

“Is There a Santa Claus?”

from <http://www.newseum.org/exhibits/online/yes-virginia/>

“Dear Editor: I am 8 years old.
Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.
Papa says, ‘If you see it in *“The Sun”* it’s so.’
Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?”

Virginia O’Hanlon,
115 West Ninety-Fifth Street”

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.¹

¹ <http://www.newseum.org/exhibits/online/yes-virginia/>

Excerpt from *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* by Catherine Keller

Theological language is an odd mix: of vivid story-characters extracted from scripture and the most cosmically stretched ideas from ancient Greek philosophy onward. I love this mix. But it is complex – and dangerous, when we neglect its complexity. From the rich and messy set of narratives comprising the Bible, certain metaphoric themes were lifted up, repeated, generalized – a process of abstraction beginning to happen with the Bible itself, at least in Paul’s writing, touched by Greek Stoic philosophy. Abstraction is a necessary art of any reflective process. But by means of these abstractions, stories have been often dogmatically pounded into simple propositions of belief. These abstractions are convenient. But they too easily mask the complex mix of metaphor, history, and philosophy. Indeed, they may disguise the metaphors as pseudo-facts.

When we forget that these metaphors are metaphors, when we think, for instance, that the metaphor of “God the Father Almighty” refers in a direct and factual way to an entity up there, we are committing what the philosopher of process, Alfred North Whitehead, called “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” Those concrete attributes of fatherhood refer to the particular experiences of biological fathers within the context of a monotheistic patriarchy, in which an “almighty” deity could of course only be imagined as masculine. The fallacy lies in confusing the concreteness of metaphors derived from a particular, finite historical context with the infinity we may call – for want of a better word – “God.” *Literalism* is the simple word for this fallacy. It freezes theology into single meanings. Instead of flowing from an inexhaustible truth-*process*, meaning gets trapped in a truth-*stasis*.²

² Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 14 – 15.