

# THE WAY

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#### FOR AUTHORS

*The Way* warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. Further details can be found on *The Way's* website, [www.theway.org.uk](http://www.theway.org.uk). The Special Number for 2005, marking the centenary of the theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1980), will be entitled *Spirituality, Tradition and Beauty*. Contributions around that title will be especially welcome.

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## FOREWORD

**M**EDITATION ON GOD'S WORD now seems so central to Christianity that we can easily forget how much that practice depends on an invention of early modernity: the printing press. Ignatius and the classical Reformers lived in the first generation for whom the printed word was an everyday reality. Perhaps it is no coincidence that they both now appear as harbingers of a new form of religious consciousness. Both discovered in the printed text a divine Word, confronting their guilt and ambiguities with an experience of grace as wholly other, as undeserved, as beyond our control. One effect of their discoveries was a split within Western Christianity over how this experience was to be understood and over what it implied about the relationship between the individual and Church authority. But one factor was common: a sharpened sense of the self as somehow essentially dialogical, essentially in confrontation:

It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Ignatius called this kind of experience of the sheer grace of God 'consolation', and contrasted it with the 'desolation' that results from self-obsession and self-absorption. This issue of *The Way* centres on four acclaimed articles first published last year in Spanish by our sister journal, *Manresa*, and here reproduced in slightly adapted form.<sup>1</sup> They explore how people today experience consolation and desolation, in a society and in a Church far different from anything that Ignatius could imagine. They bring out the links in Ignatius' mind between consolation and the disciples' Easter experience, and they remind us that desolation, too, can lead to growth and to new life. Alongside these four pieces from Spain, we have a provocative piece from Ignatius Jesudasan, noted for his Gandhian theology of liberation, pointing to the limitations of Ignatius' dualist ways of thinking. We also

<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that we are most grateful to the Editors for their kind permission to produce this English version, and to the authors for their help with the translation and adaptation process.

have some testimony from Jerónimo Nadal, one of Ignatius' closest collaborators, about his own experience of consolation.

José A. García's article ends by reminding us that the joy and integrity characteristic of consolation can be found far beyond what we conventionally regard as spiritual. Thus it is fitting that this issue also carries two spiritual explorations of contemporary society. Eamon Maher introduces us to the work of the French priest and novelist Jean Sullivan, which is marked by a sharp sensitivity to the realities of secularisation. Tony Carroll brings us up to date with some of the current debates about the presence of religious symbols in public institutions, and suggests some helpful ways forward.

Our final article, however, again has a sixteenth-century focus. Iain Taylor explains why not all Protestant theologians share the view that the debates about grace and justification at the Reformation are a thing of the past. As we listen respectfully to that perhaps uncomfortable reminder, we can also be struck by convergences. Eberhard Jüngel insists that justification, the two-edged confrontation of the self with the free grace of God, is not just one doctrine among others, but rather the foundation of all Christianity and all theology. We are not far here from the conviction of our Spanish authors: consolation is a free gift to be freely handed on, and any attempt to arrogate it for ourselves perverts our whole commitment.

Perhaps a spirituality centred on the experience of the wholly other God is in the end a spirituality specific to modernity. Feminism, ecological awareness, sensitivity to the grace of God outside Christianity—all these factors may be leading us decisively beyond the spiritualities inaugurated in the sixteenth century. Just as the printing press led to one revolution in religious consciousness, perhaps telecommunications and the internet are provoking another, and our spiritual future is indeed radically different. Yet even if that claim is true, there is more to this number of *The Way* than idle nostalgia. If we are to reconceive our discipleship decisively, an awareness of our past is the first step towards freedom from it. But then again, perhaps it is not a question of abolition but of fulfilment. Perhaps the spirituality for a postmodern world will not, after all, set aside what we have inherited both from Ignatius and (in their way) from the great Reformers. Perhaps, rather, it will set religious modernity's sense of the spirits' movements within richer, more inclusive contexts.

**Philip Endean SJ**

# THE OFFICE OF CONSOLING

*José A. García*

*Look at the office of consoling which Christ our Lord sustains, and comparing how friends normally console each other. (Exx 224)*

AMONG THE 'MOST HOLY EFFECTS' (Exx 223) that the Risen Christ brings about in his disciples is a central Ignatian reality: consolation. Ignatius seems to see a continuity between the effect of the Risen Christ on his disciples, as he restores their sense of joy, vocation and mission after the disaster of the cross, and the movement of the Spirit in any retreat. This article explores Ignatius' account of the 'office of consoling', drawing both on Ignatian sources and on the resurrection narratives in the Gospels. It also considers how we can be called to mediate this consolation, even though it remains a gift of God alone.

## ***Ignatian Consolation***

Though in ordinary speech 'console' and 'consolation' can refer to almost any act of encouragement or sympathy, these words have a special resonance when they are used by Ignatius: they denote the action of God among us, the communication of the Creator with the creature—a divine initiative which, when received gratefully and honestly, never leaves the person unchanged. Divine consolation always sets in motion the divine reality in the human person. It generates love, joy, faith, encouragement; and it always leads to mission.

The point is confirmed by Ignatius' own texts. Centrally, the third of his Discernment Rules lists a number of states which 'I call consolation':

Concerning spiritual consolation. I call it consolation when some inner motion is prompted in the person, of such a kind that they begin to be aflame with love of their Creator and Lord, and, consequently, when they cannot love any created thing on the face of the earth in itself but in the Creator of them all. Likewise when a

person pours out tears moving to love of their Lord, whether it be for sorrow over their sins, or over the passion of Christ our Lord, or over other things directly ordered to His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and every inward gladness which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, bringing repose and peace in its Creator and Lord.

However, it seems that this account is by no means complete. In his magisterial commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises*, Santiago Arzubialde claims that in the third Discernment Rule Ignatius 'leaves out seven important aspects of consolation that he develops in other places'.<sup>1</sup> Arzubialde goes on to list these:

- the *illumination and elevation of the mind*, explicitly mentioned in Exx 2.3 and 363.5;
- how consolation is a *sign of the way to follow*—Ignatius tells Teresa Rejadell that 'interior consolation ... shows to us and opens to us the path we are to follow';
- how consolation enables us *to bear difficulties easily*—Ignatius tells Rejadell that it makes 'no load so great that it does not seem light to them, nor any penance or other hardship so great that it is not very sweet';<sup>2</sup>
- the *gratuity* of this ineffable divine gift, its being beyond human control—Ignatius tells Francis Borja that consolations 'are not in our very own power to summon when we wish, but ... are purely gifts from the One who gives all that is good';<sup>3</sup>
- the kind of *experience of the three divine persons* that we find in the *Spiritual Diary*;<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio: historia y análisis* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1991), 624-625.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius to Teresa Rejadell, 18 June 1536, MHSJ EI 1, 99-107, in Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, translated and edited by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996), 129-135, here 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius to Francis Borja, 20 September 1548, MHSJ EI 2, 233-237, in *Personal Writings*, 204-207, here 206.

<sup>4</sup> See *Diary*, 19 February 1544, 21 February, 27 February, etc.

- an attitude of *humility and obedient reverence towards Holy Mother Church*;
- the *disinterestedness* marking how the person enjoys these holy gifts.<sup>5</sup>

Ignatius is making no attempt in the Discernment Rule to be exhaustive in his account of consolation. What he omits here is essential, and needs always to be borne in mind. We might summarise his overall teaching under three headings.

Firstly, spiritual consolation is a free gift of God's which needs to be recognised and acknowledged as such. It is not for us to summon up devotion and love; 'all is gift and grace from God our Lord' (Exx 322.3). If we try to take control of it, we pervert it.

Secondly, this gift of the Spirit creates within us a centre of energy focused on God that integrates our sense of ourselves and of the world. Spiritual consolation, so Ignatius tells us, brings about a miracle within the one being consoled. 'They cannot love any created thing on the face of the earth in itself but in the Creator of them all.' (Exx 316.1) People, events and things are not something apart from God; rather, God is dwelling within them, sustaining them. To love created realities without loving the God within them is a perversion of reality, an idolatry. It follows that a person who is consoled radiates a mysterious luminosity and integrity, both in their dealings with the outside world and in their own identity. There is an experience of freshness, of new insight into things, of profound joy and spiritual relish, which flows from within the person's centre right out to their sense faculties, and which modifies their conduct irrevocably. Such was Ignatius' experience on the banks of the Cardoner.

***A mysterious  
luminosity  
and integrity***

Thirdly, Ignatian consolation is not just a lived experience but a movement, a movement towards something. It shows us the way to move forward, and strengthens us for whatever step we need to take. Spiritual consolation in the form of 'interior joy', or 'illumination of the mind', or an 'increase in faith, hope and love' will obviously be a powerful experience—what the psychologist Abraham Maslow calls a 'peak experience'. But there is more to it (and if there is not, there are grounds for suspicion). Whatever form it takes, consolation from God

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius to Francis Borja, 20 September 1548, in *Personal Writings*, 207.

is both vocation and provocation. It illuminates a way to move forward, indicating this as the divine will; it suggests choices and changes. If we are not meant to make a change in time of desolation, we certainly should be open to making changes in time of consolation (Exx 318).<sup>6</sup> Otherwise we are treating consolation as if it were an occasion for complacent narcissism—we try to remain on Tabor, in ways that lead to stagnation, regression and death.

The experience itself and the direction in which it is leading us belong inseparably together, but we should also keep them distinct. Sometimes a consolation is so powerful that it can only leave us, for a time, in silent adoration. Nevertheless, true consolation always leads to vocation and mission. In consolation, God calls us to be co-workers, to pass on freely to others what we have freely received, to ‘change ourselves’ so that we move forward ‘on the way we have begun which is the divine service’ (*Constitutions*, preamble [134.5]). There is a ‘something more’ inherent in Ignatian spirituality which is never merely a matter of the human will, but rather an experience of how divine love is always stretching us. And Ignatius seems to suggest that the experience of Jesus’ disciples following the resurrection was of just this kind.

### **‘Most Holy Effects’**

The effects of the resurrection are to be found not only in the glorious body of the Risen One, but also in the radical change brought about in his disciples. Ignatius gives us no elaborate account of these effects—he remains faithful to his principles enunciated in the Annotations about being brief so that the Spirit and the individual can do the work. However, since this article is exploring the links between ‘consolation’ and the effects of Christ’s resurrection on his disciples, we may reasonably try to go further. What are these effects? Do they make a difference to the disciples? Can we still see links between them and Ignatius’ account of consolation? It is neither possible nor necessary to give a full account here. I shall simply cite some biblical examples with Ignatian parallels.

<sup>6</sup> See Ignacio Iglesias, “En tiempo de consolación sí hacer mudanza”: Lectura subyacente de la Regla 5ª de discernir espíritus (318)’, *Manresa*, 72 (2000), 83-88.

*Away from the Tombs*

The Risen One moves his disciples away from the places where they are searching, away from their different tombs where he is not. He directs them instead to the community of mission where he continues to be Lord. The women in Mark, who had been 'looking on from a distance' (Mark 15:40) at the crucifixion, come to pay homage to the broken body of Jesus. But they are directed away from this quest:

'... you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' (Mark 16:6-7)

Mary Magdalen, too, is directed by the Risen One to bear witness within the community: 'go to my brothers and say to them ...' (John 20:17). The disciples on the road to Emmaus, who are touched by the Risen One even as they are on the road of disappointment and desolation, are sent back to the Jerusalem community, which is already



preparing itself to take the good news to the world (Luke 24:13-34). The Risen One brings gifts of peace and the Holy Spirit; he transforms the disciples' fear into joy and mission (John 20:19-20).

In the Gospel resurrection narratives, the Risen One always brings about a moment of recognition on the disciples' part, leading to vocation and mission. The risen Jesus carries out among them an 'office of consoling' that lights up their way, showing them who they are in him, and what they have to do in his name. The connections with Ignatian consolation are obvious: Jesus is showing the disciples the path they must follow, and giving them a sense of God's presence in everything. He is calling them to be his co-workers, and giving them the energy they need to carry out that task.

#### *Interior Joy*

Besides the amazement, even fear, that we find in the Gospel resurrection scenes, we often come across a sense of joy. Sometimes this is left implicit; sometimes it is expressly named: 'the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord' (John 20:20).

Resurrection joy was central to Ignatius' spiritual experience, and it passed into the petition governing the whole Fourth Week:

... to ask grace to rejoice and be glad intensely at such great glory and joy of Christ our Lord. (Exx 221)

This joy, however, is primarily a joy for Christ, rather than for anyone or anything else. Ignatius' joy, and the exercitant's joy, are intense because the One to whom we owe so much has not remained buried in death, but has been placed definitively with God. Again Arzubialde is helpful:

Ignatius uses ... the word 'joy' in two distinct senses: as a synonym for the glory or triumph of Christ, and to denote a subjective experience provoked in the human person by the action of the Holy Spirit. The latter originates in the former, and manifests the disinterestedness of true love. It marks the person's coming to share in the triumph and definitive life of the Lord, culminating in mission.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Arzubialde, *Los Ejercicios*, 473.

Certainly, consolation and the 'office of consoling' culminate in mission, in our taking the right path. But the sense of the path to follow that we experience in consolation is born from something else: a pure and totally disinterested joy at the Lord. For Ignatius, nothing is as effective a motivation as gratitude, and nothing is as reliable a sign of gratitude as pure joy at the good of another.

*Awareness of the Paschal Mystery*

We can also see in the Gospel narratives how the disciples come to understand the paschal mystery. Obviously, it was not that the disciples began to preach overnight a full atonement theology. Nevertheless, the Risen One's luminous presence produced what we can call a revelation within them, overcoming what had been their incorrigible affective resistance to the paschal mystery both in Jesus' life and in their own.

At various points in the resurrection narratives, the Lord at once gently reproaches the disciples' lack of faith and explains to them why his Passion was 'necessary':

Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? (Luke 24:25-26)

It is as though Christ is somehow removing the disciples' sense of scandal at his death and restoring a sense of hope and purpose to them by saying: 'do you not realise that it was impossible for me to save the world by offering it new possibilities of individual and collective existence without its powers reacting against me and sending me to my death? Are you so idealistic and stupid as to think that I could escape such a fate? Do you think you are yourselves going to escape such a fate if you really desire to follow me?'

Once the risen Lord has shown his disciples his wounds, once he has invited Thomas to put his finger in his side, once he has bidden his disciples to look on his hands and feet, they become quite at peace with the paschal mystery. No longer do they seem scandalized by the idea that the life of the world requires them to give their own lives, that the grain of wheat has to fall into the earth and die, that they have to lose their lives in order to gain them—ideas which during Jesus' earthly ministry had caused them repeated difficulty.

Now that they have discovered God present and active in the cross of Christ and in his wounds, they are able to find God truly in all things. The connection is an important one, and is brought out by Karl Rahner:

The only person who attains the finding of God in all things and the experience of divine transparency in things is the one who finds God where God has descended to the murkiest reality of this world, the reality most closed to God, so to speak, the darkest and most inaccessible reality: the cross of Christ. Only thus can the eye of the sinner be cleansed and the attitude of indifference become possible; only thus can the person find the God who emerges to meet them also in those things which strike them as a cross, and not just where the person might wish to have God.<sup>8</sup>

Without this kind of experience of Jesus' paschal mystery, and without this kind of identification with it, mission becomes impossible: it simply does not last. Therefore, the paschal experience has to come first. Ignatius is alluding in passing to this particular **Mission and paschal joy** 'wondrous effect' when he says that the hidden faith active within consolation brings about tears in the one being consoled through 'sorrow over their sins, or over the passion of Christ our Lord' (Exx 316.2), and when he speaks of an increase of hope in the same account of consolation. The Fourth Week petition, too, with its talk of joy at Christ's joy, depends on this kind of awareness of the paschal mystery and its necessity. For a person contemplating the triumph of the resurrection, the fact that the paschal mystery has come to completion in Christ is a source of intense joy and relish.

### **Consoled So That We Might Console**

The consolation that we receive from the Lord is not given to us to enjoy in a narcissistic, self-enclosed way. Rather, it empowers us too for a ministry of consolation. The gift is for mission. If it is not shared and passed on, if it is appropriated for a person's own enjoyment, it dies. Paul expressed the principle at the outset of the second letter to the Corinthians:

<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises* (1954/5), translated by Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 272, translation corrected.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

We are to pass on to others both the interior joy of consolation, and the sense of focus that it gives to a person's dealings with external reality: the two essential aspects of Ignatian consolation. Let me develop this point in three ways.

#### *Greed*

Ignatius had a penetrating insight about how the most radical enemy of true human life was greed, whether material or spiritual. Moreover, he taught that this enemy worked in collusion with the most primeval compulsions of the human heart—the heart whose insecurities and basic fears seek relief through accumulating things (Exx 142). From this lie which appears as truth, from this enormous trick played on the whole human race, most of humanity's problems arise, both individual and collective. Here too are rooted our habits of exploitation and abuse. There is no other area of human experience that seems so much to require the consolation of God in the form of 'true joy and spiritual relish': the consolation which frees us from this diabolical deception and which leads us to the enjoyment of delights of a different kind.

What are these delights? Those that Jesus offers. By inviting us to share his relationship with Abba and his solidarity with our brothers and sisters, Jesus shows us that the real human problem is not suffering (which we can willingly bear on one another's behalf), but rather the apathy and sadness that comes when there is no one who affirms our being through loving us, and nothing and no one to love apart from ourselves. This offer of relationship is the consolation we and our world need from God—and we are called both to receive it and to pass it on.

#### *God's Presence Within All Things*

We can develop the point further. Our world needs the form of consolation which Ignatius described as loving no thing 'on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all' (Exx 316.2). Religious language plays tricks on us, and when we stop to look at it, we find it marked by deep and influential dualisms. One of these is

often expressed in spatial terms: here I am; there are the others; and God is in the background.

This does not correspond with the biblical vision of reality, nor with the experience of Ignatius at the Cardoner. Created things, the world, the self, others, Christ—all these exist *in* God. None of them exist on their own, or as some kind of superstructure, or in parallel with God, in the way that our inevitably figurative language about God often suggests. Our life is not something independent or autonomous, but rather ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Colossians 3:3): it exists in God as the first and original reality, the *archē* (principle and beginning) of everything that exists, even if the relationship is hidden and not obvious. Acknowledging this truth is a matter of grace; failing to acknowledge it has dire consequences.

If people love things in themselves, this is the root of all idolatry. It leads to human sacrifice, to hell on earth. To love things ‘in the Creator of them all’ enables a love that excludes idolatry, and forbids all sacrifice of what is truly human. Some critics of religion are concerned that faith leads us to ignore the reality of this world. But an Ignatian ‘seeking of God in all things’ is an affirmation of creation, a defence of its value. To love creation well, we have to love One who is above all things, as indeed the first of the biblical commandments reminds us. And for Ignatius, our ability to love in this way is a fruit and a sign of divine consolation.

#### *Consolation and Communication*

At one point in his *Constitutions* for the Society of Jesus, Ignatius spoke of good communication among the members as serving ‘mutual consolation and edification in the Lord’.<sup>9</sup> What Ignatius says here about Jesuits applies to the ministry of consolation in general. Our mutual communication and friendship are not just human realities but also divine ones. Through them we enable God to approach us more closely, and we mediate God’s self-gift to one another. Our communication and friendship enable a richer and more subtle discernment, both in our spiritual lives and in the ministries we undertake.

<sup>9</sup> *Constitutions*, 8.1.9 [673.2]—this is the only place where Ignatius uses the word ‘consolation’ in the *Constitutions*. See Franz Meures, ‘Jesuit Corporate Identity: Promoting Unity and Cohesion in the Society of Jesus’, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 89 (Autumn 1998), 23-40.

The connections here are profound, and in many ways remain to be discovered. Good communication, friendship and mutual support are not just means of making life less arid and more tolerable; they also build up a context within which we can discover God more easily, hear God more clearly, and follow God's lead more freely and openly. What others do, whether they are near to us or far away, can become a consolation for us, what one of my friends calls a 'vicarious consolation'.

This was Ignatius' dream for the Society he founded, and the principle can be applied to any mission within the Church. We all need something like this. We need to break down barriers that serve no purpose; we need to get beyond structures of relationship within the Church that do nothing but encourage narcissistic superficiality; we need to outgrow patterns of friendship that exist simply to meet mutual needs. We need to recognise that we are called to exercise the office of consoling among one another. Obviously we must acknowledge that true consolation comes only from the Spirit, and that it is in the end nothing other than God's free self-gift to humanity. At the same time, however, we must accept with gratitude and relish that God wants to share this office of consoling with us.

#### ***'Comparing How Friends Normally Console Each Other' (Exx 224)***

In the Fourth Week, Ignatius invites us not just to look at Christ's office of consolation, but also to make a comparison with the consolation offered between friends. This comparison might appear to trivialise what we have just been saying about the Risen Christ. How could such a comparison possibly enable us to imagine the unique reality which is the Risen Christ's consolation?

With the best will in the world, we often offer each other false consolation. We can simply exacerbate each other's wounds—whether real, imaginary or exaggerated—by confirming each other's more or less justifiable feelings of injustice. Alternatively, we can belittle the pain of the other—again whether it be real, imaginary or exaggerated. Or we can keep an unholy silence, and fail to name what we perceive to be God's call and challenge within the pain of the situation. There are so many ways in which we can give false consolation to our friends.

Two points seem to me worth making here. Firstly, it is Christ's consolation which Ignatius sees as normative: it is not that Christ consoles in the way that friends do, but rather that friends should

exercise the office of consoling as he does. Secondly, true consolation among friends amounts to our being channels of God's self-gift for each other: of the love and joy that this gift produces, of the commitment to external reality that consolation clarifies, and of the discerned way of proceeding within the external world that consolation reveals. Without both this inward joy and this outgoing integrity, no friend truly consoles another. Conversely, we can confidently affirm the presence of the Spirit's consolation wherever this joy and integrity are present—not just in places conventionally thought of as spiritual, but in many other spheres of human experience.

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# SPIRITUAL DESOLATION IN TODAY'S WORLD

*Jesús Corella*

*Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no one lays it to heart. (Jeremiah 12:10-11)*

IN THE DISCERNMENT RULES, IGNATIUS describes desolation by contrasting it with consolation. It is 'everything the contrary of the third rule' (Exx 317.1), the rule which describes consolation. Yet we are not dealing with two equal influences, two equal sources of attraction and repulsion. The normal state is consolation, and desolation is a deviation from this state which happens during certain, perhaps lengthy, periods of our lives, but which is always transitory and unstable.

## ***The Ignatian Texts***

Even literary considerations help us to put desolation in its place. The paragraph in the *Spiritual Exercises* that deals with consolation (Exx 316) is well structured. Three kinds of consolation are described one after the other in separate sentences, giving a sense of growth towards a climax and of internal harmony. The paragraph seems to move towards a goal. We end up satisfied and whole in the Creator and Lord.

The paragraph describing desolation (Exx 317) is not like this. The feelings and states of mind that Ignatius evokes here are thrown together. They are piled up, as though he wanted to convey a sense of oppression, disorientation and perplexity. 'Here we are out of joint', he seems to be saying to us; feelings just happen, and hit us without our knowing what they are. They seem to destroy the personality, reducing us to some primitive life-form. We are in a world of darkness, of disturbance and temptation, of conflict and listlessness, of sadness. We

**4th rule: The fourth, of spiritual desolation. I call desolation everything the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of the soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the disturbance of various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, and its finding itself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come out of consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come out of desolation.**

cannot actively interpret our situation; we only feel it. Even the tentative ‘as if’ which introduces Ignatius’ litany of disturbances—in contrast to the clear descriptions of Exx 316—reinforces the sense of instability. It reminds us of another ‘as if’, in the Two Standards, where we ‘imagine as if the chief of all enemies were seated in that great plain of Babylon’ (Exx 140).

The first significant word in Exx 317 is ‘darkness’, a word which Ignatius substituted for the one he had written earlier: ‘blindness’. ‘Darkness’ suggests something which is somehow part of the external climate, a transitory experience rather than a permanent impairment. Darkness can turn to light, whereas blindness can only be cured by a miracle. Nevertheless, this darkness, like the disturbance that comes next, is a darkness ‘of the soul’. It affects the person’s whole interior life.

Such a state makes the person more vulnerable to temptation. If a person has lost control of their life, something or someone else has taken them over. ‘Base and earthly things’ provoke specific demands which have to be satisfied urgently, sometimes to the point of obsession. The double expression is typical of Ignatius, and the language has a neo-Platonic tinge. But in fact things become ‘base and earthly’ only when the people using them lose their capacity to transcend them, when people can no longer go to the roots of things and recognise the source of their beauty, usefulness, and meaning.

A person in desolation is moved primarily by instincts of power and pleasure. Their human potential is inhibited, and they live in a conflict

between contrary agitations and temptations. They are like a doomed ship in the middle of the ocean. They cannot strike out in any direction, nor can they maintain themselves. They are just going under.

Ignatius goes on to name symptoms of a more spiritual character. These contrast directly with the third of the mental states which he names as typical of consolation. Instead of an increase in faith, hope and charity, here we find them lacking. And as a consequence, instead of experiencing interior joy leading to quiet and peace in the Creator and Lord, the person in desolation has a tendency to feel listless, tepid, sad, and 'as if (because desolation in itself does not bring about a separation) separated from its Creator and Lord'.

This sense of separation is the last symptom that Ignatius describes, and it marks the most acute suffering that afflicts people in desolation. God, the source of life and of reliable love, seems absent, and the person loses touch with what they want. The result is disturbance, agitation, temptation; they no longer know what they want. Perhaps they will be attracted to something which reminds them of the attractiveness of the God who is so distant, so inaccessible. But it will not satisfy them. Their quest for surrogates to relieve their anxiety leaves them worse off than they were before. One must therefore not be harsh with someone in desolation (Exx 7). The person is a victim, albeit of themselves.

**One must  
not be  
harsh with  
someone in  
desolation**

If consolation is the opposite of desolation, then the same opposition exists between the thoughts that emerge from the two states. It is as though Ignatius were saying: 'do not be too concerned with the ideas you get in this state, because crazinesses of all kinds may well arise. Concentrate more on the simple recognition that you *are* in desolation, and take appropriate steps to get beyond it as quickly as possible.'

So much for Ignatius' description of desolation in the Discernment Rules. But Ignatius has left us other accounts. Perhaps the text closest to the Rule that we have just been describing comes in one of the so-called *Autograph Directories*:

Desolation is the opposite [of consolation], coming from the evil spirit and gifts of the same. Its components are war as opposed to peace, sadness as opposed to spiritual joy, hope in base things as

opposed to hope in lofty ones; similarly, base as opposed to lofty love, dryness as opposed to tears, wandering of mind as opposed to base things versus elevation of mind. (Dir 1.12)

Here the contrast with consolation is drawn even more sharply; this text is Ignatius' strongest statement that desolation comes from 'the evil spirit', who is trying to disillusion us and to hold us back in our growth towards God. It is not that we are lacking in hope; rather, we are placing it in 'base things' rather than living hope as a theological virtue. We cannot live without hope—what matters is where we have placed that hope, what gives us strength and endurance, what our goals are. In the end, the placing of hope in 'base things' will inevitably lead to sadness or disappointment.

Obviously desolation has a particular effect on the life of prayer: finding time for prayer and perseverance in prayer become impossible. One reason why so many people abandon prayer is probably that they have not properly resolved situations of desolation, and are therefore leaving them unaddressed. In Ignatius' famous letter to Teresa Rejadell there is another description of desolation that brings out the connections with the life of prayer:

... our old enemy places before us every possible obstacle to divert us from what has been begun, attacking us very much. He acts completely counter to the first lesson (consolation), often plunging us into sadness without our knowing why we are sad. Nor can we pray with any devotion, or contemplate, or even speak and hear of things about God our Lord with any interior savour or relish. And not stopping there: ... he brings us to think that we have been completely forgotten by God, and we end up with the impression that we are completely separated from Our Lord. Everything we have done, everything we were wanting to do, none of it counts. But we can see from all this what is the cause of so much fear and weakness on our part: at one time we spent too long a time with our eyes fixed on our own miseries, and subjected ourselves to his deceptive lines of thought.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ignatius to Teresa Rejadell, 18 June 1536, MHSJ EI 1, 99-107, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, translated and edited by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996), 129-135, here 133.



*'Not even all the gold on earth can provide rest and peace to one of these tired souls'*<sup>2</sup>

There is an element found only in this important text which deserves comment. Strictly speaking, 'our old enemy' cannot detain us or divert us directly—what the enemy does, rather is to put obstacles in the way. The enemy works from outside, as it were, rather than by having any interior control over us.

One aspect of our suffering is sadness, a sadness which seems to be 'without cause' (like the consolation of Exx 330), because we do not know where it has come from or where it is leading, and which is therefore all the more overwhelming. We can hardly bear to hear of the things of God; it becomes intolerable for us to pray or even to make time for prayer. The final sentences in this paragraph describe the affective state that arises from such thoughts, in terms very reminiscent of psychic depression and low self-esteem. The evil spirit, as it were, humiliates the person in desolation: they lose any sense of

<sup>2</sup>The pictures in this article come from illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* by Gustave Doré (1832-1883).

their own integrity and value, and are subjected to a destructive force. Nevertheless, there is no such thing as 'desolation without preceding cause'. Every desolation has a human cause, whether individual, collective or structural.

Desolation is widespread today, and we often live through it without reacting to it, as if it were without remedy. Some of desolation's typical features are genuinely spiritual, arising in the context of a lived faith in God. Desolation occurs when this faith is disturbed: in Ignatian language, desolation of this kind can happen only if the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises is inspiring our lives. If our sense of the Principle and Foundation is becoming overshadowed, if we are tempted to destroy the harmony that it implies and to be driven by less disinterested or more self-centred values, sooner or later we will fall into desolation. For we are not made for such narrow things, and yet in such a state we are living as if God did not exist. There are also factors of a more psychological order. In our psyches, desolation produces the feelings of sadness, darkness, insecurity and self-absorption that the Ignatian Rule mentions.

Before continuing, it is necessary to recognise two states that are not desolation, or at least not simply desolation. Firstly there can be painful or disconcerting feelings that are positive. Sadness at one's sins, shame and confusion, the remorse caused by the good spirit in hardened sinners (Exx 314), and other such feelings are within the sphere of consolation. They are calling us towards liberation.

Secondly there can be an overlap between desolation and depression. Desolations can arise from our compulsiveness, from false and scrupulous arguments, from narcissistic perfectionism. Depression can be endogenous or it can be a reaction to external circumstances, and desolation can tap into either form. In Manresa, Ignatius was in both desolation and depression as a result of having abused his physical and psychological powers.

A depressed person is closed to the continuation of life: all the doors are shut, and nothing makes sense.<sup>3</sup> But a person in desolation alone does not lose their motivation for living. What they want (whether as temptation or tendency) is to live 'from mortal sin to

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the relationship between desolation and depression, see Brigitte-Violaine Aufauvre, 'Depression and Spiritual Desolation', *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), 47-56.

mortal sin' (Exx 314.1). They react sharply against the idea of changing their lives, or of continuing along 'the way begun which is the divine service' (*Constitutions*, preamble [134.5]), which now appears to them insipid and hateful. They do have hope, but they place it where they see that everyone else places it: in the 'low' things that are only substitutes for the 'higher' things that God is trying to give us. They have no desire to lose or to change their perverted affective supports, or to set their spiritual lives in order.

### ***Desolation Today***

My sense is that the situation we are currently experiencing as a Church is, in Ignatian terms, primarily a First Week one. This claim is in no way an accusation against anyone, and it needs to be qualified in many ways. Some, indeed, may find it too optimistic, because the 'capital sins' seem to dominate the economics and politics of the West. They might argue that the Spirit within us is so stifled that we have no mental space within which we can feel desolated, still less experience the desolation of anyone else. Only occasionally do we feel a pang of conscience, which passes away without any major change occurring in us. But let us assume that we are at least aware of the negative within us. We feel that we are sinners, and we want to move beyond our sin, but it still has powerful effects in us. And many Christians behave as if the goal of the Christian life consisted only in not sinning. Many of our prayers, including those of the liturgy, ask simply for the grace to avoid sin.

***Many Christians  
behave as if  
the Christian life  
consisted only in  
not sinning***

Let us be honest. How many people in the Church today are really prepared to throw themselves into the adventure of following Christ with all the consequences that this entails—in other words to pass into the Second Week? We do our best to keep the commandments and not to be immoral, but often our Christian life takes on a negative tinge: it becomes a matter of asceticism, a tiring grind. Our authority figures tell us what we should do and should not do, and we try our best. But we do not, for whatever reason, get to the point of 'offerings of greater moment' (Exx 97.2), or of feeling any attraction towards following Jesus, or of identifying ourselves with the Beatitudes. We do not readily find ourselves desiring a more active faith, or making commitments towards justice and solidarity. But only then do we come to the Second

and subsequent Weeks. Roman Catholic public rhetoric is still too rooted in issues about sin, issues of the First Week, despite the teaching of Vatican II about the universal call to holiness, which in Ignatian terms is a call to take the Contemplation to Attain Love as the key to one's life.

If there is anything in this claim, then it becomes relevant that the First Week is the time of greatest danger of desolation. We often lose heart; we often tire of our propensity to the same old sins; our conversion often feels fragile, too much a matter of the will. Our affectivity is still relatively uninfluenced by spiritual conviction. Breaking with our past generates anxiety and disturbance, and we will use any excuse to return to it. These initial stages are where we are most vulnerable to desolation. We have cast off our defences, because we are trying to begin to live unselfishly; we are just learning to walk within the Reign of God. But we do not yet know the joy that comes from discipleship, from gratuitous love, from trustful dedication.

It is for these reasons that Ignatius writes so extensively about desolation in the time of conversion, in the First Week. The exercitant has to be strengthened in order to deal with devastating feelings: shame and confusion at having done nothing even half serious for the Reign of God; a sense of being trapped in an exhausting and seemingly endless cycle of struggle and failure. It is not surprising that desolations arise at this point, desolations which the bad spirit can use to discourage us and to divert us from our path, or else to hold us back from making progress by detaining us in fretful obsession.

It is perhaps in this light that we can understand why so many people seem quietly to be abandoning Christianity. There is desolation in today's Church and in today's world. Moreover the First Week does not last indefinitely. Perhaps in Ignatius' time things were different, but for us the First Week is essentially transitional. Either a person moves forward positively, into a Christianity of the paschal mystery and the Reign of God, or they end up being absorbed into a world where the capital sins are rampant. They cannot simply remain still. And in such a situation, there are various kinds of desolation that easily arise.

#### *Desolation through Stagnation*

If it is right to say that the people of God are still too stuck in the First Week, this is because of tradition and the way that they have been taught. But they are also constantly becoming more critical and

questioning; they are no longer prepared to be treated like mute sheep, but rather insist that the Holy Spirit lies within them inalienably, leading them to full personhood—this is why they have been confirmed. The First Week finishes with the exercitant asking a question: what am I to do for Christ in the future? Jesus responds 'to each one in particular' (Exx 95.3) with the contemplation of the Kingdom, which is itself a call, a project involving the whole of life. It is here that the final consolation of the First Week emerges. The exercitant has to be given a future, a mission, a task. If they still think in terms of conforming to established norms, they will experience the law as slavery, however holy the law may be. This slavery will produce desolation, although it may be accompanied by a false sense of security. Anyone who confuses consolation with security or with rule-keeping has never experienced it. They are lacking everything which draws a person into relationship, which takes them out of themselves and opens them to the commitments of love. This desolation—for so it is—arises from a deficiency in the interior life, from a lack of nourishment and growth. It generates rigidity and moralism in the people who suffer from it. They will find it difficult to see God in all things; their focus is always on defects.

***Anyone who confuses consolation with security or rule-keeping has never experienced it***

#### *A Depressive World*

We have spoken of a Church stuck in the First Week; we need also to speak of a cultural world which is prone to psychic depression. Why is there so much depression today? This article cannot explore the question fully; I shall simply point to the relationship that obtains between depression and affective deprivation. A healthy interior balance of the kind that helps us to appreciate reality and enjoy it properly, that enables us to commit ourselves confidently and enthusiastically and to establish various kinds of relationship, presupposes healthy self-esteem, grounded in a realistic assessment of our capacities and our limitations. This assessment is nurtured by affective contact with others who love us, and who—without being aware of it—reveal to each of us, through both affirmation and contrast, who we are, what we can do, what we desire. The people who love us give us self-confidence; they enable us to discover what life means and what we can hope to attain in it, always in collaboration



*'Our punishment consists in nothing else but living in desire without any hope'*

with others, for the common good. If we feel loved and supported, we can love and support others. And if this is further reinforced by a sense of God as creator sustaining and protecting life even to the point of self-emptying, then the way is open for a life lived in consolation. There will be plenty of problems, but there will be a rooted consolation—as Paul put it, 'I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction' (2 Corinthians 7:4).

Again, however, we need to be realistic. Who is born into such a supportive setting, and who grows in this kind of way, within the realities of our present-day world? The most frequent cause of the lack of self-esteem that affects so many of us is an inability, from the womb onwards, to open ourselves to love received and given. And when we move from an infancy lacking in love into the world of work and social relations, we find from adolescence onwards that society itself is closed and on the defensive. Unemployment and wage-slavery create depressive environments. Whole social classes, whole nations and continents feel abandoned and excluded; we might well talk of collective depression.

From this global situation of depression, there also arise forms of desolation proper to our time. There is, as has already been said, a significant difference between depression and desolation. Desolation is a spiritual state. The cramped lives which so many people have to live inevitably obscure the presence of God within them. Who is the God transparent to street children, or among people whose children are dying of hunger? Who is the God transparent in broken relationships or unjust social structures? Where is the omnipotent God (for so we were taught God is) free of the global economic system? For many people, God is simply not visible in contemporary reality; God does not exist. For others, the God revealed in such situations is a God in desolation, a crucified God, a God who is both desolate and depressed, hellishly so, a God whose divinity is hidden.

What is really a matter of desolation is that this self-emptying God is a God without resurrection. Perhaps this God is truly God in the credal sense, but not in the full sense of the God of Jesus Christ. Easter Sunday never comes; we remain trapped in Good Friday; and we cannot see any future. This is what it is to live in a world of desolation. We are so far from glimpsing the resurrection that desolation becomes an anticipation of hell, a state without hope or love. This kind of spiritual desolation has affinities with suicidal depression, or with the absence of desire for children. The land is desolate; the chosen vine has been ravaged; all is broken, barren, without beauty or attraction. For many people life is like this, and, as Jeremiah put it, 'no one lays it to heart' (Jeremiah 12:11).

### ***Education in Gratitude: Ignatius' Three Causes for Desolation***

All these forms of desolation are nourished by our postmodern, globalised culture. The ninth of the First Week Discernment rules suggests three reasons why desolation can arise: our own lack of faithful response; our being tested in service and praise; and our needing to learn true wisdom about the gifts of God (Exx 322).

It may not be forcing the Ignatian text for us to suggest a common factor running through all three of these, one that may give us insight into many experiences of desolation today: the theme of gratitude. Gratitude is divine; humanity operates at best on a principle of tit-for-tat. If we draw closer to God, we learn to think and behave gratuitously. If we become distanced from God, we become more

concerned with retribution and just deserts; money and material benefits of other kinds become a means by which we measure personal value, in a way that is very difficult to give up. Gratuity is a hidden treasure that opens the way to the Kingdom of Heaven. It was because Ignatius had an intuition of this kind that he insisted so strongly on gratuity of ministries for the Society he founded (*Examen* 4.27 [82]). He saw something in the Church of his time—and he would see it today too—which was not in keeping with the proclamation of the Kingdom.

Consolation is given to us gratuitously, and it empowers us to give all that we have and are gratuitously. If we start making bargains with God and confuse generous dedication to God with forms of recompense, then the purity of our love is compromised and our identification with God is weakened. Perhaps the ultimate root of desolation is here: the value of created things tends to become an absolute, whether these be our own initial plans and desires, or the compensatory substitutes that we settle for if we find the challenge of right living too much. The result is a disruption of the right ordering of love.

**Consolation  
and gratuity**

All three of Ignatius' 'causes' of desolation can be related to the idea of gratuity. In the first case, we respond to God's gratuitous love tepidly, lazily, negligently, stingily—and consolation departs. This is straightforwardly First Week material, and simply needs to be worked through. The second 'cause' of desolation is that God wants us to grow in the gratuity of love, and is extending us in the divine service and praise 'without so great a reward of consolations'. God knows that this is the only training that will help us 'attain love', the love to which God is calling us, the love which grows all through the Second Week as we contemplate the Christ who loved his own 'to the end' (John 13:1). The third of Ignatius' 'causes' can be termed 'the wisdom of gratuity'. Gradually we learn and acknowledge that everything in life is 'gift and grace'. No one can conjure up these gifts on their own—if only because the gifts of consolation and love are only a sign of how 'the Lord Himself desires to give Himself to me'. Only God can do the giving.

*Gratuity Lost*

In our contemporary culture, the sense of gratuity so central to Ignatius' teaching is being lost. God's gratuitous gifts may remain

permanently on offer, but we are losing our sensitivity to them. Everything is to be bought and sold; without money, you are no-one and have nothing. The confusion of identity and possessions is a profound source of desolation. The best things in life are not for buying and selling, and they lose their lustre if people try to trade in them.

The absence of a sense of gratuity in our lives—the deepest cause of so much desolation—has many different manifestations. Often we feel valued for what we do rather than for who we are. Work can seem mechanical, like a form of slavery; if you do not produce, you are nothing. Ministers of the Church may define themselves in terms of the service that they give, and then they may face questions about whether this could not be provided just as well in a secular context. Our prayer can become simply instrumental, a means to attain benefits, or so-called 'graces'. Sexuality too can be trivialised by being commodified. Our consumer society seriously disrupts the balance of human relations.

When means take the place of ends, life disintegrates. If our sense of ultimate purpose is alive, then it integrates our personalities and deepens our mutual solidarity. We cannot be static in our use of means: either they prepare us for something better, or they become absolutes. If we become fixated on means, then desolation finds fertile soil. We become isolated, and individualism—which is simply fragmentation taken to its logical conclusion—becomes rampant. The lack of gratuity, the valuing of means over ends, the rupture of solidarity in favour of a narcissistic, self-preoccupied individualism—all these foster the spiritual desolation so prevalent among us.

### ***Overcoming Desolation***

Ignatius, however, does suggest some ways of escaping from desolation. These are taken from his own experience and from the perennial tradition of the Church. He offers us something like a spiritual psychotherapy, of great wisdom and simplicity.

To start with, he insists that a person needs a spiritual guide. An isolated individual can grow old in desolation without finding any solution—a situation which the evil spirit can astutely exploit. Discernment cannot occur without guidance. Here, the seventh Annotation is significant. The guide must not be 'hard or closed-minded' with an exercitant in desolation, but,

... gentle and mild, giving them encouragement and strength to go on, uncovering to them the tricks of the enemy ... and having them prepare and dispose themselves for the consolation which is to come. (Exx 7)

It might be thought that Ignatius is trying to replace divine consolation with the retreat-giver's advice and encouragement here. Not so—there is no substitute for consolation. The one giving the Exercises can only prepare the way. The gentleness and mildness that Ignatius speaks of is simply a kind of mediation, offered in the hope that consolation might thereby come more easily. Ignatius is describing an accepting human relationship which God might use in order to overcome the obstacles within the person.

There are also some pieces of advice for the time of desolation itself, directed both to the one receiving and to the one giving the Exercises. We are not to change in our lives in the ways the desolation is suggesting; conversely, we should try to act against it. Both of these are difficult for us today. We have become very used to letting our moods rule us. We prefer to abandon ourselves to them, or to find compensations that numb our sense of desolation. Many of those around us try to resolve their problems in these false ways. Ignatius' talk of more prayer and penance seems medieval and strained. But we need not think in these terms. Prayer and penance are means by which we can express our faith and hope in God, our quest for God, our desire to overcome the obstacles surrounding us. Above all, by 'examining ourselves carefully', we are seeking to see from a divinely enlightened perspective why our desolation has arisen—an insight that will remove desolation's sting. Ignatius' means are not the only ones to be borne in mind here. The individual's psychology may suggest that self-scrutiny will be counter-productive, and that what they need is simply a healthier and more open way of life.

Two further rules (Exx 320-321) are addressed specifically to the person actually suffering the desolation, encouraging them to patience. There is an implicit Christology here: understand the desolation from Christ's point of view, see it as Christ sees it, remember that Christ is accompanying us and going before us with his passion and cross. 'Give me your love and your grace; that is enough for me.' (Exx 234.5)



*Dante and Beatrice*

We are living through a crisis of love, and we do not often experience it. We therefore find it difficult to believe in the love that God has for us. But without this love, life has no meaning.

Finally, Ignatius encourages us to make good use of our desolation, so as to foster in ourselves the capacity for living in a stable spiritual balance. We need consolation, but we should not depend on it in the wrong kind of way. The important point is to learn to move forward in the divine service, 'whether with many divine visitations or fewer' (*Constitutions*, III.1.10 [260.2]). Divine service is linked to *divine* love—and that will certainly be stable. Divine visitations are, however, like the watering of a plant: they are necessary, but how they happen depends on times and persons.

A final and vital means to help us work through desolation (and indeed consolation) is the process of becoming, through the experience of interior movements of different kinds, a person of discernment. The

Exercises are a remarkable school of prayerful, prudent discrimination that helps us to understand life in depth and to make the most of its reality. People who are growing each day in self-understanding and in the understanding of God have resources for living amid the most conflicting motions and provocations, whatever their historical circumstances. So it is that Jesus and the great figures of the spiritual tradition continue today to be our guides. For, above all, they knew how to discern well, and to live constructively 'through all the changing scenes of life'. Ultimately, this acquired skill will be our richest resource.

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# WHAT WE LEARN FROM DESOLATION

*Antonio Guillén*

*'You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.'* (John 16:20)

THE SCHEME WHICH ST IGNATIUS GIVES US in his First Week Discernment Rules attempts to help us recognise how consolation and desolation can each be both positive and negative. Consolation and desolation alike can tell us something about God; equally, both of them can also turn us away from God. We therefore have a problem about interpretation. How are we to understand consolation and desolation well? How are we to find in both of them the Lord's generous support?

Even positive experiences have to be sifted and interpreted. At first sight we might be inclined to take consolation at face value, as something to which we can just abandon ourselves completely. But the Rules suggest that a good use of consolation requires us to think, quite deliberately:

The one who is consolation should *think about* how they will be in the desolation that will come later. (Exx 323)

The one who is being consoled should *take care* to humiliate themselves and abase themselves as much as they can, *thinking* how little they are capable of in time of desolation. (Exx 324.1)

The point comes across all the more strongly in the Second Week Rules:

We very much need to *pay attention to the course of the thoughts* ... (Exx 333.1)

... then to look at the course of the good thoughts that it brought the soul ... until it drew the soul to its depraved intention; so that *when this kind of experience has come to be known and been noted*, care can be taken for the future. (Exx 334.2-4)

... because often in this second time, through its own train ... of concepts and judgments ... it forms opinions of various kinds that ... *have to be examined very thoroughly*, before full trust is placed in them. (Exx 336.4-5)

Consolation, then, is in principle ambivalent; it can deceive. Perhaps, then, desolation, which seems properly and exclusively to come from the bad spirit, can have some benefits. Perhaps we can somehow discover within desolation the presence of the 'good spirit'. St Ignatius seems to have had no doubt that this could be so. Such a conviction seems to underlie the First Week Rules. He offers, as possible 'causes' for desolation, the idea that we are being *tested* for what we are, and the possibility that we are being given 'true awareness and knowledge ... that everything is a gift and grace of God our Lord' (Exx 322.3). He seems to be suggesting that positive experience on its own cannot yield this 'profit'.

It is to this profit that I am referring when I speak now of what we can learn from desolation. To illustrate the point, I would like to offer a parable. Parable is a literary genre not only profoundly rooted in the gospel, but also used often by St Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. So we have the parables of the Temporal King, the Two Standards, the Three Classes, and even the suggestive way in which the 'contemplation on the Incarnation' elaborates on Luke's text. The First Week Rules themselves include tiny parables: the weak woman, the vain lover, and the besieged camp (Exx 325-327). So let us add another.

### **The Parable of the Pool**

*There was once a pool amid a dusty landscape. Actually it was a wadi—a valley which in the rainy season becomes a stream. When it was full, it was so refreshing. Filled with water, its very presence radiated life all around. It enabled all kinds of greenery to flourish on its banks. Life flowed through its waters. It was a place for water sports. People felt attracted to come and bathe there, to fish, or just to enjoy the smooth blue waters that contrasted so powerfully with the dry landscape. The pool was very proud of all it could do, and of all it meant for those around.*

*But soon the pool dried up. One could hardly imagine a more appropriate symbol of death. Where there was once water, now there*

was absolutely no life whatever. There was not a single trace of vegetation anywhere in the vicinity. At the bottom of the pool, people could see dead fish, rubbish, and human waste. The surface was ugly—nothing but dirty mud, or lumps of dry, caked earth. No-one would come any more for a picnic. People preferred to avoid it.



The pool became very upset. 'Why have I, who was once a source of life, become a symbol of death? What has happened to make me so hateful, rejected by everyone like this, when only a few months ago I was so attractive, so inviting to people?' Whereas before it was very pleased with itself, now its self-image was just the opposite. Everything conspired to make it see itself as ugly, dry, attractive to no-one, life-giving to no-one. What a difference!

Then a few months later the pool filled up again with water, and once again it was back to its old chirpy self. It forgot the feelings it had had when it was dry. But then the experience of dryness returned again, and with it the same sense of disorientation and meaninglessness.

Time and time again, the inexorable cycle of rainy years and years of drought continued. Eventually, this alternation made the pool think a bit. 'In this life, for whatever reason, sometimes it goes well and sometimes it goes badly. The only thing to do is to put up with what happens at each point, and not try to understand what it's all about.' But it didn't find these ideas very encouraging. On the contrary, they just made it discontented and bitter.

But then it had another idea. 'Up there, at the source of the river, there must be a Wellspring which can make something beautiful out of my dirty surface by sending me, freely and without strings, the flowing water



*which transforms me and makes me into a delightful lake. I'm not just a pool; I'm a wadi. That's the only thing that makes sense of these different experiences.' And that idea led the pool to reflect even more deeply. 'How self-centred I was, how narcissistic, when I'd just accept all the fulsome compliments people paid me when I was so full of water.' Now it saw what the water truly was: a gift.*

*The alternations of positive and negative experiences had brought the pool a new wisdom. Now it was well aware of how ugly its surface was, but it also knew it always had a generous, resourceful companion on its side. It knew who really deserved the compliments and the expressions of thanks that the good times provoked, and now it could pass them on to their proper place. But the pool could never have discovered this if the only experience it had ever had was that of being full of water. It was thanks to both experiences, and to the interplay between them, that the pool had had its true reality revealed, and also the generosity of the Wellspring.*

'The second part of this exercise'—so Ignatius might say—'consists in applying the above parable of the pool', sometimes full of water, sometimes completely empty. Something similar can be said of the spiritual person, who is sometimes in spiritual consolation and at other times in something completely the opposite. The point of the exercise is for the person to acknowledge how the two kinds of experience caused in the soul complement each other. Both teach us important lessons. For the very alternation between them enables the Lord's presence and generosity to be revealed all the more clearly.

**Desolation's Lessons**

Obviously, the central aim of the First Week Rules is the complete and definitive rejection of what the desolation is seeking to bring about: 'to lance the bad ones' (Exx 313.2); 'in desolation it is the bad spirit which is guiding and advising us, from whose counsels we cannot take a way forward that will be right' (Exx 318.2). The Rules suggest that this rejection occurs through a three-step process.

The first step involves firm restraint on the negative tendency of the desolation:

In time of desolation, never make a change, but be firm and constant in the intentions and decision in which one was the day before this kind of desolation. (Exx 318.1)

The second step is one of moderating the desolation itself, and of forestalling its taking root in the soul:

... it is very helpful to make changes in oneself that are against the same desolation, such as being more insistent in prayer, in examining oneself carefully, and in some appropriate extension of penance. (Exx 319)

... so that it *resists* the various agitations and temptations of the enemy, because it *can* ... even though it does not feel this clearly. (Exx 320.1-2)

... and think that it will be soon consoled, taking diligent steps against this kind of desolation. (Exx 321)

But to overcome the desolation completely, you need to take a third step, one that turns the tables on it, so to speak. Then what you take from the experience is the opposite of 'what the tempter is seeking'. At this stage, too, you are allowing yourself to be guided by 'the counsel of the good spirit, which always remains'. What this amounts to is a rereading of the *desolation* from the more serene perspective accorded by the *consolation* that follows. Though the desolation was at the time a negative experience, its deepest significance is a positive one.

Of course desolation is an unpleasant, dark, negative experience. But we also need to recognise that in the subsequent consolation we receive the gift of being able to read it in another way, and that—

against all our expectations—it can now give us new and wonderful benefits. The message’s ‘container’ is negative; the message’s ‘content’—now that we have moved beyond its immediately palpable effects—is anything but.

The key text for understanding this third step is the ninth of Ignatius’ Rules. This rule is about the lessons to be drawn from desolation, and Ignatius summarises them under three main headings.

*The Need to Cultivate the Gift Received*

The first of the ‘causes’ (he could have said ‘purposes’ or ‘lessons’) that Ignatius discovers in desolation is described as follows: ‘because we are tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises, and thus *because of our faults* spiritual consolation distances itself from us’. He is echoing here what the angel said to the Church in Laodicea:

... because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing’. You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. (Revelation 3:16-17)

The reproach is directed at spiritual people who consider themselves self-sufficient, as ‘permanent owners of consolation’. For the truth is that if consolation is not cultivated, it ‘distances itself’. Ignatius thus insists on the need for tending.

Everything precious, everything valuable, needs to be cared for. If good seed is to produce fruit, it must be planted in rich, deep soil, not in rocky ground, or among thorns, or on the path. Then it is cultivated and watered; if there is no rain we use a waterwheel or a machine. If it looks as though it is drying up, we take this as a sign that it needs more water or better care.

*When the pool realised how much it depended on the water, it began to think about taking proper care of itself. When the water level went down suddenly, it would look to see if it had developed some new cracks somewhere. Then it would fill those cracks—an important way of keeping hold of the water it had and opening itself to receive more. It was grateful for the early warning it had received, because it could take some steps to put things right. And no other response could match the boundless generosity of the Wellspring.*

When, therefore, the result of tepidity, laziness and negligence in spiritual exercises is that peace and interior joy—in other words consolation—are withdrawn, then the experience can serve as a wake-up call, as a reminder of the need for gratitude, and as a summons to work more fully with the Giver of all. It is as though the Giver were saying to us, ‘Doesn’t the gift you’ve received really matter to you? You say it does, but you’re not making enough space in your life to hold on to it.’

The best possible basis for ‘spiritual exercises’ is a grateful recognition of the gifts already received and an openness for whatever might come in the future. We remind ourselves ‘where and to whom I am going’ (Exx 239.1), and we regularly give thanks to God (Exx 43.2). If this spirit is present, then all our ‘efforts’ at prayer—whether it comes easily or we find it difficult—can become moments of grateful ‘colloquy’ with the Giver.

*The Fragility of the Ego*

Ignatius stresses the second ‘cause’ of desolation more strongly:

... to test how much we are up to, and how far we are distant from His service and praise, without so much reward of consolations and accumulated graces. (Exx 322)

Desolation helps us to ‘feel and taste’ this truth—a truth that no spiritual person will ever have explicitly denied, but equally may well not have ever really believed and allowed to become part of them.

*When the pool was dry, it learnt who it really was: what its own surface was like, and how little good could be expected just from its empty hole. It tried to get water from somewhere else, and was prepared to pay everything it had—but then it realised it just couldn’t. The only thing it could do was to acknowledge that it had no resources of its own with which to ‘save itself’—or even to maintain the comfortable self-image that it used to have. After all, it was, really, a wadi.*

*But at the same time, something new dawned in its mind. It realised that its goodness had a source outside itself. It was dependent on the water that just ... just ... came. The weeks and months of emptiness had taught the wadi some self-knowledge. ‘No longer am I so absorbed in myself.’*

Similarly, the spiritual person learns something about reality from his or her desolations, and receives something of an inoculation—though never a complete one—against vainglory. Desolations involve a process of purification; now the person comes to recognise their own incapacity to carry forward their life-project of God's service and praise. They begin to sense almost instinctively that things do not work if they try to sustain themselves simply with their own ego. They are learning about what hinders their growth.

Repeated experiences of the ego's fragility exhausts our narcissistic selves that are so little inclined to acknowledge their weakness, and so prone to put up barriers against God's gracious action. We learn to 'give to God the things that are God's' (Mark 12:17). We need to recognise that its sand is no secure foundation: we have to find the rock on which the whole edifice can safely stand (Matthew 7:24).

The experience of desolation thus has an important and necessary purifying role. It removes false supports, and dashes false and narcissistic hopes. It puts things in their proper place, and teaches us to look at the Giver rather than the gifts. During the night, people look up to heaven far more often than during the clear light of day.

*The Presence of God as Giver*

The third of the 'causes' is the one which Ignatius elaborates most fully. It is formulated both carefully and at length:

... to give us a true awareness and knowledge so that we might sense interiorly that it is not from us to apply or to have accumulated devotion, intense love, tears or any other spiritual consolation, but that *everything is gift and grace of God our Lord*; and so that we not place our nest in something else, raising our understanding in some pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or the other parts of spiritual consolation. (Exx 322)

What is at stake is simply the presence of God as Giver.

The rationale behind this 'third cause' takes up and presupposes what has been said before. It reiterates the call not to attribute to ourselves the fruits of consolation. How can we explain the origin of 'accumulated devotion'? It would be absurd to attribute such an increase to oneself, having established that one could neither produce or conserve it when one thought one needed it. Ignatius here cites Thomas à Kempis, taking up a suggestive image: those who,

... without having wings to fly, ... want to set their nest in heaven ... because they presumed to greater things than pleased God they quickly lost His grace. They who had built their homes in heaven became helpless, vile outcasts, humbled and impoverished, that they might learn not to fly with their own wings but to trust in Mine.<sup>1</sup>

What is new and distinctive here is how this third 'cause' explains the 'true awareness and knowledge' that one receives from desolation when one looks at it in hindsight, with the benefit of a subsequent experience of consolation. 'Everything is gift and grace of God our Lord.' God's character as Giver is revealed in all its magnificence once one has recognised one's incapacity to conjure up God's gifts by any other means.

*The pool discovered the existence of the Wellspring by rereading past experiences in a way that was life-giving, vivifying—whereas any other reading was life-denying. Now everything took on a meaning, the positive and the negative. Both experiences (even that of being quite empty of water) had been necessary for it to sense how the Wellspring was always there. The droughts had been times of blessing. Anything that had brought this wonderful awareness was worth it.*

Desolation can often be a valuable lesson, helping a spiritual person to value properly what they regularly receive, and to understand what they are receiving as a gift. 'We only value something when we lack it', says a Spanish proverb, reflecting experiences known to all of us. So too the Prodigal Son's finding himself homeless and without food enabled him to feel the desire to return to his father's house, and to be grateful for the gift of being a son. At other times, desolation can truly be seen as a message of support from God to the person. 'I am here; don't think you are alone. I haven't forgotten you or abandoned you. Quite the contrary.' It is like parents playing hide-and-seek with their children—first they hide behind a tree, and then they immediately relieve the child's anxiety by reappearing. So the Wellspring likes to help the pool sense its closeness.

**Desolation  
as lesson  
and support**

<sup>1</sup>Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 3.7.4.

In none of these cases should desolation be thought of as an experience beyond God's control. The worst desolation in history—that of Good Friday—was anything but out of God's control. We Christians live today from the discovery that on that terrible day the love of the Lord was stronger than suffering, and from the consequent realisation that the 'silence of God' was pregnant with words of hope.

### ***Praying Through Desolation: Responding to the Lord's Goad***

The Easter stories in the Gospels confront us with a long succession of people in desolation. The catastrophe that was Good Friday made no sense to any of them. Everyone, in Ignatius' language, 'made a change', and in no uncertain terms. Hope was lost; the goodness of God seemed to have hidden itself; it seemed that Jesus was no more than a corpse to be respected or the central figure in a nice story to be retold and then perhaps forgotten. Jesus was, quite simply, dead—permanently.

At this point, the Risen One began to 'reconstruct' his broken friends, and to replace their reading of events with a new reading that made their hearts burn within them (Luke 24:32). The group of broken people who had scattered in their unhappiness slowly reassembled, and began to take on a life even richer than they had had before. In place of their 'barriers' and their disappointments, their pain was turned to joy (John 16:20). How had the Risen One provoked this change? How had he helped each one of his disciples to read reality anew?

#### ***The Risen One 'reconstructs' his broken disciples***

In John's Gospel, there are three apparitions to disciples who are in desolation, and from the narratives we can discover a series of suggestions about how to pray through desolation. The questions posed by the Risen One give the disciples resources for prayer, within 'the divine help that always remains for them, although they do not sense it clearly' (Exx 320.2).

*'Why Are You Weeping?' (John 20:13)*

Mary Magdalen was looking only for Jesus' dead body. Downcast, badly disillusioned, she could see only death around her. She could interpret the empty tomb only as evidence that the corpse had been desecrated, as one more bitter blow. John underlines Mary's fixation with the tomb, and her constant weeping.

In this situation of bitterness and tears, the Lord's gift appears through a question posed by two angels: 'Why are you weeping? What is the anxiety within you that is sapping your life?' When we are in desolation, the Lord's invitation takes the form of an insistent demand to move beyond our own sadness, to 'move outside' our 'self-love, desire and interest' (Exx 189.10), and to overcome the mortal evil of despair.

It is not easy to understand that sadness and one's own wounds can be material for prayer that is accepted by the Lord of Life. Nevertheless, the gift keeps on being given: we can recognise how Christ accepts these wounds, transforms them, and gives us another, liberating reading of them. Perhaps there is no better material for daily prayer.

Drawing on the 'divine help that always remains' for her (Exx 320.2), Mary responds to the question, and discovers that there is still an element of prayer within her pain ('they have taken away my Lord'). Without knowing how, she realises that she can stop looking at the tomb ('she turned around and saw'). For any Christian in desolation, there can be a new perspective that leads them beyond obsessive fixation with sadness, and allows them to discover, precisely in what is causing their desolation, the closeness of the Risen One who is giving life. As they respond to his question, their faith increases.

*'Who Are You Looking For?' (John 20:15)*

The gardener whom Mary Magdalen discovers beside her repeats the angels' question, but with greater warmth and taking it further: 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for to resolve and satisfy such misfortune?' Mary's answer, 'tell me where you have laid him', implies that she is looking for a corpse, for something that would have kept her in the sphere of death.

When the Risen One calls her by name—'Mary!'—he is claiming that he himself can give a positive meaning to the brutal disruption of Good Friday. There is One who is still listening to the cry of those who suffer, and giving answer. And this can occur for each of us. The Lord's fidelity is confirmed on Easter morning. Desolation is not the last word, either of history in general, or of our own individual life-stories.

Mary discovers herself anew, and she proclaims the foundation of a hope that she had thought lost: her living relationship with the Lord ('Rabboni!'). Through her contact with the Risen One, she too has, in

the fullest sense, risen again. His resurrection allows her to receive, as the ‘apostle of the apostles’, the first ecclesial mission:

‘... go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”.’ (John 20:17)

What better answer could there have been to her prayer? Could Mary Magdalen ever have imagined that she was to be sent on mission only a minute after feeling so joyless, so hopeless?

Every situation of desolation has hidden within it this supportive provocation from the Lord: ‘Who are you really looking for—*really*?’ If we honestly confront the provocation that such a question represents, if we try to unearth the response hidden within our griefs and disappointments, and if we reread the mission that the Lord has given us on this basis alone, then we come to sense that we are being sent by the Lord to new tasks and labours in a way that is radically different. Desolation used in this way has strengthened our confidence.

*‘Is It Because You Have Seen Me That You Believe?’ (John 20:29)*

Thomas is the victim of his own punctured enthusiasm, and perhaps also of unacknowledged feelings of guilt at not having accompanied Jesus to the end (John 11:16). The memory of his having betrayed Jesus on Good Friday is blocking him, just as with Mary Magdalen, Peter and everyone else. It is not easy to explain to him at this point that nothing good ever came from wounded narcissism.



What narcissism does accomplish is to instil a total lack of confidence in human mediation. Nobody can do anything to shake us out of the discouragement and sadness that are consuming us. That is what Thomas is expressing in the wildly formulated conditions that he sets for believing: ‘unless I see the mark of the nails ...’. But soon afterwards, he is touched by the ‘marvellous effects’ (Exx 223) of the presence of his ‘Lord and God’ (John 20:28). He hears Jesus’ gentle reproach for his haughty dismissal of

others' report: 'So, it is because you have seen me that you believe? Wasn't your companions' witness enough?'

Jesus' gentle correction refers to the group's shared experience. Ignatius would later write that the Spirit within each individual is the same Spirit that works within the whole Church (Exx 365.1). There were resources available to Thomas in the group of disciples that would have enabled him to counter his temptations. Those who will believe on account of the apostles' message will be blessed (John 20:29); faith is lived, fostered and nourished corporately. Thus Ignatius in the Discernment Rules advises that 'another spiritual person should know the tricks and insinuations that the good soul is suffering' as a way of preventing 'the tempter making progress with the malice he has begun' (Exx 326).

One of the sad effects of desolation is that one loses even the smallest sense of being part of a community, part of a Church. This sense is what the tax collector has, praying humbly in the temple; this is what the Pharisee, allegedly praying in front of him, in fact rejects through his presumptuousness (Luke 18:10-14). When the Risen One comes near to Thomas, and when Thomas' heart has been softened by the darkness, then he has learnt to be less like a self-contained Pharisee and more like the humble, grateful tax collector.

*'Do You Love Me?' (John 21:15-17)*

Peter had always believed that Jesus was asking him to follow him, even to Peter's laying down his life. Several times he had responded enthusiastically, rashly, to a question that was not in fact being put to him. It is only at Lake Tiberias, after the experience of Good Friday and the collapse of his strength, that he is able to hear the real question: 'Peter, do you love me?' Like the pool in our parable, he has had to see himself empty in order to recognise that his strength is a gift, and that every gift requires the receiver to give thanks.

When Peter answers at this point—at last with some humility—he is once again entrusted with a mission: 'feed my lambs'. Now indeed Peter will be able to fulfil this mission, and he can give his life in doing it if he wants to. The bitter, tearful desolation of Good Friday has shown him, finally, that the Giver's fundamental question to him was about love. The water from the Wellspring, which flowed through the pool and made it so abundant, was ultimately destined—like everything else from the Wellspring—for the Sea.

Sooner or later, people living by the Spirit will, like Peter, get the message from their consolations and desolations, and simply give themselves fully and freely to their sisters and brothers. Everything is received so that it can be passed onwards. We have to move beyond narcissistic pretensions, beyond imagining ourselves as owners of the good within us; we must also avoid the trap of seeking to hold on to it for our own enjoyment.

The point of the spiritual life is not to accumulate consolations, but to become more open to God. The ear needs to be attuned, the mind stretched, and the body loosened, so that God's presence can be discovered even in the silence, and we can come to love and serve God in all things. In this process, desolation has a vital role. Its lessons are salutary.

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*From the Ignatian Tradition*

## ON CONSOLATION

*Jerónimo Nadal*

*Jerónimo Nadal (1507-1580) did much to consolidate the foundation of the Society of Jesus, above all through his visitations of significant communities in Spain and Portugal. This issue's **From the Ignatian Tradition** is an anthology of passages from Nadal's writings on consolation. We begin with an extended passage from a talk he gave at Alcalá in 1561, and continue with some passages from the spiritual diary which Nadal kept from the time of his joining the Jesuits in 1545 until shortly before his death.<sup>1</sup> The diary particularly enables us to sense how the Ignatian teaching arises from quite particular personal experience. More generally, we can see Nadal negotiating tensions inherent in the tradition. How is freedom under God to be reconciled with the need for some kind of control? How can we preserve a dynamic sense of prayer informing ministry and not degenerate into mere functionalism?*

### **To the Jesuits at Alcalá, November 1561**

So, what are you going to do with consolations?

It's important that you understand why God our Lord is giving them to you, what it is that God is wanting with them. It is so that you do what you have to do with greater perfection; so that you understand with greater light and clarity what you were dealing with earlier; so that you desire more eagerly and truly and with more lively desires to employ yourselves in what belongs to the divine service, and have more strength for this. You do badly to lose yourself totally in consolations, and to vanish into them; you are not taking what is most important into account. A person like that is here opening the door to

<sup>1</sup>The originals are to be found in MHSJ MN 5, 481-484, and *Orationis observationes*.

the devil for very dangerous deceits and errors. *Utendum est consolatione, non fruendum*—consolation is for use, not enjoyment. Consolation has to be taken as a means and as a gift that our Lord makes, and not as an end—it is not for resting in, but for taking as a down payment enabling you to move forward.

And so that you understand what concerns this material: there are two kinds of consolation; some are of the understanding and others of the will. Those of the understanding go like this. You begin to meditate on the things of God our Lord with Catholic trains of thought, drawing on faith and on the natural light of the understanding. God our Lord in His infinite mercy and goodness is wanting to give you a personal mercy and gift, and thus to strengthen your understanding, to give you more clarity and light with which the intellectual sight of interior things can be sharpened; and this can grow, with the Lord's help, so much that there is such facility and such abstraction that the senses are no longer necessary. And these are called *ecstasies* when the senses are set aside and the whole understanding is captivated by the consideration of divine things. God our Lord at this point is giving another, new way of understanding, well known among those who have the use of the 'senses' and who derive awareness of things with their service and help.<sup>2</sup>

There are also *raptures*, and these are substantially the same as ecstasy. There is a difference in that ecstasy grows little by little until it finds itself in that state, as I said to you, while rapture is immediate, without helps from the senses coming first, neither from meditation nor contemplation, of the kind you see in ecstasy. So it was with St Paul's rapture.<sup>3</sup>

These things are not to be sought in prayer, nor are you to go to prayer for this purpose. And when God our Lord in his mercy gives them, they are to be taken with humility and simplicity, with the person recognising that they merit nothing of any of that, and making greater acts of humility the more mercies they recognise that they are

<sup>2</sup> Nadal is a believer in the 'spiritual senses', special or transformed faculties that come into play in exalted prayer states, and refers to them here allusively.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:2-4: 'I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.'

receiving from God's hand, and spurring themselves, encouraging themselves to serve their Lord more.

The consolation of the will is a *concurus*<sup>4</sup> that God our Lord gives it in accord with its nature. It is that the will's feelings and activities should be gentle, intimate, united to God; and from here tears arise—from the abundance of consolation the heart melts, and from that the tears flow. These tears are good, and a sign of the great gifts that God our Lord is giving the person—and the person should make great efforts to move forward in the divine service. There are also tears of sadness in these consolations, at seeing one's soul separated from what it loves so much and not able to go and enjoy at once what it so much desires. And all these consolations are difficult to explain. And there are also tears of sadness at one's own sins and those of others.

It remains for us to say how we are to handle these things. I say you should deal with them by the ordinary way, through common terms—that it should be for the building up of the Church; and if you do not hold on to that, it is better that you keep quiet. These interior matters have to be explained in the way that they are spoken of in the Church. And you can make very great use of the afterglow of prayer to discuss these things firmly and with assurance, as one who has much knowledge, as one who is master of the subject. But those who say everything do badly and err, and do not please God our Lord, who wants to have his secret friends, and does not give these things to be revealed. Those who go about saying, 'I saw this and that in my prayer', do not please me, because the things in question are things that they just feel like; and when they might be true, God does not give them for this purpose. They are not to be made public without the advice of spiritual persons. And, finally, all these interior things are to be subjected to the legitimate judgment of one's superiors, in order to avoid the errors which customarily occur.



<sup>4</sup> A technical term within accounts of divine and human action that see no contradiction between divine omnipotence and human freedom.

### From Nadal's Prayer Notes

SAYING OF FR IGNATIUS. In good decisions, if there is some consolation, and then desolation comes, this is a confirmation of the earlier intention.<sup>5</sup> (n.3, 1545)

There are two modes of spiritual life; one through desolations; the other through consolations. The former is generally of greater merit, if only your spirit stands in purity of faith, hope and charity without sensible consolation. However, I do not think this has ever happened to anyone—which seems to be indicated in the first chapter of 2 Corinthians.<sup>6</sup> (n.25, 1546?)

PERCEPTIBLE CONSOLATION IS NOT TO BE SOUGHT. I<sup>7</sup> was a person whose prayers seemed to aim at my being consoled and serving God in gladness. But it was shown to me that I should feel the inappropriateness of my sins, and pray on account of them. Thus I was not to pray for perceptible consolation, but rather to understand that I was worthy of all desolation and punishment. And if consolations were to be sought, I should understand that this should be on condition that they help promote the greater glory of God, and that, quite simply, the will of God be done. (n.150, 1546-1547)

Perceptible workings of the spirit and interior relishes and consolations, even as they fill the soul with gentleness and simplicity, are nevertheless to be observed diligently and attentively in case they are extended to things other than that for the sake of which they have taken on their effectiveness and helpfulness. For ... it might happen that the one who is superior interprets everything in a favourable way, naively, and never reproves or corrects someone under him. And so it is worth establishing a taste for a second virtue, while at the same time

<sup>5</sup>This saying dates from the time of Nadal's entry into the Jesuits.

<sup>6</sup>The connection here is not quite clear. 2 Corinthians opens with an evocation of God's consolation and of how human beings can mediate it, and later Paul evokes a particularly painful experience: '... we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again' (2 Corinthians 1: 8-10).

<sup>7</sup>In the original, Nadal describes his own experience in the third person.

preserving that for the one which you already have;<sup>8</sup> and by nature and grace the person should use the particular virtue, the particular relish, needed in order to act according to both commandments and precepts.<sup>9</sup> (n.239, after 1552)

There is one rationale for joy when it comes from penitence, and another for the joy which comes from other spiritual exercises—different, in other words, arising from the different roots from which the joy comes. The former is a matter of tears, containing sadness and cherishing it, but also joyful; the latter is a joy of exultation which does not go easily with sadness. Thus, arising from the difference in object, there is a difference in the rationale for joy. (n.294, ca.1555)

Spiritual consolations follow spiritual virtues (charity, faith, hope, contemplation, prayer, gifts of the spirit)—just as other virtues are followed by their consolations. For to act virtuously is to act with relish. (n.380, 1556-1557)

Take great care not to use inappropriately the light of consolation or the grace of your vocation. For you can use these well and badly; however, they are not given except to be used, whether publicly or privately. (n.437, 1557)

After two days of desolation, which seemed to be to do with lack of courage, a spirit of large-heartedness was given me, greater than I had ever felt, centred on these things about the Society and about bringing heretics back into faith and union with the Apostolic See. This large-heartedness was linked with a facility in being humble towards any human being whatever.

The Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son; thus through that missioning it comes about that the Spirit's being led forth eternally and infinitely is felt in the spirit, by some means that cannot be recounted.

<sup>8</sup> In the immediate context, Nadal has been discussing conflict between the duties of obedience and a person's own common sense. Perhaps because this is a difficult topic, his language here becomes obscure. Throughout these notes, Nadal's writing draws on Aristotelian virtue theory, and in particular on the claim that the virtues dispose us emotionally to behave in good ways. His point is that these dispositions can take us too far—perhaps a sub-Aristotelian version of Ignatius' teaching about the angel of darkness appearing as an angel of light. 'The virtue you already have' is presumably obedience. The text is worth including because of its rare and frank admission that Jesuits need to discern critically their trained disposition to do what they are told.

<sup>9</sup> Both divine commandments applying to everyone, and the 'evangelical counsels' of poverty, chastity and obedience, applying to those called in a special way.

When I was meditating on how the Apostles, having received the Holy Spirit, spoke of the marvels of God, nothing occurred to me that I should speak of before the sins from which the Lord had freed me.

Some thoughts were disturbing me, and as I was praying against them in Mass, a certain spirit of repugnance was given me through which those thoughts were dissipated. For the repugnance was of such a kind, as though a perceptible grace in the gentleness of the heart coming from outside had expelled them with an invisible strength. Glory be to Christ Jesus. (nn.483-486, 1558)

When ugly thoughts press and disturb us, we must take effective and deliberate control in Christ and his cross, and turn our attention to acts of the will, even though we can maintain only the weakest hold on some good object. And the whole force of our will should thrust out towards this object (of course in due proportion).

Those whom a perceptible grace touches, either of their vocation or a private one, tend to be negligent in uprooting vices and in planting virtues in their spirits. Therefore careful and diligent attention needs to be given that such grace be not neglected—and so much so that those consolations should make us more vigilant, becoming weapons and resources by which we will be helped against our vices, and incited to impress virtues on our spirits. This will happen if we always join humility and fear to those spiritual apprehensions and relishes. Is this what Paul means—‘do not become proud, but stand in awe’—and when he tells them to taste with sobriety?<sup>10</sup>

A kind of door was opened up to me, beyond all visible things, in darkness. (nn.503-504, 1558)

This too is to be observed: consolations are not to be sought just for their own sake, but as resources for helping one’s neighbour—whether one is studying, or a coadjutor, or a spiritual coadjutor or a professed father.<sup>11</sup> It is here that there is a source of consolation and perfect patience in tribulation. (n.534, 1559?)

It is generally more to be feared, and more carefully to be watched for, that we shall err when we are dealing with consolation of spirit than in

<sup>10</sup> Allusions to Romans 11:20 and 12:3, Vulgate.

<sup>11</sup> Nadal is here referring to different grades of membership in the Society.

desolation. For desolation tends to make us cautious and intimidated; consolation makes us more confident and inattentive—in other words this is about our vice and negligence, not about any incapacity in true consolation. (n.672, date uncertain).

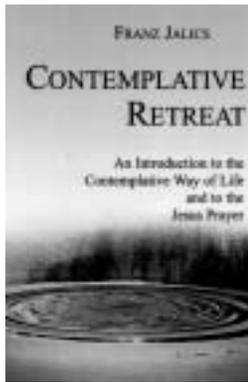
‘When Jesus was twelve years old’ (Luke 2). Christ Jesus is teaching us how to handle our ministries. We move away from the presence of Christ, in other words from contemplation and prayer, to action, thinking that he is in our companionship and that his strength is in our action. But our negligence brings it about that we lose this sense, this spiritual meaning, in our action. We return to Jerusalem, to prayer; we seek Christ in our sorrow, and we find him. In other words, consolation of spirit. Gently, devoutly, we make our complaint and reveal our sorrow to Christ. But he does not reproach us for our mean-spiritedness, because in our action, even though we do not have an actual sense and consolation of the spirit, nevertheless we must trust that Christ is with us in those things which are his Father’s business: that is, in our ministries which he gave us in order to work with us. Indeed, now it is not we who are working, but Christ who is working in us and we are working with Christ. Impress, Lord God, on our heart that spiritual sense that all the actions of Jesus Christ, his sufferings, his death, his mysteries, his merits are indeed of God, as well as of this human person. Hence the divine strength; hence the exultation of spirit; hence the heavenly strength from God; hence the doors open into the gifts of God. (nn.942, 1574-1575?)

When consolation is given, do not fail to co-operate with it, but rather gently receive it, so to speak, and—as it requires this—co-operate spiritually in joyfulness of heart.

God’s light and the sense or intimation of divine strength exists through divine gift. We co-operate with it not of ourselves, but through the strength that is in it, very strongly indeed, but also very peacefully and very gently in Christ. (n.951, 1574-1575)

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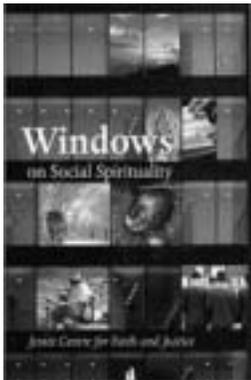
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# SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION AND ENVY

*Ignacio Iglesias*

*'Let me hear joy and gladness.'* (Psalm 51:8)

IT WILL ALWAYS BE A MYSTERY, something beyond human comprehension, how far episodes of consolation and desolation arise from human reality as such, from the conscious and unconscious mechanisms of human nature, and how far they are caused by agents 'from outside' (Exx 32.3). But the fact that all this is a mystery should not become an excuse for just giving up on the quest to understand it. The matter can lead to sheer adoration, and to the wisdom that comes from adoration, but it can and should also be explored.

Not long ago, a book called *Living Through a Spiritual Discernment* made me think again about this old problem. The author tries to shed light, from her own personal history, on what is of God and what comes from the human person in the inevitable 'mixture of God and oneself' that marks our passage through life:

Every experience of encounter with God has to move from a certain fusion and confusion towards differentiation. God does not pass above our humanity to reveal Himself by just hitting us, as it were, with the divine condition of absolute being and truth. God's self-revelation, rather, occurs through our human temperaments, through our personal histories. Gradually it distinguishes itself from these, through the whole course of our lives with God—with the help also of discernment. And gradually it makes itself known as something distinct from me. And then I discover that I too am distinct from God.<sup>1</sup>

Ignatius' Discernment Rules—his analysis of the phenomena of consolation and desolation in 'rules for in some way sensing and getting to know the various motions which occur in the soul—the

<sup>1</sup>Noémie Meguerditchian, *Vivir un discernimiento espiritual* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2001), 9; see also 151.

good to receive them and the bad to lance them' (Exx 313) as well as in those which 'with more accurate ways of discriminating between spirits ... are more suited for use in the Second Week' (Exx 328)—are a magnificent example of this kind of exploration. Since ancient times, other great classics of spirituality and mystical literature have attempted the same task. But neither Ignatius nor anyone else offers complete and finished treatments—in drawing up the Rules, Ignatius was clearly conscious of this. He is passing on the results of his own explorations as a basis for further discovery.

In this article I would like to look at consolation in the context of a deeply-rooted, complex set of feelings, common to almost all human beings, namely envy. The root meaning of 'envy' is 'seeing badly' (Latin *in-vidia*) the good of another. It includes a sadness at others' success and happiness at their failure. Envy is a capital or primal sin:

Like all egoism, from which it takes one of its most repugnant aspects, envy undermines the work of personal salvation, and, in so far as it frustrates the plans of God with regard to one's own vocation, it tends towards making the envious person a serious obstacle to the vocation of others.<sup>2</sup>

I have always admired how Ignatius could at once value consolation as such so highly, as a great sign of God's presence in history, and yet remain so suspicious about the way in which human beings receive this consolation and work with it.

### ***Spiritual Consolation and Anxiety***

Of course there is no place for talk about anxiety in connection with the origin of spiritual consolation. God who is the source and origin of all consolation (2 Corinthians 1:3) is, in person, pure consolation and joy, radiated and manifested in the various forms of joy to be found among creatures. We can only speak of anxiety in connection with human receptivity to consolation, with how the human person comes to accept and maintain a sense of consolation.

<sup>2</sup>*Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 4, col. 774.

*Consolation's Evanescence*

Ignatius sees consolation as a dynamic reality within the person ('interior movement', 'motions', 'move', 'increase'...). Moreover, there is something inherently evanescent in it (Exx 323), given its dependence on how human beings receive it and foster it, on how they co-operate with it, on how they are tempted to claim ownership and control over it, and on how they can either follow or resist the impulses that it involves. Ignatius explores the paths that consolation takes, interprets its signs, reveals obstacles and resistances to it, makes helpful suggestions from his own experience, and puts forward ways in which the human receiver of consolation can make corrections.

As Ignatius talks about consolation in terms of the soul's being 'inflamed in love for its Creator and Lord' (Exx 316.1) and of how the soul is consequently incapable of loving any created thing 'in itself' rather than 'in the Creator of them all', he certainly indicates the ways in which lived consolation can be disrupted. For in fact we can slide all too easily between loving creatures 'in the Creator of them all' and loving them 'in themselves', between using them to 'love and serve' and worshipping them idolatrously, between taking the creatures as an invitation to love their Giver, and as a vehicle for our own self love. Even in this first description of consolation, Ignatius is placing consolation before the exercitant in terms of the Principle and Foundation. He is speaking of the God who has created humanity and all things on the face of the earth so that they may serve God (Exx 23).

**False priorities  
disrupt  
consolation**

In the end, consolation is one of these 'things'—and the human person can either move rightly towards it or else go astray. Either we remain humble and grateful, dependent on the fact that it is given us and committed to the Giver. Or else we become quasi-owners of this 'thing'; we begin—without noticing that we are doing so—to adore it; and gradually we thus turn consolation in on itself. Either we share in the joy that we receive as a gift from a Giver, or we use it to become self-satisfied. The effect of the latter is to suffocate the consolation and to isolate us.

*Hearts Turned Away*

In the Old Testament, God places only one condition on the gifts made to Solomon: 'if you will walk in my ways' (1 Kings 3:14). But

Solomon's heart 'turned away from the LORD'. 'His heart was not true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.' (1 Kings 11: 9, 4) The process of turning away was not deliberate, but rather a slow slippage, a progressive loss of clarity in the relationship. Whether or not it was voluntary is an open question in Solomon's case; such changes are indeed always imperceptible. But we can chart three stages within the process.

*From Gratitude to Ownership*

Up to a certain point, the Consoler and the consoled have been travelling together, in relationship, through an 'interior motion', caused by the Consoler, that 'inflames the soul'. But at some point—a point that cannot be identified—the break begins. We begin to make our own way, and a forgetfulness of God begins to condition all that we do. Somehow the relationship cools. Memories become less and less reliable. There is so much to take on board, and it becomes increasingly convenient to deal with things in a less than fully human way. It becomes tempting to treat our relationship with God as something that can be put into storage, leaving us more energy for the present.

Consolation is a gift that you cannot save up like capital; it is not like information that can be stored in a database to be accessed quickly and conveniently. On the contrary, it is essentially fluid; we have to replenish it by constantly receiving it as a gift. It is also by nature something to be shared: it has to be handed on just as it is, at once, with the same sense of free gift with which it has been received. John's Jesus prays to the Father that 'that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:26). Gratitude is preserved only if it is continued and passed on. It loses its character if we cease to receive what is given as gift, or if we try to hoard it. Then the receiver's life is impaired: we who can only live in an atmosphere of joy start trying to find or create our own oxygen, our own consolation. When Peter wanted to build three dwellings on Mount Tabor (Matthew 17:4), the impulse was a spontaneous and natural one. At the same time, it indicated a harmful desire: that of taking control of what is essentially a gratuitous gift, and to be lived as such.

It is easy enough to move from consolation to desolation, and indeed (though less so) to move in the other direction. Ignatius'

**What is  
freely given  
cannot be  
hoarded**

account of the three 'causes' of desolation (Exx 322) opens up some possibilities for understanding the alienation that we can experience, as does Ignatius' shrewd intuition about the need to distinguish the time of consolation itself from what comes after it (Exx 336).

In economics, ownership implies power over something; in the spiritual life it ends up as slavery. As we try to hold onto spiritual joy, to preserve it, we stifle it. The abundance that the Bible sees as a sign of blessing can lead us into forgetfulness and idolatry. So it was in biblical times; so it is now. Moses warned the people as they passed into the Promised Land about how abundance (and, we can say, consolation) can obscure the memory and blind the heart:

Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God ... . When you have eaten your fill ... do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God .... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have got me this wealth'. (Deuteronomy 8:11-17)

Consolation is never a prize that is appropriated or earned; the idea of 'merit' distorts and profanes the very notion of consolation. If we begin to 'function' on the basis of consolation, to take it for granted, we have already stopped receiving it. A frantic effort to hold on to it will soon begin, of a kind that gives ample scope for the evil spirit to appear under the form of an angel of light (Exx 331).

*From Ownership to Possessiveness*

Even with material possessions, ownership does not make us feel secure. Rather it leads to new forms of insecurity, to the fear of losing what we own and of being robbed. We lose our sense of freedom and gratuity, and instead begin to defend what we imagine to be the freedom of our ownership, in a self-destructive spiral of avarice. Yet we can never be satisfied. We try to accumulate our own consolations as the work of our own hands. Blinded by enthusiasm, we can fail to recognise that we are no longer being led by the same good spirit. The spirit which brought us consolation 'for the soul's benefit, that it might grow and climb from the good to the better' has been replaced by the spirit which works 'for the opposite', and seeks 'to enter in a way that is with the devout soul, and to leave by himself' (Exx 331-332).

These 'spirits' or 'angels' do not just appear on the human scene as messengers from heaven or hell. Their action is organically part of

human nature, as the more or less exclusive cause of the gradual slippages—sometimes unconscious, sometimes consented to—within us as we become separated from God’s leading.<sup>3</sup> As was said earlier, God does not pass our human nature by; God’s self-revelation occurs through our human temperaments, through our personal histories.

In the Gospel parable of the rich man with his barns, Jesus makes fun of our craving for security:

“... I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.’ (Luke 12:19-21)

In Ignatian terms, the rich man loves his consolations and the things that give rise to them ‘in themselves’. He forgets in his complacency both about their origin and their goal. Thus he becomes trapped within a painful isolation from God, and is left to his own mercies.

*From Possessiveness to Rivalry*

At this point mechanisms start to operate deep within the human person—mechanisms which can be sordid and shameful. Because we have appropriated to ourselves the joy given by God, it has become a vulnerable possession to be protected and indeed defended—if necessary violently—against real or potential competitors. As we look around us, we start comparing ourselves with others. It saddens us that others are living in a security and enjoyment which we do not have—we feel as though we have been robbed. The presence of these imaginary enemies make us tense, and our lives become full of bitterness and sadness. We become frustrated: ‘for then it is proper to the evil spirit to gnaw, to sadden, to place obstacles’ (Exx 315.2).

Those who have studied the phenomenon of envy, whether in individuals or in groups, connect it to the psychological effect of primal

<sup>3</sup> See Santiago Arzubalde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio: historia y análisis* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 1991), 596: ‘The word “spirits” ... enables the Ignatian text to contain three different significances. It can refer generically and abstractly to specific, individual *movements of different kinds* that show a certain tendency or propensity. It can refer the relation these movements have to the *causes* from which they proceed, conceived in more or less personalised terms. Finally, it can also refer to the *goodness* or *wickedness* inherent within these tendencies ....’



Envy by Pieter van der Heyden—'a horrible monster, a most wild plague'

experiences that were somehow frustrating or humiliating. These experiences lead to a double reaction in which people become very assertive and defensive about what they possess, using it to exclude others and to demonstrate their own superiority; at the same time they attack anyone who possesses something good that they lack.

For Ignatius, it is not only consolation that is reversible and that can fluctuate; positive growth in Christian discipleship can also go into reverse gear. The activity of the evil spirit—the 'progression of thoughts' (Exx 332-334) which frequently leads to desolation—seems closely to resemble, in committed people who are fundamentally people of consolation, the symptoms and passions of envy. One might even say that Ignatius, in his description of the strategies and activities of the evil spirit, has unmasked the 'envious one' who has never ceased to be present in human history from the beginning (Genesis 4:1-8).

The affinities here are not, obviously, exact, but nor are they purely fanciful. Oddly, the term 'envy' is not to be found in Ignatius' main writings—despite the fact that he himself passed from being quite

unashamedly envious to being himself envied without in any way wishing it. But his whole spiritual strategy, and particularly his commitment to a freely chosen ‘lowliness and humility’—in the face of severe criticism—show that he is well aware of the corollary of human pride that is envy.

**The subtle transition from joy to complacency**

Consolation begins to decay when we make the subtle transition from joy to complacency, from a relational fulfilment to self-satisfaction. There follows a process of gradual degeneration, aided by our emotional inertia. We are seduced by human consolations of all kinds, as vain compensations for the loss of the first and true consolation. When the process is complete, we realise how fragile these surrogates are. We are worn out by the tension involved in looking as though we are devout and in consolation, when in fact we are interiorly bitter and alone and left to our own resources. At this point our behaviour may become shameless, and envy in its many forms may appear, consuming like a virus whatever remains of the original consolation, and venting its anger by attacking the consolations of others.

**Envy and Clericalism**

In his ‘rules to help people feel and get to know’, Ignatius deals with this process as it occurs in the individual, and it is to the individual that all his warnings are directed. But the seriousness of the issues at stake becomes manifest in their effects within society. Envy is essentially aggressive, both within the self and in the self’s relationships with others. It creates a world divided into those who envy and those who are envied. The latter, innocently rejoicing in their consolation, find it almost impossible to understand the former’s ‘perverted intention and malice’, and they find it very difficult to defend themselves. Certainly they cannot take up the same kind of weapons—they can only work with the goodness of their own gratuitously given consolation, which is ‘not from this world’ (John 18:36).

Almost inevitably, however, we have to ask: is there a form of envy typical of the clerical, churchy world? After all, Jesus was the victim *par excellence* of envy (Matthew 27:18); he was hounded by an envy which the religious leaders of his time skilfully manipulated. In the final retreat that he gave to the clergy of Milan, Cardinal Martini

provided an introduction to the *lectio divina* of John's Gospel. Within the framework of the Ignatian Second Week, Martini offered a meditation on the whole of chapters 5-12 of the Gospel, a meditation which he entitled 'the enemies of Jesus'. Martini discusses one group of these enemies in connection with chapter 7, under the title, 'the charge that arises from envy and mental blockage':

In this episode, envy and mental blockage in the face of God's action mount up. The darkness is not some abstract, ethereal reality, but something very concrete, present in the human heart: this man is more successful than we are, and we have to eliminate him.<sup>4</sup>

In the Church that we see emerging in Acts and in Paul's letters, envy is abundantly and obviously present and active—not among the Church's 'enemies' but within the Church itself, gnawing away at roots that are still tender:

Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. (Philippians 1:15-17)

And this has continued. The sadness of some early Church writers is all too prophetic:

I would like to keep silence, but reality would shout louder than my voice .... If we denounce evil, we have nothing to lose—on the contrary. Yes, the Church herself is contaminated .... We are fighting with each other, and it is envy that is arming us against each other .... If, as we take out our hostility on each other, we all undermine the common task, where will we land up? We are weakening the body of Christ .... We are proclaiming ourselves to be members of one single body, and we are devouring each other just as the lions would ....<sup>5</sup>

It would certainly be interesting—though perhaps the task would be too complex—to write a history of envy, looking at the hornets' nest

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Martini, *Il caso serio della fede* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2002), 134-137.

<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, *In epistolam 2. ad Corinthios*, 28.3-4.

of human resistance in the Church, especially among its clergy, to the ever creative and daring action of the Spirit. This resistance often adopts the very language of the Spirit, and claims to be operating ‘in the Spirit’s name’, as it obstructs the joy and vitality that the Spirit seeks to foster. When Paul tells us not to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), he is speaking in a particular context, and out of his own experience of being envied. But surely he is pointing to something more universal, something which can spread like an epidemic. Those who are envied often appear as the ‘little ones’ of the gospel; those who envy them retain, under many disguises, the same old anxieties about power that even Jesus’ disciples so ingenuously revealed in questions like ‘who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?’ (Matthew 18:1)

In the retreat conferences mentioned above, Martini affirms clearly: ‘envy is the root of all evil, and this applies also to the ecclesiastical sphere’. Drawing on the work of Donald Cozzens, Martini argues that the use of family imagery for relationships within the Church, whatever its strengths, can foster relationships of rivalry and envy. If the Church is conceived simply as Mother, the bishop as Father, and the clergy as brothers, then various negative dynamics of the kind exposed by Freud can be unleashed. The limitations of metaphors need to be recognised:

Personally, I have never wanted to stress the role of the bishop as father. There may be something of the reality of fatherhood in a bishop, but it must be understood alongside the word of Jesus, ‘call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven’ (Matthew 23:9).<sup>6</sup>

When Ignatius speaks of the evil spirit gnawing and saddening and placing obstacles, he is not speaking only of its attacks on those ‘ascending from good to better’ (Exx 315). Its greatest perversity comes when people have begun to slide blindly towards isolation and complacency, and when they start to take others with them. For it is not just they themselves who are choked by their sadness; they infect others with it. It is not just that their own consolation is corroded;

<sup>6</sup> Martini, *Il caso serio*, 136. See *The Changing Face of the Priesthood: A Reflection on the Priest’s Crisis of Soul* (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical, 2000).

their new 'consolations', those provided by 'the evil angel' (Exx 331), include the desire to see other people unhappy.

How is it possible that people who are, in principle, people of consolation, and who have certainly been touched by consolation, should slide towards an evil which they cannot even name? The insinuation of this kind of virus into the heart of the one consoled is nevertheless an obvious fact. Perhaps latent envy originates in a need to have one's own consolation recognised by others; in the process this consolation loses contact with the gratuity essential to it, and becomes a tool of complacency. If so, we can see Ignatius' wise advice as an allusion to this danger:

Let the one who is consoled set about humbling and lowering themselves as much as they can, reflecting on how little they are fit for in the time of desolation without this kind of grace or consolation. (Exx 324.1)

### **Consolation's Healing**

For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations ... are you not merely human? (1 Corinthians 3:3-4)

For Paul, envy is a problem of immaturity, a problem that arises when a person takes their own needs as the criterion of human value, whether in themselves or in others. Envious people are obsessed with themselves. They see their own reality and—especially—that of others in a distorted, perverted way. The results are multiple and complex. They can take the form of fight (intolerance, defamation, hostility, hatred) or flight (apathy, scepticism, negativity, conformism, withdrawal). Envy is thus difficult to recognise or to cure. Envy is blind, and makes people blind. Its first victims are the envious themselves, but they are not the last, because envy is essentially death-dealing.

Human growth away from mutual aggression and towards Jesus' self-giving love presupposes that we have gradually developed a new vision of ourselves and of people in general, and that we have gradually unlearned the habit of putting ourselves first. We need to move from loving all things 'in themselves' to loving them, loving them *all*, 'in the Creator of them all' (Exx 316.2).

Thus our overcoming of envy has to begin with simply recognising it—witness Ignatius’ teaching about retracing ‘the progression of thoughts’ (Exx 333.1). Once we have recognised the damage and distortion, we can reassemble our sense of integrity. Finally, we can break down the prison walls that our envy has led us to construct, and recover our freedom in the experience of being loved anew by God and of seeing ourselves as we are seen. The good spirit helps here, and can make use of the sadness that is itself part of envy (Exx 314). But we will almost certainly need another gentle hand to help us restore our vision and open our eyes to the signs that *God* esteems and values us, if we are to build a new and more profound form of self-esteem.

If we do not acknowledge our own envy, ‘humbling and lowering ourselves’ as much as we can (Exx 324.1), then the process of regeneration from envy will not begin—it was the lack of such humility that allowed our former consolation to decline. The regeneration process consists in recovering a sense of gratuity and giftedness, both passively and actively. Gratuity is the essential atmosphere within which both consolation and the person consoled can flourish. If we know that we are infinitely loved for who we are, this will take us beyond the need to make claims on anyone, or to seek anything at the expense of someone else. We will no longer be downcast because another is happy. The other is not an adversary, or even a competitor. On the contrary, for our regenerate self, the other’s otherness is taken up into our own joy.

God wants us to work actively and responsibly with the ‘good angel’ as we follow the path towards full self-esteem that will open out when we rediscover the infinite esteem of God signified by consolation.

***Recovering a sense of God’s infinite esteem***

In a world consumed by envies of various kinds, far more than are recognised or manifest, we can and must learn anew the objective value of the human person—a value that comes from within. This lesson consolidates consolation, and without it the maintenance of the spiritual practices wisely recommended by Ignatius for times of desolation (Exx 318-321) will not be easy.

What Ignatius says about the characteristic action of the good spirit seems naturally to describe this process of re-education. We can simply list the functions which Ignatius attributes to it. It begins by ‘causing pain and remorse’ in a person’s conscience, opening the mind to reason (Exx 314.2), and counteracting envy’s ‘gnawing and

saddening'. It continues by encouraging and strengthening, giving consolations, tears, inspirations and peace. It removes illusions, until finally 'all sadness and disturbance' disappear, and make room for 'true joy and spiritual relish'. And all of this happens 'sweetly, lightly, gently, as when a drop of water soaks into a sponge' (Exx 335.1).

Much of this process involves both God and the human person, through the deployment and use of natural resources which are gifts from God, placed by God at human disposal. The functions of the 'good angel' not only converge with the human process of re-educating self-esteem; they coincide with it. What God adds is the sense of gratuity that enables us to sense that we are loved absolutely, beyond our shortcomings and limitations, even when we feel humiliated by our own envy.

The two 'progressions of thoughts' that 'come from without'—the one which destroys consolation and the one that restores it again—develop from different origins. The first arises from human ideas about self-sufficiency, as we attribute to ourselves what is God's free gift. The second builds on the truth and humility that come when we return to the unconditional self-esteem which has been freely given us, and which we should never have lost. When we recover that self-esteem and begin to radiate the joy that is springing up within us, when we discover that even the bitterness and sadness with which our envy punished us can somehow be recycled into love, then we begin to enter into fullness. Love alone overcomes envy. Moreover, if the Psalmist's prayer, 'restore to me the joy of your salvation', is answered, then inevitably this reality will overflow into the lives of others: 'I will teach transgressors your ways' (Psalm 51:12-13).

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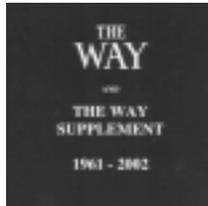
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# ANGELS OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

*Ignatius Jesudasan*

WHEN ANGELS APPEAR in religious or scriptural narratives, they represent the invisible, mysterious, spiritual realm of God. They make God's will and action known. Spiritual teachers such as Ignatius Loyola speak of angels of light and darkness, active within the praying or meditating individual. In his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius is drawing on his late medieval religious heritage and can take the existence of angels simply for granted, and on that basis analyze and interpret states of soul.

As a man of his time, Ignatius was unable to locate individuals within social, political and religious systems. Ignatian spirituality is effective and nourishing at the personal and communal levels, but it leaves social and political realities untouched, unscrutinised. Thus, inevitably, its political and cultural effects are conservative: it reinforces the *status quo*. Ignatius' talk of good and evil angels sustains—unconsciously and therefore all the more powerfully—the prevailing social and religious system.

This essay is a critique of the unarticulated political ideology underlying the rhetoric of angels and devils as we find it in Ignatius and in many other writers. Ignatian spirituality in general, and what it says about angels and devils in particular, may appeal to those comfortably established in Church and State, but it is positively harmful for those deprived by the systems of advantage and opportunity. Angels may be presented as the voice of God, impartial and transcendent. But the reality is that this so-called voice of God is a clever disguise for the voice of the ruling systems. Angels represent the dominant modes of thought, reinforcing their assumptions and their patterns of order, power and social control. None of this is apparent on the surface, because the mechanisms are seldom made explicit. They will never be obvious to the advantaged. Those in power will be at



*The Favored* by *Ferdinand Hodler* (1853-1918)

most superficially aware of the mythologies legitimating their position. Because such awareness will subvert the advantage they hold, it is in their interests to ignore the mythologies and to pretend ignorance of them. There is both more and less to angels than meets the eye. Justice and truth require that we undertake a critical social analysis of how angel figures function in religious writings and in spiritual tradition.

Sacred narratives and texts rarely state their assumptions. Narrative and dogmatic genres enable the authors to avoid being explicit about them. Yet authoritarian personalities and institutions nevertheless assert their power through such documents, without seeming to do so. Narrative is never as transparent as it appears. It can be highly freighted with ideology operating in the service of domination. As people in our own age become less gullible and more sceptical, the mainstream Churches appear ever less credible. One important path of re-evangelization may consist in purging our presentation of Christian faith from oppressive ideology, and thus in presenting faith in a radically new way.

Let me state three theses:

- any authentic religion or spirituality will be critically aware of how it functions within the world's social, political and economic systems, and will be concerned to articulate itself as a force for liberation;
- an inauthentic religion or spirituality will be an ideology of domination, hiding its own true character under the sacred garb of myths;
- talk of 'angels' is often an integral part of the mechanism by which prevailing ideologies disguise the truth, and thus helps hold individuals and communities within oppressive dependence.

In what follows, I propose to develop these theses in two ways. I want to expose the unreality of the so-called 'angels of light and darkness' by looking at the metaphors involved in our naming them, our identifying them. I also want to suggest a more positive account of the reality that talk of the 'angel of light' is seeking to articulate. The criterion for authenticity in religion and spirituality is, to my mind, a concern for justice and equality. When religious and spiritual rhetoric is peddled without such a concern, the result is a politico-economic fundamentalism that has nothing to do with the true gospel of Jesus.

### ***Light and Darkness***

The idea of angels is closely linked to the primordial contrast between light and darkness. We are aware of a wide and obvious difference between light and darkness, and we naturally extend this pattern of thinking when we talk of the angels of light and darkness. We think that darkness has or is a substantial reality, just as we think of light as a substantial reality. But the truth is otherwise. Light and darkness are only indications. The substantial reality is the *source* of light, the source that is present when we see light, and absent when we are in darkness. In the presence of a sufficiently powerful source of light, our eyes can see external figures and objects more or less clearly and distinctly. Darkness, for its part, has no reality or consistency of its own, despite the ways in which our language encourages us to think of it. Our patterns of thought and language are deceptive.

All too easily we interpret our experience in terms of our preconceptions. We claim to experience objective reality, whereas what we really experience are our preconceptions, our invented notions and beliefs which we have imposed on ourselves or received from others. Of course I am not denying that light and darkness affect our experience; I am only denying that they have any objective reality, any substantial being, in themselves. Darkness is only the absence from our sight of the source of light, and hence our resulting incapacity to see. It is not a positive reality in itself.

If darkness is not an objective reality, but simply a subjective experience of not being able to see, then the so-called 'angel of darkness' cannot be objectively real either. We are using a figure of speech, a creature of language whose whole existence is in and as a word. It makes us feel threatened by playing on the natural emotion of the fear of darkness, and thus achieves hidden intentions and purposes. 'Angel of darkness' is a metaphor, a linguistic product of an ideology inculcating a particular worldview through the natural instincts of love and fear.

Human language reflects the chaotic variety of emotions and needs within individuals and groups. Love and fear are active in every individual and group, pulling them in conflicting directions. Love may overcome fear, and draw the group into unity; alternatively fear may prevail, and in such a way that its source becomes projected onto a mythical, demonized Other. When religions speak in terms of angels of light and darkness, it is often such fear mechanisms that are at work. But it is important to recognise that there is no objective reality in this 'other' that is the target of the projections; rather an innate self-hatred is being displaced onto a pseudo-reality. *We* are the angels; our enemies are the devils. But neither of these affirmations is true. Rather, both the angel and the devil are realities within us, within each of us. The metaphor of the angel of light often expresses a repressive self-righteousness, and as such it illustrates the true wisdom lurking in Ignatius' teaching about the angel of darkness masquerading as the angel of light.

No language can function without metaphor, and metaphors are not always false or malign. But we need constantly to be aware of their social and political functions. Some examples may bring home what I am trying to convey. In the synoptic Gospels, the Pharisees accuse

Jesus of driving out the demons with the help of Beelzebub, a charge which Jesus is presented as vigorously refuting.<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament, Beelzebub was the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, whom Ahaziah, King of Israel, was tempted to ask whether he would recover from sickness, before he was rebuked for his infidelity by Elijah (2 Kings 1:2-9). Some scripture scholars think that this name can be traced back to Ugaritic roots. 'Beelzebub' is a prince, a fertility god otherwise called 'prince, the lord of the earth' and 'prince, king'. It was Jewish hostility to the Philistines which had corrupted the title so that it was understood as 'lord of flies'. The enemy's god, and by extension the enemy themselves, were redescribed in terms of ridiculous pests and demons. A similar dynamic may be operative in some of the harsher statements about the Jews put on the lips of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel:



*A Japanese Demon*

'Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' (John 8:43-44)

This phenomenon can also be documented outside the Christian tradition, in the Vedas. In the Rig Veda, Varuna, the highest spirit or god of the cosmic rhythm, is called an *Asura*. In texts written by the enemies of the Rig Veda's authors, this word came to mean something demonic. It came to designate a demon or evil spirit, who is 'not god'

<sup>1</sup>Mark 3:22-27; Matthew 10:25, 12:24-27; Luke 11:15-20.

and who is constantly opposed to the *devas*, the true gods. The objects of the in-group's worship are divine; those of the out-group's are demonic. One and the same name or identity can serve as an object of respect or ridicule—everything depends on the social location and perspective.

Even in my own lifetime, adherents of non-Christian faiths in India were referred to, before Vatican II, as *agnanis*—in English 'ignorant ones' or 'infidels'. Whoever did not embrace Christianity was simply an 'infidel'—a compliment with which the Muslims paid Christians and other non-Muslims in the same coin. More recently, in the political sphere, we may cite President George W. Bush's talk of an 'axis of evil' in connection with the Iraq war. In so doing, Bush is proudly and uncritically implying that the USA is the centre or axis of everything in the world that is good.

The language of angels and devils or gods and demons reflects a primordial human tendency to split the world into two opposed camps of 'us' and 'them'. Everything good, noble and beautiful is linked to *us*, the angels; everything wicked, base and ugly is linked to *them*, the demons.

Angels are commonly imagined in the world's religions as young, and as charming, beautiful winged figures. Devils and demons appear also as winged, but they are old, ugly, frightening bird-beasts, with horns on their heads, claws on their fingers, and fangs in their mouths. They can swim across oceans, fly across space, and traverse long distances instantaneously, just like angels. But they are also capable, thanks to their superior power, of overcoming the angels. Such images are perhaps no more than reflections of a desire for youthful power, for beauty, for goodness and for immortality, and of a fear of death, of evil and wickedness. It is in such a way that angels and demons can live an unreal but powerful life in human psyches.

When traditional spiritualities and scriptures mythically personify angels, they perpetuate belief in them by lending an air of objective reality or legitimacy to tribal antagonisms. The USA today represents the most powerful manifestation of such tribalism that has ever been known. Its ideological basis is a religious fundamentalism similar to that which prevails in the tribally religious state of Israel. Given the power of modern technology and the system of economic free enterprise, the USA combines tribalism with modernity, and exemplifies at its grossest the religious and political dynamic of the

nation state. There is nothing exclusively Islamic about the idea of a holy war.

### **Good and Evil**

The point can be extended to much of our discourse about good and evil. Such language often merely reflects a psychic consensus, a cultural tradition or defence mechanism. Talk of 'good' and 'evil' generally expresses nothing more than subjective desire and revulsion, legitimated in terms of a divinely ordained ethical and scriptural code, and of social and religious institutions. The gods are a screen for society's projections, figures in a religious ideology which enforces conformity and asserts superiority over both neighbours and enemies.

'Good' and 'evil' often function, therefore, as ideological constructs; they serve agendas of power and domination, disguised as moral and theological codes of purity and impurity, of honour and dishonour. They are not innocent, pure and disinterested in the way that they first appear to be. The use of such language often exemplifies the real truth hidden in Ignatius' insight about the angel of darkness appearing as an angel of light. There is something ambiguously demonic built into all religions and moralities; they hold out promises or make threats in order to control and regulate both individual and collective freedom. Individuals are thus socialised into determinate ways of thinking, and come both to internalise and to perpetuate them.

**'Good' and  
'evil' often  
function as  
ideological  
constructs**

As long as they remain committed to such dualist patterns of sensibility, organized religion and morality can neither be free nor freeing. Instead, they function as fundamentalist propaganda in the interests of those in power. They instil in those who conform a selfish expectation and hope of ultimate reward, and threaten them with terrible punishments should they dissent. This kind of spirituality and morality is not really free. The God of such religion and morality is a capricious tyrant, the creature of the social tyranny that is exercised through such a religious system.

I am not denying the objective truth that some states of affairs are good while other states of affairs are evil. I am denying that 'good' and 'evil' are themselves substantive realities, and rejecting any belief in good or bad angels as objective causes of good or evil states of affairs. I am insisting, rather, that we ourselves are the angels or messengers of

the good and evil that we do and suffer. Such an assertion raises the possibility of an authentic religion and spirituality of total freedom, which readily accepts its moral responsibility for good and evil, and is not driven and enslaved by the promise of reward or by the threat of punishment. Human beings, at least collectively, are responsible for much that they do and endure.

If this point is clearly understood, there can indeed be a legitimate prayer to 'good angels'. Such prayer can express our fear of harm and our desire to summon up good will in service of life, of nature and of our fellow human beings. It can also strengthen our commitment to overcome the ill will expressed in every selfish impulse and act.

The *rishis*, the sages of ancient India, spoke of God, the ultimate Reality, as beyond and transcending the divisive categories of moral good and evil. God neither governs such categories nor is governed by them. If we imagine things to be otherwise, we are the victims of an anthropomorphic idol; we are seeking to measure God, to cut God down to human size. God's self transcends our dilemmas of moral good and evil.

Scripture speaks of a God who frees us from the bondage of morality. God promises us a transcendent truth and grace that the world of law can neither provide nor imagine. There can be no spiritual salvation *in* or *into* a world dominated by the law of moral good and evil. True salvation has to be a salvation *from* a world of law, reward and punishment. God alone can give such grace: for those who love God, God works in *everything* for their good (Romans 8:28). This grace and goodness is beyond the reach of moral, aggressive activism. Salvation is a contemplative oneness with God, with a God working in all cosmic processes, all historical events. Those who have attained to such a union may truly and authentically be described in terms of the metaphor, 'angels of light'. Jesus himself was such an angel, such an evangelist of freedom and salvation. His whole life, his death and resurrection, bear witness to this kind of salvific liberation.

### ***The Use and Abuse of a Metaphor***

From what I have just said about Jesus and about other prophets of salvation, it will be clear that I recognise a legitimate use of the term 'angel'. I am refuting simply the alienating patterns of thought that are often embedded in such discourse. Talk of angels can express an

important truth about ourselves, about how we can be messengers—and thus in the root sense angels—of good and evil to one another.

The more conventional uses of this metaphor, however, are seriously harmful, and reinforce attitudes of aggression and fear that have nothing to do with the gospel:

- they encourage us to split our sense of self and thus to compromise our integrity;
- they project the good or evil we ourselves do on to mythical external agencies, and thus obscure our own responsibility;
- most seriously of all, they legitimate and enforce the social and legal structures of a particular political and economic system by attributing them to God and imposing them in God's holy name;
- they sacralise society's sanctions by means of doctrines of heaven and hell. Conformists are taken to the bosom of the angels in eternal heavenly light, while dissenters are sent to the outer darkness that is the realm of the demons.

Talk of the angels of light and darkness is often part of an alienating worldview that masks an oppressive social order. It can all too easily hide the reality of blatant and avoidable exploitation. Its seductive, rollicking rhetoric promotes a false consciousness that appears all the more plausible the more it perpetuates itself from generation to generation. Such talk is an important ideological tool supporting social orders that are tribalist rather than evangelical. It abuses the holy name of God, and it sets the idols of an oppressive cult on the divine throne. It obscures the truth that God is one without favourites, a God who is to be 'all in all'.

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## **RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN STATE INSTITUTIONS**

*Anthony J. Carroll*

**I**N RECENT MONTHS, THERE HAVE BEEN SHARP CONFLICTS in several European countries about the use of religious symbols in public settings. Should the Muslim headscarf (*hijab*) or the Jewish skullcap (*kippah*) be worn by staff in public institutions? Should it be permitted for the crucifix to be displayed in schools? A major social issue is at stake here: the proper public expression of religion in modern democratic societies. In this article, I shall begin by outlining how the controversies have been developing, principally in Germany and France, with some reference to Britain and the USA. Then I shall try to bring out the different visions of religion and the state that underlie the different policies that people advocate. Finally, I shall suggest some ways in which the discussion might move forward.

### **Current Conflicts**

#### *Germany*

In Germany, a major focus of the conflict has been the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in schools. The federal *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) holds at once that the state is to be neutral in matters of religious confession, and that citizens should have an undisturbed right to practise and express their own religion freely.<sup>1</sup> Current court disputes at both federal and regional state levels are exploring the tension between these two principles. On 24 September 2003, the Federal Constitutional Court, the highest legal authority in Germany, declared in favour of Fereshta Ludin, an Afghan-born German citizen who had

<sup>1</sup> See Article 4 of the German Basic Law (*Das Grundgesetz*). This can be found in both English and German on the German Government website at [www.bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de).

applied for a teaching post in a state school in Stuttgart. It upheld Ludin's claim that the State did not unequivocally prohibit the wearing of formal religious symbols such as the Islamic headscarf in schools. The federal court declared that each regional state could impose such a restriction, but only if it formulated a correspondingly explicit law.

This situation has caused a great deal of anxiety among Germany's Muslim population, who fear that their rights to religious freedom are being interfered with. They point to the situation in the southern state of Bavaria, which is predominantly Catholic; there schools often have large crucifixes on the walls as a matter of course. The fact that much of the Muslim population is also economically poorer than other ethnic groups in Germany no doubt also contributes to their resentment.

However, this problem is not confined to the Western secular democracies. In both Turkey and Egypt the issue of the headscarf has been the subject of public debate. In 1996 the Egyptian government refused to enforce legally the wearing of the headscarf, despite the pressure put on it by some sections of society. Indeed, one of the highest theological authorities in Sunni Islam, Mohammed Al-Tantawi, who works at the highly respected Al-Azhar University in Cairo, recently declared his sympathy for the positions of Western democracies such as Germany and France.<sup>2</sup> Much, of course, turns on the meaning of neutrality.

#### *France*

In France the situation is somewhat different. The formation of France as a republic emerged out of a struggle to liberate the country from the power of both the monarch and the Catholic Church. In 1789 the Declaration of the Rights of Humanity proclaimed:

No one shall be disquieted on account of their opinions, including their religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.<sup>3</sup>

The tradition of not disturbing the peace has led effectively to the privatisation of religion, and to a more radical separation of church

<sup>2</sup> See *Rheinischer Merkur*, 29 January 2004, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Article 10 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Humanity quoted, in inclusive language, from the Avalon Project of the Yale Law School at [www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/rightsof.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/rightsof.htm).

and state than we find in Germany.<sup>4</sup> Constitutionalists in France have generally considered this radical separation of church and state, and the consequent freedom of education from religious control, to be central to the identity of the French state. After more than a century of conflict between clerical and anti-clerical factions, the Fifth Republic confirmed this fundamental principle in 1958:

France shall be indivisible, secular, democratic and a social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Political secularity—in French, *laïcité*—is an embodiment of the fundamental values of the French Republic: liberty, equality and fraternity. It expresses the Enlightenment pretension to a universal rationality.

In the 1980s, this secularity was challenged once again. On 4 October 1989, three Muslim schoolgirls were expelled from the Gabriel-Havez Secondary School in Creil, north of Paris, for wearing the headscarf to school. The headmaster considered that such behaviour disturbed the secular nature of the school and thus contravened the principles of state education. The *Conseil d'État*, the advisory council to the French state, declared on 28 November that the headmaster was indeed right in his decision and that the schoolgirls had contravened the principle of *laïcité* by their actions. This was later confirmed by the *Conseil d'État* on 11 March 1995 when a similar expulsion occurred. However, in 2003 the *Conseil d'État* changed its opinion on this matter and declared that schoolchildren could wear the headscarf to school so long as it did not cause conflict in the school.

<sup>4</sup> The French Constitution makes no mention at all of God. In contrast, the members of the Parliamentary Council that formulated the *Grundgesetz* in 1949 stated clearly that they were 'conscious of their responsibility before God and humanity'. After the horrors of World War II, it was felt important to mention God as the ultimate judge of the polity, and to make explicit a belief in a power that transcends democracy and can even redeem it.

<sup>5</sup> 'La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances.' Quoted from [www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/textes/constit.htm](http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/textes/constit.htm).



*Protests in Paris, 1989*

The tensions over this issue have recently led to a quite new political development in France. In April 2003 the then French Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, invited the Muslim community to form a body called the French Islamic Organisation in order to mediate between the state and the Muslim community in France on such matters.<sup>6</sup> This was a radical move by Sarkozy, since traditionally the French state does not recognise intermediate groups or communities and has considered all citizens to be adequately represented by the state. It was Sarkozy's hope that moderate secular Muslims could foster good relations between the state and the Muslim community. However, when he addressed this new body in April 2003, he was booed as he argued that the photograph on the compulsory French identity card should be taken with an uncovered head.

<sup>6</sup> See Hannah Godfrey, 'Schools' Bid for Headscarf Ban Widens French Divide', *The Observer*, 15 June 2003.

In October 2003 the issue of the headscarf was further exacerbated by the exclusion of two schoolgirls from the Henri-Wallon d'Aubervilliers Secondary School in Seine-Saint Denis, on the outskirts of Paris. The French National Assembly voted overwhelmingly on 10 February 2004 to pass a new law banning 'conspicuous religious symbols' in state institutions. Now that this decision has been ratified by the French Senate, religious symbols such as the headscarf will be illegal in French schools.

It may be worth noting the concern that these developments have aroused in the Roman Catholic Church. Addressing the papal diplomatic corps on Monday 12 January 2004, Pope John Paul II implicitly referred to the issue. Although he considered the state to have a legitimate right to function autonomously and in that sense to be secular, he warned against any tendency towards a dogmatic secularism openly hostile to religious belief.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Britain and the USA*

In Britain too, the wearing of official religious symbols has been a matter of concern. In the summer of 2000, Fareena Alam protested against having been refused a passport on the ground that she was wearing a headscarf on her photograph. Subsequently, the Home Office formulated a clear guideline that represented something of a compromise:

Provided that photographs show the full face ... photographs should not be rejected where a religious head covering is worn.<sup>8</sup>

Among some, these debates meet only with incomprehension. Nevertheless, over 300 Muslims met in London on 25 January 2004 to prepare themselves to address this kind of problem as it might arise in British society. At present, the official position of the British government is that people should be allowed to wear religious symbols in public institutions and when functioning in public roles such as those of a teacher or a police officer. Nevertheless, the discussion on the continent of Europe has had its influence in Britain.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Address to Diplomatic Corps', 12 January 2004, [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2004/january/documents](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2004/january/documents).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *Islam for Today*, [www.islamfortoday.com/passport.htm](http://www.islamfortoday.com/passport.htm).

As for the situation in the USA, there have been regular newspaper discussions about such issues as headscarves on driving licence photos, and the right to wear religious symbols in jobs requiring a uniform dress. Perhaps the most significant issue for public debate in the United States has been that of the right to refrain from saying the phrase 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance regularly recited in state schools.<sup>9</sup>

The questions raised here go far beyond the wearing of religious symbols; they concern the very nature of modern democratic societies. How are democracies to balance what are at least sometimes the competing claims of tolerance and social cohesion, particularly as they become increasingly multi-religious? It is to these fundamental issues that I now turn.

### ***Liberal Pluralism and Social Cohesion***

The case against the presence of religious symbols in schools seems to be that they will somehow represent an undue influence of the teacher over the pupils. Since teachers are agents of the state, a demonstration in school of their religious commitment undermines the state's neutral, secular character. Teachers should keep their personal beliefs private, and not influence their pupils' freedom to choose their own religion.

What, however, does this neutrality amount to? Is the modern democratic state really neutral? Let us look at two influential political philosophers in different countries. Both are 'liberal', and both argue that only neutrality can ground a tolerant and cohesive society.

In Germany, Jürgen Habermas has argued that religions must translate their claims into the secular language of modern democratic politics if the dangers of religious fundamentalism are to be avoided. Thus religions must renounce any claim to have a total grasp of the truth. They can be dialogue partners in modern democratic debate only if they allow a 'neutral common sense' to decide whether or not religious claims are legitimate. Only if religions commit themselves to the rules of the democratic process will their tendencies to dominate by force rather than by rational argument be kept in check.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion of this matter by Adam Liptak in *The New York Times*, 1 March 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Habermas elucidated his view in a speech he gave when he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Association in November 2001 and later in an article he wrote in the Summer 2003 edition of



*The Kippah*

In the USA, John Rawls has articulated the principle rather differently.<sup>11</sup> Rawls' groundbreaking work, *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, developed a conception of 'justice as fairness'. Rawls was trying to break away from conceptions of justice in terms of metaphysical principle or specific content, and instead to understand justice simply in terms of a social contract. People

living out of 'justice as fairness' make no claims for themselves that they are not prepared also to acknowledge as valid for others. The principles of justice apply equally to all, as citizens with the same rights and responsibilities—but Rawls makes no commitment to any particular account of what these principles will amount to.

Rawls refers to an 'overlapping consensus',<sup>12</sup> and suggests that the mainstream worldviews have enough in common for none of them to threaten the basic democratic values of society. Their values 'overlap', even if they do not exactly coincide. There can be broad agreement on social practice, even if the principles and values motivating that practice arise from very different religious convictions. Thus a secularist, a Muslim and a Catholic can in principle all agree to Rawls' principle of 'justice as fairness', while being motivated in very different ways. The Muslim may consider that such is the will of Allah as revealed in the Qur'an; the Roman Catholic may appeal to the Church's moral and social teaching; the secularist may argue that such a conception of justice forms the rational basis of a just society. Though their arguments are different, they agree regarding a minimal basis for political justice in society.

In a characteristically liberal way both Habermas and Rawls seek to generate consensus by focusing on the pragmatic. If society is to

the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. For an English version of his Peace Prize speech, see 'Faith and Knowledge', in *The Future of Human Nature* (Oxford: Polity, 2003), 101-115.

<sup>11</sup> See *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), and, most recently and most accessibly, *Law of the Peoples* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> See *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 133-172.

function, we need to marginalise our substantive religious commitments and focus on points of shared agreement.<sup>13</sup>

Though there are obvious attractions in this way of thinking, the conception of neutrality on which they depend is illusory. As Charles Taylor has noted, this kind of claim about neutrality is inevitably inscribed within an ‘inescapable framework’ that at least implies a particular vision of the good.<sup>14</sup> The liberal position trades on standard Western accounts of what it means to be moral, of what end or good a society exists for, and indeed of what should count as a rational argument. Liberals are being unfair when they presume that only religious positions are situated within a particular moral and substantive horizon.

**The liberal  
conception of  
neutrality is  
illusory**

Liberals consider themselves free of the prejudice of which they accuse their religious counterparts because they are heirs of the Enlightenment. They stand within a tradition that rejected superstition and religion in favour of emancipated reason. Enlightenment reason, in the famous slogan of Kant, was meant to be courageous enough to think for itself and not to have to depend on religious tradition in order to justify its own position.<sup>15</sup>

In political theory, the issue is discussed in terms of a debate between ‘communitarians’ and ‘liberals’. Communitarians, such as Charles Taylor, argue that moral and political positions are always indebted to particular traditions or communities within which they are embedded. Liberals, such as Habermas and Rawls, tend to base their arguments on some form of procedural or neutral reason that tries to avoid appealing to substantive—and hence contested—visions of the good.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas and Rawls consider substantive positions to be views about the good that are embodied in religious traditions. As these views are internal to a particular tradition, those outside such a tradition will not always share them. Rawls and Habermas use different terms: Habermas talks of ‘substantive worldviews’, whereas Rawls speaks of ‘reasonable comprehensive doctrines’. Nevertheless, they have both tended to share the basic liberal position that in the deliberation process of democracy one should stick to pragmatic procedures and leave the substantive questions about the good out of the discussion. For a more nuanced account of Rawls’ position that nevertheless does not substantially affect my argument here, see Patrick Riordan SJ, ‘Permission to Speak: Religious Arguments in Public Reason’, *Heythrop Journal*, 45 (2004), 178-196.

<sup>14</sup> See Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 3-24 (a chapter entitled ‘Inescapable Frameworks’).

<sup>15</sup> See Kant’s famous 1784 essay, ‘What is Enlightenment?’

The problem with the liberal position will become clearer if we return to our central example. A liberal theorist finds it problematic that a teacher should wear or display a religious symbol in a state classroom. However, they would have—presumably—no such difficulty were a teacher to wear Nike trainers. But what is the difference supposed to be? Surely the trainers too carry a message which could influence a pupil? If I, as a teacher, express a particular preference for one type of trainer then I am clearly saying that I hold this type of sports shoe to be a good thing, something to be worn, something worth spending money on. Then imagine a further case: a teacher wearing a T-shirt bearing the name of a pop group. This action can mean that the teacher subscribes to the pop group's values, in a way that may well influence any young person who sees them. No teacher can avoid transmitting values and indeed convictions to their pupils. We learn by imitating those around us. By imitating various possibilities, we come to judge between what we believe and what we do not believe. No matter what a teacher does, they will influence a young person. The question is not how to avoid that dynamic, but rather how to handle it constructively.

**No teacher  
can avoid  
transmitting  
values**

The liberal at this point needs to claim both that religious and moral convictions are clearly distinguishable from other convictions, and that they constitute a special case. Here and here alone, young people should be able to decide for themselves, uncorrupted by outside influence. The liberal thus needs to argue that the wearing of specifically religious symbols is somehow abusive, in a way that wearing Nike trainers is not.

This brings us to the crux of the liberal position. The liberal's problem with religious conviction cannot in the end be simply that it is a conviction, but rather that the conviction in question is somehow questionable or illegitimate, in that its grounding comes from a private support system of family and religious community. The justification for religious conviction comes from sources that, in principle, are not publicly accessible. I really have to belong to this family or this religious community in order to understand the argument. From the outside, I cannot penetrate the hidden matrix of social meanings and bonds that make up a religious tradition. It is for this reason that liberal philosophers such as Habermas and Rawls consider religious discourse beyond political reasonableness. Only if religions translate their discourse into a publicly accessible language can they hope to

make their voice heard in the public domain. Secular political language is neutral; religious language is not.<sup>16</sup> When I wear a religious symbol in a state institution, I am implicitly saying, 'come and join us in our world that only we can justify'. For the liberal, this represents an attempt to proselytize; if it occurs in a classroom between teacher and pupil, it is tantamount to religious kidnapping.

This version of the liberal argument is not to be dismissed too lightly. Anyone with even with a limited experience of the techniques used by the new sects should be concerned about manipulation, especially where young people—who may be very impressionable—are concerned. Nevertheless, as the examples of the trainers and the T-shirt show, this version of liberalism involves the secular state presuming a capacity for itself that it refuses to recognise within religions. It must claim that it alone can justify values, on the basis of reason, and that religions are somehow incapable of exercising proper regulation.

Is this fair? Is it reasonable to presume that religions cannot judge between unfair proselytism and the reasonable acknowledgement of one's faith in the public domain? I think not. Such a presumption is rooted in a dogmatic assertion shaping some secular states such as France and Germany. In many cases, the formation of such democracies was accomplished in the teeth of religious opposition. This opposition still colours their political imaginations, and it has made them unable to deal in a rational and democratic way with some of the public expressions of religion. In the background still lurks the spectre of the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. States have a systemic fear that if religions are allowed into the public domain, society will become even more fragmented than it already is, and collective decision-making will become impossible.

The alternative to the liberal position is the so-called 'Anglo-Saxon' model.<sup>17</sup> This model acknowledges the positive insights of

<sup>16</sup> Rawls speaks of political and not metaphysical justice, and Habermas of post-metaphysical thinking. In both cases, the liberal presupposition is that religious views are metaphysical, that is, situated within a substantive worldview, whereas political views are not. See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, and Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> In speaking of models here, I am using a methodological device employed by sociologists known as 'ideal-types', that is to say, a caricature which accentuates certain social aspects in order to facilitate analysis. It is in this spirit that I talk about the Franco-German model and the Anglo-Saxon model. I am not suggesting that the models fit every aspect of these societies, nor indeed that one can simply

communitarianism about how learning and socialisation are accomplished within particular communities with distinctive commitments. Communitarianism privileges the good of a particular tradition over the claims to universal rightness of a neutral reason supposedly independent of tradition and cultural context. It readily accepts a pluralism of cultures within the one society. Continental European societies, however, are concerned that such a model will lead to ever greater fragmentation, a fear that is not, in present late-modern or postmodern societies, without foundation. When, therefore, the French state sees headscarves in the classroom, it fears societal atomization and the weakening of the social bond—*le lien social*. If you let one group do their own thing, the danger is that everyone will simply go their own way. Society will disintegrate, and the result will be nothing other than anarchic tribalism.

### ***Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism***

We need to move beyond the impasse between these two models. Our first step must be to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of each of them. Liberalism's claim to neutrality is attractive. It purports to offer a basis for social cohesion that avoids divisive questions about the objective good. However, as I have argued, its seemingly neutral, rational principles are in reality neither neutral nor independent of material claims. Liberalism is itself an ideology; it is grounded in a particular vision of the world, one that is all the more powerful because it is not explicitly acknowledged. For its part, communitarianism respects the particularities and the substantive claims of distinct groups. It supports the freedom to live according to one's own moral, religious and cultural convictions. But questions remain about social cohesion, about the solidarity between different communities, and even about the recognition of the other communities' claims besides those of one's own. Liberalism stresses freedom at the cost of ideological blindness and naïveté; communitarianism fosters cohesion at the risk of societal atomization. How can one draw on the strengths of these conflicting positions and avoid the limitations of each of them?

lump these constellations together. However, without some degree of generalisation it is impossible to make any kind of systematic social analysis.

I would like to suggest three basic criteria that help specify constructive ways forward, with special reference to the particular example of teachers wearing headscarves in the classroom.

#### *Acknowledging Commitments*

Firstly, all positions regarding the relationship between religion and society—including the liberal one—should be stated in a way that acknowledges their embeddedness within a particular moral and metaphysical framework. This principle demands healthy self-awareness, and also an openness to communities with different histories. It can be seen as a simple extension of the so-called ‘golden rule’: do unto others as you would have done unto you. Such a procedure will help a tradition remain authentic to itself; it will also, and more importantly, foster a respect for the particularities of the other traditions with which it seeks to live in relationship. Corporate self-awareness will foster a salutary tolerance and mutuality. There seem to me to be two practical consequences of this criterion for teachers in schools. First, they should be allowed to express their religious convictions openly, and not be made to feel that they can hold them only in private. Indeed, I would argue that through doing this children can learn from adults the importance of faithfulness to commitments and the meaning of personal conviction. Second, in acknowledging their own convictions and commitments teachers need to find a way of doing so that exhibits tolerance of others’ religious commitments. A fundamentalist attitude that excludes other traditions *a priori* should not be acceptable from a teacher in a state school.



#### *Citizenship*

Secondly, all members of a society should share a commitment to citizenship. Each tradition needs to be committed to making its own contribution to the wider society; it must be prepared to work for solidarity and justice in the common public domain. It is corrosive of this spirit of solidarity for traditions to live in ghettos with independent

social structures insulating them from the surrounding society and preventing healthy confrontation between different traditions. Confrontation can be a source of creative challenge. Through this, a tradition can present its own riches as a resource for others; it can also learn ideas and practices from other traditions that can complement those it already has. In the classroom situation this means that it is the duty of the teacher to foster an attitude of citizenship by helping the children to see how their religious commitments motivate them to work for the common good of all citizens in society. Moreover, beyond a sense of national solidarity, children can learn from a teacher a concern for a universal solidarity based on the dignity and rights of all people. All major religious traditions have an important contribution to make to the formation of young people today, and they can help states to deepen their own commitments to global justice and solidarity.

*Appropriate Assertiveness*

Thirdly, there needs to be a public respect for the legitimate right of religious believers to live according to their faith—a respect that can surely be maintained without permitting active and inappropriate proselytism. I would suggest that a Muslim teacher should indeed be allowed to wear a headscarf when she is teaching in a state school, if this is important as a sign of her religious integrity. She should be allowed to make the statement that the scarf represents. However, the statement has to be understood carefully: it amounts to the legitimate right of a person to express their belonging to a particular faith community. It would be inappropriate for a person to use the public institution of the school as a forum in which to canvass for new members of the religion. All concerned—management and employees—must be concerned to preserve the legitimate right of teachers to follow their own consciences within the boundaries that are appropriate to a pluralist state. Schools in Britain seem to negotiate this balance with great skill and sensitivity. This is an achievement of which they can be rightly proud. Perhaps our continental neighbours might benefit from their experience.

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The issues about religious symbols in state institutions point to difficult challenges facing democratic societies and their governments today.

There are no easy and universally valid answers; particular historical and religious contexts must always be taken into account. Moreover, legislation alone is unlikely to provide a solution. But maybe my three guidelines can do something to enable various religious traditions to participate in modern pluralist societies without compromising their integrity and neutralising their distinctiveness. No secular tradition has a monopoly on neutrality; no one religious tradition has a right to impose its views in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society. If real mutual understanding and co-operation are to grow, then we must all face the challenge of balancing social integration with religious freedom.

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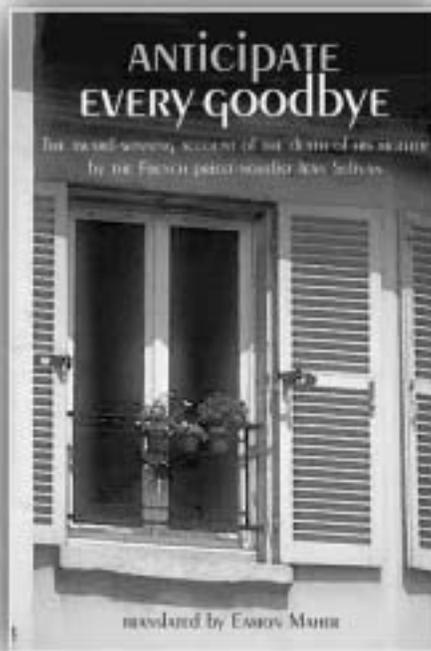
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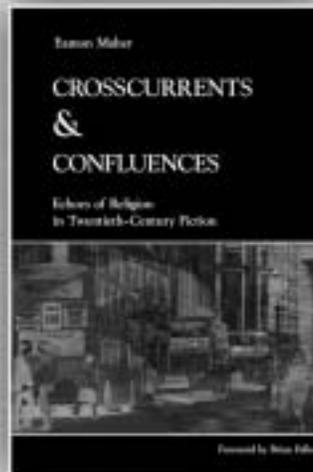
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# REDUCING YOURSELF TO ZERO

## Jean Sullivan's *Anticipate Every Goodbye*

Eamon Maher

In itself religion is conservative; it emphasizes the fear of death, protection against evil, and a taste for the miraculous as an escape from reality. The Gospel, in contrast, implies constant revolution, rousing those who hear it from the sleep of fable and magic, as well as from any political absolute.<sup>1</sup>

THE AUTHOR OF THIS QUOTATION was a priest named Joseph Lemarchand, who wrote under the pen-name of Jean Sullivan (1913-1980). It comes from his spiritual journal, and the contrast he makes here between religion and the Gospel was one that haunted him throughout his career. It was in his book *Anticipate Every Goodbye*,<sup>2</sup> a memoir of his relationship with his mother, that he explored this contrast most fully.

Sullivan stood within a rich tradition of Catholic novel-writing, whose main exponents in France were François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos and Julien Green, and he was well capable of writing prose that could win literary prizes. In 1964, for example, one of his ten novels, *Mais il y a la mer*, won the *Grand Prix catholique de littérature*. Yet this tradition of Catholic novels had begun to wane by the time Sullivan began to publish in the 1950s, and he was conscious that the human situation after the trauma of two world wars demanded something different. He wrote in his *Petite littérature individuelle*:

It could be that genius cannot be imitated, or that former cultural and religious signs have become outdated to such a degree that

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Light: The Spiritual Journal of Jean Sullivan*, translated by Joseph Cunneen and Patrick Gormally (New York: Paulist, 1988), 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Anticipate Every Goodbye* (Dublin: Veritas, 2000) is this author's translation of *Devance tout adieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). All subsequent references to this work will appear in the text, with the page number in brackets.

they can only communicate with a public living in the past. Spiritual writers today, it seems to me, are either out of touch or forced to renew themselves and follow a new direction, or else they have to become resigned to silence.<sup>3</sup>

Sullivan evoked the spiritual reality of the 1960s and 1970s in France through a different kind of writing: disjointed narratives with marginal characters who keep on searching for God in a world unfavourably disposed to traditional religious practice. In his famous *Diary of a Country Priest*, Georges Bernanos had shown how Catholicism was losing the fight against secular forces in the rural parishes of France. A few decades later, the situation of organized religion was appreciably worse. For Sullivan, this was not necessarily a bad thing. As far as he was concerned, the Word continued to reach the minds and hearts of the ‘few’ who were capable of appreciating its breath and rhythm. He wrote in *Morning Light*, his spiritual journal:

And why should the Gospels be readily accepted? Breath, rhythm, gesture, parable and paradox—poems—are at once simple and secret, and can only be gradually unveiled. ... The poem of the Gospel deals with existence and is intended to rise like yeast. Its style is just the opposite of a message that tries to control our lives with slogans and principles.<sup>4</sup>

His own writing was an attempt to prolong the Word, with its call for uprooting and rebirth, paradox and questioning. He aspired towards the poetic quality that he found in the Gospels; his writing depends on the reader to unravel its hidden meaning, and only then can it ‘rise like yeast’ and transform the way we look on the world. As he wrote, once more in *Morning Light*:

I wanted so badly to cleanse myself of formalism, to be cured of taboos and guilt feelings. I tried to provide a passageway for a Word that never left me in peace. I was tied to it, married to it, indissolubly.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Petite littérature individuelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 142.

<sup>4</sup> *Morning Light*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Morning Light*, 8-9.

This passion for the breath and rhythm of the Gospel, with the fragile and yet powerful humanity that it contains, is evident in his memoir about his mother, *Anticipate Every Goodbye*. The reality of death—what Sullivan once calls ‘God’s other name’<sup>6</sup>—is the principal test of a person’s faith. The mystical journey is about crossing the threshold of death where the revelation of God’s love becomes known. Here, elaborate word play and admirable prose appear trivial. Sullivan was more concerned with being true to his ‘inner music’, a music that would not necessarily appeal to many:

It is possible that the music of my books is not made for you. One comes across numerous and diverse melodies in books that are only suited to the *small number* capable of responding to their call.<sup>7</sup>

In *Anticipate Every Goodbye*, he expressed the point like this:

The world is full of books, books with buckets of talent displayed in them, well-constructed phrases that could be sweet or sharp as a razor blade, admirable. In such works dazzling things are offered to you, mirrors in which the fundamental boredom of the aesthetes is reflected. I preferred books that had a bit of everything, that were difficult to grasp and that permitted you to lose yourself in order to find a new you. In them I could hear the untamed interior voice that cries out in every human being, a heartbeat, a sign of life. You are not meant to admire these books but to start afresh because of them. (p.84)

### **Looking Forward to Death**

Sullivan evidently had no interest in ‘art for art’s sake’. He wanted to bring about a reawakening in his readers, some of whom, he hoped, would ‘start afresh’ after being exposed to what he has to say. *Anticipate Every Goodbye* attempts to provoke his readers in this way by offering a narrative of his own most primal relationship, his relationship with his mother. It covers his youth in Brittany, his vocation to the priesthood, and, most importantly, the death of his mother.

The account begins with Sullivan driving down from Rennes on one of his weekly Sunday visits to his mother, now in her seventies. As

<sup>6</sup> *Morning Light*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Miroir Brisé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 51.

he turns the corner and sees the village tower of Montauban and the familiar landscape of his native Brittany, his mind jumps forward to his mother's funeral, when he, as the eldest child, will walk at the front of the cortège towards what they call 'the valley of Jehosaphat', the local village cemetery. Some day he knows she will not be there to greet him, a thought that fills him with anguish. As he drives up to the house, he notes with relief: 'Everything's alright this time round. I can make out Mother's shadow moving about through the curtains.' (p. 10) They are not too 'demonstrative' in their family:

I kiss my mother at the root of her hair. I will kiss her like this on her deathbed. She won't return my kiss, no more than she does now; that is the custom we have adopted. Everything takes place on the inside. (p. 10)

Sullivan's wonderfully controlled prose here manages to capture in a few lines the type of relationship that exists between this simple peasant and her son, the cultivated writer-priest. They appear slightly distant from one another. They are not the sort of people who throw



*Jean Sullivan*

their arms around one another and give a public display of their affection. Their feelings go deep: 'everything takes place on the inside'.

From the beginning of his account, Sullivan lets the reader know that his mother is going to die. There is much toing and froing between past, present and future as the picture is built up of a relationship that has undergone trauma and despair.

The first great blow to the happiness of both mother and son came with the death of Sullivan's father on the Western Front in 1914, a year after Sullivan's birth. Sullivan looked on himself in later life as someone who suffered from a complex of being a fatherless child, the child of a dead man. The image of M. Lemarchand leaving his young wife and child would

linger in his son's mind for many years: 'I suspect that as he was heading to the station across the paths he was saying goodbye to the land with the soles of his shoes' (p.24). The soldier harboured no illusions about the fate that was awaiting him, and knew that he would in all likelihood never see his family again. When the news of his death finally reached Sullivan's mother, she became a broken woman. She had lost a man she loved dearly.

But when the landlord shortly afterwards doubled the rent of her farm arbitrarily, Angèle (as the mother was called) saw no option but to remarry in order to hold on to the lease. Her son, used to having his mother all to himself, was rocked by the news of the remarriage. He describes how he avoided the wedding ceremony and was found in the woods by a neighbour, who dragged him to the house where the reception was taking place:

I know that mother is getting married today. I must be feeling shame, fear and emptiness. ... I know that for years I carried a deep scar inside me, a scar that wouldn't leave me and to which I couldn't even give a name. (p.52)

As he is brought towards Fontaines Noires, their farm, he sees his mother getting up from the table with a face 'filled with sadness'.

Later in life, Sullivan would understand his mother's reasons for remarrying, but the perception that she had in some way abandoned him and betrayed the memory of his dead father was hard to eradicate. There were obvious Oedipal tensions aroused, as the young child was forced to cede his place to a stranger who came and established himself in their home. It is significant that the Sunday visits which Sullivan describes with such tenderness took place when his mother was once more a widow and the children of the second marriage had grown up and left home. Once again, it was just the two of them on their own. Sullivan acknowledges that his stepfather was an honourable man. He was never able to call him 'father', but he did respect him. In his view, his mother never had the same love for this man as she had had for her first husband. Nevertheless, she was always careful to hide the fact: her second husband was the father of two of her children, and she was bound to him by the sacrament of matrimony.

### ***Seminary, Priesthood and Frustration***

Angèle was a very pious woman, and she had a strong desire to see her son become a priest. This dream came closer to realisation when young Jean decided to go to the minor seminary, a place he nevertheless described as a 'purgatory' (p.56). Sullivan felt that the training he received in his seminary years was totally inadequate. He repeated in exams and essays what he knew his teachers wanted to hear, but he was critical of what he was receiving:

Far too few teachers know that you can excel in theology, in spiritual life, even in piety, and still have a heart that is completely hard. (p.56)

Sullivan developed a keen critical faculty at an early stage. He had no desire to become a mere functionary, someone who simply trotted out the Church's line on moral and social issues. He wanted to think things through for himself, to analyze issues, and to question the opinions of his superiors. He was very different from his mother's image of how a priest should behave. She never questioned what priests said in their sermons, and accepted all their pronouncements with humility. Sullivan would criticize sharply the clerical system that encouraged such passivity:

The priests of this time tended to preach about laws and obligations. In this way they had succeeded in transforming Christianity into something approaching a natural religion. In their eyes the rural order in which the Church still played a dominant role was an expression of the divine will. They had forgotten about freedom, without which there is no real faith. (p.52)

Sullivan resolved never to accept the trappings of power that can come with the priesthood among devout people like his mother. After a number of years as a priest, he came to be convinced that his sermons were merely an exercise in oratory; they contained no sincerely held spiritual convictions. Preaching was a public performance, and one at which he excelled. He had become a major cultural figure in Rennes; he ran a film society and a very successful cultural centre; he edited a local newspaper, *Dialogues-Ouest*; and he taught in the Catholic *lycée*. He was able to present dogma in a modern form, to quote from the specialists, to hide behind the pope's

pronouncements, to explore literature and the new world of cinema, and to hold a congregation spellbound. Often he was congratulated on his sermons. But Sullivan came to realise that he was being dishonest:

What brought about my downfall or saved me, depending on how you look on it, was this: when I was congratulated for having spoken so beautifully, while I felt the usual sense of pride, I would also feel great sadness, followed by irritation. I could never forget the inherent contradiction in the idea that you can announce the message of the Gospel while at the same time making a career out of it. (p.59)

What is admirable about Sullivan is his ability not only to sense the hypocrisy of others, but also to see through his own posturing.

However, he was in no doubt about the fortitude and sincerity of his mother's faith. It was a blind, simple faith that helped her endure the vicissitudes of her life. She had difficulty accepting her son's literary vocation, and could not understand why he rarely donned the clerical garb. She wished he would agree to say Mass in the local church so that people could appreciate his sermons (she had heard of his prowess in this regard) and see how clever he was. She did not accept that he had to be so critical of the Church. For example, one day he made a particularly virulent attack on the presence of so many bishops and priests at the local Sea Festival, where there was a ritual blessing of the boats and the sea. His mother loved the pageantry and the way the port was covered in bunting, but her son felt obliged to point out to her that the occasion was organized by the wealthy ship-owners. Christianity had nothing to do with such a sham: it made religion an accomplice in the exploitation of the poorly paid sailors. Just when he felt assured of victory, she said: 'Are you certain that you're not searching for your own comfort in all this? You too want a religion that suits you.' (p.75) Mothers know their sons in ways that can prove uncomfortable at times.

**Blind,  
simple faith  
helped Angèle  
endure**

### ***The Onset of Death***

Sullivan looked on his mother as his strength and refuge. One day he was frightened and surprised to find himself writing about her in the past tense. Though we are well into the book by the time she is hospitalised, it comes as no surprise. By this point it is 1965. For a long

time he had been anticipating her departure, and had seen every Sunday visit as somehow a rehearsal for this experience. Every time he drove away from the house and saw her waving from the window, he would feel he was saying goodbye to her for the last time. Now, however, he is not anticipating the nightmare, but living it out in truth. The writing assumes a new power. He rushes to catch a train from Paris so that he can be at her bedside in Rennes:

Forms and sounds became dim, the countryside was shifting uncontrollably. Love was like death; I had never known up until this point what it was like to fall into nothingness. (p. 93)

Hope is restored when he arrives and is told that the illness is probably caused by food poisoning. The rash on her face is not encouraging, but that is probably related to a problem with her urea. The immediate reaction is one of relief. There will be more Sunday visits, more opportunities to unburden himself of his traumas.

His joy is short-lived, however. He is advised to bring her to Nantes as problems have developed with her kidneys. They travel down in an ambulance and encounter difficulties finding the admissions building. When they finally are admitted, all the tests have to be done again, all the forms signed, all the same questions answered. She is shivering with the cold, and yet the ambulance driver informs them that she needs to take the gown back to Rennes—hospital regulations are very clear on this point. Indignity is thus added to the pain the poor woman has to endure. Her son feels helpless. For once in his life he regrets not having worn his clerical collar, as it might have obtained better attention for his mother. The intensive care unit, the centre of ‘this huge camp of suffering’, is disturbing: ‘death was palpable here’ (p.100).

What upsets Sullivan more than anything is the fact that his mother’s faith, rock solid until now, seems to fail her at this crucial moment:

Only at that precise moment did I realise that she was going to die, that she was replacing Christ on the naked cross, experiencing all the feelings of abandonment. I could see her eyes—I couldn’t, I wouldn’t read what they were saying. I would only know later. (p.111)

She refuses to pick up the rosary beads that had never left her side throughout her life; when he mentions that she might like to invoke Our Lady of Lourdes, to whom she had a great devotion, she shakes her head. He wonders what is becoming of her, but then he realises that 'in the unseen part of her soul she was still attached to the living and true God' (pp. 110-111). But what of his own identity as a priest in this situation? Surely his presence as a priest-son should be a comfort to her at such a time. But he cannot find the words or the gestures to ease her pain and her doubts. The functionary priest cannot function, probably because of the turmoil he is going through. He does discover that the hospital chaplain has heard her confession and given her the Sacrament of the Sick.

***The functionary  
priest cannot  
function***

His mother's condition deteriorates rapidly in Nantes. As there is now no hope that she will recover, the hospital authorities give permission for the woman to be transported home to die. Just as they are putting her into the ambulance, she passes away. Hospital regulations would decree in such circumstances that the patient be brought back inside but the driver agrees to continue, provided that they leave her eyes open. As they drive along the country roads, Sullivan sees the trees and the sky reflected in these eyes. It looks as though she is finally at peace.

Her son is far from peace, however. He sees the move from this life to the vastness of eternity as a disturbing journey filled with pain and doubt. It is hard to leave the familiar world behind, our little possessions, the people we love, the daily routine however mundane. When we are in good health, we do not think about the important issues in life. We prefer to try and earn money and achieve success. But in the end, these things are useless:

We are all blind, thinking that life consists of possessing material goods, holding on to this, then that, getting to know one thing, then another, trying desperately to ignore the fact that the whole process inevitably amounts to absolutely nothing. Life isn't just a game where you have to possess and know as many things as possible. Rather, it is about reducing yourself to zero, living in a new and more authentic way. (p. 114)

In today's globalised world, economic concerns dominate our awareness, and prevent our fostering spiritual values that might help us

come to terms with the reality of death. In the wake of his mother's death, Sullivan realises that what he had thought of as faith was nothing more than a collection of ideas—it had not become any real part of him. It was superficial and facile, belonging more to the intellect than to the heart. He slowly begins to see that the gospel message of unconditional love requires people to place themselves in the desert of doubt and apprehension, to take spiritual risks, to know pain at the deepest level. In accompanying his mother on her climb to Golgotha, he experiences at first hand the Passion of Christ. After witnessing the spiritual desolation that Angèle was made to endure, Sullivan decides that he wants nobody apart from medical experts present at his own death. 'It is frightening to show this spectacle to any living person.' (p.113)

When they arrive at the house, Sullivan learns that his mother has prepared everything for her funeral. He has never seen the garden in such a riot of colour. He takes no active part in the concelebrated funeral Mass; he is in a daze. When the undertakers arrive to cover the coffin, he retreats to the garden, where he cries. Rather than making a spectacle of his grief, he wears dark glasses throughout the ceremony. He knows that people must find him hard and aloof. But the pain he experiences is evident from the following lines:

I am now the son of nobody. I will go now, mother, like an adult, towards my Maker. You were a sign that he existed: I knew through you of His presence. ... Now that you are gone, there is nothing more between me and death, that is to say between me and God. Alleluia. Who is that inside me saying this word, Alleluia? (p.120)

### ***Cathartic Pain***

What does this memoir, *Anticipate Every Goodbye*, tell us about God, about the transcendent one? It is not immediately obvious that Sullivan reacts to his mother's death by accepting the will of God. His first feeling, a very human one, is that it is not fair that she should die. He reads in Angèle's eyes when she is in the hospital a question addressed to God: 'Why did you make us mortal?' (p.124) But there is a sense in which the pain inflicted on both mother and son is cathartic. Sullivan is forced to work through many of the important issues surrounding faith and his relationship with God, issues which he has not addressed

with any seriousness before this point in his life. He realises that his writing could be a help to others:

Writing down these anecdotes, expressing ordinary feelings, which quite possibly millions of people secretly feel after seeing their own mother dying, reassures me and comforts me a bit. It sometimes seems to me that my mother is the humble mother of a great number of people. (p.124)

The great writers are those whose humanity shines through and informs everything that they write. Suffering, frailty, and sensitivity are important elements in both the aesthetic and the Christian paths. By expressing what is most personal to him, Sullivan manages to write a memoir that lives far beyond its own time and place, and will speak to anyone who has had to witness the death of someone they love. He does nothing to sanitise the experience; he describes his mother's death with a raw honesty that is frightening, but ultimately rewarding. What is refreshing about Sullivan is that he is prepared to admit that he does not have any ready-made answers. Instead, his writing is a way of working through the trauma he has endured. The account has none of the feel-good factor of the death-counselling manual. That is because it is up to us to find our own answers about death and eternity, answers that will involve our looking closely at unpalatable and painful realities.

***A raw honesty that is frightening, but also rewarding***

Christians have to know that their beliefs are based on the reality of the Cross. The gospel message rouses us 'from the sleep of fable and magic'. It is not meant to be comfortable:

When the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God, cries out that he has been abandoned on the Cross, by what right do you seek reassuring truths? (p.125)

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## **WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION?**

### **The Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration and its Protestant Critics**

*Iain Taylor*

WHAT HAPPENED ON 31 OCTOBER 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, was full of poignant symbolism. The date was significant: Reformation Day. The venue, too, was meaningful: there in 1530 probably the central document of Lutheranism was drafted, the Augsburg Confession. On that day and in that place, official representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, the parties who had seemed so opposed 469 years before, signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.<sup>1</sup> Could it be that the signing of this document represents a genuine resolution to the ecclesiastical divisions that have existed since the Reformation?

This was not the first such document to be produced as the fruit of ecumenical endeavours between the two Churches. Earlier works that presage the Joint Declaration include *The Gospel and the Church* (1972),<sup>2</sup> *Justification by Faith* (1983),<sup>3</sup> the German collection published in English as *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?* (1986),<sup>4</sup> and *Church and Justification* (1994),<sup>5</sup> all of which are

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Joint Declaration can be found in *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) and at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni).

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Joint Lutheran–Roman Catholic Study Commission, published in *Growth in Agreement* (New York and Geneva: Paulist and WCC, 1984), 168–189.

<sup>3</sup> *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990 [1986]).

<sup>5</sup> (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994).



*The Signing of the Joint Declaration, Augsburg 1999,  
by Bishop Christian Krause and Cardinal Edward Cassidy*

mentioned in the text of the Joint Declaration (n.5). Yet it deserves to be considered particularly significant, primarily because it has been heralded as one of the most important of all modern ecumenical ventures. On the Protestant side there have been many who have welcomed it with acclamation. And on the Roman Catholic side, the head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity has said that the document represents a great step forward for the whole ecumenical movement, and that it inaugurates a new, qualitatively different phase in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches. Pope John Paul II even went so far as to call it a 'moment of grace'.<sup>6</sup>

Among the more illustrious of the document's advocates are many members of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), and prominent US theologians such as Robert Jenson, Bruce Marshall

<sup>6</sup> See J. Jezirowski, 'Ein Augenblick der Gnade. Die Vollversammlung—unauffällig inmitten des Trubels', *Lutherische Monatshefte*, 36 (1997), 7.

and David Yeago. Wolfhart Pannenberg too, who is one of the most distinguished living theologians, has recently offered an extended defence of the Joint Declaration as consistent with certain (but not all) central strands of Lutheran thinking on justification.<sup>7</sup> Pannenberg wrote this document in an effort to meet some of the criticisms that other Lutherans have raised, especially those of Eberhard Jüngel, whose objections we shall consider below.

### **What the Declaration Claims**

What is it that these thinkers are defending? The purpose of the Joint Declaration is, in its own words, to ‘formulate a consensus on basic truths concerning the doctrine of justification’ (13), and thus to invalidate the condemnations and alleviate the divisions that have beset the Western Church on this issue since the sixteenth century. It does this by first explicating the biblical message of justification, and then dealing with a number of contentious issues. It outlines what Lutherans and Catholics can confess together, and the different ways in which they formulate their understandings—for example, ‘justification as forgiveness of sins and making righteous’ (nn.22-24), ‘justification by faith and through grace’ (nn.25-27), ‘assurance of salvation’ (nn.34-36). It then states in conclusion:

In the light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification ... are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths. (n.40)

Much ground is covered and many details are contested, but the core points of agreement are fairly clear. There is consensus not just on the centrality of justification to Christian life and doctrine, but also on its nature:

<sup>7</sup> Pannenberg’s partial defence of the Joint Declaration can be found in his contributions to a volume which he co-edited with the Roman Catholic theologian Bernd Jochen Hilberath: *Zur Zukunft der Ökumene: Die ‘Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre’* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1999). A related though by no means identical discussion of the issues in English can be found in Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology*, vol.3, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998), 211-236.

By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works. (n.15)

### **Anthony Lane's Evangelical Assessment**

The main aim of this article is to explain why many Protestant theologians are critical of the Joint Declaration. Inevitably the Joint Declaration itself as well as the debate surrounding it has had a decidedly German flavour, and most of our study will be taken up with the issues arising within German Lutheranism. But we can begin with one significant and relatively accessible book written in Britain: Anthony N. S. Lane's *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment*.<sup>8</sup> Lane writes from an avowedly Evangelical perspective, from the tradition of Protestantism arising out of the revival and missionary movements of the eighteenth century. It is a helpful introduction to many of the key documents and issues. It takes Calvin as a representative authority for the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification, and the Council of Trent for the Roman Catholic understanding. There are also chapters taking the reader through some of the key documents leading up to the Joint Declaration, and explaining many of the issues at stake. Lane is often content simply to explain the issues rather than argue about them. Nevertheless, his work can serve as a useful overview of the history and the results of ecumenical dialogue on justification.<sup>9</sup> Most—though not all—of the judgments he does offer are positive.

Lane clearly states that the Joint Declaration has by no means fully overcome the Reformation divide. In answer to his final question, 'Does the measure of agreement reached mean that the Reformation is over?' Lane replies,

By no means. There remain huge differences in other areas such as mariology and the authority of the pope. The accord reached on the doctrine of justification is an important milestone on the path

<sup>8</sup> (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> It does not, however, supersede Ernstpeter Maurer's study in German, *Rechtfertigung: Konfessionstrennend oder konfessionsverbindend?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998).

towards full agreement, but there remains a considerable distance still to be covered. (p. 231)

Yet such comments cannot mask Lane's fundamental agreement with the Joint Declaration. In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent's teaching was incompatible with the Protestant understanding. Yet now at the turn of the millennium, there exists a 'consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification'. As Lane goes on to explain:

In my view the consensus that has been achieved has come about mainly through Roman Catholics being willing to move beyond the positions of the sixteenth century. The price paid on the Protestant side has consisted mainly in the willingness to be more tolerant of a range of views and to accept an element of ambiguity. The dialogue documents have not required Protestants to go back on any of their traditional doctrines. (p.226)

For Lane, then, the ground for protesting has been taken away, on the matter of justification at least. With the Joint Declaration, he can thank God 'for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the Church'.

### **Eberhard Jüngel**

Lane's positive account of the Joint Declaration is far from being the usual or typical Protestant response. Others are far less convinced by it. They doubt that the Roman Catholic Church really has moved sufficiently close to the Reformation (and, in their view, biblical) understanding of justification for talk of consensus to be justified. They are also sceptical that the Joint Declaration really is a milestone in mutual comprehension of the truth of the gospel.

The most thoroughgoing critique has come from the pen of Eberhard Jüngel,<sup>10</sup> a Lutheran theologian recently retired from the University of Tübingen. His criticisms, as well as his restatement of

<sup>10</sup> Others include Reinhardt Brandt, 'Gemeinsame Erklärung—kritische Fragen. Die "Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre" und Fragen zu ihrer Rezeption in den deutschen lutherischen Kirchen', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 95 (1998), 63-102; Joachim Ringleben, 'Der Begriff des Glaubens in der "Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre" (1997): Ein theologisches Gutachten', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 95 (1998), 232-249.

what he considers a true appreciation of the Reformation doctrine of justification, have appeared in several publications, the most significant of which is *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*.<sup>11</sup> We shall return to this book presently.

Authors like Lane are irenic: for them, a commitment to ecumenism involves a wariness about narrow confessionalism. Jüngel's tone is far less irenic, and his criticisms of the Joint Declaration are both sharp and forceful. Nor is he enamoured of the so-called 'ecumenical hermeneutic'



Martin Luther,  
by Lukas Cranach the elder

that has become popular in certain sections of the theological and ecclesiastical establishment.<sup>12</sup> Yet Jüngel is far from committed to the kind of narrow confessionalism that those who framed the Joint Declaration sought to overcome. He is not opposed in principle to any such rapprochement between the Churches, and his specific criticisms do not by any means amount to a rejection in principle of the Joint Declaration. The criticisms, Jüngel says, spring not from Protestant or Lutheran commitments, nor even from a special attachment to Martin Luther, but from the gospel itself. Thus they are genuinely 'ecumenical' objections, since for Jüngel (as for most Protestant thinkers) to be ecumenical is more about continuity with the biblical gospel than about fidelity to the conclusions of historical Church councils. Indeed, Jüngel declined to sign a famous letter of protest written in 1999 and signed by many theology professors in Germany—a letter which reflected his own views—because it seemed too concerned with preserving past formulations, and not sufficiently involved in the substance of justification, for him to give it his full endorsement.

So, what is Jüngel's problem with the Joint Declaration? He sees the document as surrendering vital Reformation principles:

<sup>11</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith: A Theological Study with an Ecumenical Purpose*, translated by Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2001 [1998]).

<sup>12</sup> Though, of course, he considers his own hermeneutic 'ecumenical' in the very best sense.

... there were no sound theological foundations laid here 'on the way to overcoming the division of the Church'. For here decisive insights of the Reformation were either obscured or surrendered. Certainly there is much in this text that the Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church can say in common. But these are pronouncements which almost without exception move in the area and on the level of the *Decree Concerning Justification* which the Roman Catholic Church had adopted at the Council of Trent in 1547 on the basis of, and more particularly *against*, the Reformers' doctrine of justification.<sup>13</sup>

Far from accommodating or taking account of genuinely Protestant concerns, the Joint Declaration simply ignores or abandons them. Jüngel singles out three points which we will look at in a moment: the function of the doctrine of justification as the criterion for the rest of Christian doctrine; the belief that Christians are righteous and sinners at the same time; and the theological reasoning behind the Reformers' stress on justification by faith alone. Indeed he sees the Joint Declaration as in some respects no less antagonistic in effect towards Protestant concerns than the Council of Trent that heralded the Counter-Reformation.

### ***Unresolved Ambiguities***

During the period when drafts of what became the Joint Declaration were being drawn up, Jüngel sounded various warning cries. One of the most significant of these was an article entitled 'For God's Sake—Clarity! Critical Remarks on the Subjugation of the Function of the Justification Article as Criterion—On the Occasion of an Ecumenical "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification"'.<sup>14</sup> Here Jüngel notes changes in language introduced in the later stages of the drafting process. At a meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in Hong Kong in 1995, the assembly asked that the final version present the doctrine of justification as 'the criterion' that 'orients all the doctrine and practice of our Churches constantly on Christ'. This was, Jüngel believes, the agreed position already outlined in the collection edited

<sup>13</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, xxxiv.

<sup>14</sup> 'Um Gottes willen—Klarheit! Kritische Bemerkungen zur Verharmlosung der kriteriologischen Funktion des Rechtfertigungsartikels—aus Anlass einer ökumenischen "Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre"', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 94 (1997), 394-406.

by Pannenberg and Lehmann in 1986, and it had been carried through to the draft formulated as late as June 1996, when Cardinal Cassidy had begun to lead the Roman Catholic side.<sup>15</sup> Yet this phrasing was changed as the result of initiatives from Cardinal Ratzinger and the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity. As a result the final version states only that justification is ‘*an* indispensable criterion’ (n.18), rather than *the* criterion. And the Joint Declaration adds that Catholics ‘remind themselves of several criteria’, although they do ‘not want to deny the special function of message of justification’. And it was such alterations to the text that led to protests in Lutheran circles, both academic and ecclesiastical.

‘For God’s Sake—Clarity!’ also highlights an increasing ambiguity in official Roman Catholic statements—an ambiguity that for Jüngel only creates confusion. In particular Jüngel, both in that article and in his subsequent writings, has concentrated on one of the ablest theological minds in Roman Catholicism, namely Walter Kasper.

Jüngel is especially disappointed because Kasper knows Lutheran theology well, and understands the indispensable centrality for Lutherans of the doctrine of justification. But Kasper simply misrepresents the doctrine of justification as *criterion*. This expression indicates that justification for Lutherans is not just one doctrine among others, but rather the criterion for all doctrine, the doctrine against which all other doctrines can be tested and their truth value established.<sup>16</sup> Some of Kasper’s earlier remarks show his sensitivity to this Lutheran concern, and his awareness of justification having absolute, not relative, centrality in Lutheran theology.<sup>17</sup> More recently, however, as Kasper has been defending the Joint Declaration, this sensitivity has been less in evidence. For Kasper, the document represents,

**Justification  
is not one  
doctrine among  
others**

... the inclusion of the central Reformation concern, justification by faith alone, into the mainstream of the ... catholic tradition of

<sup>15</sup> 1996 draft, n. 18.

<sup>16</sup> More technical writing speaks of the ‘criteriological significance’ of the doctrine of justification.

<sup>17</sup> Jüngel, ‘Um Gottes willen—Klarheit!’ 402.

the ancient Church, which is itself enriched by the accentuating of the doctrine of justification.<sup>18</sup>

This later position of Kasper's does not tally either with Jüngel's understanding of the Reformation, or—and this troubles Jüngel even more—with earlier ecumenical documents. For in some of the preliminary studies involving both Roman Catholics and Lutherans, notably in the German collection entitled in English *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?* (1986), agreement had been reached on a definition of the doctrine of justification that Jüngel considered both more clear and more acceptable. 'According to it', he writes, 'the doctrine of justification has the function of *identifying* what in truth deserves to be called *Christian*. It is the *identifying criterion of what is Christian*.'<sup>19</sup>

The suspicion is that there has been a failure to take account of the concerns that led to the Reformers' protest in the first place. Moreover, Jüngel thinks the ambiguity surrounding the criteriological significance of the doctrine of justification leaves other contentious matters just as far from resolution as they were before. For, he asks, how far can an ecumenical 'consensus about fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification' really be maintained when on the Roman Catholic side there is still a papal announcement of a Jubilee indulgence for the year 2000 and the continued refusal to have fellowship at the eucharistic table?<sup>20</sup>

Jüngel's misgivings concerning the Joint Declaration in draft stage were not assuaged on the publication and ratification of the final version. A clear statement of the doctrine of justification and its centrality for Christian faith, he felt, was needed, one that would make clear the classic Reformation teaching and show its (in)compatibility with some key statements of the Joint Declaration. This he seeks to provide in his book, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith*. Not only does this book state the understanding of the doctrine of justification as found both in Scripture, especially in Paul, and in the theological tradition, especially in Luther. It also highlights points that Jüngel believes have become obscured in the midst of the ecumenical

<sup>18</sup> Jüngel, 'Um Gottes willen—Klarheit!' 403.

<sup>19</sup> Jüngel, 'Um Gottes willen—Klarheit!' 397. Emphases original.

<sup>20</sup> Jüngel, *Justification*, xxvii-xxviii.

endeavours of recent years. These include the ones we have already noted: the undermining of justification as a criterion for all other doctrine, and the misrepresentation of key Lutheran concerns by Roman Catholic officials. But there are other points too: the continuing disagreement about Luther's formula *simul iustus et peccator* (righteous and sinners at the same time), and the omission of the formula *sola fide*, 'by faith alone'.

### ***Simul iustus et Peccator (Righteous and Sinners at the Same Time)***

What is the formula *simul iustus et peccator*, and why does Jüngel consider it so important? Coined by Luther to explain his understanding of justification by faith, the phrase expresses the fact that one is justified already by our clinging to Christ in faith, and that this is *not* the *result* of Christian acts of love and obedience. When the delegates at the Council of Trent rejected the idea that 'a just person sins',<sup>21</sup> they were—however poorly they understood it—obviously referring to this slogan.

Jüngel believes that this formula must still be upheld. It expresses the simultaneity of sin and righteousness within the Christian, as well as the conflict within this simultaneity. The simultaneity is, Jüngel believes, attested both by Christian experience and by Holy Scripture. On the one hand there is the undeniable everyday experience that even a justified person remains in some ways a being of the flesh, and constantly suffers from a bad conscience. On the other the Bible states both that those who have been born of God do not sin (1 John 3:9) and that we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin (1 John 1:8). As Luther expressed the matter, 'I am a sinner in and by myself apart from Christ. Apart from myself and in Christ I am not a sinner.'<sup>22</sup>

***The conflict  
between sin and  
righteousness***

This simultaneity leads to a struggle. The old humanity of sin and the new humanity of righteousness within the Christian are not in peaceful coexistence. It would be wrong to see the struggle as eternally unresolved, and the two protagonists are not equal. The outcome of this struggle is not in doubt, since Christ has power over sin. Yet we

<sup>21</sup> *Decree on Justification*, canon 25.

<sup>22</sup> Quotation from *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests*, cited in Jüngel, *Justification*, 220.

never escape from the war in this life—release and complete victory are granted us only in the life to come. Again Jüngel cites Luther:

We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.<sup>23</sup>

To one convinced of the necessity of such a formula, the Joint Declaration will inevitably arouse suspicion. For, whatever *rapprochement* there may have been on other matters, Jüngel goes on:

The fact remains, that the formula *simul iustus et peccator* is still unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church today. In its statement on *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the Catholic Church again pronounced Luther's formula (which is interpreted positively in the Joint Declaration) to be unacceptable to Catholics. It expressly disavowed the facts which this formula expresses. It even located the major difficulty 'preventing an affirmation of total consensus between the parties on the theme of Justification'. This is without any doubt to be found in 'the formula "at the same time righteous and sinner", which is "for Catholics ... not acceptable".' (p.215)

### **Sola Fide (By Faith Alone)**

The final misgiving we shall mention here concerns the omission of any mention of the traditional Lutheran exclusive formula 'by faith alone'. Defenders of the Joint Declaration have justified this omission by citing the example of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession of 1530, whose drafter, Philip Melanchthon, left it out in Article 4 on justification. This text simply says:

... we cannot be justified before God by our own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith.

To Jüngel, such argumentation on the part of Lutheran ecumenists is unacceptable. Firstly, it ignores the explicit inclusion of the formula in Article 6 on 'The New Obedience', which says that we have

<sup>23</sup>Quotation from *Defence and Explanation of All the Articles*, cited in Jüngel, *Justification*, 221.

'forgiveness of sins ... through faith alone', as well as ignoring the claim in Article 20 on 'Faith and Good Works', which says that our reconciliation with God 'happens only through faith'.

Second, when Melancthon wrote that the *Augsburg Confession* was 'not contrary or opposed to ... [even that] of the Roman Church', this does not mean, as some Lutherans have understood it, that ecumenical agreement permits and requires removal of the exclusive formula. Rather,

... since, as Melancthon thought, the ... articles are also acceptable to the Roman Catholic Church, we ought to be able to say from the Lutheran perspective that the *sola fide* formula is acceptable ecumenically. (p.236)

Third, if the previous points are correct, then it is the later Council of Trent's *Decree on Justification* that is ecumenically in error, since it opposes the very articles that Melancthon claims ought to find theological consensus on all sides. Jüngel sees a great irony in the position of Lutheran advocates of the Joint Declaration. They are taking a step back from a position of evangelical unity stated within one of their own confessional documents; instead, they are showing a loyalty to the more restrictive position of Trent.

Jüngel's challenge, then, to those who see the Joint Declaration as a major ecumenical breakthrough is stark. As he puts it in one of his most pointed judgments:

The Joint Declaration reiterates basically the only part of the Catholic doctrine of justification that was condemned by the Lutheran Confessions, saying that it is still Catholic teaching. And it goes on to assert that the condemnation in the Lutheran Confessions no longer applies to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as expounded in the Joint Declaration. This is one of the scandals in the history of theology of which that *Declaration* will go on to serve as an example. To accept this amounts to a sacrifice of the intellect on the part of any theologian. (p.207)

Far from dealing with the points of contention of the Reformation era, the Joint Declaration proceeds as if they do not exist.

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We have seen, then, that work still remains to be done, on the Protestant side at least, if there is to be a widespread acceptance of the Joint Declaration. There do exist those, and they are many—even on the Lutheran side—who are quite happy not only to endorse the intentions underlying the Joint Declaration, but also to believe that it represents a genuine ecumenical success. They believe that the Declaration signals not just a coming together of Europe's divided theological parties, but also the fulfilment of the concerns of the Reformation, and the advent of true catholicity. If they are indeed correct in this judgement, may they succeed in arguing their case among the Churches!

There exist those such as Lane, who are more guarded about the merits of the Joint Declaration, but whose belief in real change within the Roman Catholic position leads them to see a partial but significant *rapprochement*.

There also exist, inevitably, those whose material objections are tinged with parochiality—a parochiality which threatens to undermine not only ecumenical ventures such as the Joint Declaration, but also the true concerns, both catholic and evangelical, that did genuinely inspire the Reformers and their doctrine of justification by faith alone. May such narrow confessionalism, wherever it comes from, open its eyes to the moments of grace and truth not just in the other party, but also in their own side!

Finally, there is the more interesting and theologically impressive example of Eberhard Jüngel. There seems no reason to doubt his desire for a united Church, nor his disavowal of the confessionalism that remains intransigently suspicious of anything that looks like a watering down of doctrine. For ecumenical ecclesiastical *rapprochement* is not to be at the expense of ecumenical theology—a theology that is both Evangelical and Catholic when these terms are correctly understood. And for such Evangelical and Catholic theology that will clarify not only the doctrine of justification but also the other matters that divide the Churches let us hope and pray.

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## RECENT BOOKS

**Jerome Nadal, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels: Volume 1: The Infancy Narratives*, translated by Frederick A. Homann (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's UP, 2003). 0 916101 41 X, pp. xii + 184, \$39.95.**

Before he died, Ignatius of Loyola suggested to his assistant, Jerónimo Nadal, that the Lenten and Sunday gospels be distilled into headings that could serve as points for meditation. Adding exegesis and pictures would, in the words of Nadal's secretary Diego Jiménez, 'be a substantial addition to the meditation and prayer materials then used by the Society's young religious' (p. 99). Nadal, already the author of several studies on prayer, undertook the task. He had made several attempts to illustrate the points himself, all of which proved inadequate. After Nadal's death, the Jesuits eventually engaged, at great expense, some of the best engravers in Antwerp to render designs by Bernadino Passeri and Maarten de Vos, though Nadal's own conceptions may lie behind these designs. In 1593 *Evangelicae historiae imagines (Images from the Gospels)* appeared, followed in 1594 by *Adnotationes et meditationes in evangelia (Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels)*. In this latter version, Nadal's notes and meditations accompany the engravings, forming a single work tightly integrating images, notes and meditations.

The substantial investment paid off. Various editions have previously appeared of the images alone (both in the order of the lectionary pericopes and in the order of the Gospel narratives), of the notes and meditations alone, or of both text and engravings together. Paul Hoffaeus (Höfer), from 1580 to 1591 German Assistant to Fr General Acquaviva, noted that the book is 'useful and profitable to all classes of persons who know Latin, especially to candidates for the priesthood'. It 'is not only much desired by contemplatives in Europe', he continued, 'but also coveted in both the Indies by the Company's workers who, using the images, could more easily imprint new Christians with all the mysteries of human redemption, which they retain with difficulty through preaching and catechism' (p. 1).

Though the engravings have previously been published on their own, Homann also gives us Nadal's *Adnotationes*, and thereby provides a fascinating window into early Jesuit interpretation of prayer and of the Spiritual Exercises. Until now no English translation of Nadal's text has been available, and Homann's edition is also accompanied by a CD-ROM

ANNUNCIATIO.

Luc. i.

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A. Conuentus Angelorum, vbi declarat Deus Incarnationem Christi, & designatur Gabriel legatus.

B. Veniens Nazareth Gabriel, sibi ex aëre corpus accomodat.

C. Nubes è caelo, vnde radij ad Mariam Virginem pertinent.

D. Cubiculum, quod vsitur Laureti in agro Piceno, vbi est Maria.

E. Ingreditur Angelus ad Mariam Virginem; eam salutat; assentitur Maria: fit Deus homo, & ipsa Mater Dei.

F. Creatio hominis, quo die Deus factus est homo.

G. Eadem die Christus moritur, vt homo perditus recreetur.

H. Pie credi potest, Angelum missum in Limbum, ad Christi incarnationem Patribus nunciandam.

containing high-resolution scans of all 153 engravings. Volume I presents the first nine chapters, along with a monograph-length introduction by art historian Walter Melion. Subsequent volumes will offer a selection of Nadal's chapters on the passion (Volume II) and the resurrection (Volume III).

First, the images. The engravings employ what was then the new technique of perspective drawing, and the cartographers' method of annotating maps; they draw the beholder both into the Gospel story and into the deeper mystery that the events express. In each engraving, a series of letters marks a sequence of foci for prayerful attention. These foci may be the context of the pericope, or the events immediately preceding and following the central action, or unseen aspects of the same event. For example, in chapter 1 (illustration 107 in the order of the liturgical year), the engraving of the Annunciation is read from top left: 'A: the assembly of angels where God announces Christ's incarnation and Gabriel is appointed messenger; B: coming to Nazareth, Gabriel fashions for himself a body of air; C: the cloud from heaven, from which rays stream down on to the Virgin Mary; D: the room itself, which is seen at Loreto in the Ascoli Piceno region of Italy, where Mary is; E: the angel comes in and goes to the Virgin Mary; he greets her; Mary assents; God becomes human and she becomes Mother of God'.

This central sequence is, however, placed within a second that is smaller and fainter, occupying the margin and the sky as if to suggest greater hiddenness in mystery: 'F: the creation of humanity—on that day God became human', following speculation by early Church theologians that the creation and the Annunciation both took place on March 25; 'G: on the same day, Christ dies, that lost humanity can be recreated'; and 'H: you may piously believe that the angel was sent into Limbo, to announce to the patriarchs the good news of the Incarnation'.

Through this ingenious technique, chronological time is set within a divine frame of reference, in which all aspects of the unfolding mystery are seen as part of the same 'moment' of revelation. Exterior sight sustains interior sight, and together they encourage contemplation and a deep inner penetration of the mystery narrated in the Gospel pericope. And this penetration of the mystery leads to action in the world.

Meanwhile, Nadal's text develops a commentary which interweaves the historical event and the doctrinal mystery at every point. Nadal's biblical exegesis is typical of the time, though according to Diego Jiménez he was 'more inclined to rely on the work and judgment of older writers' (p. 101), preferring the tried and familiar to the novel and speculative.

Following the exegetical and doctrinal notes, each chapter closes with a meditation. Nadal was not at first inclined to publish the meditations, believing that anyone moderately practised in prayer could write such meditations for themselves. But others prevailed upon him, and he relented (Jiménez' preface, p. 101). The meditations sometimes take the form of a colloquy or a dialogue with the person to whom the prayer is addressed; in this edition the translator has taken the liberty of inserting the speaker's identity in brackets.

This edition of *Adnotationes* makes a significant contribution both to the study of Ignatian spirituality and to discussions about the role of visual images in prayer. But it would be unfortunate if these *Adnotationes* remained purely a historical curiosity. How much we might gain if we too followed Diego Jimenez' words:

Expect no spiritual growth (which Christ effects abundantly in souls open to him in contemplation of his sacred life) from a mere glance at the pictures or wonder at their artistic beauty. Spend a whole day, even several days, with each image. Read the Annotation and Meditation points slowly. Meditate, contemplate, pray over the whole exercise. And, as the Apostle says, 'in all things make your requests known to God in prayer and petition and thanksgiving.' (p. 102)

**Elizabeth Liebert SNJM**

**Patrick Purnell, *Imagine* (Oxford: Way Books, 2004). 0 904717 14 3, pp. x + 54, £7.**

Throughout his life Patrick Purnell SJ has been writing poetry. Having now reached what he calls his 'greying years', he has been persuaded by his Jesuit brethren and his friends to offer a selection of his verse to the public. Purnell is probably better known as a gifted spiritual guide than as a writer, and he has also held many distinguished professional posts in the course of his life. He has been assistant headmaster at St Ignatius' College in North London, National Catechetical Adviser, and Jesuit Director of Novices. He himself believes that his most important work was the introduction in England and Wales of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) in 1981 .

Purnell arrived at St Beuno's, the novitiate of the Society of Jesus, at the age of seventeen; since he has lived all his adult life in the Society, it is hardly surprising that his verse is shot through with echoes of Ignatian

spirituality. In his brief introduction, he acknowledges that his title, *Imagine*, refers to an essential tool of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. Imagination, Purnell explains, 'is a true way of knowing; it can be thought of as the access to the real through the unreal' (p.vii).

Much of Patrick's verse reflects his vibrant faith, and he can also be delightfully droll. It is in this vein that he comments on the close of the Christmas season:

Christmas is being put away:  
The Kings in a cardboard box,  
Mary stashed in tissue paper,  
Joseph wrapped in a woolly hat,  
And the infant Christ in a nylon sock ...

Another poem ends with lines that are both joke and complaint:

Haven't you the wit  
To see I cannot cope with you—  
With you who have earmarked me  
For life?

Purnell's writing is marked by a deep compassion and empathy. He enables us to enter into his searing outrage over the plight of refugees, or to share the disciples' disquiet as they ate the Seder supper with Jesus: 'They drank your health / In the blood you'd shed ...' More poignantly still, Purnell helps us to become present to Mary's anguish as she watches, powerless, while Joseph struggles with her destiny:

I had no power to ease his heart,  
No skill with words  
To lift the veil of mystery  
And tell what had been done ...

Though much of Patrick's verse comes from the heart of his spiritual life, his poetry is not confined to the pious. The hymn to the valley of the Clwyd will surely take its place alongside the best of pastoral verse. The appeal of poetry is, of course, essentially personal. But *Imagine* will please all tastes. The book is well presented and would make an attractive present—but when you make contact with *The Way* to order it, buy a second copy, because you will also want one for yourself!

**Frances Makower RSCJ**

**Gareth Moore OP, *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* (London: Continuum, 2003). 0 8264 5949 8, pp. xii + 308, £14.99.**

The late Gareth Moore OP rejoiced 'to be a member of an Order whose motto is *Veritas*', and this, his last book before his untimely death in December 2002, searches for the truth regarding a document published in 1986 by the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF): a 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons' (*Homosexualitatis Problema*, hereafter HP). Moore's central thesis is trenchant:

... there are no good arguments, from either Scripture or natural law, against what have come to be known as homosexual relationships. The arguments put forward to show that such relationships are immoral are bad. Either their premisses are false or the argument by means of which the conclusion is drawn from them itself contains errors. (p.x)

Moore addresses directly only the question of male homosexuality, but he believes that most of his case applies equally to women.

Is it or is it not the case that same-sex relations have a potential for good? Most of the writing in HP suggests that a person is afflicted with the 'homosexual condition': such a person is the passive recipient of influences and must be protected. 'Homosexual activity prevents one's own fulfilment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God.' (HP n.7)

Moore is concerned to take seriously the witness of men who have found a rich experience of love through a stable homosexual relationship. 'One has to go beyond the superficial world of gay clubs and bars to see how the majority of gays live.' (p.297, n.5) For Moore, HP trivialises homosexuality, reducing it in a quite arbitrary manner to a simple desire to have sex. 'For the majority of gay men—for the normal gay man—this is simply false.' (p.45) Homosexual love includes a far richer and more complex set of desires, and can lead to a permanent, intimate and loving relationship 'in many respects similar to that of a married couple' (p.46). Moreover, HP also claims that the acceptance of homosexual activity 'has a direct impact on society's understanding of the nature and rights of the family and puts these in jeopardy' (HP n.9, Moore, p.45)—a claim made without any serious evidence being offered. The undermining of marriage in modern Western society arises more from poverty, from violence in the home, and from the culture of disposable relationships.

The arguments against homosexuality addressed by Moore are of two main kinds: those appealing to biblical texts, and those grounded in so-

called 'natural law'. HP, largely echoed by the 1992 *Catechism*, appeals to a range of biblical passages: Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10. What Moore does with the Romans text illustrates his general approach. Those identified earlier by Paul as people 'who by their wickedness suppress the truth',

... exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:25-27)

This seems to be a clear condemnation of homosexuality and is cited as such by HP. But Moore suggests that the context of the verses should make us hesitate to understand the text in this way. The Gentiles have *sinned* in that they have abandoned God; the shameless acts committed by men with men are a *consequence* of that sin. 'What is dishonourable about the passions of which Paul speaks is not that they are homosexual passions, but simply that they are *passions*.' (p.93) For Paul all passions are dishonourable and shameful because to have passion is to be out of control. Same-sex activity is merely a manifestation of a more fundamental reality: the deliberate rejection of God. This raises difficulties about using this text in the modern debate about homosexuality among sincere Christians (p.104). But when HP, discussing the Romans 1 passage, asserts that 'Paul is at a loss to find a clearer example of this disharmony [between God and creatures] than homosexual relations' (n.6), it offers no justification for this strong statement.

Other passages are bedevilled by translational difficulties: NRSV speaks of 'male prostitutes' and 'sodomites' not inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), but the condemnation here may be restricted only to pederasty, and a similar point can be made about 1 Timothy 1:10. There is in fact no word in biblical Hebrew or biblical Greek that can unproblematically be translated as 'homosexual'. The condemnations appealed to by those who would proscribe homosexuality need to be read carefully: we need to understand just what is being condemned, and under what description. Once we do, then none of the biblical texts cited by HP can be used to justify a clear-cut and certain condemnation of all same-sex relationships.

Another argument deployed against same-sex relations turns on the claim that they are unnatural, or against nature. Aquinas' discussion of

homosexuality in the *Summa theologiae* (1-2.94.2) is predicated on the assumption that all human beings are naturally heterosexual. But this hypothesis is unsubstantiated. 'There is no good reason to believe, as Aquinas seems to, that homosexuals have deliberately perverted a sexual desire which was innately heterosexual.' (p. 193) The fact that heterosexual coupling is naturally a good thing does not imply that all homosexual coupling is naturally a bad thing. 'Just as natural law does not entail the rejection of same-sex practices, so acceptance of those practices does not entail a rejection of natural law.' (p. 195)

Much depends here, of course, on how 'nature' is understood. In chapter 8, Moore insists that the personal has to be taken seriously in natural law arguments: it is not acts and things which primarily have purposes, but persons. Once that point is established, the assertion that homosexual acts lack an essential and indispensable finality is by no means self-evident and is open to serious criticism. As a matter of observable fact, there are many happy and fulfilled sexually active homosexuals.

Chapter 9 addresses the curious but influential position of the US American moral theologian, Germain Grisez. For Grisez:

... the coupling of two bodies of the same sex cannot form one complete organism and so cannot contribute to a bodily communion of persons. Hence, the experience of intimacy of the partners in sodomy cannot be the experience of any real unity between them. Rather, each one's experience of intimacy is private and incommunicable, and is no more a common good than the mere experience of sexual arousal and orgasm. Therefore the choice to engage in sodomy for the sake of that experience of intimacy in no way contributes to the partners' real common good as committed friends. (*The Way of the Lord Jesus* [Quincy, IL: Franciscan, 1993], vol. 2, p. 653)

The argument here depends on Grisez's conception of 'one-flesh unity'. Since two men together cannot form a single organism that is capable of reproduction, it follows that homosexual activity, according to Grisez, is immoral. But the whole concept of 'forming a single organism' is a confused idea, and to assert that there can be no bodily communion between the two men is simply not true. For Moore, Grisez's argumentation is confused and full of unsupported assertions. Moore convincingly demolishes Grisez's strange theology of marriage.

It is important to note that Moore's aims in this book are limited. He simply shows that the arguments offered in *Homosexualitatis Problema* do not stand up to critical scrutiny. He does not set out to show that it is good to be gay, nor does he directly attack the official Roman proscription of homosexual activity. But he does show that none of the arguments

produced by the Vatican in support of its case are adequate. 'Regrettably, in this area the Church teaches badly.' (p.282)

In this review, I have attempted to present a clear and objective summary of Moore's book. It has not been my intention either to defend the arguments he has put forward or to criticize them—a task that would require a much longer review. Moore has convincingly shown that nothing is gained in the important debate about homosexuality within the Christian community by invoking biblical passages without reference to their context. He has also shown that many of the standard 'natural law' arguments are open to serious criticism. Moore thus compels us to re-examine arguments that many have accepted uncritically. What he says must be taken seriously.

**Clarence Gallagher SJ**

**Franz Jalics, *Contemplative Retreat: An Introduction to the Contemplative Way of Life and to the Jesus Prayer* (Longwood, Fl: Xulon Press, 2003). 1 594671 56 7, pp. 332, £12.50.**

This book is both a practical handbook and an introduction to the theology of the spiritual life. The author has been working as a spiritual guide for some thirty years. He has his own retreat centre in Germany, where he guides hundreds of retreatants each year. Although Jalics claims that the book does not intend to be a theoretical treatise (p.8), the elements for a theory of the contemplative life are in fact present. Each chapter devotes considerable space to snippets of conversation between the retreat director and the retreatant. The dialogues give vivid examples of how to proceed, and illustrate the pitfalls that confront both exercitants and their directors on this spiritual way.

The book is divided into ten chapters, each of which sketches a possible day in a contemplative retreat. At the same time, the author shows how the book could be used to accompany a retreat in daily life over a number of months. And it could also be used outside a retreat setting, with the successive chapters gradually introducing the reader to the way of contemplation step by step.

By contemplation, Jalics understands a simple form of prayer without words or images. He distinguishes contemplation from scriptural meditation. Obviously, Scripture is essential for a Christian. But the author proposes that with time believers can leave the Scripture aside in their prayer, and focus directly on God's own Self. In scriptural prayer or in

Ignatian contemplations, the believer is very active with the mind or imagination. In contemplative prayer, the believer leaves these faculties aside in order simply to be in the presence of God. One should not call this prayer passive. The believer is quite alert and ready to receive God's presence. The believer also has a firm intention of giving the time of prayer to God. There is a definite spirit of resolution. But the believer does not set out to achieve anything. Everything is left to God. If nothing happens in the prayer (or so it might seem), that is perfectly all right. The believer is open for God, independent of any results.

The author proposes a number of steps along the way. The first is to learn to quieten down and to perceive, to live in the present. For this, contact with nature can be a great help. So the author suggests giving a few days to walking in the countryside and observing. Then he leads the retreatant into the experience of being attentive, first to their own breathing, next to their folded hands, and to the warmth at the centre of their palms. Gradually the retreatant is led to add the name of Mary to every breath and then the Name of Jesus Christ. The author sees the way of prayer that he teaches as connected to the Jesus Prayer, in which we pray the Name of Jesus with every breath, and surrender our whole being into the Name.

This presentation of the way of contemplation lays a striking emphasis upon suffering. The author is set against searching for self. He warns against seeing prayer as a means of achieving inner harmony or peace, as a sort of self-help. Every approach to prayer of this type is ultimately egotistical. Rather, one should be searching for God alone. When one enters into stillness, many demons from the subconscious appear. At first one experiences stillness, but then all the wounds of current life and past history are opened. At this point the silence of prayer can be terrifying. The author's consistent advice is to stay with the feelings and suffer them. In this way gradually they are purified, and one comes a step closer to the light. There is no way to God which bypasses this suffering.

The message of the book is simple. The goal of life and of prayer is the adoration of God, the seeking of God for God's sake. Prayer is nothing more than a loving attention to God. Yet the path is not easy; the demands are great, and there are many pitfalls along the way. This book is rich in a wisdom that shows us how to arrive at the goal, and Jalics is a compassionate guide. One who has a generous heart will find in this book precious help for continuing on the journey.

**John O'Donnell SJ**

**James Alison, *On Being Liked* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003). 0 232 52517 X, pp. xviii + 150, £10.95.**

At first the title worried me. I had always been taught that loving, not liking, was the important element in Christian spirituality. But Alison gives a convincing reason why he specifically uses the work 'like':

... behind the work 'like' there is an astonishing gentleness. The word 'love', which we have vastly overused, can have for us the meaning of a forceful intervention to rescue us, and we can forget that behind ... there is something much stronger, gentler and more continuous, not dependent at all on needing to rescue us. This is *liking* us ... a power so gentle ... that we are able not to be afraid .... (p. 15)

Towards the end of the book he suggests that we need 'to send the word "love" to the laundry and use the word "like" instead'. Alison has met too many people whose allegedly loving attitude towards those who are gay derives from a 'love' that 'does not include the word "like"'.

The word 'like' is rather more difficult to twist into a lie than the word 'love'. We know when someone likes us as we are, and so the word 'like' cannot slip over into saying 'my love for you means that I will like you if you become someone else'. (p. 107)

Alison links this emphasis on the word 'like' with a central insight of the cultural theorist René Girard: we receive ourselves through the eyes of another, and our very identity depends on who desires us, who likes us. For Christianity, therefore, the whole of creation has its very being through God's *liking* it (and not just loving it). Thus the growth that comes in Acts 10, when Peter, representing an exclusive Jewish tradition, eventually extends that tradition to include the Gentile Cornelius, is grounded on the truth that God likes everybody and excludes nobody. This narrative of Peter and Cornelius forms the background to the whole of Alison's book: God *likes* the impure people and wants them to be included in God's story. It follows that our task is to expand our 'liking' to all others, as Peter began to do. In a passage that gets to the heart of the whole enterprise, Alison writes of the 'unclean Gentiles':

God is not confronting them to get them to repent or even inviting them to become something else. God is possessing them with delight, and they are delighting in the being possessed. They are starting to tell a story, which in theory is an impossible story, of how they have come to discover themselves liked by God. (p. x)

Alison divides his book into what he calls three triptychs, the first and most important of which is about salvation. Although most Christians are agreed that Christ did work our salvation, there is very little agreement as to how he worked it. According to Alison, we still live under the shadow of 'the old default account', common to both Catholic and Protestant 'orthodoxy'. This account consists in variations on the substitutionary theory of the atonement, which is scandalously derivative of pagan conceptions of God and of sacrifice. For Alison, the Christian story is not primarily about dealing with sin, but rather about 'God wanting us to share in the act of creation from the inside':

How can we understand anew that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, come among us, undergoing murder and rising again, so that we can be unbound from our sin and enabled to live for ever? (p. 13)

The second triptych centres on the position of gay people within Christianity and on the questions this raises about the Church and truth. The questions are not so much about the ethics of being gay as such, but about Christianity's inability to say, 'we have been wrong'. Some of Alison's colleagues have played the part of Job's comforters in their attempts to rescue him from what they see as a destructive obsession. But it is the experience of God's liking him as he is that enables Alison to express, with the boldness of a latter-day Job, the importance of not succumbing to an unjust victimisation. Dishonest conformity is a temptation. Alison insists that the gay issue touches all of us, and must not be dealt with in the abstract. At the same time, he finds impressive ways of suggesting 'without loss of catholicity that Church authority can indeed mislead the faithful' (p. xiv). Moreover, Alison shows that admission of this truth does not weaken Church authority, but rather strengthens it.

The third triptych is about being contemplative, and concerns process rather than content: 'a shift in understanding, a de-centring of being which is in a sense all that theology and life in the Spirit is about' (p. xv). Alison has spaced the three chapters of this 'triptych' throughout the book—one, 'Contemplation in a World of Violence', at the beginning; another, 'Confessions of a Former Marginaholic', in the middle; and the third, 'The Strangeness of this Passivity', at the end. Together they gradually reveal an important insight: if being found in God's liking and relaxing into this liking constitute the central Christian experience, faith is not so much what I believe, but rather a discovery that I am *believed in* by another.

An earlier book of Alison's was entitled *The Joy of Being Wrong*; this collection of essays may perhaps involve the author in the pain, or hell, of being right. Alison confronts some deeply rooted misunderstandings of

who Jesus is, of what he does, and of how he does it. Jesus is not a sacrificial victim placating a cruel Father. Jesus, the likeness of the Father, incarnates the Father's *liking*, and empowers us through the Spirit to enter into that liking: the liking which informs the sacrifice—in the true sense—not only of Jesus but also of the Father. The message of *On Being Liked* comes across with crucifying clarity, with the boldness of the resurrection, and with a pentecostal empowerment of the reader. What Alison lives and teaches is refreshingly and inspiringly contagious. It is also—despite what many might still have us think—deeply consonant with Catholic tradition.

**William Hewett SJ**

***Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, translation, introduction and commentary by Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: OUP, 2003).  
0 19 925993 3, pp. xl + 376, £60.**

Evagrius of Pontus (345-399) is among the most original and influential figures in the history of Christian spirituality. He is also among the least known. Evagrius grew up in what today is northern Turkey, near the Black Sea. The son of a Christian bishop, he moved in elite circles. He was ordained lector by Basil of Caesarea and deacon by Gregory of Nazianzus. Basil and Gregory were, of course, the great defenders of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and the architects of the doctrine of the Trinity. As Gregory's archdeacon in Constantinople, Evagrius was renowned for his skilled defence of the orthodox position, and was almost certainly present when the Council of Constantinople of 381 formulated the version of the Nicene Creed that we recite today.

Not long after the Council, Evagrius fell in love with a married woman, and the risk of scandal was serious. After a vision, Evagrius broke off the affair, and fled the imperial capital for Jerusalem. There he came under the sway of Melania the Elder, one of the wealthiest women in the Roman Empire and founder of a Latin-speaking monastery on the Mount of Olives. Melania convinced him to adopt the monastic life, and sent him to friends in Egypt. Egypt was gaining international fame as the hub of a vibrant new movement: what we now call monasticism. In 383, Evagrius settled in Nitria, a cenobitic monastery 40 miles from Alexandria; two years later he moved on to the anchoritic settlement of Kellia. He was apprenticed in the monastic life under two of the greatest of the Desert Fathers, Macarius the Egyptian and Macarius the Alexandrian. Evagrius soon emerged as a leader of a circle of intellectual monks, and became

famous for his skills in the discernment of spirits. An early death saved him the anguish of exile. In 399, Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, turned against Evagrius' friends and followers, branding them as heretical Origenists and chasing them out of Egypt. They reportedly embraced and promulgated the boldest speculations of the great third-century biblical scholar Origen. They held, for example, that we all once existed as 'minds' united with God, but fell from this incorporeal state because of some ancient negligence—God then rescued us by creating our current fallen bodily existence. In other words, Evagrius' circle reputedly taught something like a Christian version of reincarnation.

While few today know Evagrius' name, many know a key part of his teaching—the 'seven deadly sins' (though Evagrius called them 'thoughts' rather than 'sins' and had eight rather than seven). Evagrius had astute psychological insight and masterfully unmasked religious self-deception. But such psychological sensitivity is only one side of Evagrius' spirituality. He also pioneered Christian mystical theology, advocating an unceasing wordless and imageless prayer, and he was among the first to plot stages in the soul's journey to God. His teachings were brought from Egypt to the Latin-speaking West by John Cassian, whose writings, in turn, were made required reading by St Benedict in his famous *Rule*. In this way, Evagrius' teaching became an integral part of medieval Catholic spirituality.

Despite his wisdom, Evagrius was posthumously condemned for Origenism by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. As a result, some writings were lost; others were preserved either under the names of other writers (such as Nilus of Ancyra) or in early Syriac and Armenian translations. Only in the twentieth century did scholars begin to recover his works, and thus to recognise how profoundly he shaped mystical theologies in Byzantium, in the Latin West, and in the Syriac East. This remarkable detective work was done mostly by French-speaking scholars who produced critical editions, theological analyses, and translations into French. At the forefront of this movement have been Antoine and Claire Guillaumont. The Guillaumonts have combined erudition with lucidity to present Evagrius to a broad range of audiences, both learned and popular.

The English-speaking world is just beginning to catch up with all this. That is why Robert Sinkewicz's new translation of Evagrius is such an important step forward. Sinkewicz offers fresh translations of Evagrius' two best-known works, *The Monk* (better known as *Praktikos*) and *Chapters on Prayer*. He has also translated works never before available in English, including *Foundations of the Monastic Life*, *To Eulogius*, *On the Eight Thoughts*, *On Thoughts*, and *Exhortation to a Virgin*. Translating Evagrius is a formidable task. Evagrius' most familiar works are collections of numbered

sentences or paragraphs called ‘chapters’ (*kephalaia*). Evagrius had a knack of coining aphorisms: for instance, ‘If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian’ (*Chapters on Prayer*, 60). Many of Evagrius’ chapters rely on technical terminology. The opening of *The Monk* reads: ‘Christianity is the doctrine of Christ our Saviour. It is comprised of the practical, the natural, and the theological.’ Each term here has a precise meaning in Evagrius’ system. What Sinkewicz translates as ‘natural’ is *physikē*, ‘physics’. For Evagrius, Christians need to discover God’s presence in the hidden ‘physics’ of God’s providential order, both within nature and beneath it.

Sinkewicz has rendered Evagrius’ terse style into an English that is both clear and precise—no small achievement given Evagrius’ fondness for technical terms. He has chosen to translate only the ascetical works, and only those preserved in Greek. This means that important (and controversial) works—*The Gnostic*, *The Gnostic Chapters*, as well as some 62 letters—are still not available. Nor has he translated Evagrius’ biblical commentaries on Psalms and Proverbs. The evidence from these works is essential to a balanced portrait of Evagrius, both as a Christian theologian and as a human being. Sinkewicz’s translation is an important step forward, but much remains to be done.

Some readers may be disappointed by Sinkewicz’s work as a commentator. He draws on the best recent scholarship on Evagrius’ biography and spirituality; he is aware of how important the Coptic sources are for reconstructing the biography. But his presentation is often too terse, and geared solely to a scholarly readership. The English-speaking world still needs what the Guillaumonts have provided in French: introductions and commentaries that make Evagrius’ brilliant intricacies lucid.

*William Harmless SJ*

**Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, *Windows on Social Spirituality* (Blackrock: Columba Press, 2003). 1 85607 400 5, pp. 160, £8.**

Do ‘I believe’, or do ‘we believe’? This relatively recent small change—one which the ‘reformers of the reform’ want to reverse—in the English translation of the creed recited during the Roman Catholic eucharist is highly significant. Is faith to be thought of primarily as a solitary quest to develop a unique relationship with the God within, to be ‘alone with the Alone’, in Plotinus’ phrase? Or is it impossible to follow Christ without discovering God in those around me, and committing myself

wholeheartedly to their welfare? This book argues passionately for the second stance. Its thirteen essays look at the question from a variety of angles (hence the 'windows' of the title). None of them, however, will allow a wholly solitary spirituality.

A number of the authors evidently feel that the average church-goer still needs to be persuaded that the question of social spirituality is important. Jim Corkery describes it as an 'unripened fruit': it has always been implicit in Christian thought, but it is only now being fully spelt out. Peter McVerry's reading of the Magnificat exemplifies this process. He traces in Mary's prayer a strand that links her experience of being loved by God with praise for the God who overturns an unjust social order. From this he derives a pattern of discipleship whereby a commitment to justice grows from an experience of God's love: God loves me, so I recognise that I am of infinite value; if this is true of me, it is true of everyone; so everyone must be treated in a way that acknowledges their value, that is, they must be treated justly.

Two theological ideas, those of trinity and of communion, underpin much of the discussion. The Trinity here is neither an abstruse mathematical puzzle, nor what Aileen Walsh calls the 'great dread of the preacher'. Rather, the doctrine of the Trinity points to the relationships within God, and between God and the world. It has the major implication that in matters of faith the interpersonal and social take priority over that which is narrowly individual. The reflection in Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for a human being to be alone is more than a divine mandate for marriage. We are created by God to be a people living in communion with one another, and the eucharist that Christ instituted is both the model for that community and its foundation.

The book falls into two parts, the first concentrating on ideas, the second dealing with various practical initiatives and questions, including the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, and Christian responses to ecological problems. Laurence Murphy explores the parallels between giving the Spiritual Exercises and 'life coaching' (a therapeutic practice currently popular in the United States). Patricia Higgins draws on her experience of voluntary work in a social justice project to describe the ways in which an appropriate spirituality can sustain commitment to such work. Eugene Quinn's belief that a person's response to the stranger in society will depend upon their basic attitude of fear or love has much to say to current debates about the treatment of asylum-seekers in Europe and beyond.

The first and last essays give a good impression of the scope of the book. Bill Toner offers an extended parable about two gardeners: one who prunes

and weeds ruthlessly to produce an immaculate garden; and one who tenderly cares for each ailing plant even at the cost of somewhat scruffy borders. Which, he asks, better corresponds to the experience of the God whom Jesus called 'Abba'? And what should this say to the church? Séamus Murphy's approach in his essay, 'Two Challenges for Social Spirituality', is much more analytical. He wonders first how spirituality can avoid becoming no more than another therapeutic tool which disengages an individual's sense of social obligation. Secondly, and perhaps more controversially, he considers ways in which spirituality can preserve a sense of the human as the centre of creation. He sees this outlook as central to the Abrahamic faith tradition uniting Christians, Muslims and Jews, and argues that it is in danger of being swamped by New Age nature worship.

The Centre for Faith and Justice is one response by the Irish Jesuits to the recognition that Christianity is necessarily a faith that does justice. In presenting these essays, the Centre has provided a fine service both for those to whom this conviction will be surprising news, and for justice activists who feel the need for a spirituality that will more effectively support what they do.

**Paul Nicholson SJ**

**Stephen H. Loudon and Leslie J. Francis, *The Naked Parish Priest: What Priests Really Think They're Doing* (London: Continuum, 2003). 0 8264 6798 9, pp. viii + 232, £14.99.**

There is a tendency to believe that all Catholic priests think and feel alike. However, according to this study in what the authors like to call 'empirical theology', hearts of many different kinds beat beneath the dog collar and the clerical suit—hearts with a wide range of views on subjects crucial to the health and development of the Catholic Church.

The research is based on a questionnaire sent in 1996 to all priests, both diocesan and religious, serving in parishes in England and Wales. The data collected is thus already eight years out of date. Of those who received the questionnaire, 42% completed and returned it. This response rate compares well with those of similar surveys completed in other countries, but it remains an open question whether the sample is representative of the clergy as a whole. It may be that those with more passionately held views responded more readily than middle-of-the-road parish priests already overburdened with too much paperwork. Had the

survey had the blessing of the hierarchy, there would undoubtedly have been a better response rate.

The authors asked a wide range of questions on subjects ranging from the adequacy of seminary training to theology and pastoral work. Some of these questions were topical and contentious, but they stayed on the comparatively safe ground of what priests thought, rather than investigating what they actually did.

The answers to these questions are concisely summarised in 22 tables in the appendix; this information is further broken down in subsidiary tables differentiating between age groups and between religious and diocesan priests. For those who are comfortable with statistics, the findings are most easily accessible through these tables. In the main body of the book, lively discussions set the figures in their theological and sociological context. For some of those who completed the questionnaire, this material will be too radical.

So what are the startling conclusions of this study? Seminary training is perceived as preparing one rather better for presiding at the liturgy (66%) than for ministering to women (18%), and worse still for ministry to teenagers (13%). Celibacy is still held in high esteem by most (73%), but a sizable minority would marry if they could (18%). The clergy as a whole are fairly tolerant of alcohol abuse by their peers (only 7% would bar them from ministry), but less tolerant of sexual misdemeanours. Only 4% would allow a paedophile to continue in ministry.

There is much unanimity on core theological issues: 98% believe that Jesus is both God and a human being, and that he is truly present in the Eucharist. On moral issues there is less agreement. The clergy are split 50-50 both on contraception and with regard to the divorced being received back into communion. Most (82%) are hopeful of further progress in ecumenism, and some (39%) envisage a time in the Church when women might be ordained. As regards burnout and stress, 84% do not regret their decision to become priests and would do it all over again, given the chance.

Some of the individual comments made by priests in response to the more open questions are particularly striking. One that sticks in my mind is that of the priest who lamented the fact that he could not give communion to Anglican clergy who had the same beliefs as he did with regard to the Eucharist, while he had to give communion to many who came to First Communion Masses even though they did not believe at all.

The question remains as to the value of 'empirical theology'. Our Church is not a democracy, and the stated views of the priests of England and Wales are unlikely to have much impact on the development of our

Church's theology. But it is surely significant that one third of our priests feel lonely, and that a quarter admit to watching too much television. Perhaps this study will help us to understand them and care for them a bit better. Have you hugged your parish priest recently?

*Tim Curtis SJ*

**Roger Grainger, *Group Spirituality: A Workshop Approach* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2003). 1 58391 917 1, pp. xiv + 178, £14.99.**

Roger Grainger is a dramatherapist, and as such he has provided a refreshing new angle on group spirituality. He shows how practical drama workshops can use play, rituals, dream-acting and an awareness of the body to open up spirituality groups, adding colour and life to them and helping them to become more wholistic.

The author mixes psychological theory, dramatherapy, a smattering of theology, and a good dose of practical application in his work with spirituality groups. At the outset, he tells us that 'the workshops ... are the most important part of the book, the rest of it providing background material in the form of supportive theories' (p. 7). True to his word, Grainger opens each chapter with a practical example, and closes it with outlines of several themed spirituality workshops which develop the chapter's topic. Sandwiched in between is his exposition of the topic and of the theory supporting it; the theory is drawn primarily from the field of psychology.

The first chapter explores Grainger's understanding of groups. What is possible in them? How can we establish a sense of safety in groups? How can healing occur in a safe space? And how are bodies and stories important both to dramatherapy and to Grainger's version of group spirituality? Grainger draws extensively here on psychological literature, and especially on the work of Carl Rogers. The most powerful feature of this chapter is its focus on bodies—'bodies speak louder than words' (pp. 25-29)—in particular in Grainger's demonstration of the healing power of wordless acting.

'Space', both literal and metaphorical, forms the focus of chapter two. Using D. W. Winnicott's work as a foundation, Grainger returns to the themes of safety, healing and embodiment from the first chapter, deepening them as he explores how creating space can facilitate the work of spirituality groups. In his section on learning to play again, he shows the importance of space to play, and the importance of play for adults as well as

for children. The concluding workshops about space fill out his discussion of play and healing.

Chapter three, the longest and most important, discusses how ritual and story can be means of teaching, and also of healing. It draws together in a wholistic way all the threads in the book. It returns to the themes of story and of 'cosmicisation' which were introduced in chapter one, by examining how story develops into archetype. After an introductory section which uses Edward Bailey's categories of implicit and explicit religion to distinguish religion from spirituality, Grainger develops his understanding of the theory and practice of story. He draws on the work of the psychologist George Kelly, and provides a compelling example of healing through story: the example of a woman who, in wrestling for months with how to make sense of her painful life, was finally able to understand a crucial piece of her story and thus experience healing and freedom. Embodiment, safe space, story and healing all appear both in the exposition and, more importantly, in the narratives at the beginning, middle and end of the chapter. The chapter thus forms an elegant example of exactly what is being discussed here and throughout the book—teaching through ritual and story.

Chapter four moves from stories to dreams. Grainger gives an introduction to dreaming based on C. G. Jung, and an exposition of the relationships between dreams, play, ritual and theatre. Then he outlines a series of dream workshops in which participants become more skilled in attending to their dreams and learning from them. Gently Grainger leads them through a process by which they become comfortable with their dreams; then they share their dreams with others; finally they act out their dreams in the group.

In chapter five (entitled 'Down to Earth'), Grainger sets the transformation that occurs in spirituality workshops within the wider perspective of Jung's transpersonal archetypes (introduced in chapters 3 and 4) and of the themes of life and death. He then discusses how such transformation affects daily life. A shift of perspective occurs, Grainger claims, when one understands creativity as both divine and human, and when one experiences oneself as a co-creator with God.

I found myself wishing that Grainger were more familiar with the field of spirituality. He draws with aplomb on psychology and dramatherapy, but seems unaware either of popular or of academic literature on spirituality; in the introduction he admits that he does not know of any books about the spirituality of groups (p.9). Reference to some of the literature might have strengthened, for example, his discussion of the relationship between spirituality and religion. Even more importantly, his lack of familiarity with

the literature on group spirituality means that he is unaware that his discoveries of the shifts that occur in spirituality groups (for example, on pp. 133 and 139) have been well documented elsewhere. Much of what he relates about the transformative power of spirituality groups is paralleled in other books and articles.

Nevertheless, Grainger has made an important contribution to the practical literature on group spirituality. The fresh perspective of dramatherapy, the use of embodiment and play, the many creative ritual and workshop examples, and the stories of meaning-making and healing, make this an excellent resource for anyone teaching spirituality courses, giving retreats, or leading spirituality groups or prayer groups. The psychological theory provided by Grainger helpfully enriches the picture of what is occurring in spirituality groups when safety is established, stories are told, and healing occurs—and the reminder of psychological considerations to spiritual directors may be useful and timely. I look forward to using this book myself and I recommend it heartily to others.

**Margaret Benefiel**

**Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52385 1, pp. 216, £9.95.**

Wendy Wright has composed a timely survey of a spiritual tradition which, as she notes, is not as widely studied as many others, despite the riches it contains. The account of Salesian spirituality that she offers echoes both the relational emphasis of much contemporary writing in spirituality and the universal call to holiness that was a key theme of Vatican II. She manages to steer a steady course between the Scylla of overly abstract terminology and the Charybdis of sentimentality, reaching the harbour of the heart, the destination of this rich tradition.

The characters in Wright's narrative are attractive, lively and compelling. It is testament to her knowledge and ability that she is able to give such a flowing account of a tradition that she describes as 'institutionally diffuse', with 'less clearly delineated' parameters than other spiritual traditions (p. 17). Her narrative is full of biblical allusions: she brings out the role played by the Song of Songs in Francis de Sales' development, and uses images of light and Pentecost to describe the spread of Salesian spirituality. Her presentation also stresses the relational character of the tradition. She portrays the main founders (for example, Don Bosco and Louis Brisson in the nineteenth century) not as lone

heroes or pioneers, but rather as people whose wisdom grew in relationship with those around them.

This characteristic is clearly shown in her presentation of Francis and Jane de Chantal. Her account of their spiritual friendship (which she has examined in more detail in *Bond of Perfection*) offers a distinctively Salesian model of spiritual direction, one that privileges involvement rather than detachment, showing that the growth of director and directee can be mutual. Jane's 'refracting' of the Salesian spirit makes a significant contribution to its development (p.61), even though she remains the more hidden and mysterious of the two. The recovery that Wright undertakes with respect to Jane is significant and interesting, and could serve as a useful model in other contexts, both within and beyond the Salesian tradition. The ordinary background out of which the tradition grew is also emphasized: 'The intense focus on the quality of a single human heart in the midst of ... complex political activity ... was characteristic of Francis de Sales' (pp.38-39).

Francis' stress on the heart is given robust and attractive treatment by Wright, and she draws out the profound optimism that marks his tradition. The heart is understood biblically by Francis; it 'does not connote merely sentiment, affection or emotion', but also 'intellect and reason' (p.32). The Salesian imperative, 'Live Jesus!', is addressed to all those who wish to model their hearts on his: 'Discipleship is the lifelong opening of the heart to be transformed by Jesus' own gentle heart' (pp.33-34). In a dynamic chapter on devotion to the Sacred Heart (drawing on her recent *Sacred Heart: Gateway to God*), she charts the progress of this aspect of the Salesian world of hearts from mystical encounter to popular devotion, noting the way in which its nature shifted as its appeal widened. For Wright, the 'deep grammar' of this devotion 'remained utterly Salesian' despite the changes (p.108)—a claim that is perhaps a little over-generous.

Wright's characterization of Francis and Jane as ahead of their time, particularly in the chapters on the nineteenth century and Vatican II, raises an interesting issue for studies of spiritual traditions. As she acknowledges herself, 'each age fits its heroes to its own image' (p.93); as we seek to recover spiritual treasures, we may simply be reading our contemporary concerns into the tradition. Wright is exemplary in her effort to bring out the original setting of the Salesian classic texts. Once that task is accomplished, she charts the development of themes and tendencies, showing how they have been refracted in many ways at different times. These developments have enabled the dynamic and relational emphases of Salesian spirituality to survive, making them available to people living in situations quite different from those of the origins.

Wright's work suggests a need to continue the re-translation of Francis' works, so that the riches of the Salesian world of hearts can be made accessible to contemporary English-speaking readers. Her account engages its readers, and makes them aware that the call, 'Live Jesus!', is both practical and possible. The road to sanctity in the Salesian tradition is not an exclusive one, trodden only by 'an élite cadre of superhuman heroes .... Sanctity is simply the deep realisation of the life given over to Love.' (p.178)

**Martin Poulson SDB**

**Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 2003). 0 674 00966 5, pp.xviii + 242, £16.50.**

In this book on Mary of Magdala, Dr Brock has achieved the difficult task of 'translating' a doctoral dissertation, originally submitted at Harvard, into a readable and helpful book for the non-specialist. Brock's primary interest is apostolic authority in the early Christian churches, how it was established and what it implied. Her thesis is that women, and especially Mary of Magdala, were first numbered among the apostles, but were later denied that authoritative role. In particular, she notes the tension between the primacy of Mary and of Peter as witnesses to the resurrection, and seeks to establish that 'as one of these two figures gains prominence, the status of the other often declines' (p. 162).

A central claim of Brock's is that there are several definitions of 'apostle' in the New Testament. But in general terms an apostle is one who saw the risen Jesus and received from him a commission. Mary Magdalene was the first to meet these two criteria in three of the four canonical gospels, and this should therefore have established her enduring position as an apostle. But 'should' is the operative word. Chapters 2-4 trace the treatment of Mary of Magdala and Peter in the canonical gospels, and conclude that Mary is always present at the sepulchre scenes, and moreover that she is listed first. It is only Luke who heightens Peter's prominence as apostolic witness to the resurrection by omitting Mary's commission by Jesus. The point is important, because—as Brock shows—groups in earliest Christianity would invoke an apostle's name to establish their authority, sometimes in a way that undermined that of other groups.

The tension between Mary of Magdala and Peter continues in early Christian literature. Chapters 5-7 trace what could be called the

competition between Mary and Peter in some of the texts that were not incorporated into what we call the New Testament. Dr Brock's evaluation of non-canonical sources is balanced and generally accessible to non-specialists (though she might have done more to keep readers aware of the likely dates of these works). Indeed, her presentation of this material will probably excite the interest and curiosity of readers who do not know it.

Brock notes that the *Acts of Paul* 'incorporates numerous models of strong female leadership' (p. 107) with Mary of Magdala prominent; by contrast, the *Acts of Peter* 'exhibits a significant lack of autonomous actions on the part of women' (p. 109). This further supports her thesis that 'the greater Peter's authority in a text, the more Mary Magdalene's role is altered or compromised' (p. 122). In works in which Peter is particularly prominent, Mary Magdalene is often either eliminated from the narrative, or else replaced by Mary the mother of Jesus. Without saying that she is doing so, Brock is here demonstrating the genesis of Petrine primacy in the Church.

Why is all this important? In the New Testament period, an apostolic link to Jesus was 'a vital means of establishing ... credibility and eligibility to preach and teach the gospel message' (p. 143). Paul's use of 'apostle' is gender-inclusive: Junia is 'prominent among the apostles' (Romans 16: 7). Writing some years later, Luke restricts the definition to males: the replacement for Judas has to be from one of the 'men who have accompanied us' (Acts 1: 21-22). This mirrors what happened to Mary of Magdala (and to women generally in Church history). In early sources she is 'the apostle to the apostles', but gradually she is eclipsed by the figure of Peter. Later tradition (most lamentably, Gregory the Great in the sixth century) misidentified Mary of Magdala with the unnamed 'woman who was a sinner' of Luke 7: 37-50. On this basis, Mary of Magdala was displaced from her status as an authoritative witness to the resurrection, and became a repentant sinner, usually a sexual sinner. There is no New Testament evidence whatever for this charge. The shift undercut the apostolic authority for women that could have been claimed through Mary's important position. 'Unfortunately ... the more exclusive definition of apostolic eligibility has gained undue influence in many Christian circles against its earlier and more inclusive counterpart.' (p. 173)

Who qualifies as an apostle? What is the ongoing importance of apostleship? These are the existential questions the book raises. A commission of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene to preach and proclaim the gospel places her in the authoritative tradition that Christian history has largely reserved for males. Attempts like Brock's firmly to re-establish the existence of female apostles in the canonical New Testament ask us to

re-examine exactly what apostolic status implies for contemporary Christian practice. Although there is little here that will be new to scholars, this clearly written and carefully organized volume helps us to face this important practical question. While the book is extensively documented and closes with nearly 60 pages of bibliographies and indices, its main text is accessible to the general reader. For those unfamiliar with the material, Brock's readings of biblical texts will be enlightening, and her use of apocryphal materials fascinating.

**Bonnie Thurston**

***Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, edited by David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (London: SCM Press, 2003). 0 334 02920 1, pp. x + 295, £19.99.**

This book invites the reader to listen in on a conversation among scholars, both systematic theologians and biblical specialists, as they reflect on how to read both Christian and Jewish Scriptures at once with intellectual integrity and with faith—a critical question for modern readers.

The collection is structured around the theme of Wisdom—an option which brings many advantages. The idea is rooted in the Jewish and Christian traditions; it provides an overarching concept linking the commands of the Torah and the teaching of Jesus, and the Christian tradition drew on it to articulate the eternal and cosmic significance of Christ. Most importantly of all, divine wisdom is a reality of faith which both inspires and transcends the human pursuit of learning.

Much of the discussion centres on interpretation: the questions raised for believers by the historico-critical method, and the challenge which comes from so-called postmodern theories. The historico-critical method examines the origins and cultural context of a text, and attempts to uncover the intentions of the author(s). It thereby claims to provide a 'neutral' and rational basis for academic study, but at the same time undermines many devotionally significant claims, both about what actually happened in the past, and about how Christian doctrine is grounded in Scripture. Postmodern theories, on the other hand, emphasize the active role of the reader: the texts as such contain a multiplicity of meanings. In such theories, however, text cannot refer to anything beyond text. Though the reader may discover indefinitely many meanings in the text, none of them succeed in referring to any reality beyond the text.

In different ways, the authors suggest what might be called a spirituality of reading Scripture. The historico-critical method is necessary for the faithful reading of Scripture today, but something more is required. For these texts speak to the present. They are intrinsically open to rereading—here there is an overlap with post-modern positions.

What makes Scripture distinctively open in this way is expressed differently by different authors. Thus David F. Ford asks the question as to whether there is an authentic Christian way of reading Scripture which can respect the Jewish tradition of reading. He uses the concept of 'figural reading' to denote the fresh use of existing text by a community to make sense of the divine action as they experience it now. The texts thus do not contain meanings in their own right independent of a community's 'figural' reading. The original text of Isaiah 7 about the young girl conceiving is not 'about' Jesus. Yet those who have experienced Jesus of Nazareth can make sense of that experience through Isaiah 7. The texts-on-the-page are common ground for different faith communities to explore in their collective search for Wisdom.

For Daniel W. Hardy, Scripture contains a 'depth' and 'density' of meaning, which spurs the reader to a continually new exploration. For Rowan Williams, Scripture is sacred text, which has evolved over time, as a faith community gives itself an account of the gracious action of God. Each layer contains contradictions, paradoxes, stresses and tensions. Later writings in the tradition attempt to resolve these, but in so doing they produce new paradoxes and contradictions of their own. The whole text thus acquires an excess of meaning, pointing to the living God of grace who is greater than any given narrative.

Reading the Christian Scriptures cannot be divorced from the activities of Christian life and worship (Robert Morgan). The history of a faith community's interpretation of Scripture is a part of the history of the divine communication with that community—indeed it is part of the history of God's communication with the whole of humanity (Martin Hengel). Harmony with the community's history of interpretation (in part, the history of the emergence of Christian doctrine) is thus one of the conditions for a wise reading of Christian scripture (James D. G. Dunn). For John Webster, scripture sets its own criteria for wise reading, by demanding a departure from the self and a simplification of attention and desire. We approach the text as disciples eager to be told something that our imperfect human reason cannot understand alone (Markus Bockmühl).

Two essays (Paul Joyce and Frances Young) focus on Proverbs 8:22, 'The Lord created me at the beginning of his work': a key text in the

development of the theology of the Word of God. Young suggests guidelines for an 'ethical reading of Scripture'—one that is aware of 'dubious linguistic and contextual moves' in the tradition of interpretation, but that also recognises how even radical criticism of that tradition remains dependent on it.

The rational discipline of historico-critical reading purifies the traditional reading of the community, but does not replace it. This claim is intelligible provided one acknowledges that the text has something—or someone—beyond it, and that its meaning lies in reference to that reality. Morna D. Hooker's essay on the Christ hymn in Colossians (1:15-20) suggests that the author, by presenting Christ as the authentic Wisdom of God, is 'subverting' his own text 'by pointing to a greater authority behind the text'. Just as in Christ the Word of God comes to us in and through threatened, unstable humanity, so the text that bears witness to the Word is 'open to the same vulnerability'.

Other essays explore the contemporary significance of apocalyptic (Christopher Rowland), the use of Colossians as a source of ecological wisdom (Richard Bauckham), and Jonah as a corrective to abuse of the word of God (Walter Moberly). Diane Lipton offers a rereading of the problematically vindictive text 'Remember Amalek' (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) from a Jewish perspective. Graham Stanton looks for Wisdom in the law of Christ. William Horbury examines the use of the Song of Songs in Christian and Jewish Wisdom mysticism, while Denys Turner explores its interpretation in the Middle Ages.

This is a rich collection of essays from scholars who are committed to Scripture as sacred text, as a continuing source of Wisdom for life. There is encouragement here for all those who believe that rumours of the grand narrative's collapse are greatly exaggerated.

**John Moffatt SJ**

**George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003). 9 780300 096934, pp. xxii + 620, £25.00.**

'Puritanical', like 'Jesuitical', has taken on associations that are quite false to the reality of actual Puritans or Jesuits. Just as New England Puritans are widely remembered for the Salem witch trials, so Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is best known for that frightening sermon which was also one of his rhetorical masterpieces, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. George Marsden's biography of Edwards is also a masterpiece—a masterpiece of

careful historical scholarship. It succeeds in recovering both the complexity and the richness of a profoundly alien theological world centred on a powerfully evangelical spirituality of conversion. Far more than a biography, it offers a thorough redefinition of Puritan New England, of its culture and spirituality, and of its most brilliant theologian.

As a key figure in the emergence of American revivalism, Edwards is often viewed as a forerunner of evangelical Christianity, which later dominated so much of American religion and has even become 'one of America's leading exports' (p.9). But at the same time Edwards' thought and spirituality are deeply rooted in a fundamentally Catholic tradition. Marsden reminds us that Edwards lived in a world that 'was in many respects closer to the world of medieval Christendom than it was to that of even nineteenth-century America' (p.7). Although a contemporary of Benjamin Franklin, Edwards died well before the first rumblings of the American Revolution, and before the social upheavals that followed, including the radical democratization of American religion. Though he was an avid promoter of the Great Awakening (1740) and of the earlier Valley Awakening (1734), both of which centered on an individualistic spirituality of personal conversion and rebirth in the Holy Spirit, Edwards nevertheless held a high view of the sacraments. He saw the Church as the Body of Christ and the Eucharist as 'Christ's communal presence with believers'. He therefore advocated weekly communion, but also insisted on the worthiness of recipients, rejecting the so-called halfway covenant (p.354). He was ultimately dismissed from the pastorate of Northampton, the very town where mass revivalism first began, over the question of higher standards for admission to communion. Impaled 'on the horns of a dilemma inherited' from his Puritan tradition, he was strongly committed both to 'rebuilding Christendom by making towns and eventually nations into virtually Christian societies' and to 'advocating a pure, called-out church ... on the premise that many church members, including many clergy, were unconverted' (p.350).

Looked at from the perspective of the larger Christian tradition, Edwards offers a compelling reformulation of Trinitarian theology and spirituality at a time when 'there was a substantial cultural overlap between the late medieval-Reformation outlook, preserved largely intact in Edwards' Puritan heritage, and the world of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment'. Rather than moving toward a view of God as static and impassive, the divine clockmaker of the Deists, Edwards built his theology on the Trinitarian heritage of 'God as the active creator and sustainer of an inconceivably immense universe' (p.504). He immersed

himself in the writings of Locke and early modern idealist philosophers, and found that they reinforced Christianity's Trinitarian view of reality:

... that the universe most essentially consisted of personal relationships ....  
 Creation was most essentially a means by which the creator-sustainer  
 communicated his holiness, beauty, and redemptive love to other persons.  
 Edwards thus addressed one of the greatest mysteries facing traditional theism  
 in the post-Newtonian universe: how can the creator of such an unimaginably  
 vast universe be in intimate communication with creatures so infinitely inferior  
 to himself? (p. 504)

This deeply Trinitarian view of God is not the only conviction of Edwards and his Puritan heritage which echoes Ignatian spirituality. The hell-fire and brimstone sermons, like the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, are only one element in a strategy of transformative conversion to the service of Christ and his kingdom. In a chapter dedicated to 'awakening' sermons and their particular role in the entire revival process, Marsden examines both the stern Edwards and the gentle, pastoral Edwards: 'Ultimately—and here is the counterbalance to the hands of an angry God—one had to become as a child taking the wounded hand of the gentle Christ'. Another Ignatian echo is Edwards' insistence on discernment. While maintaining the necessity of affective religious experience, he also recognises—unlike many of the evangelical writers who came after him—and reworks the old Puritan tradition of 'distinguishing signs' for the difficult process of discerning authenticity. Moreover, he sees revivalism in an ecclesial mode: as an international phenomenon which is part and parcel of God's promise of building the kingdom and ushering in the final triumph of the Church of Christ:

In Edwards' favourite image, Christ is the bridegroom who is bringing his bride, the church, into a creature's fullest possible experience of Trinitarian love.  
 (p. 488)

Marsden provides a thorough study of this international evangelical network, linking England, Scotland and the European Continent to the American colonies:

Their great practical hope lay in the growing transatlantic movement to promote heartfelt piety ... they aspired to be used by God to help usher in his kingdom through a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the salvation of countless souls. (p. 142)

Edwards' account of the protracted revival in his own parish of Northampton, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, became an

inspiration for revivals in both England and Scotland. John Wesley read it in 1738, the year of his conversion experience, and later published his own abridgment (p. 173).

Finally, like Ignatius, Edwards saw the service of the kingdom as an essentially missionary enterprise, requiring a profound spirit of renunciation. His most popular work, the *Life of David Brainerd* (a missionary to New England Indians), is more an account 'of the sacrifice involved in Brainerd's mission than in its success', highlighting the necessary 'readiness to renounce the world for the kingdom'. Once again, Wesley published an abridgment, which went into many printings. Franklin's *Autobiography*, 'the story of the self-made man, eventually became paradigmatic of the American ideal, but at least before the Civil War, Edwards' *Brainerd*, the self-renouncing man, offered a major alternative' (pp. 332-333).

**Christopher Viscardi SJ**

**Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002). 0 19 925238 6, pp. xvii + 332, £45.00.**

Any new publication by Andrew Louth is bound to be welcome to readers interested in thoughtful, literate, historically grounded theology. Currently professor of Patristic and Byzantine Studies at the University of Durham, Louth has translated Balthasar and Maximus the Confessor, and written on Barth, Augustine, and the Caroline divines. Perhaps his most important work up to now has been as an interpreter of the early Greek spiritual and mystical tradition. In this new book, Louth offers us a comprehensive, detailed survey of the achievement of St John of Damascus, the eighth-century monk, theologian, and liturgical poet and preacher. It is the first serious general monograph on the Damascene's work in at least forty years, and probably the first ever in English; but the book's importance and value as a theological study go far beyond the simple fact that it fills a gaping scholarly hole.

For modern readers, conscious of the importance of cultural liminality and historical transitions, John of Damascus can hardly fail to be an intriguing figure. Born of a prominent Syrian Christian family in the second half of the seventh century, John seems—like his father and grandfather—to have been a civil servant in the treasury of the Umayyad caliphs, the Arabic rulers who established the first Islamic Empire over much of the

Middle East. Around 706 he became a monk in Palestine, where Christians now also lived under Islamic rule, and took the name John; until his death around 750, he apparently remained there, occupied with study and writing. His works, in a wide variety of genres, testify to his extraordinarily deep immersion in the classical Greek Christian tradition of rhetoric, philosophy and theology. Most of his doctrinal and polemical writing seems to have been meant to help Christians understand better what made them religiously distinct from their Muslim rulers, as well as from believers in the various heretical forms of Christianity (among which John also counted Islam) that were now being given equal protection by the government. At least ten of John's festal homilies have also been preserved, works of great literary finish and spiritual power; he was also an early defender of the veneration of icons. And while he is perhaps best known in the West for his great synthesis of Greek Patristic theology, *On the Orthodox Faith*, often cited as an authority by Thomas Aquinas, his reputation in Eastern Orthodoxy rests even more on his liturgical canons, a new form of hymn which he and a few of his contemporaries developed for the monastic office.

Andrew Louth's study brilliantly covers the whole of John's literary and theological achievement. Louth succeeds in placing him in the context of his own changing culture, as he distilled the essence of Greek Christian thought for a Church now distant from the security of a Christian Empire, occasionally drawing subtle parallels with Western thinkers as diverse as Bede, Pascal and David Jones. Abundantly furnished with scholarly detail and a rich bibliography, the book is also an admirable introduction to John's thought for those who have little acquaintance with patristic studies, offering helpful background sketches on such subjects as patristic Christology, early preaching and hymnody, and the iconoclastic controversy. It is written with elegance, unflinching clarity, and thought-provoking theological depth, and is carefully and beautifully produced by the Oxford University Press. Louth's work seems destined to be the standard general treatment of John Damascene, in any language, for decades to come, and should fill that role with distinction.

**Brian E. Daley SJ**

**Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization* (London: SCM Press, 2003). 0 334 02928 7, pp. xii + 260, £14.99.**

Reading Mary C. Grey's *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization* feels like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Initially it is unclear whether or how the pieces fit together, but if you stay with the book, something remarkable and unusual emerges.

In the first of three sections, Grey calls upon various resources of myth, narrative, and personal experience to articulate her central concern: the corrosive effects of global capitalism upon the human spirit. Grey describes a pathology arising from a failure to recognise human vulnerability. She insists that globalisation is not simply a political and economic issue. Because it leads to a misplacement of desire it is also a fundamental theological and spiritual concern. Human desire is constrained by all kinds of addictive enslavements (such as consumer goods) that ultimately do not satisfy the human heart. This spiritual vacuum intensifies the deepening environmental crisis and the economic inequalities among the world's peoples. Grey's diagnosis is not new; her originality lies in her method and her use of imaginative resources to explore the history of Western capitalism and the emergence of a global market economy. Thus we find a story of disillusioned protesters seeking solace at a Celtic sacred site, and a midrash-like tale of the biblical Miriam linked to the plight of contemporary Indian women in their futile search for water.

In the second part, Grey asks how a persuasive case can be made for voluntary asceticism in a world of consumer indulgence. The theological notion of *kenosis* (self-emptying) has often been associated with a patriarchy that glorifies suffering, reinforces social inequalities, and promotes a dualistic way of thinking that stunts authentic engagement with the world. Yet the feminist liberation theology that exposes these problems is also inadequate. Ingeniously drawing on the myth of Psyche and Eros, Grey suggests that *kenosis* should be a key concept not just for christology, but for theology and church practice in general. Theology itself needs to enter into a new *via negativa*. Theology's response to the superficiality of contemporary life is to surrender its claims to certitude and enter into a contemplative unknowing. It must realise the incompleteness of all dogmas, and acknowledge the harmful effects of misconceived images and notions of God on human history. Theology must become less suspicious of alternative ways of thinking. It must challenge the prevailing understanding of human beings as self-sufficient individuals, to be esteemed according to their purchasing power. Only if theology enters into

the darkness, as Psyche did, can theology be reunited with its true sources of wisdom and re-creation.

Grey is here reclaiming the power of passion (*eros*). In a chapter entitled, “‘Becoming a Watered Garden’: A Sacramental Poetics’, Grey links ancient Celtic tales that reverence water and sacred wells with the formless chaos that marked the beginning of creation in the biblical account. She explores a poetics of moistness and fluidity rather than dryness and desiccation. Drawing on psychologists (Sandor Ferenczi), poets (Gerald Manley Hopkins), ecologists and ecotheologians (Rachel Carson and Nancy Vangerud), and theologians (Edward Farley and Susan Ross), she pleads for a new poetics that will connect our deepest yearnings with what will really make humans and all creation flourish.

In the third part Grey suggests that in our time a new revelation of divine Mystery is emerging. Ecofeminism and ecomysticism teach us holistic ways of life in harmony with the earth. Gandhian spirituality promises a transformation emerging from the practices of non-violence and the coupling of ethics with economics. Communities of simplicity and voluntary sacrifice could become the ‘well watered gardens’ that will refresh and transform the global and spiritual landscape. We can imagine a new asceticism—one that would not tolerate the continuing victimisation of the earth’s poor, and would insist that something other than consumer indulgence must be the basis for human desires and choices. Instead, the human community would move beyond consumerism to voluntary sharing, beyond individualism to community solidarity.

This book deepens and amplifies ideas that Grey has put forward before. In *Redeeming the Dream* (London: SPCK, 1989), Grey explained sin as ‘going against the relational grain of existence’. Here she goes further: sin is ‘going against the connections with all life systems, blocking, denying and destroying the life-giving connections’ (p. 146). This book is an admirable statement of hope from an ecofeminist theologian and activist deeply committed to the healing of hearts and to the transformation of a world broken by globalisation’s false promises.

**Valerie A. Lesniak**

**John Webster, *Holiness* (London: SCM, 2003). 0 334 02895 7, pp. viii + 120, £12.99.**

This book called *Holiness* is written by a theologian and offered as an exercise in theology. But it quite deliberately differs from much of what

passes for theology today. It recognises 'the reality of the gospel as a permanent source of unsettlement, discomfiture, and renewal of vocation', and both advocates and exemplifies a way of thinking that is always 'emerging from its own dissolution and reconstitution' (p.5). There are clear parallels here with the claim that the study of spirituality is self-implicating. You cannot consistently study and write about God's dealings with humanity without yourself being transformed. If, in the interests of academic credibility, you adopt a position of detached neutrality, you risk falsifying your topic.

Where readers of *The Way* may find this book rather alien is in its resolutely Barthian assumptions. Throughout his four lecture-length chapters, on theology itself, on the Trinity, on the Church and on the Christian understanding of humanity, Webster eschews the approach that seeks to enrich Christian self-understanding through conversations with contemporary culture. He is sceptical about the power of unaided (and sinful) human reason to speak sensibly of God. He is concerned to articulate the distinctiveness of Christian witness, and is doubtful that any generic account of a human religious potential helps us understand ourselves properly as creatures of the God who elects Christ, and who elects us in him. Hence the avoidance of the word 'spirituality', and of the suggestive slippages it can permit between the Holy Spirit and the spiritual element in humanity

The classical Protestantism here is, notoriously, controverted. My own reaction is to welcome Webster's challenge to be more overt about the distinctiveness of Christian tradition, while wanting to articulate the reality of sin in very different, less overt ways, and to be more generous about the evangelical significance of what lies outside the Church. But, for all the learning behind it, this is an intentionally simple book which should be read on its own terms. Beautifully and eloquently written, it articulates Protestant convictions in a way from which all can learn, and demonstrates with rare consistency and economy how the concerns behind 'spirituality' might be addressed from a Barthian standpoint. Which is also to say that this book is a wonderful and attractive introduction quite simply to Protestant Christianity. For, whatever their other differences, Barthians and students of 'spirituality' agree on one key conviction: proper knowledge of God arises only from engagement with God.

**Philip Endean SJ**