"and fantasy is a stronger force than reason. Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings."

"and learns from the Abbess across the water a lesson many of Murdoch’s characters learn in extremis, that the true spiritual life has no story and is not tragic."

"‘Art’ she says in ‘Existentialists and Mystics’ ‘is not discredited if we realise that it is based on and partly consists of ordinary human jumble, incoherence, accident, sex. (Sex, though it produces great thought-forms, is fundamentally jumble: not even roulette so much as mish-mash.)’ The depiction of sex in this novel, in Nick, Michael, Toby, Paul and Dora, is both absurd and terrible, accurate and truly unpredictable. It is made more terrible and more touching because it is set against the power-house across the water, the enclosed order of nuns which Catherine is to enter. It swarms against an ideal of self-denial. Murdoch can write about flesh, male and female, its tastes and textures, smells and dampness, in a way that is imagined through, her own. The Platonic dialogue which is a skeleton of the novel is about sex, but the reader’s experience is immediate, and sensual."

". The twentieth-century novel, she said, in a famous distinction that was almost too brilliantly quotable, was ‘either crystalline or journalistic’. The crystalline novel was a small, perfect object like a poem, ‘quasi-allegorical’; the journalistic novel was a ‘large shapeless quasi-documentary object’ telling ‘some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts’."

". Our sense of value was wound up in our judgement of our own ‘sincerity’. In another phrase which I never forgot, which changed the way I looked at things, she wrote, ‘For the hard idea of truth we had substituted the facile idea of sincerity.’"

My comment: - It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere." IT DOES! Truth is the most important thing. We must strive to know truth to the limits of our understanding. As far as possible we should not allow preconceived ideas to colour or distort our perception of truth otherwise we live in a dream world.

"You cannot, of course, have a hard idea of truth if you have insufficient faith in the human capacity to apprehend or describe the world. Recent, very exciting, intellectual fashions and explorations have caused us to question all our assumptions, to question the adequacy of language to describe the world, and our own powers to know either language, the world, or how they are related. I think, indeed, that the recent groundswell of interest in science, and scientific thought, is a function of the need for some hard idea of truth in two generations who have been disabused of the idea that the concept is meaningful. At least scientists’ empirical truths work solidly in a solid world. They contradict solipsism" (Solipsism (i/ˈsɒlɪpsɪzəm/) is the philosophical idea that only one’s own mind is sure to exist. The term comes from the Latin solus (alone) and ipse (self). Solipsism as an epistemological position holds that knowledge of anything outside one’s own mind is unsure. The external world and other minds cannot be known, and might not exist outside the mind. As a metaphysical position, solipsism goes further to the conclusion that the world and other minds do not
exist. As such it is the only epistemological position that, by its own postulate, is both irrefutable and yet indefensible in the same manner.)

"In later novels there are a series of characters who are good men, struggling, like Murdoch herself, to work out an idea of goodness in a world without religion, who only realise slowly and with difficulty how much of their sense of good derives (historically and in the forms of society we still live in) from a religion they no longer believe"

"Death of God’, derived from Nietzsche and Altizer was paradoxically energising the Church by saying that God had withdrawn, was unknowable, was absent from His creation. The title comes from the idea that when God withdraws the world fragments, and various angels, good and evil, are all-powerful. It can be seen, in retrospect, that the final enclosure of Imber in the world of the Abbey prefigures some such separation."

My Note: That God seems to be absent from the world is self evident. But it is only our idea of God that is absent. The "word of the Lord endures for ever." If the law of gravity is the "word of the Lord" then it certainly endures for ever, but what of the "law of love" does that also endure?

"The Bell is lived through the minds of Michael, Dora and Toby, whilst we never ‘see into’ Paul, or Nick, or Catherine, who remain, to use a Murdochian word, ‘opaque’." 

"Even Mrs Mark, in The Bell, a deliciously recognisable type of the uncharitable charitable person, has a personal history, a marriage, a mystery.

CHAPTER VI

"His prayer was no struggle, but the surrender of himself, with all the ill that he contained, to the Ground of his being. Gradually his serenity returned and with it a calm joy, the renewal of the certainty that there existed truly that living God in whom all pain is healed and all evil finally overcome." But see at the end.

"But although it is possible, and indeed demanded of us, that all and any occupation be given a sacramental meaning, this is now for the majority of people almost intolerably difficult; and for some of such people, ‘disturbed and hunted by God’, as she put it, who cannot find a work which satisfies them in the ordinary world, a life half retired, and a work made simple and significant by its dedicated setting, is what is needed. Our duty, the Abbess said, is not necessarily to seek the people with a longing for god Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

CHAPTER IX  Paul’s domination of Dora

" He was speaking of going home; and he glowed with a palpable determination to take his wife back with him and instal her as one does an art treasure, clearing the scene, locking the door. His will arched over Dora like a canopy. I"
CHAPTER XII

"And as to this I had no other answer in Shewing of our Lord God but this: That which is impossible to thee is not impossible to me: I shall save my word in all things and I shall make all things well. Thus I was taught, by the grace of God, that I should steadfastly hold me in the Faith as I had aforehand understood, and therewith that I should firmly believe that all things shall be well, as our Lord showed in the same time."

CHAPTER XIV

"But about those religious folk. Don’t let them give you a bad conscience. People like that adore having a sense of sin and living in an atmosphere of emotion and self-abasement. You must be a great catch, the penitent wife and so forth. But don’t give in to them. Never forget, my darling, that what they believe just isn’t true."

‘They may be nice,’ said Noel, ‘but they’re thoroughly misguided. No good comes in the end of untrue beliefs. There is no God and there is no judgement, except the judgement that each one of us makes for himself; and what that is is a private matter. Sometimes of course one has to interfere with people to stop them doing things one dislikes. But for Christ’s sake let their minds alone. I can’t stand complacent swine who go around judging other people and making them feel cheap. If they want to wallow in a sense of unworthiness, let them; but when they interfere with their neighbours one ought positively to fight them!"

CHAPTER XVI

"Whether in some other, and possibly better, society it could ever be morally permissible to have homosexual relations was, Michael felt, no business of his. He felt pretty sure that in any world in which he would live he would judge it, for various reasons, to be wrong. But this did not make him feel that he could sweep, as James did, the whole subject aside. It was complicated. For himself, God had made him so and he did not think that God had made him a monster."

‘All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of bloody thing shall be well,’ said Nick. ‘Isn’t that so, Cathie?’"

CHAPTER XIX

"He was too tarnished an instrument to do the work that needed doing. Love. He shook his head. Perhaps only those who had given up the world had the right to use that word."

CHAPTER XX

"‘Oh, to hell with all that,’ said Dora. ‘The point is Paul’s here. Can’t you get it into your head? For Christ’s sake go away before he sees you.’ ‘I’m fed up with hearing about Paul,’ said Noel. ‘Paul treats you disgustingly and you never really cared for him anyway. I think a little plain dealing with Paul wouldn’t be a bad idea. I’m not sure that I won’t give Paul a piece of my mind.’ ‘You can’t be serious!’ moaned Dora, distracted. ‘You don’t know what he’s like. You’ve only seen him at parties. The Bishop will arrive any moment and then everyone will come and Paul will make a scene and I couldn’t bear it!’ ‘You’re a dreadful girl,’ said Noel. ‘You placate Paul until you can’t stand it any
longer and then you run away and then you get frightened and then you start placating him again. You must either knuckle under completely or else fight him. Quite apart from anything else, your present policy isn’t fair to Paul. **You won’t really know whether you want to stay with him until you’ve fought him openly on equal terms, and not just by running away. And my guess is that once you start to fight you’ll know you can’t stay with Paul.** And this is where I begin to get interested. You’re unreliable and untidy and ignorant and totally exasperating but somehow I’d like to see you around the place again.’ ‘Gosh, you aren’t falling in love with me?’ cried Dora, horrified. ‘I don’t use that terminology,’ said Noel, ‘so let’s just say that I miss you. It’s not out of sight out of mind any more, my girl.’”

CHAPTER XX1

"Since you’re in a hurry we’ll cut out the hymns and prayers and go straight on to the sermon. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Dearly beloved, we are come of a fallen race, we are sinners one and all. Gone are the days in the Garden, the days of our innocence when we loved each other and were happy. Now we are set each man against his fellow and the mark of Cain is upon us, and with our sin comes grief and hatred and shame. What is there to lighten our darkness? What is there to ease our pain? Wait, there is a consolation and a remedy, the very Word of God, the dayspring from on high. A higher destiny and a higher joy awaits us than any which was known to our primeval pa as he lay blameless under the apple tree. It comes, it comes and it will make Gods of us all. I speak, beloved, of the joys of repentance, the delights of confession, the delicious pleasure of writhing and grovelling in the dust. O felix culpa! For had we been without sin we had been deprived of that supreme enjoyment. And see miraculously how our pain and our shame can be transformed! How sweet then our guilt, how welcome our transgression, which can bring on the pangs of so sharp a joy. Let us embrace our sin, beloved, and fall to couple with it upon the ground. Let us overcome our shame and turn our sorrow into joy, proclaiming our ill-deeds, kneeling and prostrating ourselves in the dust, and calling out for judgement, ravished, repentant, redeemed.’"

CHAPTER XXIV

"It was sunny again, but chill; the dusty illusions of late summer were giving place to the golden beauties of autumn, sharper and more poignantly ephemeral."

CHAPTER XXVI

"Wretchedly Michael forced himself to remember the occasions on which Nick had appealed to him since he came to Imber, and how on every occasion Michael had denied him. Michael had concerned himself with keeping his own hands clean, his own future secure, when instead he should have opened his heart: should impetuously and devotedly and beyond all reason have broken the alabaster cruse of very costly ointment."
"Gradually he became more detached but there was no sense of his faith being renewed. He thought of religion as something far away, something into which he had never really penetrated at all. He vaguely remembered that he had had emotions, experiences, hopes; but real faith in God was something utterly remote from all that. He understood that at last, and felt, almost coldly, the remoteness. The pattern which he had seen in his life had existed only in his own romantic imagination. At the human level there was no pattern. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.’ And as he felt, bitterly, the grimness of these words, he put it to himself: there is a God, but I do not believe in Him."

"Perhaps he was beyond help. He thought of those against whom he had offended, and gathered them about him in this perhaps endless and perhaps meaningless attention. And next door, as it were, to total unbelief there recurred to him the egotistical and helpless cry of the Dies Irae. Quaerens me, sedisti lassus; Redemisti, Crucem passus; Tantus labor non sit cassus."