-undisturbed chambers; others (cast centuries or eons ago from their once-respected places) lie shattered in chards or ground into powder on the cathedral floor. Not a moment passes without the dreams of long-dead dreamers being outstripped, shattered, or abandoned, giving way to new visions, each immortal in reach, ephemeral in grasp.

Welcome to the Cathedral of the World.

Above all else, contemplate the windows. In the Cathedral of the World there are windows without number, some long forgotten, covered with many patinas of grime, others revered by millions, the most sacred of shrines. Each in its own way is beautiful. Some are abstract, others representational; some dark and meditative, others bright and dazzling. Each window tells a story about the creation of the world, the meaning of history, the purpose of life, the nature of humankind, the mystery of death. The windows of the cathedral are where the light shines through.

Because the cathedral is so vast, our time so short, and our vision so dim, over the course of our pilgrimage we are able to contemplate only a tiny part of the cathedral, explore a few apses, reflect upon the play of darkness and light through a few of its windows. Yet, by pondering and acting on our ruminations, we discover insights that will invest our days with meaning.

A twenty-first-century theology based on the concept of one light and many windows offers its adherents both breadth and focus. Honoring multiple religious approaches, it only excludes the truth claims of absolutists. That is because fundamentalists claim that the light shines through their window only...

Skeptics draw the opposite conclusion. Seeing the bewildering variety of windows and observing the folly of the worshippers, they conclude there is no light. But the windows are not the light. They are where the light shines through.

We shall never see the light directly, only as refracted through the windows of the cathedral. Prompting humility, life's mystery lies hidden. The light is veiled. Yet, being halfway in size between the creation itself and our body's smallest constituent part, that we can encompass with our minds the universe that encompasses us is a cause for great wonder. Awakened by the light, we stand in the cathedral, trembling with awe.