Art is the daughter of the divine.

—Rudolf Steiner

What is art, and what is the divine? Is there a relationship between the two? There are many ways to define art, but in very simple terms, art is the expression of human creativity. A work of art is the end result of one or more humans making unique connections—connections within the self of the artist and connections with the external world of persons and things. On most occasions, the artist feels an expansion of his or her self as these new connections are made. Further, the audience, reader, or viewer of the art work also feels an expansion of his or her self as new connections are discovered in the presence of the work of art. This expansion is similar to the joys of learning a new skill, like learning a new computer software program or learning to ride a bike. We delight in learning and feeling our inner-selves growing.

This artistic expansion of our selves through new connections can come in many forms: empathizing with the emotions of characters in an ancient drama, a sense of awe when viewing a landscape painting, or a sense of fear when short-story character walks into a dark, mysterious room. Art enriches our lives with all sorts of new connections.

But what is the relationship between art and the spiritual? Before we can solve that question, we need to ask, what is the spiritual? The term spiritual is often associated with "the beyond;" it is associated with truths and experiences which transcend our immediate experiences. When we are aware of the spiritual, we are discovering unique connections, just as art helps us discover new connections.

The term "beyond" is helpful in thinking about the spiritual, but a better term might be "ultimate." When people define the spiritual as the "beyond," the conclusion is easily made that the spiritual features of life are attachments or extensions of "normal life." And for some people, religion and spiritual concerns are minor additions to "real" life. However, for many other people around the world, the spiritual issues of life are the central or essential qualities of life. It is the spiritual which gives meaning, order, and unity to everything—from the universe as a whole to our private selves. From this perspective, the "beyond" is really the "ultimate," and it needs to be carefully studied and considered as the most important feature of life.

Once again, both art and the spiritual draw us into new connections with the world and with ourselves. They help us move from our immediate experiences with the physical world to a new awareness of a deeper reality. With the intangible, creative energy of our minds and hearts, we make pieces of art which are very physical. Yet, those physical things (novels, poems, paintings, etc.) often point us toward the ultimate—the spiritual. In the same way, our spiritual longings, questions, and experiences lead us to write religious textbooks and perform religious rites which are very physical. Yet, those physical books and religious actions point to the spiritual. In both art and religion, an
intangible dimension of life becomes physical, yet that physical thing points us back to the intangible again. Put another way: the spiritual and creative energy within humans produces concrete things (a sculpture or a cathedral), but those things are not the goal of art or of religion. The objects of art and religion lead people to intangible experiences and truths.

When we stretch ourselves and go beyond the immediate, physical world, we begin to move into either the realm of the creative or the realm of the spiritual. When we are creative, we are stepping out of the world as it currently exists, and we are looking for new possibilities or at least new connections between things which already exist. When we seek the spiritual, we are stepping out of the immediate, physical world of daily experience, and we are seeking to know and experience God and our souls.

Thus, Steiner, from a certain perspective, is right: "Art is the daughter of the divine." To add another step, religion is also the daughter of the divine. When we creatively explore and experience things beyond the immediate physical world a metaphorical child is born. Sometimes that child is religion, and sometimes it is a work of art. In either case, we are building and delighting in new connections. And in either case, our inner selves are expanding.

This anthology of literary works gives a taste of some of the ways writers have explored, shared, dismissed, or argued about the ultimate, spiritual questions of life. The first goal of this book is to give a range of works which show how authors can take us beyond our immediate, daily experience. The mere exposure to these works is intellectually enriching, emotionally expanding, and suggestive of new ways the reader can consider the connection between the spiritual and literature.

The second, more subtle, goal of this work is that readers will seek to find health in their spiritual lives. Today's culture is filled with distractions and amusements which draw our attention to the immediate and not to the "beyond." Further, today's electronic culture of instant communication and short bits of data does not encourage us to explore our long-term needs – such as inner rest, peace with God, and calm love for each other. In spite of radical differences, the religions of the world share a common concern: humanity is searching for a spiritual peace which can give the individual an anchor to survive the storms of life. Understanding this need, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27, King James Version). The editors of this anthology have their firm conclusions about how people can find peace with God. They invite you to also explore this issue for yourself. They hope that these selections will challenge you to seek the personal peace and spiritual health which Jesus promised.

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