... indoctrinations and commands from outside ... channels of grace from outside are only of any use if they meet the ultimate grace which comes from within ...

... the immediate experience of God, the experience where it dawns on a human being that the mystery all grasp that we call God is near, can be spoken to, and enfolds us with blessing precisely when we don’t try make it something under our control, but hand ourselves over to it unconditionally ...

Karl Rahner, ‘Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit’
Foreword

Maintaining the Tension: Freedom, Commitment and Discernment
Eileen C. Burke-Sullivan

Contemporary culture sees freedom and commitment as opposites. But in fact the commitments we make enable us to deepen and develop our freedom through ongoing discernment.

Looking at God Looking at You: Ignatius’ Third Addition
Robert R. Marsh

Before every period of prayer, Ignatius invites us to consider how God is looking at us. Prayer should open us up, beyond our own preoccupations, to a God who deals with us in freedom.

More than Collaboration
Eolene M. Boyd-MacMillan

Psychologists sometimes talk of the Exercises strengthening the ego, and of our collaboration with divine grace. Perhaps we should speak instead, even as psychologists, of our being drawn into relationality with God.

Moving Mysticism to the Centre: Karl Rahner (1904-1984)
Patricia Carroll

For Rahner, it was not just privileged souls that were mystical; all human experience was caught up within the touch of God.

Karl Rahner and Liberation Theology
Jon Sobrino

Perhaps the leading Jesuit liberation theologian reflects on how Karl Rahner supported the decisive new shifts in Latin American church life that emerged as his teaching career came to an end.
‘A Symbol Perfected in Death’: Rahner’s Theology and Alfred Delp (1907-1945)

Philip Endean

One of Rahner’s most brilliant contemporaries was executed by the Nazis as a result of his involvement in resistance work. The spiritual process Alfred Delp went through in the months before his execution powerfully illustrates the conversions that Rahner and Lonergan describe more abstractly.

Freedom, Married Love and the Exercises

Thomas M. Kelly

The spiritual freedom fostered by the Exercises can open couples to the sacramental reality of marriage, enabling spouses to find God’s own reality within each other.

Fidelity in Context: John Courtney Murray (1904-1967)

Thomas Hughson

How John Courtney Murray’s groundbreaking work at Vatican II on religious freedom emerged from a lifetime of reflection on the US American constitution and its relationships with Catholicism.

A Spirituality of Democracy

Eugene C. Bianchi

It is often said that the Church is not a democracy. Eugene Bianchi honours Murray’s legacy by exploring anew the profound connections between democracy and the Christian spiritual tradition.

Conversion and Spirituality: Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984)

Raymond Moloney

Lonergan’s theories about consciousness provide spirituality with a clear and systematic account of human integration, both intellectual and affective. For Lonergan, spirituality is the culmination of philosophy and theology.
**The Truth That Makes Us Free**

Bruce Lescher

Study may sometimes be tedious, but at its best it liberates. Bruce Lescher here explores how the study of spirituality expands our freedom, and opens us to the otherness of God.

**An Ignatian Way of Doing Theology: Theology Discerning 'The True Life'**

Christophe Theobald

The Ignatian values of discernment and ‘the true life’ generate a quite distinctive style of theology, one which is only now coming into its own as contemporary society becomes ever more fluid.

**When Cell Doors Close and Hearts Open**

Lysanne Sizoo

A report on how the Exercises are bringing a sense of interior freedom within a Swedish prison.

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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. The special number for 2005, marking the centenary of the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1980), will be entitled *Spirituality, Tradition and Beauty*. In 2006 the special number, marking jubilees for Ignatius and for his first two companions, Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier, will be about Ignatian spirituality and growth in relationships. Contributions for these two projects will be especially welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THOMAS CRANMER'S *Book of Common Prayer* contains a 'Collect for Peace':

O God, the author and lover of peace, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; defend us your servants in all assaults of our enemies, that, surely trusting in your defence, we may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer turns on paradoxes. Our deepest desire may be for peace, but we need protection from adversaries, and the one who is our peace famously proclaimed that he had in fact brought a sword. Moreover, the freedom for which we yearn depends on a commitment of service. So John Donne, a few decades later than Cranmer, could pray:

Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Disciplines, whether or not overtly spiritual, have their place. But we follow them healthily only if we can move beyond them, only if we are captivated by the promise of new possibilities which they enable, only if they open us to the freedom of God. It is this complex interplay between commitment and freedom that we are exploring and celebrating as we present the special number of *The Way* for 2004.

The picture on the cover comes from a cloistered university hall in Bilbao, the capital of Ignatius' native Basque country. The doorway opens out on to the city and its river, both a prospect of urban industry, and an attractive new horizon. Through the city, a river flows. The essays which follow reflect the broad range of experiences found in the human city: career decisions as a young student; married life and its invitations to mutual growth; imprisonment; political engagement; the

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1 Our thanks to the University of Deusto's publications department for making the image available to us and for their gracious permission to reproduce it.
struggle for ever greater honesty and transparency in prayer; the benefits of study.

Within that rich variety, this collection focuses particularly on three theologians all born exactly 100 years ago: Bernard Lonergan, John Courtney Murray and Karl Rahner. All three were Jesuits, formed within a distinctive set of spiritual and intellectual structures; all three passionately pursued the knowledge of God in which, as Cranmer puts it, 'stands our eternal life'; all three strove to widen the Church’s vision, and to pioneer theologies ever more sensitive to the divine expansiveness. Their contributions to the Second Vatican Council were significant. They modelled a life of the mind that nourished, rather than constricted, the life of the Spirit. They taught us that healthy commitment is constantly expanding us, opening us up to new confrontations with the God who speaks in the otherness of our experience.

All too easily, the Christian imagination is tempted to settle for a less demanding vision. As we discover the vastness and variety of the creation, we can easily end up abandoning any claim that Christ is the definitive revelation of God. Alternatively we can adopt a neurotic, ignorant defensiveness that only masquerades as fidelity. The Ignatian revival of the twentieth century involved not only a rediscovery of Ignatius the mystic, Ignatius the man of intense feeling; it was also an intellectual movement. It gave us powerful resources for an approach to Christianity at once generous and mature. Let no one be tempted to think these resources passé.

Philip Endean SJ
MAINTAINING THE TENSION

Freedom, Commitment and Discernment

Eileen C. Burke-Sullivan

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY IS MARKED ABOVE ALL by its sensitivity to the divine freedom. A classic statement of this principle comes in the famous essay of Karl Rahner’s in which he adopts the persona of Ignatius:

God is able and willing to deal immediately with His creature; the fact that this occurs is something that human beings can experience happening; they can apprehend the sovereign disposing of God’s freedom over their lives and appropriate it—a disposing that objective argument ‘from below’ cannot predict as a law of human reason, neither philosophically, nor theologically, nor arguing from experience. ... This quite simple-minded, and yet in fact quite outrageous conviction seems to me ... the heart of what you tend to call my spirituality.1

But Ignatian spirituality is also a spirituality of commitment and relationship. Another classic twentieth-century Ignatian figure, Pedro Arrupe, once wrote about how this God of freedom is essentially relational, and is constantly drawing us into commitments both to Himself and to each other. Though he was writing specifically for Jesuits, what he says applies to Christians at large:

Communion among us reflects the divine koînōnia, for God wanted to bind us to Himself in love, for a mission given to us, under obedience, not only as individuals but as sharers together in an apostolic co-n-spiration proceeding from Him. The union that exists among us follows a divine pattern. The bonding that the Spirit

1 From Karl Rahner, ‘Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit’ (1978), translation taken from that prepared for an anthology of Rahner’s spiritual writings by Philip Endean to be published by Orbis Books in late 2004. Rahner here attempts to interpret Ignatius' key insights in the context of modern concerns and post-Vatican II faith sensibilities.
brings about in a community proceeds from that same unity which love brings about within the heart of the Trinity.²

However, in our postmodern cultural context, these two values of freedom and commitment can easily appear to be in conflict.

Earlier this year, a lengthy discussion on the nature and experience of freedom took place in my first-year university theology class. The young people present were for the most part living without close adult supervision or directive guidance for the first time in their lives. It became clear that they felt uneasy about the choices that they had to make. At the same time they were strongly resistant to the idea of those choices being limited in any way. They recognised that long-term commitments were frightening, and that they held the potential for happiness or misery. They were also quite aware that a particular choice led them to further choices, while closing off some of the possibilities that they had originally had. They wanted help—even someone to ‘tell’ them what to do about these multiple and often interwoven choices—but they resisted giving up any of their perceived power of determination.

These young people were paralyzed as they confronted the banquet of choices presented to them. I suggested that one way of working through these multiple decisions was to determine where they felt that they owed their primary commitment—to God, or to their country, or to their family, or to their moral values, or whatever.

Many of them reacted as though they had been stung. They felt that the very idea of a prior commitment framing and limiting their choices was a denial of their freedom to choose. Furthermore, a number of them stated that they could think of no commitment for which they would be willing to suffer, much less to give up their lives. They may have conceded that their freedom was not absolute, and that they were limited by such factors as their genetic make-up, their social setting, and their economic resources. But they were clearly afraid of themselves establishing any further permanent limits on their seemingly limitless choices.

² Pedro Arrupe, ‘The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism’ (1980), n. 99. This text has been reproduced a number of times, and was originally published in Acta Romana Societatis Iesu, 18 (1980-1983), 115-163, here 157-158. Translation slightly corrected.
When I worked with slightly older students in another setting, this somewhat generalised fear came into clearer focus. I was invited to participate in a weekend programme for sophomore women who were looking for some help with decision-making, specifically about determining their major course of study. I had been asked to offer some guidance as to a method of decision-making. What emerged from my discussions with small groups of the young women was their deep and abiding fear of making important decisions badly, decisions that might have lifelong consequences. They had observed the experience of others, and in some cases they were victims of poor choices by their own parents. Despite what this might have taught them, their own decision-making skills were quite evidently negligible.

Western secular culture has provided an extraordinary array of possibilities for young men and women, especially for those with access to material wealth and education. What secular culture alone cannot or seemingly will not offer, however, is a context of life-giving commitment that makes the task of competent decision-making reasonable and possible.

These young people are reluctant to make commitments for fear that commitments will restrict their freedom. For them, freedom is freedom from commitments; commitments by definition reduce freedom. But the paralysis into which they have fallen reveals that the relationship between freedom and commitment is more complex and reciprocal. When freedom is realised, then commitments are made—commitments which may involve the loss of freedom in one sense, but which nevertheless draw us into key life-giving relationships that, paradoxically, fulfil our freedom, and open us up to the possibility of further and deeper commitments. Only if we understand the dialectic between the seemingly opposing movements of commitment and freedom can we undertake any real decision-making process. Such a process involves a sustained polar tension; a person feels pulled first one way and then another. It is the maintenance of the tension that protects the reality of each pole. Freedom without the seeming curtailments represented by commitment is an abstraction rather than a reality. Conversely, commitment undertaken without a free decision is a lie—it is not commitment, but rather coercion or slavery.
**Ignatius**

The writings of Ignatius show that, after important conversion experiences of God’s healing presence, his spiritual awareness became firmly grounded in a commitment to the Trinitarian God. His pursuit of freedom then emerged and flourished in the context of that commitment. Modern studies of the *Spiritual Exercises* nearly all agree that the purpose of the preparatory meditations on the Principle and Foundation is to ground exercitants in a conscious commitment to God before they undertake the Exercises. This commitment has to be secured by an experience of God’s prior and unconditional love. Without that, the grace of the First Week—that of knowing oneself as a loved sinner—may well not occur, and the First Week exercises may leave the person less free than they were before. Nor will it be possible for the person to develop the kind of committed relationship to Jesus, both human and divine, that is the foundation for any healthy election process in the Second Week.

The Exercises help us to see that when our responsive and fundamental commitment to God and to God’s purposes is deepened, so is our interior freedom to pursue the intention of God, which is the exercitant’s greatest joy and peace. Knowledge of God’s merciful intention can only be experienced in the context of love exchanged in a committed relationship with God. This remains true not only in the context of the Spiritual Exercises formally undertaken, but also in the whole life of the person who is seeking genuine personal fulfilment.

What appears less obvious about Ignatius’ wisdom, but can be deduced from his own development, is that his spiritual experience of freedom was also grounded in his commitments. He was committed in faith and service to the Church, and subsequently in fidelity and companionship within the Society of Jesus. And the more committed he became to specific human relationships in relationship with God, the greater was his ultimate freedom to make choices leading to a lifetime of joy and peace.

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3 Virtually all commentators since the 1960s stress the importance of an expressed love and reverence flowing from the received grace of God’s overwhelming mercy in determining a person’s readiness to engage in the Spiritual Exercises, at least in their full form. There is historical evidence that Ignatius was unwilling to lead Pierre Favre into the Exercises for some time because this grace was not manifest in his experience.
It is evident from Ignatius’ story that he was at some level committed to the visible and institutional Church before he made a real commitment to God. The autobiography attests that from his youth Ignatius had deep and abiding loyalty to people and to institutions for whom and for which he even seemed willing to die. But it is also evident that Ignatius’ commitment to the Church was part of a complex of social, familial and cultural loyalties. These were tied in to some degree with sin and self-aggrandisement, rather than reflecting an informed personal commitment to the mystery of the Church. Whatever the mix of motivations, however, his commitment to the Roman Catholic faith was deep enough and true enough to make his availability to God’s grace possible after the Battle of Pamplona.

Once Ignatius turned his life over to God, his commitment to the Church as God’s instrument became the context for realising his freedom. And his personal freedom became interwoven with that of other students at Paris who recognised that their own best futures lay in companionship with him, seeking God’s glory through the service of the Church. In one way his freedom seemed to become more limited, but in another way a whole new horizon of choices opened up which had been inaccessible to him as one man alone.

We might say that discernment, the practice of discovering the best choice for oneself among an array of choices, is the negotiation of a graceful path between freedom and commitment. According to Ignatius’ insights, discernment is the discovery of one’s greatest hope for happiness and peace within one’s ‘providential life setting’—the matrix of human possibilities, commitments, and other contingencies.

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4 I owe this language and some of these insights to a long-time friend and colleague, Fr Thomas Swift SJ, formerly of the Missouri Province and now deceased.
Discernment in the twenty-first century must be interpersonal of ordinary life given to us by God. This hope is grounded in the discovery of God’s desire for each person, and in the liberating power of God’s Spirit. The Spirit can overcome the forces of evil that operate within human experience by means of fear—forces that blind, deafen, and ultimately defeat our capacity to choose.

Thus far, I have not said anything very startling about Ignatius’ life. But the implications of what I am saying about Ignatius may nevertheless be controversial in modern Western circumstances. Most genuine discernment needs to take place within committed relationships rather than within individual contexts or settings. Discernment processes, including those of so-called personal discernment, are communal rather than private. The point is reinforced when we note the revived consciousness of the communion character of Trinitarian life and of the Church.  

I am being tentative here because what I am saying seems to fly in the face of the practice of discernment adopted by many of the disciples of Ignatius’ method. Ignatius himself seems to have come to know God in the rather private setting of the cave at Manresa—although we do not know how far his interaction with other people during those months gave him a real context for his prayer and discernment that is not precisely recorded. But surely post-Enlightenment, twenty-first-century western culture demands something more interpersonal. For one thing, this culture expects a certain parity between men and women, between employers and employees, and even between parents and children, which would have been foreign to the sixteenth century. Francis Borja may have been able to discern his future—and also determine the futures of his ten children—without consulting family or friends. But the same did not seem to be true for Isabel Roser, or for the other women who sought to follow Ignatius.  

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5 Much contemporary theological writing explores the links between Christian communion and the relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity. See, for example, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God For Us (New York and London: HarperCollins, 1991). Since Vatican II nearly all ecclesiologists have presented the Church as a communio, even if that term does not mean exactly the same thing in all of the studies. See, for example, Dennis Doyle, Communion Ecclesiology: Visions and Versions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000).

6 One of the best resources for data about this cultural disparity among those whom Ignatius directed in the Exercises is Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert, The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women (New York: Paulist, 2003).
Moreover, the theological context as well as the social context has changed. Contemporary moral theology from the magisterium has a personalist orientation. This raises serious questions about how far one can appropriately make a genuine discernment of God’s desire without involving those whose lives will be deeply affected by the outcome. It seems obvious that vowed religious in communities with a commitment to Ignatian spirituality would undertake all significant discernments communally rather than privately.

Since I do not have more than consultative experience with vowed religious, however, I would prefer to consider other examples of communal discernment here: within families, within lay faith communities such as the Christian Life Communities or Ignatian Associates, and within ministry work groups such as school faculties and administrative teams. In groups or institutions which profess to draw on Ignatian spirituality, and which depend on the personal commitment of their members, it is important that those members are included in the process of decision-making through discernment. I shall consider two quite disparate examples, involving different kinds and levels of commitment.

**Freedom and Commitment within Marriage**

Doug and Martha met as young professionals after college. Doug had spent a year in the novitiate of a religious community; he had determined that he did not have a priestly or religious vocation; and he had gone back to university to take an advanced degree. Martha was employed as a Roman Catholic campus minister at the large US state university where Doug enrolled. In early summer, shortly after she met Doug but before they began dating, Martha decided to fulfil a long-term dream and make a thirty-day Ignatian retreat. She had been thinking seriously about applying to enter a women’s missionary religious community, or about joining the Peace Corps, the Jesuit Volunteers, or another lay missionary project. But the ministry team-leader, Fr Ted, recognised her gift for working with young adults, and encouraged her to think of her work at the campus as another form of real service to the poor.

\(^7\) Names and all specific details of this couple’s life have been changed, but the case is a real one.
Martha’s retreat was a wonderful experience. She had asked Fr Ted and several other members of the campus ministry team to join her at the retreat centre for a few days of prayer, and to help her in considering her gifts and skills with her director. She felt strongly that God desired her service and took her into companionship, but she found the specifics ‘cloudy’. Martha was convinced that God would illuminate her situation and remove any barriers that she might have set up to a fuller and more generous service.

A few weeks after her return to campus at the start of the fall term, Martha started to organize some small groups of students for prayer and service at a local homeless shelter. Doug heard about the groups at Sunday Mass and decided to participate in order to sustain his own spiritual energy. The couple found that they had much in common—especially a deep faith in God and a desire to be of service to God’s Kingdom. In the spring, Doug asked Martha to consider marrying him and she suggested that they enter prayer together to determine if this was God’s invitation. Their growing mutual attraction was rapidly and deeply connected after they began to pray together, and by May the couple had announced to their families that they planned to marry within the year.

So far, so good, one might say, but did they live happily ever after? Not in any fairytale sense. The couple determined that they were called to support each other in lay ministry. Doug finished his degree work and began to teach, while Martha returned to college to take a Master of Divinity degree so that she could minister more competently in parish leadership. Through the years both have had to re-discern the location of their service several times. At the time of their marriage they decided that theirs would always be a hospitable home, where guests would be welcome whether it was convenient or not. This had to be adjusted when children arrived in the family, but their basic commitment remained stable. Above all, they have consistently submitted important personal and family decisions to a process of prayerful discernment. And they have taught their children to value a commitment to God, and to pay attention to God’s desire in their own thoughts and affections. Once the children were around ten, they were invited to participate in family decisions, provided they were willing to pray deeply and to be honest about their concerns and feelings.

This couple has known heartache and wonderful joy. They have had to fight to keep the intensity and beauty of their love for one
another while fulfilling their children's needs for parental attention and private time. They have struggled with the contemporary secular culture which relegates their values to the social rubbish heap. They have sought to maintain the vision of the Second Vatican Council in their ministry, remaining deeply faithful to the Roman Catholic tradition while becoming more ecumenical in outlook. Their participation in their parish has had ups and downs, but they have remained active in small faith communities and have stayed close to the sacramental practice of the Church.

Through Ignatian discernment they have been able to interweave their fundamental commitments—to God and to one another in Christ, to their children as God’s gift and call, and to their ministry of service. These commitments have brought remarkable grace both to themselves and to the others whose lives they touch. Their commitments have not lessened the demands of growing freedom; rather their freedom has been expanded and shaped within the blessed boundaries of those commitments.

I can personally attest that it is not a simple thing for married couples to practise discernment following the wisdom of Ignatian spirituality. But it is possible, and necessary if either partner believes that God has a desire for them and for their marriage, and if they want to live in the freedom that is expressed in the Contemplation to Attain
Love. How can two people who have sacramentally become one flesh be called by a loving God in ways that do not take into account the needs, hopes, dreams and desires of both? Their union is enriched and enlivened by the mutual transparency that they need for an authentic discernment of God’s desire. Is that discernment ever certain or perfect? Not on this side of eternity.

Discernment in marriage, I think, begins in conversation between the partners about what is really important to them. It often begins with a decision that will affect both their lives. Both partners have to be willing to pray about their fears and to talk about them. They must disclose their needs without defensiveness, as well as the risks that each one is willing to take. They must discuss their options seriously, and submit them to prayer and reflection. When a decision is made, that too must be submitted to prayer, and it must be discussed alongside the hopes and the fears of each. Such processes may be lengthy at first, but as couples strengthen their communication and their willingness to listen to each other, they will discover a deeper love that makes the process less threatening. It does not come about overnight if it is not already the couple’s habit. They may do well to begin by talking to a spiritual director with whom both partners are comfortable.

Obviously, communal discernment is not possible in a marriage unless there is a viable and healthy human relationship, and a reasonable level of Christian faith in both partners. It will be easier for a couple to undertake discerned decision-making if they are comfortable with prayer and with conversation about prayer.

**Commitment in Small Communities**

I have been participating in Christian Life Communities in the United States for some thirty years. During that time I have seen different levels of spiritual maturity in a wide variety of groups. Some were barely more than social gatherings for good friends, while others were so committed that their members helped each other financially, supported each other through long and painful terminal illness, cared for one another’s children, saved the lives of members who were suicidally depressed, and celebrated sacramental and ritual events together including baptism, marriage, orders, the anointing of the sick and the burial of the dead. The most genuinely life-giving of these
groups have centred around the practice of spiritual direction, discernment of significant choices, and various forms of accountability for members' growth in faith.

In my earliest years with the CLC, shortly after the reform of the pre-Conciliar Sodalities of Our Lady, the groups in the United States seemed somewhat skittish about the notion of commitment. Many were vague—at best—about the meaning and experience of Ignatian spirituality. This was reflected in a membership that rose and fell, and in intermittent participation. There were members who participated in prayer but were not interested in service, or vice versa. Some members wanted to participate in local communities but were not drawn to a larger national or international commitment. But as the communities became serious about making the Spiritual Exercises a notable change could be observed. People increasingly appreciated and applied the principles of the personal discernment of God's call. They gradually awakened to the fact that God's call is never for private growth and happiness only. It happens in the context of community, and for the sake of a person's genuine communal commitments.

Christian Life Communities in the United States have scarcely begun to realise their potential as agents for evangelizing culture—but that is changing as some groups take their Ignatian vocation more seriously. Where there are efforts toward real discerned decisions among members there is greater evidence of commitment to community life. Correlatively, those communities where the bonds of mutual care appear strongest are most likely respond to the needs of the poor, and speak out with the greatest freedom in the service of justice.

Communal discernment in Christian Life Communities is not easy, at any level of community life. Are their varying efforts at corporate discernment 'authentic'? Perhaps some would measure up to the 'Deliberation of the First Fathers',' and many would not. The vocation of CLC members remains the work of discovering God's desire within the world and for the world in a context of hundreds of possible choices. So the work of growing in discernment skills remains important to our formation process at all levels of participation.

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8 For a detailed description of this famous communal discernment see Jules J. Toner, 'The Deliberation that Started the Jesuits', Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, 6/4 (June 1974).
Maintaining the Tension between Freedom and Commitment

I began this essay with two brief narratives about the dilemmas of educated young adults in contemporary US culture. From the perspective of Christian faith, the response to those dilemmas must be grounded in a commitment to the Triune God. That commitment is expressed through key relationships, within which each of us is being invited by the divine initiative to realise God’s own love. Given such a commitment, a startling array of possibilities is presented to us for our discernment. And each, in principle, can lead us towards the goal of joy and peace in God.

This situation demands a careful negotiation between commitments and options. It seems self-evident that entering into dialogue with the people to whom we are committed is an essential part of discerning God’s desire for each one of us. We cannot afford to pretend that we are isolated individuals before God. Indeed, how can we hope to hear authentically God’s deepest desire for ourselves apart from the voices of our committed relationships?

Eileen C. Burke-Sullivan worked for many years in parochial and educational ministry, and is an experienced giver of the Exercises. For three years she was Executive Director of the Christian Life Communities in the USA. More recently she has obtained a doctorate from Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and is now an Assistant Professor of Theology at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska.
LOOKING AT GOD LOOKING AT YOU

Ignatius’ Third Addition

Robert R. Marsh

A step or two in front of the place where I am to contemplate or meditate, I will stand for the length of an Our Father, raising my mind above and considering how God our Lord is looking at me, etc., and make an act of reverence or humility.¹ (Exx 75)

This is one of the Ignatian ‘Additions’ or ‘Additional Directions’—general guidelines ‘for making the Exercises better and finding more readily what one desires’ (Exx 73.1). Ignatius has just been mentioning the remote preparation for a day of prayer—what to do on falling asleep and what to do on rising. He will go on to talk about posture, about the review of prayer, and about the maintenance of a suitable mood in the retreat situation. Here, however, he is discussing what will help someone make each exercise better, what will help them find more readily what they desire. What Ignatius says here is intended for every prayer or spiritual exercise we make.

This may seem surprising. Especially outside retreat, relatively few of us observe this directive. I want nevertheless to argue that this third Addition not only helps us make the Exercises better, but also gives us a perspective which is absolutely vital for a correct appreciation of Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius is putting his finger here on a neuralgic issue which pains every aspect of our prayer, of our lives, and of the

¹ ... un paso o dos antes del lugar donde tengo de contemplar o meditar, me pondré en pie, por espacio de un Pater noster, alzado el entendimiento arriba, considerando cómo Dios nuestro Señor me mira, etc., y hacer una reverencia o humillación.
way we speak to one another about God. Ignatius both identifies the issue, and offers an antidote.

**Mind-Blindness and Autism**

As is well known, children up to the age of four cannot handle the idea that other people have other minds with independent contents. A three-year-old believes that everyone knows what they know and sees what they see. The psychologists call it mind-blindness. Somewhere between the ages of three and four, children shed their mind-blindness, and begin to work out that other people have their own sets of desires and knowledge and expectations. They develop what the literature calls a ‘theory of mind’.

But some children never develop an adequate theory of mind and stay more or less mind-blind all their lives. We call this condition autism. Autistic children are able to deal with other people on one level, but they never make the leap into other people’s heads to see things their way. They never understand that someone else is a person like themselves, with independent knowledge, intentions and feelings. Thus they become frustrated at the unpredictability of their environment, and seek to impose some shape by ritual and repetition. They are prone to stubbornness, and to tantrums when things are changed out of their usual pattern.

Autism is a good image for how most of us are in prayer. We tend to be mind-blind about God. We think that God knows simply what we know, sees simply what we see; and consequently we rarely stop to ask God what God actually sees or knows or feels. We find it hard to let God enter our prayer as a real living person; instead, we misuse the name ‘God’ to denote a projection of what we think and feel. At the very least this image sums up how I personally am in prayer. I am spiritually autistic—mind-blind about God. You might not be. You might be very different from me. But let me go on to speak of my own experience and you can judge for yourselves.

Like an autistic child, I go about my prayer in a whole set of ways that try to minimise the chaos of my inner life by finding rituals and rules to tame my inner experience. I focus on my own needs and intentions, my own desires and insights, my own consolations and desolations. Most of my prayer consists of me thinking, or me feeling, me speaking, or me being silent. Some of the time I may pay lip service
Looking at God Looking at You

to my notional commitment to the belief that God enters my prayer as a person. I certainly spend quite a lot of inner time addressing something I call God. But in fact, this internal rehearsal of my experience tends to swing between two modes of speech: either I talk to myself or I talk to my idea of God. Of course it is not all talking—I operate in quieter ways too, through a kind of interior looking, or just sitting. And sometimes I read or paint or write. But these activities only extend and modulate the pattern; they do not fundamentally change it. Not that this ‘prayer’ is dull; it can be lovely, or horrible, depending upon my mood or upon what is going on in the rest of my life. But what it remains, fundamentally, is mine—my thoughts, my feelings, my words, my silence.

Thus when my spiritual director asks me how God has responded to my inner talk, I tend not to know. I have not let God interrupt me. I don’t just mean that I talk and talk and never listen—‘Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking’. But even when I am trying to listen, even when I am sincerely asking for an answer to some deep question, I tend in fact to ask, and then go straight on to mulling over several possible
answers that God might have given already, rather than asking God and waiting for an answer.

I am, by nature, mind-blind where God is concerned. I do not really expect God to have a point of view about my inner experience—or about my outer experience for that matter. On the odd occasion when I get beyond this blindness, I still approach God’s point of view abstractly. I wonder what kind of thing God ought to see or feel or believe, rather than trying to discover what God is actually seeing, feeling and believing. I am concerned with what God would say rather than with what God does say. And even when I expect more, even when my heart has been opened to the possibility that God might appear in my prayer as a real person with real feelings, desires and needs—even then, all the rituals of my inner autism are so strong that following through is a struggle.

I have not always been aware of this disability in myself. I am not reconciled to it. If you had asked me fifteen years ago whether I thought God was present and active in my prayer, I am sure that I would have given a resoundingly affirmative answer. Back then, I did not think that I was spiritually mind-blind but, looking back from where I stand now, I reckon I was.

At that time, I had had some training in spiritual direction, and I had even done some training of others. One of the standard textbooks that I read, and that I got others to read, was The Practice of Spiritual Direction by William Barry and William Connolly. Now I read it, and I see that the book is occupied on every page with how to foster just the non-autistic experience of God that I am talking about. Back then, I would have told you that I believed it and practised what they were saying; but, truth to tell, if that actually was the case, it was more by accident than design. As a director I rarely asked the kinds of questions that got people in touch with the real living God of their experience; instead I was satisfied with getting them to reflect on their own experience. If it ever contained the real, surprising God this was a happy accident. My spiritual mind-blindness runs deep. And what is worse, I am always thinking that I have got over it.

The Prison of Modernity

Why am I like this? Perhaps the answers are personal: I happen to be a sad soul who is developmentally challenged in this area. But I doubt it. Let me be bold and venture the opinion that everyone I have seen for spiritual direction or guided retreat suffers from mind-blindness to some degree. Spiritual autism is a pathology of our times. We do not allow God to be a living presence—a real subject—in our lives, because we have been trained by our culture to believe that God cannot, or at least does not, behave in that way.

A phrase such as 'our culture' is, of course, a little imperialistic. I mean the modern culture of the educated Western world. People who write about such things—we might call them cultural analysts—use the word modern in a very specific way. They do not mean up-to-date or recent. Rather, they are referring to a cultural trend that has been going on for centuries in the West, probably beginning around 500 years ago. According to this reckoning, Ignatius himself lived at the dawn of modernity, and he is its archetypal saint.

This version of modernity has a number of characteristic outlooks that we tend to take for granted, or at least that we find ourselves having to fight against. Let me mention four of them, four cultural attitudes which predispose us to mind-blindness about God. Two of them concern the nature of the human person; two affect our outlook on God. Together, I believe, they set us up to be spiritually mind-blind.

Individualism

First, we tend to see ourselves as individuals and to behave as individualists. When the medievals wanted to ground their knowledge they looked to other people. They looked to tradition. They looked to authorities. But subsequent philosophy has looked in a different place. It has turned to the individual, to the subject. What can I know? What can I be certain of? How can I overcome illusion? How can I be free from other people's false ideas? These are the issues that fascinate us still. How can I be free? How can I make up my own mind? What does my own experience say about this or that? Who am I in myself?

Instead of valuing where we come from, we are concerned with who we can make ourselves into. Instead of valuing our parents' patterns of life, we want to express our own uniqueness. Instead of valuing quiet suffering, we want to get therapy that will make us better.
On the whole, we are subjective, expressive, therapeutic individualists. No wonder my prayer is all about me, me, me.

Doubt

If I ever start to take seriously the idea that God might appear in my prayer with thoughts and feelings of God’s own, a second modern outlook rushes in with objections. We have been brought up to doubt, to be sceptical. Modernity has been obsessed with the question of method. How do I become sure about what I believe? And it has tended to lean on the side of doubt. We wonder how we can be sure of anything. We do not want to be tricked by our own quirks. How do I know that this is God, and not just wishful thinking? How do I know that the words I hear are words from God, and not projections of my inner needs? After Freud and Marx, we know better than ever the many ways in which we can be mistaken, often unconsciously. So is it not better to believe as little as possible? Should I not stick with my own experience and keep God out of it? It is difficult enough to make claims about my own experience; what kind of crank starts to make claims about what God might be saying to them? No wonder I do not make great claims about my prayer; no wonder I keep it simple. I stay the level of reflection on my own experience, and avoid the risk of making a fool of myself by believing that God might speak.

Divine Action

If philosophy has spent 500 years struggling with the problem of knowledge, theology has spent that time worrying about divine action. What place does God have in the world? What can God, in concrete physical terms, actually do? Do we believe in miracles? Is the world not, rather, a disenchanted mechanism?

The caricature of the medieval world portrays it as rife with superstition, with angels and demons around every corner. The coming of modernity has banished angels and demons to chocolate boxes and television screens. Perhaps this is a relief. But what has been lost is a sense that God can be a part of everyday human experience. Science has pushed God to the edges of our culture. Newton thought that his clockwork solar system ran pretty smoothly on its own, with God providing the occasional necessary top-up. Then Laplace did the maths, and found that the planets got on very well all alone, thank you. When asked about God, his reaction was politely dismissive: ‘Sir, I
have no need of that hypothesis’. Over the past 500 years we have tended to find, over and again, that we have no need of God. God has been pushed into the distance. And the idea of God has been watered down, tamed. The interfering tyrant with a finger in every pie has become a remote and impersonal first cause. Not the kind of God whom I expect to express opinions in my prayer.

_God as Person_

Which brings us to the question of whether God is a person. This is not really a modern problem: it is much older. On retreat people often ask, ‘why do I need to tell God that—God knows everything already?’ If God is unchanging, all-knowing, and uniformly benevolent, how can I expect God to have moods, feelings, desires, needs even, which God expresses in my prayer? Why communicate with such a God? What effect could I possibly expect to have upon this God? God might be watching me, but what sense does it make to consider _how_ God is looking at me?

_Ignatius and Modernity’s Pitfalls_

Ignatius and his _Spiritual Exercises_ date from the beginning of the cultural trend that we call modernity. Ignatius has one foot firmly planted in the medieval world, with the other standing in the modern era. Ignatius’ genius, I believe, is to offer an outlook, a spirituality, which is at home in modernity and yet avoids its pitfalls. The third Addition sums up his outlook. Here Ignatius is giving not only an orientation for any kind of prayer or spiritual exercise, but also a pointer to how we should shape our whole way of life. We are to begin by spending a moment considering how God is looking at us, and we are to respond with an act of reverence. Very simply, Ignatius is inviting us constantly to include _God_ in our theory of mind, constantly to let God be really real.

We do not begin our prayer alone as individuals; we begin with _someone else_ looking at us. We will rapidly move on to the ‘id quod volo’, the grace that I desire. But first we experience, for a moment, that we _are desired_, that we begin outside ourselves, that who we are is not self-generated. We are not self-made men and women. We _receive_
ourselves, in the eyes of another. In this way, Ignatius defuses our individualism.

He subverts our doubt, too. We start our epistemology with doubt; Ignatius begins his with trust—not trust as the opposite of doubt, but trust that subverts doubt. We doubt our senses. We doubt the facts. We doubt ourselves. But Ignatius does not want us to start our prayer in the realm of facts and data and things; he points us towards the realm of relationship. Relationship, to be real, always begins in trust, and breathes trust as its atmosphere. We are right to doubt things, but right to trust persons.

All relationships demand a basic trust. Trust can be tempered by experience; in some cases it must be toned down, or even withdrawn. But unless we can trust at least some of the time, we remain alone and isolated. As is well known, Ignatius is no advocate of credulity. Not all our experience is experience of God. We are moved by many spirits, good and bad, and Ignatius provides the guidelines for telling them apart in his methods of discernment. But discernment only operates in an atmosphere of prior trust—only when we admit an experience and let it develop do we have the grounds for discernment. You cannot discern from a distance. You have to get involved, to take the risk; only on that basis can you assess the feedback and make the adjustment. Discernment implies relationship.

In the third Addition, Ignatius invites us into a complex, relational reality. If God is looking at us, God is in relationship with us. As we try to understand this relationship, we can focus either on God or on ourselves. We can consider what it is like to be looked at. How am I feeling? We can also consider the God who is looking, and what that God is like. How is God feeling? As we move between these two ways of responding to Ignatius’ invitation, they begin to fuse, to enrich each other, to be woven into something intricate and beautiful. I am looking at God looking at me looking at God. When I look at the God who looks at me, it is not a matter simply of seeing the other as one object among many, but of looking, gazing, contemplating. We see each other. The look transforms—it is encounter.

This encounter is a touchstone. Modernity doubts that God can act, and doubts that God is a person. Ignatius is asking whether we can move beyond our doubt. Can we discover a God who can act and who is a person? When I pause and consider and look at God looking at me,
Looking at God Looking at You

who do I find looking back? That is a question for experience, not for theory.

Some translations of the third Addition read ‘consider that God is looking at me …’. This reading is linguistically possible, but it misses the real point. The brute fact in itself might be enough to dispel the problem of individualism and the problem of doubt, but we need something more. We need to see how God is looking at us. Not in general, not in principle, not in the abstract—but here and now and specifically. Is our God a living person with thoughts and feelings of God’s own, and not just an extension of our own thinking and feeling?

Once people have discovered the living God, they often discover too that their experience in prayer is not totally malleable. It has a stubborn shape. The God of their prayer is not totally projected. Prayer starts to get surprising. The bush burns, but it is not consumed. You ask a question, and get an answer that shocks you. You search in one place, but God is in another. You are feeling one thing, but God feels another.

When prayer becomes an encounter with the living God, it becomes unpredictable. You thought you were doing something relatively safe—praying—and instead you find yourself face to face with someone real. Fierce or fond, bright or dark (who knows?), but it is someone other and someone real—not yourself. Ignatius wants every spiritual exercise to be an encounter with the living God, another knot in the web of relationship woven in the gaze that passes between you and God.

Today God is smiling. Tomorrow God is sad. The day after God might be sleeping, or dancing, or weeping, or angry. I cannot know how God is looking at me without looking at God. I cannot make up the answer, or guess it, or remember how it was. The only way to do what Ignatius asks is to turn the inner gaze on God and see, here and now, how God is actually looking back … at me.

It is in this way that Ignatius wants each one of us to step into prayer every time. All Ignatian prayer begins with the encounter with the living God. Only thus can the identification of personal desires be more than selfishness or individualistic therapy. Thus it is that Ignatian colloquy can become real conversation, ‘friend to friend’, rather than a hesitant monologue. Only through this encounter do all the annotations, procedures and processes make sense. This central conviction also governs Ignatius’ laconic dictum: ‘acts of the will
require more reverence than acts of the intellect’ (Exx 3.3). Because of this encounter, Ignatius can expect the Spiritual Exercises to be a rollercoaster ride of alternating spiritual motions. This encounter also tells us why generosity is the prime prerequisite for making the Exercises well.

The whole First Week can be seen as a simple development of this attitude to prayer. Can I discover myself in the eyes of God? Can I come to see myself the way God sees me—honestly and benevolently? Me, with all the fragments, all the shame and all the glory, caught in a gaze of love, and invited into companionship with Jesus?

This article has been couched in the language of vision throughout—looking, gazing, seeing, contemplating. But you could substitute any of the other senses. Many of us know God imaginatively through sound: we hear God speak. Others sense God by touch; they could not tell you how God looks at them for all the tea in China, but they know the weight of God’s hand on their shoulder. It is the communication that matters—how it happens is secondary. Ignatius does not simply say, ‘considering how God our Lord is looking at me’; he adds what is a favourite word of his, ‘etc.’ Some translations take the ‘et cetera’ to refer to further thoughts we might have. But a richer interpretation sees it as referring to further activities in which God may be engaging. God is not only looking at us but interacting with us in a wide range of ways: enlightening us, communicating Godself to us, embracing us.3

Thus the third Addition offers more than an introductory gambit in the game of prayer. Ignatius’ God is an active God, a God not content to be a distant observer, a God intimately engaged with every person who prays. This God is miles away from the cultural caricature I presented earlier. This God can be encountered, known. This God feels, acts, interacts. This God has personality.

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MORE THAN COLLABORATION

Eolene M. Boyd-MacMillan

For the contemporary revival of the Ignatian Exercises, one of the most important resources has been the contribution made by psychology. Understandably and perhaps inevitably, psychologists can treat spirituality in general, and the Exercises in particular, as simply one means of human development among others. Moreover, they may well focus on the individual rather than on those with whom the individual stands in relationship. In this article, I want to suggest that all of us—including psychologists—need to think differently. We will only develop a proper psychology of the Exercises if we recognise that the spiritual freedom and transformation they promote presuppose a mutual relational commitment between the self and God. God acts in the human heart. Any psychology articulated simply in terms of the self’s development is liable to obscure and distort that central reality.

I propose to make this case by putting forward three interrelated claims. Firstly, it is a mistake to see the Exercises primarily in terms of ‘ego-strengthening’: they need to be seen as a process by which a person is given a new nature in relationality with God. Secondly, I want to suggest that ego-development is not an end in itself; rather it represents a transitional stage on the path towards authentic, mature relationality with God. Indeed, I want to speculate that the ego is best understood as itself a ‘transitional object’. Finally, I want to argue that the interchange between theology and psychology needs to be genuinely reciprocal. It is not just that theological accounts of the self need to be informed by psychology. It is equally the case that an adequate psychology needs to take seriously, at least as a possibility, theology’s account of the self in relationship with God. In particular, not every psychological account of ego-development is consistent with the gospel vision.

On Ego-Strengthening

In the last special number of The Way, ‘Psychology and Ignatian Spirituality’, Ruth Holgate and W. W. Meissner both referred to the
transformation nurtured by the Ignatian Exercises in terms of the psychological concept of ‘ego-strengthening’. This process involves a ‘graced collaboration’: the Holy Spirit works through the ‘natural’ resources of a person’s ego in order to motivate change. Holgate presents ‘ego strength’ as,

\[\ldots\text{the ability of the ego to direct and control its energy in the face of the various pulls from the id, from the superego, and from outside forces. Sufficient ego strength implies a level of conscious self-control.}\]

But is the language of ‘ego-strengthening’ and ‘graced collaboration’ strong enough? Does it really convey the deep, painful, psychic re-structuring offered by Ignatian spirituality that strengthens a person’s ego in a particular way? Is Meissner really correct to see the reconstruction of the psyche fostered by the Exercises as ‘centred on the pilgrim’s ego’? \(^1\) Is it really ‘conscious self-control’ that is at stake here? Or should we be talking about something else: another sort of control that arises when the human self comes into conscious relationship with God? Surely the Exercises are about more than self-control? Surely they facilitate the transformation of the self into a ‘self in unique relationality’? And is not the Source of this relationality God?

Of course the Exercises do strengthen a person’s ego. But this occurs in so far as the ego is relativised by the Holy Spirit, moved away from the centre of attention. The ego no longer directs and controls a person ‘on its own’; it operates, rather, ‘in relationality’, relationality with God. Paradoxically, the effect is indeed that the ego is strengthened rather than diminished, but the strengthening is of a certain kind. The ego’s amazing capacities are affirmed in that its relationality with God negates its propensity to chaos. People actively participate in the process, but they emphatically neither initiate nor effect this re-construction on their own. I use the term ‘relationality’, rather than the more familiar ‘relationship’, as a way of indicating that our relationship with God can take on a life of itself, so to speak (just

\(^1\) Ruth Holgate, ‘Growing into God’, *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), 7-18, here 8.

as the love between the Father and the Son in classical Trinitarian theology is somehow a third entity called the Spirit). It is human-divine relationality in this sense that I understand to be the goal of the Exercises.3

It is not, therefore, the promise of ‘self-mastery’ supported by ‘the grace of God’ that draws a person to the Exercises, but the desire evoked by the opening phrase of Hopkins’ greatest poem: ‘Thou mastering me / God!’ Moreover, such desires arise only through the invitation of the Holy Spirit, and as an active, dynamic response to God’s initiative. ‘Human-divine relationality’ is by no means a fruit of the ego’s effort alone.

Penance

The point becomes manifest in the language we use to think about sin and penance, and about the graces of the First Week. For Holgate, grace energizes ‘the resources of the ego …. It is an active not passive spirituality envisaged here, one energized by God.’5 Meissner describes penance as involving ‘a form of self-assertion’, ‘assuming responsibility’, ‘reinforcement of the independence of the self’, ‘self-disciplinary action’, ‘active mastery of instinctual impulses and desires’, and ‘development in ego-capacity’.6 All of this ‘requires directive activity of the ego’.7 But, as Holgate herself acknowledges in passing,8 it is God who energizes Christian spiritual growth, not a vague power or energy. If Ignatius understands God as the generating Source of the process, then any account of ego-strengthening primarily in terms of the self

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8 Holgate, ‘Growing into God’, 17. She acknowledges that this might ‘appear as a matter of “no pain, no gain”, of effort and straining at spiritual growth’, noting that God energizes this process of ‘graced collaboration’.
only distorts the issue. We are dealing with death and rebirth, not simply with self-development.

Meissner regularly evokes a Thomist principle:

Grace does not replace or override the resources of human nature, but ‘perfects’ them. It works in and through natural human capacities.\(^9\)

This language tells us only half the story: it asserts that God’s action in grace perfects God’s primordial intention for humanity. But the ‘perfecting’ also involves a structural shift, something new—not a purely ‘natural’ development that would occur without a divine initiative. Surely the Exercises centre on something other than a continuation or intensification of the synergy of grace and nature involved in our very existence. Surely they nurture quite specifically ‘spiritual effects’, the divine gift that St Paul calls a new creation in Christ.

Related but Different

The ego-strengthening that is nurtured by the Exercises is in some ways quite different from other developmental ego-strengthening. A person may strengthen their ego through individual therapy without acknowledging the human-divine relationship. From a Christian viewpoint God is still involved, since without God’s gracious sustaining will the therapeutic relationship would not exist. But there is no explicitly willed co-operation with God.

Christian tradition asserts that human beings have fallen, and are therefore incapable of choosing the good and opting for God simply from their own resources. God in person must somehow supply; it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to reconnect on a profound level with the Original in whose image they are made.\(^10\) There is a profound difference between the experience of human-divine relationality and that of developmental ego-strengthening more generally. Under the experience of grace, a person comes to recognise how their own

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\(^10\) For a careful discussion of Augustine’s understanding of original sin, in dialogue with feminist theology, see Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), especially chapter 8. McFadyen is both a psychiatric nurse and a theologian.
humanity is in relationality with a divine who is wholly other—a recognition which is both deeply painful and deeply joyful.

**Negation and Restructuring**

Christianity speaks of a primeval Fall, a corruption of the creation that God had seen to be good, a corruption that sets in early in human history. However problematic this belief may be historically, it serves as a powerful symbolic expression of the ambiguities haunting the process of ego-development.

Ego-development is the person’s self-creation and self-discovery as they interact with their lived world. They have to differentiate between themselves and what is not themselves. This seems to occur as an infant experiences separation from the primary carer and from external restraint. The separation is necessary; theologically we have to see it as something willed by God and therefore in itself good. But, in lived reality, anxiety sets in at this point, inevitably. At a very early stage, the process of human growth becomes complicated and corrupted; it has to proceed if the person is to flourish and mature, but the process is inevitably flawed. Some primeval force seems to prevent the human being from developing in a balanced and peaceful way. The anxiety corrupts the reciprocity between the child and its environment, even though that environment is, thanks to God’s sustaining presence, the source of life. As a person’s ego strengthens, it becomes capable of greater achievements and accomplishments. But the strong ego will still be haunted by its anxiety, by its inability to prevent death (with the associated Angst about non-existence), and by its propensity towards idolatry, its tendency to substitute some created reality for God. If the human ego is as capable of evil as it is of good, then ego-strengthening as such can increase its capacity for harm.

Everything, then, depends on how the ego is strengthened. The Exercises open us to an ego-strengthening brought about through human-divine relationality, through the self-gift of God drawing the creature back into gracious relationship. Grace addresses the ego’s negation, restructuring the psyche so that the person can live, die and live again in the human-divine relationality for which God created them. God both perfects the person and gives them a new nature.

The Ignatian Exercises strengthen our ego capacities in a distinctive and paradoxical way, one that faces up to sin or negation
and reorientates the ego within the context of human-divine relationality. The Exercises involve what might seem like ego-weakening. A person painfully recognises on some level the negation or sin that is part of their identity and agency. Ruth Holgate refers to this process as it occurs in the First Week of the Exercises.\textsuperscript{11} The Holy Spirit enables a self-awareness that involves inner or personal conflict. A person’s ego struggles to ensure pleasure and survival in the face of the threat that neither can be maintained. This type of self-confrontation is distressing.\textsuperscript{12} Yet as the person risks this look into their ‘inner void’, they can encounter, despite the pain, the Source of divine grace who sustains them and enables them to face both their own ego capacities and their propensity for negation. The encounter with the Holy Spirit relativises the ego, orienting it towards human-divine relationality.

Ignatius asserts that God invites and enables faithful living. The psychic restructuring that allows us to move from an ego-centred life to human-divine relationality involves the deep pain of inner conflict and self-awareness. The ego needs to be exposed and restructured so that its strength can come out of the relational reality for which it was created, rather than out of defensive negation. Divine engagement is required for an ego-strengthening that redirects our development in intentional relationality with the Source of our being.

Any direct correspondence between the ego-strengthening that ostensibly arises from human intention alone, and the ego-strengthening that arises from deep, transforming human-divine relationality seems, therefore, highly questionable. But perhaps there is more to be said. Perhaps, viewed theologically, a person’s ego-development prepares them for human-divine relationality.

\textsuperscript{11} Holgate, ‘Growing into God’, 12.

\textsuperscript{12} Sarah Coakley asserts that “engaging in any such regular and repeated "waiting on the divine" will involve great personal commitment and (apparently) great personal risk; to put it in psychological terms, the dangers of a too-sudden uprush of material from the unconscious, too immediate a contact of the thus disarmed self with God, are not inconsiderable” (Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender [Oxford: Blackwell, 2002], 35).
The Ego as Transitional Object

In his *Way* article, Brendan Callaghan asserts that for Ignatius ‘God calls me to become who I am capable of being’. God both invites and enables this becoming. The Exercises engage a whole person, their intellect, their imagination and their emotions, as they take possession of themselves inside and out. To explore this ‘self-possession’, Callaghan focuses on the post-Freudian school of Object Relations, which studies ‘the ways in which individuals learn to relate to “that which is other-than-I”’. This school emphasizes relationships as key motivating factors in human life. In the course of learning to relate to others, people learn to relate to themselves:

To learn that I am separate and hence sometimes alone, to learn that I am not all-powerful and hence must sometimes be helpless—these are potentially terrifying transitions. But I must make them if I am to become a functioning adult in the world.

According to Callaghan’s summary of Object Relations theory, we cope with being alone and helpless through a transitional object, ‘something that is both “out there” in the physical world and which carries significance for me in my internal world—an object which I both discover and create’. Can we consider our egos as transitional objects, both self-discovered and self-created?

As Callaghan presents them, transitional objects enable a person to inhabit a transitional space, ‘to stay at the point of intersection between the outside and the inside’. This point of intersection ‘does not just have the quality of “between” as in “located between”, but also as in “leading between” or “bridging between”’ inner and outer worlds; it transcends the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity. ‘Our God-representations’, Callaghan writes, ‘can be seen as operating’ in this space of inner and outer intersection. These representations derive from various sources, and can develop throughout our lives.\(^{14}\)

The Ignatian Exercises foster development in our God-representations, as well as in how we represent ourselves in

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\(^{13}\) Brendan Callaghan, ‘Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors?’, *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), 19-32, here 20. For the remaining references on this page, see 20-24.

relationship with God. We are confronted ‘with the fundamental images and symbols of the gospel’ and these images and symbols interact with our God-representations. Our human-divine relationality reshapes our images, in a permanent process of growth. Callaghan notes that the Ignatian Exercises assist the exercitant,

\[\text{... in the process of disengaging from a possessive, idolatrous attachment to any particular image of God, or to any particular image of myself in relation to God ..., I can grow in seeing God and myself more truthfully.}\]

This clarity of vision is produced by human-divine relationality, not through the efforts of the exercitant alone. Our images are never perfect reflections of reality, but they can be refined or replaced, with great struggle and pain, as we interact with the realities that they represent.

An understanding of the ego as itself a transitional object is consistent with the active sense of transitional objects bridging or ‘leading between’ subjectivity and objectivity in transitional space. I both discover and create my ego, in response to my inevitable and necessary experiences of aloneness and helplessness. According to some psychoanalytic theory, children simultaneously discover and create, prior to the development of the ego, what is called the ‘face phenomenon’—a sense of their carer’s presence as represented by the face, around which they orient and order their world. They experience anxiety in the absence of the ‘face’, and external restraint when the ‘face’ returns. They then protect themselves from the anxiety through the discovery and creation of the ego.

The ego is a more permanent presence. It is like a face that will never go away. Whereas the face comes and goes, causing the vulnerable child acute anxiety, the ego is permanent, and seems to offer security and reassurance, a defence against the threat of abandonment. The ego becomes the means through which the self

15 Callaghan, ‘Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors?’, 31-32.
More than Collaboration

relates to the inner and outer worlds, but it does not provide a true connection with reality. It is too much conditioned by the self’s need and fear. We are all too aware at one level that the defensive ego cannot prevent death or protect against existential Angst, but we still try to achieve survival and pleasure.

This conflict can only be resolved if somehow—through grace?—we are opened to our personality being restructured, and specifically to being restructured in human-divine relationality. Painful awareness of our hurts, of our idols, and of our harmful proclivities can make us aware of God’s loving presence. The ego can be seen as itself a transitional object, preparing the person for explicit human-divine relationality. People become more fully who they are in dynamic relationship with God. As Jesus indicated, they lose their lives in order to find them (Matthew 16:25).

**Interdisciplinarity**

One theme running through much contemporary writing on psychology and spirituality is the relationship between human and divine agency, between theological explanation and accounts of

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17 James Loder asserts the possibility of a psychological and neurological opening to the transcendent through the collapse of a person’s ego defences (see the text that he co-authored with Jim Neidhardt, The Knight’s Move, 15 n.18, 271). For Loder, questions about meaning and purpose open a person to the sustaining presence of God, who simultaneously offers a deep, transforming relationship. Such questions reflect a person’s inner tension between sin and *imago dei*. Sin distorts human responses to meaning and purpose questions, while the *imago dei* (individually and collectively) continues to search for ‘its original’ (Loder, Logic of the Spirit, 114).
human nature given by the human sciences. The work of James Loder, whom I have already mentioned, offers some fruitful insights.

Loder studied human knowing, in particular what he called ‘convictional’ or ‘transformational’ knowing. He argued that humans know or think transformationally, in an inherently paradoxical process occurring,

... whenever, within a given frame of reference or experience, hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of the given frame and reorder its elements accordingly.\(^\text{18}\)

Coherence and meaning emerge through something like a figure-ground reversal, in which the background becomes the focus of awareness.\(^\text{19}\) In the transformational knowing nurtured in the Ignatian Exercises, God’s sustaining presence is no longer merely a more or less conscious background; it becomes the focus of a person’s awareness and life.

Loder’s theory can be used to qualify Meissner’s assertions about God’s gracious presence working in and through natural resources. It highlights both the continuities and the discontinuities between other transformations and Christian transformation.\(^\text{20}\) In Christian transformational knowing, the focus is not on the ego, but on the self in human-divine relationality. God’s sustaining presence becomes the Source of coherence and meaning amid an existential conflict between the ego’s efforts to ensure pleasure and survival and the painful realisations of failure and mortality.\(^\text{21}\) Christian transformation relativises the ego, strengthening and reconstructing it in a distinctive way.

This leads us to a more general point about psychology and theology. It has become common to claim that ‘psychology reveals much about the Spiritual Exercises’. But the insights should not flow

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\(^{19}\) Loder cites the work of Michael Polanyi (*Personal Knowledge* [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 174-184) and his discussion of tacit and explicit awareness. See Loder and Neidhardt, *The Knight’s Move*, 3.

\(^{20}\) See Loder, *Transforming Moment*, chapter two.

\(^{21}\) Loder notes that ‘Human beings begin to die the moment they are born’ (*Logic of the Spirit*, 73). The artist David Hockney is quoted as saying, ‘Some die young, some die old. The harsh truth is that the cause of death is birth.’ (*The Times* [17 March 2004], on p. 2 of the section entitled *Times 2*).
only in one direction. Not only those who live and pray out of the Ignatian Exercises, but also psychologists interested in psychic transformation, can benefit from understanding divine grace in interdisciplinary terms. Psychology as a discipline might not want categorically to affirm divine gracious initiative and relational desire. Yet if it remains open to the possibility of divine agency having reportable effects in the human psyche, psychology will be better able to describe and explain Christian spiritual transformation.

If psychologists can at least remain open to the possibility that exercitants are engaged with a reality outside themselves, then they are open to new insights into psychic transformation. In his survey of the origins of the human sense of God in sociology, anthropology and psychology, John Bowker concludes that the ‘possibility cannot be excluded that there may be x in reality which has in the past … reinforced the continuity of such terms as “god”’. By focusing,

... on the ways in which individuals form a personal construct of life, psychoanalysis necessarily returns to an interest in the possible reality of the objects of belief. It does not say that all objects of belief therefore have a reality in existence; but it no longer excludes the possibility of a reality of objects of belief in effect, and hence perhaps, in some instances, of a reality in existence as a sufficient ground for the effect.

Even if researchers want to be sceptical about the divine origin of the ego-strengthening effects of the Exercises, they should still recognise in principle the importance of relationality as such in psychic transformation. They may conclude that this relationality only exists between a person’s ego and their identification with a faith community or with particular symbols and images, but the power of the relationality remains evident. And given that the Exercises clearly have some positive effect, ‘good science’ requires that the God-question at least be left open.


24 Bowker, The Sense of God, 133, italics original, my emphasis in bold italic.
Brendan Callaghan begins his article by recalling how his psychology teacher asserted that ‘the facts are friendly’: ‘good science should point us towards the same reality as Christian reflection and insight’. He ends by noting that psychology provides ‘a glimpse of some of the mechanisms which make the Exercises effective in fostering our growth before God’. For his part, Meissner writes that ‘there is plenty of room for endorsing [the] principle of integral action of nature and grace as proposed in the Ignatian paradox in the clinical interaction with patients in the analytic setting’. For these authors, as for myself, psychological and spiritual collaboration need to produce insights for each discipline. I am at one with these authors in insisting that we need to learn from both psychology and theology. But psychology will give us true insight only if we recognise that the Ignatian Exercises open us up to a reality beyond the ego, to the Holy Spirit engaging a person in the painful yet joyful realities of new life.

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Callaghan, ‘Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors?’, 19.
Callaghan, ‘Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors?’, 32.
Meissner, ‘The Ignatian Paradox’, 44.
I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Drs P. Endean and D. Wright on earlier drafts of this essay.
MOVING MYSTICISM TO THE CENTRE

Karl Rahner (1904-1984)

Patricia Carroll

In a 1977 lecture on ‘the spirituality of the Church of the future’, Karl Rahner spoke of the new cultural context in which tomorrow’s Christians would find themselves. Spirituality would always be a relationship with the living God,

... who has revealed Himself in the history of humanity, who has placed Himself within the innermost heart of His world created by Him and within humanity—Himself as sustaining ground, most central dynamic, and ultimate goal.¹

But there would be far fewer external supports for Christianity; ecumenism would increase in importance; spirituality would be more focused on the essentials of Christianity than on particular devotions, and it would be marked by a new sense of solidarity. In this context, Rahner recalled what he had first written a decade earlier: ‘the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not be a Christian any more’. By ‘mystic’, he meant a person who has had a ‘genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence’.²

Rahner is here moving mysticism from the margins of Christian life to the centre; this version of mysticism is not a mark of the privileged soul, but rather a feature of people’s everyday experience as they struggle to live the Christian way of life.

² ‘The Spirituality of the Church of the Future’, 149.
**Ignatian Roots**

Rahner’s account of mysticism is strikingly contemporary, and often formulated in terms of the future’s needs. Nevertheless, Rahner arrived at his vision through his study of the Christian past, in particular through his reading of Ignatius Loyola. With his brother Hugo, Rahner was a major contributor to the rediscovery of Ignatian sources in the years before World War II. It was in the sixteenth-century Ignatius, living as he did at the dawn of modernity, that Rahner found a prototype for contemporary spirituality. Ignatius was strikingly creative in his emphasis on the subject, on interiority, and on the subjective striving for self-reflection and self-responsibility. Furthermore, Rahner clearly stated on many occasions that his own theological thinking sprang from the practice of the Ignatian Exercises.

For Rahner, Ignatius was a mystic, one in whom God’s creative grace had shone through, and whose encounter with God in Christ had led him to be an agent of service and transformation in the world. The experience of Ignatius the mystic modelled a spirituality of world-involvement.

**God in All Things**

Rahner insisted throughout his life and work that God is the Holy Mystery who pervades the whole of reality, the incomprehensible ground of all being. God is not one mystery among others, but the Mystery, one who can never be known or grasped:

... the concept of God is not a grasp of God by which a person masters the mystery, but it is letting oneself be grasped by the mystery which is present and yet always withdrawing itself.

The human person is fundamentally orientated towards this mystery, an orientation manifest in the questioning spirit of human beings, in the human search for meaning and fulfilment.

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Human Questioning

The range of questions which human beings ask is limitless:

Every supposable goal of knowledge and action has always already been made relative again: it has become provisional, a step. Every answer is always just the emergence of a new question. One experiences oneself as the infinite possibility, because, of necessity, one is constantly placing, both in practice and in theory, every sought-after result in question again, constantly setting it again within a broader horizon that arises before one in ways that cannot be foreseen.5

This questioning restlessness is at the heart of what it means to be human. We are dynamic beings, always in process, always en route.

To evoke God’s presence to this movement, Rahner uses two different images. He speaks firstly of light: we do not see the light when we look at things but rather the light is that by which we see. Similarly the God whom no one has ever seen nevertheless enables our every perception and act. He also speaks of God as a horizon. Human beings know particular objects through and within an infinite horizon. God at once contains and transcends our questing selves, the movement that we are. All human awareness of this-worldly things is accompanied by an awareness of what is beyond the world, and should by rights recognise itself as dependent on that transcendent source. And the point applies also to human action: in all our doings we are in touch with God:

Whether one says so expressly or not, whether one lets this truth emerge or represses it, the human person is always in their mental life orientated towards a Holy Mystery as the ground of their being. This mystery, which as inexplicit and therefore unexpressed horizon is always encircling and sustaining the tiny circle of our everyday experience of knowing and acting, is what is most primordial, but as such also what is most hidden and least noticed. It speaks by being silent; it is present by pointing us, in its absence, towards our limits.6

The spirituality which emerges from this vision is radically optimistic and all-inclusive. All human experience, conscious or unconscious, is pregnant with God’s presence.

5 Foundations of Christian Faith, 32.
It must be stressed that the Holy Mystery can never be fully grasped by us as if it were an object, one among others. This Holy Mystery at the centre of all things remains concealed, and in one sense permanently unknown; it can never really be the direct object of our knowledge. Our knowing is contained in unknowing:

The moment we become aware of ourselves precisely as the limited being that we radically and in so many ways are, we have already overstepped these boundaries .... We have experienced ourselves as beings who are constantly passing beyond themselves towards that which cannot be circumscribed, towards that which, precisely
Thus our relationship to this Mystery is not a matter of comprehending knowledge but responsive love. In one of his early prayers, Rahner muses ruefully:

… most of what I have learnt, I have learnt in order to forget it again and to experience in the area of knowledge too my poverty, narrowness, and limitation.

‘Mere knowledge’ does not satisfy. How, then, can human beings draw near to the heart of all things, the true heart of reality? Like many of the mystics before him, Rahner answers unequivocally, ‘not by knowledge alone, but by the full flower of knowledge, love’. And this loving, experiential knowledge is transformative:

It is only the knowledge gained through experience, through living and suffering, that does not in the end disappoint and turn into boredom and oblivion, but instead fills the heart with the knowing wisdom of experienced love. It is not what I have thought out, but what I have lived through and suffered through that should fill my mind and my heart. It fills the heart with the wisdom of love, instead of crushing it with the disappointment of boredom and final oblivion. It is not the result of our own speculation, but the golden harvest of what we have lived through and suffered through, that has power to enrich the heart and nourish the spirit.

Freedom

Yet love implies freedom; our love for God’s infinity is a matter of choice. The capacity for this kind of choice is an inescapable characteristic of human existence; even the refusal to make such a choice nevertheless amounts to one. To choose to be a teacher or a musician or an industrialist involves a whole set of directions and actions expressive of a response, whether positive or negative, deep or shallow, to the invitation of Holy Mystery. We are responsible for our

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choices, and at some point we shall be called to give account. To the extent that we are conscious of our freedom as existing within the infinite horizon of being, we are compelled to make a decision for or against this mystery at the centre of all existence—a decision which we must gradually try to integrate our whole life long. We can choose to open ourselves in surrender to the mystery, or we can turn away and make an absolute, an idol, of some finite object or objects in the world.

Inclusiveness

When, therefore, we speak of human experience, we are already speaking of the divine. Moreover, the experience of God is not just for a privileged few. All human beings are already in relationship with God; all are touched immediately by God’s self-communication, by God’s gift of God’s own self. Moreover, if God is at the heart of everything in our lives, God is not confined to the experiences that are joy-filled or filled with consolation. God is as much present in the darkness as in the light.

Theological Transformations

This conviction of God present in all things, in a way that could be experienced, led Rahner to develop decisively the theological tradition he inherited. Two themes are particularly important for this essay: grace, and spiritual growth.

Grace

Rahner’s innovations in the theology of grace were fundamentally four. The first was about the priority of God’s self-gift in the Christian life. In conventional Catholic theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the gift of God’s own self (confusingly called uncreated grace) was seen as a consequence of a life of good Christian practice (created graces). Rahner reversed the order. Uncreated grace, God’s own self, was the central principle of our every act. The human person is,

11 For fuller and more technical accounts, see Declan Marmion, A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 149-162; Endean, Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality, 32-67.
... the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God .... The word ‘self-communication’ really is intended to mean that God, in God’s most proper reality and activity, is making Himself the innermost constitutive element of the human person.\textsuperscript{12}

Secondly, and consequently, grace was not to be understood as a superstructure or an appendage to human reality, imposed from outside upon human beings by some divine decree. The human person lives within grace from the outset, at least in principle, and is called to share God’s own life. God’s creation has as its innermost purpose God’s loving gift of self to what is not God. That means that there is a supernatural capacity in us for God’s gratuitously self-giving love from the beginning. Rahner resolves the paradoxes here by talking of humanity as being endowed with a ‘supernatural existential’. Our whole being (our ‘existential’) is ordered, and therefore receptive, to a sheer gift of God, over and beyond the gift of creation (‘supernatural’).\textsuperscript{13}

Thirdly, Rahner stressed the universality of God’s salvific will. Less generous religious imaginations regard grace as a scarce commodity, and they may hold that there is no salvation outside explicit Christianity. Rahner posited that God’s grace must be universal. God is not finite, and does not act episodically; therefore no area of human life is excluded from the gracious presence of God. This optimistic view was reflected in Vatican II’s two major documents on the Church, \textit{Lumen gentium} and \textit{Gaudium et spes}.\textsuperscript{14}

Finally, Rahner challenged the view, standard in Tridentine scholasticism, that grace, being supernatural, was necessarily beyond human experience. It may be dim and indistinct, but if it is a human reality, it is an experiential one. Both Scripture and Church tradition point towards a consciously experienced graced relationship:

\begin{quote}
Grace, the Holy Spirit, the working of the Spirit in the proper sense of a divinising grace that really contains within it the Spirit of God
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Foundations of Christian Faith}, 116.
\textsuperscript{13} See ‘Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace’, TI 1, 297-317, especially 305; \textit{Foundations of Christian Faith}, 123-124, 126-133.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Lumen gentium}, n. 16; \textit{Gaudium et spes}, n. 22.
as such, is, I believe, something which (let me be careful) has its
effects as such also within human consciousness.  

From these innovations in the theology of grace, it follows that
mysticism is a universal phenomenon. If God’s self-communication in
grace is always present to consciousness, it follows that human beings
may experience God in any sphere of life, from the mundane to the
sublime, since all in the end is sublime. Thus Rahner can speak of
everyday mysticism, situated within so-called ordinary Christian living:

It seems to me … to be the task of Christian theology as a whole
and of the Christian theology of mysticism in particular to show
and to render intelligible the fact that what is really the
fundamental manifestation of a mystical transcendence-experience
is also already present, even if unreflectively, in the simple act of
Christian living in faith, hope and love, present as that act’s
sustaining ground—and that such unreflective (let us say)
transcendence given out of grace towards the nameless mystery we
call God is already there in this faith, hope and love.  

Mysticism

What, then, are we to make of growth in grace? How can we have a
mystical ‘ascent’ if God’s grace is present to all human experience from
the beginning? In a very important early essay, written in 1944, Rahner
both criticizes and reinterprets the traditional languages of Christian
perfection and mystical ascent. Almost inevitably, such language leads
us to think of the spiritual life quantitatively, in terms of divisions and
stages, with increasingly ‘more’ grace at ‘higher’ stages. Rahner’s
smear-phrase for this way of thinking was “ontic” sanctity. Before we
know where we are, we are speaking of continual ‘increases’ of grace,
of people becoming ‘more perfect’ or ‘holier’, of spiritual progress being
dependent on certain tasks being accomplished, of those on the lower
‘rungs’ of the ‘ladder’ being somehow ‘further’ from God, and therefore
‘less perfect’.

16 ‘The Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Christian Dogmatics’, TI 18, 173-188,
here 176.
Rahner subverts these vulgar ideas. The talk of growth and ascent in the tradition has to be understood strictly in terms of our response to God’s grace, not as making a statement about God’s initiative as such. Some may indeed have reached exceptional levels of maturity in their relationship with God, and been drawn into passive, non-conceptual forms of prayer. This is because our response may change developmentally. Hence empirical psychology becomes important for the study of spirituality; hence too we may legitimately speculate that the mystics exhibit the dynamics of high psychic development. Moreover, we can make the same point in more ‘lay’ terms by suggesting that human consent to God’s grace can deepen existentially. The quality of the graced encounter can always be enhanced. But it is wrong to see them as having entered a fundamentally different sphere of existence where the ordinary norms of Christian living no longer apply. It is equally wrong to see everyday Christian living as merely a preparation for a ‘mystical union’ that is somehow different in kind. Still less are such mystics—in the conventional sense—to be understood as privy to ‘more’ grace. It is just that they experience in an extraordinary way the grace which, we may trust, all Christians experience in a more hidden, and perhaps less developed, way.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Everyday Mysticism}

Rahner may be an important theologian, but he generally evokes the Holy Mystery in simple, everyday terms. He invites people to remember some quite normal human experiences. He evokes, for example,

\begin{itemize}
  \item a state of sudden aloneness when everything is called into question ...
  \item a moment when the silence resounds more penetratingly than the accustomed din of everyday life ...
  \item a point when one is brought face to face with one’s own freedom and responsibility ...
  \item a sudden experience of being absolutely and unconditionally accepted in love.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{18} ‘The Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Christian Dogmatics’, 175-176.
It is everyday life, rather than explicit prayer or meditation, that leads us to the Mystery: experiences of aloneness, of freedom and responsibility, of judgment, of receiving love, of facing death, of the peace which comes from giving up attachments. It is in ordinary life that the Mystery breaks in upon our awareness:

… grace has its particular history in human beings’ day-to-day life with its splendours and breakdowns, and is really experienced there.  

Rahner is here developing a more inclusive, less elitist model of mysticism and of Christianity. He is distinguishing between the reality of grace and conventional constructions of grace. The remarkable phenomena often referred to in the literature about the mystics are secondary, as are the monastic connotations of much spiritual writing. The crucial consequence is that there is no necessity for Christians to extract themselves from the world in order to experience something of the divine. Rather the presence of Holy Mystery is to be discovered in the midst of the world.

Positive and Negative Experiences of God

In his reflection ‘Experience of the Holy Spirit’, Rahner invites the reader to consider how the experience of the mystics could possibly have anything to do with those who see themselves as ordinary everyday Christians. He insists that the experiences of which the mystics speak,

... are certainly not events that are absolutely outside the experience of an ordinary Christian … the witness of the mystics regarding their experiences gives testimony to an experience that every Christian, indeed every human being, can have and can ask for, but which they can also easily overlook or repress.

It is wrong to see the mystics as merely giving us ‘an account of a country that we ourselves have never entered’. The spiritual tradition speaks of both the positive and the negative ways, of experiences where there is a positive sense that God is encountered, and of the encounter with God’s Mystery in situations of seeming negativity.

20 ‘On the Theology of Worship’, TI 19, 141-149, here 147.
For some, then,

… the greatness and glory, goodness, beauty, and transparency of the particular realities of our experience point as a promise towards the eternal light and the eternal life.

But perhaps, Rahner suggests, it is negative situations where the experience of God is clearer:

… when the definable limits of everyday realities break down and dissolve, when we experience such realities going under, when the lights which illuminate the tiny island of our everyday go out, and the questions becomes inescapable: is the night that surrounds us the emptiness of absurdity and death, or the blessed Christmas which, already lit from within, is promising eternal day.²³

Rahner lists twelve examples of such moments, hoping to spark off the memory of similar events in the lives of his readers. These include choosing to trust and hope in a hopeless situation, forgiving without acknowledgement, bearing pain patiently, and taking up the burden of responsibility. Precisely at such moments, ‘God is there’, and ‘liberating grace’.²⁴

Perhaps we can end by highlighting what is important and creative in Rahner’s vision. Firstly, by claiming that the subject-matter of theology, God’s grace, is a matter of human experience, Rahner broke down the barriers between theology and spirituality that had become increasingly rigid from the late

middle ages onwards. In particular, the spiritual and mystical had become detached from everyday Christian life, and had come to appear as the preserve of an elite. Rahner re-establishes the continuities between so-called 'extraordinary' mystical experience and the everyday life of Christian faith, hope and love.

Secondly, Rahner sees the experience of God as open to all, including those who are outside Christianity. Though people remain free to accept or reject God's call, everyone is invited to the immediacy of God's presence.

Thirdly, Rahner's version of mysticism is not one of interiority alone. Every human activity has a mystical dimension, and everyday mysticism involves self-emptying, not in pure interiority but in service of others and in the trustful endurance of seeming emptiness.

Fourthly, and above all, Rahner moves mysticism back from the margins of Christian self-understanding to a more authentic, central place within everyday Christian life. If Christianity is to survive in a post-Christian culture, mystical awareness understood in these terms is, as Rahner asserted, vital. Moreover, the loss of cultural supports for Christianity is not simply to be lamented, and perhaps not to be lamented at all. It may be that this very loss is the means through which the Holy Mystery has called us to a deeper, more authentic, and more inclusive union.

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DURING THE 1970s, A NEW CHURCH AND A NEW THEOLOGY arose in Latin America. This article is a personal reflection on what Karl Rahner has meant for me in that context, though I hope that what I say will apply to liberation theology more broadly. I write out of the life-experience in El Salvador that has led me to read with new eyes the theology I had previously studied, in which Rahner’s work was a very important element. I am also writing out of my close personal and intellectual relationship with Ignacio Ellacuría, Rahner’s student in Innsbruck between 1958 and 1962. On account of his defence of faith and justice, Ellacuría, as many will know, was murdered on 16 November 1989, along with five other Jesuits and two female workers from the university in which he taught. But we should remember that Ellacuría was not just Rahner’s pupil. He took forward important ideas in Rahner’s theology, as he sought to express them in his own historical situation and in a way appropriate for the world of the poor.

This article begins with an account of Rahner’s attitude towards the new things that were happening ecclesially and theologically in Latin America during the last years of his life. Then I shall try to explore Rahner’s influence on liberation theology.

The Demands of a New Situation

In an interview he gave to a Spanish magazine shortly before his death, Rahner was asked what he thought about the current state of the Church. Rahner replied in terms that have proved themselves only too true: ‘in general, we are living through a “wintry season”’.¹ People still

¹ Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life, edited by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, translation edited by Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 39. As the interview was originally published in Spanish, we follow the Spanish version here.
quote these words today as a kind of lament or protest. But Rahner added something that has, unfortunately, been forgotten: ‘however, there are some parts of the Church where there is a very animated, charismatic life, one that yields hope’. He was referring to the creative new developments happening in Churches like those of Latin America: their witness, their praxis, their theology and above all their martyrs. When he used the word ‘charismatic’, he was not implying any similarity with Pentecostalism. Rather he was indicating that in these Churches discipleship of Jesus was flourishing, along with a genuine life of mutuality and a gospel freedom far more Christian than anything offered by the Enlightenment. It is worth asking why these words of Rahner, full as they were of hope and of a sense of new growth, have remained unknown among Christians in rich countries, and why people have quoted just the phase about the wintry season. This does not do justice to Rahner, and it is quite unfair to the reality of Latin American Christianity.

When I met Rahner in Milwaukee in 1979, he asked me with great interest and solicitude what the effect had been of the recent assembly of bishops at Puebla in Mexico. Had it maintained the momentum of its prophetic predecessor in 1968 at Medellín, or had it rather strengthened the retrenchment that was already being promoted in various official circles? And it is well known that two weeks before his death, on 16 March 1984, he wrote a letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima defending Gustavo Gutiérrez’ theology against the charge of being unorthodox. This theology, Rahner said, was in many ways very original, because it was ‘at the service of evangelization in a
specific situation. There was something in the churches of Latin America that attracted Rahner both as a human being and as a Christian. He admired such bishops as Hélder Câmara; he recognised Oscar Romero as a martyr. I do not know how much Rahner knew or intuited about the Base Ecclesial Communities, but I think he would have understood what was most important about them: their rootedness in lived reality. Rahner struggled mightily against docetism in Christology—the idea that Jesus was really a divine being who just appeared to be human—and these communities represented the overcoming of what we can call ecclesial docetism. I think Rahner would have applauded what Ellacuría used to say about what makes the Church’s institution Christian:

The Church is both mother and teacher, but for different reasons. Moreover, her maternal character is more fundamental than her teaching role. Her mission of giving and transmitting life is more important than that of sanctioning specific teachings with her authority.

An important part of the new reality emerging from Latin America was its theology: liberation theology. I do not think that Rahner had any detailed knowledge of it, but he was certainly aware intuitively of the fundamental issues at stake and he supported it. This was by no means something to be taken for granted; other great figures of his generation, such as Jacques Maritain, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar had no idea of how to respond to this emergent reality. Liberation theology was stammering out its insights without much conceptual profundity. It was coming from distant, unknown places, and its future was uncertain. It nevertheless represented a searchingly critical question to European theology, including its more enlightened, post-Conciliar versions.

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2 The letter can be found in the Swiss journal Orientierung, 49 (1985), 54.
3 When adopting Ignatius’ persona in ‘Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit’, Rahner alluded to Ignatius’ well-known resistance to the idea of Jesuit bishops, but added, ‘If it is a bishop like Hélder Câmara, then one of you can certainly be that, because he risks life and limb for the poor’. See Ignatius of Loyola, translated by Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Collins, 1979), 23.
That Rahner paid serious attention to this theology in his seventies, when most people are long set in their ways, demonstrates his exceptional openness. This was an openness which he shared with Pope John XXIII, who convoked the Council when he was almost eighty, and with figures such as Oscar Romero, who in his sixties underwent a profound personal conversion and transformed his local church in a way quite without parallel in recent times.

Rahner both saw and defended the novelty of this theology. He recognised that more was at stake than a radical approach to social and ethical problems; liberation theology was theology. He saw the ground for such novelty in the pluralism which he regarded as essential to theology—a conviction which he repeated regularly in his final years. And the need for such a theology impressed itself upon him all the more as he came to recognise the reality of injustice and oppression as a scandal confronting so-called Enlightenment rationality and democratic freedom.

Rahner was thus open-minded, both ecclesiastically and intellectually. And this open-mindedness extended beyond the concerns more standard in the European academy: evolution, Christian-Marxist dialogue, ecumenism, the development of the Council’s teaching. It could embrace also something that was much less familiar, much more radically new, something that was stirring in a far-off continent that many (including many theologians and others well placed in the Church) were tempted to write off as underdeveloped.

**Rahner’s Influence on Liberation Theology**

To set out Rahner’s influence on liberation theology inevitably involves oversimplification. It was Rahner’s dogmatic theology, rather than his philosophy, that was crucial in this connection. And we must remember that there are many different liberation theologies, even in Latin America. His influence was probably unconscious and unintentional, enabling liberation theologians to develop approaches that were new, anddistinctively Latin American. Of this I am convinced, though it is no easy task to specify just what form Rahner’s contribution took.

For me, Rahner’s contribution to liberation theology centred on the fundamental attitude with which he undertook the theological
task, the existential disposition with which he set about making theological sense of reality. Rahner had no special insight into realities central for the new theology such as the liberation of the poor, but his way of approaching God through reflection on human reality, and of approaching human reality through reflection on God, greatly benefited liberation theology at its origins. Let me simply mention some aspects of what I mean.

**Theology and Reality**

What struck me in Rahner’s theology was how reality itself was its foundation. The point may seem obvious, but there are theologies that start from preconceived notions in which this principle is not often observed. Be that as it may, Rahner was outstanding in his fidelity to the real.

In his well known article on the theology of the symbol, Rahner wrote of how all realities were symbolic because they ‘necessarily “express” themselves in order to attain their own nature’. Perhaps I am overstating the point, but I think that Rahner’s theology can be understood as a service to this process. Rahner was able to convey a taste for lived reality. In Latin, the words for ‘taste’ and ‘wisdom’ are connected, and Rahner was, in the root sense of the word, a sapiential thinker.

A number of Rahner’s formulations bear witness to this gift. He could write of how the different Christian mysteries, in the plural,

... are merely intrinsic aspects of the one Mystery with which the Christian doctrine of revelation confronts the human person.  

And there were other examples:

I think that to be a Christian is the most simple injunction laid upon us, the easy burden of which the Gospel speaks that is quite simple, and, as such, so weighty. When you carry it, it carries you; and the longer you live, the heavier and the lighter it will become. In the end we are left with mystery, but it is the mystery of Jesus.

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7 ‘The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology’, TI 4, 36-73, here 36.
Tomorrow’s devout person will either be a mystic—someone who has ‘experienced’ something—or else they will no longer be devout at all.9

…only the person pardoned knows themselves to be a sinner.

And remember, too, how his first big article reacted against the conventional tradition with the plaintive ‘it can’t be like this’.10 Rahner would think, ruminate, argue—but the process ended not with a conclusion arrived at through logical steps, nor with the rounding off of a rational argument, but rather with proclamation of the reality that was expressing itself.

Mutatis mutandis, I believe that the foundational moments of liberation theology were also marked by this insistence on placing reality at the centre of thinking. Liberation theology did not begin with concepts or sophisticated arguments, but with reality. In Ignatian language, it discovered its ‘principle and foundation’ in this reality, the in-breaking of the poor, and stayed close to this foundational reality amid all the theorizing.

To put the point more graphically: liberation theology’s fundamental assertion and conviction is that the poor—and God in the poor—have broken into history. The believer, the human person, has to respond to this reality, indeed correspond to it. We are charged to liberate the poor and, in Ellacuría’s phrase, to take them down from their cross. Theology can no longer be the ideology that fosters oppression. None of these convictions is just the result of a theoretical argument; they

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9 ‘Christian Living Formerly and Today’, TI 7, 3-24, here 15.
10 ‘Remarks on the Theological Treatise de Trinitate’, TI 4, 77-102, here 87.
come from an honest and hopeful option to let lived reality be central, to let it speak, to hear its word, to let it guide us and call forth our response.

A further scandalous and novel step—though one seen more in liberation theology than in Rahner—is the recognition that salvation lies precisely in these poor people. They are sustaining us; they are enlightening us about God and about ourselves; in some undeserved and unexpected way, they are keeping our hope alive. Liberation theology does not conclude all this from the ideas it had before (though it was certainly schooled in older theologies); rather it discovers and extends what it finds as it engages lived reality. ‘The glory of God is the poor person who is alive.’ ‘You—who are poor and who are victims—are the suffering servant of God for today, the crucified people.’ ‘The poor are evangelizing us.’ These pithy phrases, from Archbishop Romero, from Ellacuría, from the Puebla assembly, proclaim what is actually happening. They match Rahner for radicality and frankness.

**Reality as Mystery**

This reality has a mystery at its heart. God is the mystery par excellence, and the human person is the being confronted with mystery. Rahner insists that God is the Holy Mystery who, without ceasing to be mystery, is essentially salvific—no longer is there any question of God’s either saving or condemning us. This conviction runs right into the details of Rahner’s Christology and ecclesiology. Thus the Church of this God, by virtue of its affinity with God, can canonize, pronounce where absolute salvation can be found. But it cannot condemn; it cannot make a similar pronouncement about damnation.

Rahner has a deeper sense of God’s mystery than other standard progressive theologians, one that is matched in liberation theology. Gutiérrez places mystery, God’s mystery, at the centre. Without being artificial, I believe the liberation theology understands the poor person as mystery: not just a particular case that makes ethical demands, nor even just as a person who might be saved, but rather as a reality freighted with the Mystery.

The inbreaking of the poor person, and of God within them, recalls much of Rahner’s account of mystery. The poor person is the Other who is distant, who cannot be manipulated; because they have been oppressed, they are different and demanding. But at the same time they are the Other who is close, saving, the Holy Mystery. Thus
Ellacuría could write of the crucified people as the presence of the mystery of God, and regard this presence as itself saving. As is too little known, he spoke of a soteriology of history.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Reality and the Sacramental}

One point on which Rahner was insistent was that reality is intrinsically symbolic: it seeks to express itself. It is well known that Rahner, along with others such as Otto Semmelroth, developed an understanding of the Church as itself sacramental, and of the seven sacraments as an expression of this primordial sacramentality.\textsuperscript{12} But all this is grounded in the sacramentality of Jesus. Let it suffice to recall Rahner’s brilliant interpretation of the Incarnation: when God became human, Christ’s flesh (s\textit{arx}) was not a mere livery; it was, simply and radically, the manifestation of the divine in our world.\textsuperscript{13} On this basis, Rahner could speak of the eternal significance of Jesus’ humanity for our relationship with God.\textsuperscript{14} Ellacuría used to add, by way of commentary, that this world was a world of sin: becoming flesh was not just a metaphysical descent, but rather an immersion in a deathly historical reality.


\textsuperscript{12} See \textit{The Church and the Sacraments}, translated by W. J. O’Hara (London: Burns and Oates, 1963 [1961]).

\textsuperscript{13} ‘The Theology of the Symbol’, 237-240.

\textsuperscript{14} The title of an important essay in \textit{TI} 3, 35-47.
Though liberation theology has not developed a theory of the sacraments, the idea of the Church as primordial sacrament is certainly present within it. The central conviction of liberation theology is that of God’s presence in the poor. This implies that mysticism and politics, the transcendent and the historical, can and must converge. Thus liberation theology takes human history with absolute seriousness—it may be distinguishable from the reality of God, but it may not be separated from the reality of God, still less set in opposition to it. The vulgar criticisms of liberation theology, to the effect that it is sociology rather than theology, simply miss the point that history expresses God, is sacramentally charged with God. And as the crucified people represent the second Isaiah’s Servant, they too are a sacrament of God.

Transcendence here is not something beyond history but within it. The history of God and of humanity becomes one single ‘great history of God’. Rahner had begun to deal with this theme in an important article, ‘History of the World and Salvation History’, and his idea of grace present in all human existence, the so-called supernatural existential, also contributed. What we call the problem of nature and grace is in reality the question of there being one single history, always graced by God, but with a grace that human freedom can reject. Liberation theology insists that there is only one history, with two dimensions that we need to see as a history of grace and a history of sin—abstract distinctions like ‘nature and grace’ or ‘sacred and secular’ will not do.

The Logic of Lived Experience

If we move now to the quality of Rahner’s engagement with reality, we can begin with Rahner’s conviction that God, God’s own self and God’s will, can be and is given to us in what simply happens, in ways that nothing else can specify or predict. Moreover, such happenings can be recognised as coming from God. The conventional theology Rahner inherited did not take sufficiently seriously the fact that some things happen quite freely and unpredictably, nor that those things can

15TI 5, 97-114.
be of God. 16 Fidelity thus involves something other than an adaptation of established theology to particular circumstances. We need to respond to the specific happenings, needs and desires that are ‘true signs of God’s presence and purpose’. 17

This sense of God’s active presence in history to be discerned through the signs of the times, and of the will of God not being reducible to universal principles, is also central to the theology of liberation. From the beginning, Gutiérrez’ fundamental conviction has been that the poor are not just objects of our consideration and benevolent options. Rather the poor, with their sufferings and hopes, have ‘broken into’ history, irrupted into it. 18 Moreover, God has broken in with the poor, and people have been able to receive that inbreaking in a way that does not amount simply to a deduction from what they already knew. Once it has occurred, the inbreaking can and must be compared with what earlier texts in Scripture, tradition and theology have to say; it can also be clarified with the help of philosophy and the human sciences. But the basic reception of the irruption is something else. It emerges from the dependence on experience that is characteristic of human (‘the poor have broken in’) and religious (‘and God within them’) logic. Within conventional theology prior to Rahner, these statements of liberation theology would have been quite impossible, but Rahner’s own theology both grounds and echoes them.

Theology Leading into Mystery

For Rahner, the fact that God is Mystery leads to a conception of theology as leading into mystery. All theological realities can and should be referred to God, the one and only Mystery, from whom they derive their significance and intelligibility.

Personally, I believe that in liberation theology, the place of the poor is similar. Though facile parallels must be avoided, it nevertheless follows that if God is present in the poor person, then we must be able to use the same logic in talking about the poor that we use regarding God. With all due caution, I do believe that liberation theology can

17 Gaudium et spes, n. 11
legitimately speak of the poor person as an ultimate, and of the option for the poor as defining my identity—what I can know, what I have to do, what I can rightly hope for and celebrate. Theology can amount to a *reductio in pauperes*, a process of leading us into the mystery which is the poor.

It follows that theology can talk of the Church—without doing violence to the faith or manipulating the poor—as essentially a Church of the poor. It can speak of how the poor have a potential for evangelization; it can develop theological formulae such as ‘apart from the poor, no salvation’. And obviously it can see the poor person as presenting the reality which decides whether our lives are human or inhuman, whether we are eternally to be saved or condemned. In the face of the poor, then salvation just means working for their liberation, working—in Ellacuría’s phrase—to take the crucified people down from their cross. And on the last day, they will be our judges. John Paul II put the point sharply in Canada in 1985: ‘the poor countries will judge the rich ones’. But, in my experience in El Salvador, one often has to add that the poor will also pardon us, an experience which brings home to me the truth of Rahner’s saying that you know you are a sinner only if you are pardoned. Whether this point about the poor being the ultimate can be justified metaphysically, I do not know. But existentially it is true: there is nothing more ultimate than ‘the authority of those who suffer’, says Johannes Baptist Metz; there is no task more crucial than the reaction of mercy towards victims.19

**Theology and Spirituality**

For Rahner, theology is not just a matter of knowledge and practice but also of spirituality:

In my theology what is of fundamental significance for me is the givenness of a genuine, primordial experience of God and of God’s Spirit. This is logically (though not necessarily chronologically) prior to reflection and to theological verbalisation, and it can never be fully appropriated by reflection.20

Rahner is making not only a personal claim but also a methodological one. The experience of God is both the source and the goal of his theology. His use of a particular intellectual tool, transcendental thought, is secondary.

Liberation theology, too, takes commitment and experience as foundational. From the very beginning, liberation theologians have insisted that their theology is a secondary outgrowth, and that what is primary is an experience of faith and a praxis of liberation; our theology is our spirituality. Sometimes it has been said that liberation theology abounds in good faith and in spirituality, but not in knowledge—here and there, perhaps, with some justification. But I believe that the best theologians let their spiritual experience, their experience of God, shape their academic activity as theologians.

Differences

I have been noting the fundamental influence of Rahner on liberation theology. This is rarely an influence at the level of content, even though liberation theologians accepted many of Rahner's ideas. Nor did Rahner have any direct influence on what was most specific to the theology of liberation: the idea of liberation coming from the poor, and the impact this would have on our ways of conceiving God, Christ and the Church. Rahner's contribution was a significant one, but it was indirect.

As liberation theology came to birth, it found inspiration and theological legitimation in Rahner's general approach to theology, even though he did not speak of liberation, and in his handling of the theologies with which he took issue. The influence operated principally at the level of what I would call 'theological attitude'. It encouraged creativity, freedom, responsibility both to history and to the contemporary world, and gospel-centredness. By this last I mean taking Jesus as the unconditional norm for interpreting important realities and not the other way round. At this attitudinal level, there was certainly a convergence between Rahner and the liberation theologians.

Obviously there were some significant differences. Rahner engaged the Enlightenment as represented by Kant; liberation theology engaged

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21 See, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, ‘Speaking about God’, Concilium, 171 (February 1984), 27-31.
the Enlightenment as represented by Marx. What they shared was a concern to take the challenges utterly seriously.

Moreover, liberation theology would now see important gaps in Rahner’s theology. He did not offer any analysis of praxis as a dimension of human knowledge; he did not present salvation as a liberative reality in history. More surprisingly, his brilliant retrieval of the humanity of Christ did not explore the cross fully. In his final period he may have become more sensitive to the realities of the world, but he did not develop a theological method appropriate to them. We could not call Rahner’s theology prophetic, even if, right up to the end of his life, his theology did express the utopian vision of Christianity. Metz tells us that he would reproach Rahner for theologizing without reckoning with Auschwitz. And I do not think Rahner ever came to understand Ellacuría’s utopian conception of a ‘civilisation of poverty’ in contrast to the ‘civilisation of wealth’ that has never given life or dignity to its minorities. Yet this vision has deep gospel roots, and also, in the meditation on Two Standards, Ignatian ones.

Rahner could have dealt with themes of this kind, but they came too late for him. Nevertheless, we should not forget his support for the Church and the way of Christian life that was emerging in Latin America in his last years. As a human being and a theologian, Rahner was moving in his last years towards what was best in liberation theology, and he would have made his own contribution towards it, at once critical and stimulating.

Lost in the Mystery of God

Let me end more personally. My own first encounter with Rahner was through his little book On the Theology of Death, which I came across by chance when I was a student in St Louis in the 1960s. I later read and studied many other things that he wrote, but I never forgot this remarkable book on death. Let me recall two points from this book that are fundamentals here in El Salvador, points on which, to use a classic term, the Church stands or falls.

Firstly, Rahner says that martyrdom is ‘the Christian death par excellence’. How often that phrase has come back to me in El Salvador! Whether something from Rahner’s personal experience lies in the background, or whether this is just another of his profound dogmatic statements, I do not know. Perhaps his affection and veneration for Alfred Delp suggests that there was something personal behind it.

Secondly, there was Rahner’s vision of death. As he put it in the interview quoted at the very beginning of this article:

> The true summit of my life has yet to arrive. I mean the abyss which is the mystery of God, into which we hurl ourselves with the hope of being accepted by His love and His mercy.

‘Summit’, ‘yet to arrive’, ‘mystery of God’, ‘to be accepted by His love and His mercy’. Is there a liberation theology here? The answer to that question is not so important. But I like what Pedro Casaldáliga, Christian, bishop and poet of liberation, wrote after Rahner’s death:

> ‘What are you doing now?’
> the Pope used to ask him (inquisitorially? kindly?).
> The theologian used to reply (evasively? magisterially?),
> ‘I am preparing to live the great Encounter’.
> And with eighty Aprils, well-pondered,
> a hearer of the Mystery in the Word,
> he plunged into the absolute future.

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24 Faith in a *Wintery Season*, 38.
‘A SYMBOL PERFECTED IN DEATH’

Rahner’s Theology and Alfred Delp
(1907-1945)

An article marking the publication of two new volumes on Delp in English: Mary Frances Coady, With Bound Hands—A Jesuit in Nazi Germany: The Life and Selected Prison Letters of Alfred Delp, and Alfred Delp, Prison Writings, with introductions by Alan C. Mitchell and Thomas Merton.

KARL RAHNER’S MORE EXTENSIVE ACCOUNTS of Ignatian decision-making are notoriously abstract. ‘The subject’s own subjectivity’ becomes the focus of the individual’s awareness; the ‘transcendence’ that is normally just the tacit accompaniment to all our acts of knowing and willing becomes ‘thematic’. The test of a good decision is whether the proposed alternative somehow fits with this ‘fundamental consolation’, this Urträstung:

… whether these two phenomena are inwardly in harmony, and fit with each other; whether the desire for the contestable object of choice leaves untouched that pure openness to God which occurs in the supernatural experience of transcendence, indeed even supports and increases it, or whether it weakens and obscures it.

The decision emerges from within; resources of grace within the self become active.

Rahner’s vision rests on an attractive, generous account of grace within the self. When the Word of God is preached, it meets something within us:

... the awakening of divine experience is not in fact indoctrination with something previously not present in the human person, but rather a more explicit self-appropriation, the free acceptance of a reality of the human constitution that is always there, normally buried and repressed, but nevertheless there inevitably. Its name is grace, and God’s own self is there, immediately.  

It was on this basis that Karl Rahner could ground his claims about what was essential in Christianity existing beyond the visible Church—ideas which flowed into Vatican II, with its sense of aggiornamento, of how there were important Christian values latent in the contemporary world just as such. There is nothing truly human which does not also affect the followers of Christ.  

Exhilarating and creative though this vision may be, it has its critics. Holiness and conversion are reduced to the mere evoking of potential. There is no room for a God who can reach into our lives, confront us, transform us. So Hans Urs von Balthasar’s ‘main argument’ against Rahner’s approach to theology runs like this:  

... when God sends His own living Word to His creatures, He does so, not to instruct them about the mysteries of the world, nor primarily to fulfil their deepest needs and yearnings. Rather He communicates and actively demonstrates such unheard-of things that humanity feels not satisfied but awestruck by a love which it could never have hoped to experience.  

In biblical terms, Rahner’s theology might be said to reduce all Christian conversion to the paradigm of the prodigal son in his pigsty ‘coming to himself’ (Luke 15:17). There is no room for the Lord’s call to Abram to leave one’s country and kindred and move forward to a

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5 *Gaudium et spes*, n.1. For an account of the Council’s significance, see the important essays collected in John W. O’Malley, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, De: Michael Glazier, 1989).  
land that will be shown him. There may be some room for Paul’s account of his conversion in Galatians—God choosing ‘to reveal His son to me’ (Galatians 1:16)—but none for the convulsions of the narratives in Acts.

For all their differences from the likes of von Balthasar, political and liberation theologians make similar criticisms. Thus Johann Baptist Metz complained that Rahner’s account of experience does not take history seriously enough:

> It makes the social contradictions and conflicts, out of which historical experience achingly lives and in and through which the historical subject is constituted, disappear into the non-objectiveness of a previously known transcendental experience, in which these contradictions are already undialectically reconciled.\(^7\)

Moreover, the point about not taking history seriously is also a point about not taking society seriously. We do not have our experiences as isolated individuals, but as participants in culture and society, shaped by a language; for its part, Catholic Christianity is precisely not about the individual soul, but rather a salvation given in and through the Church, the body of believers.

These are speculative issues, and speculative answers of various kinds have been given, both by Rahner himself and by his followers, even if the critics remain largely unsatisfied. They turn, crucially, on the claim that this ‘transcendental experience’ never takes place on its own, despite some of Rahner’s wilder formulations. The abstract idiom indicates, not some supposedly pure ‘spiritual’ sphere separated from the messiness of everyday life, but rather a respect for the diversity of the Spirit’s working. If I articulate my experience of God’s Spirit simply through a narrative of my experience, then I am putting forward my experience as a norm for you. The abstract idiom—like the sober, elliptical expressions of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*—respects your freedom to be different, enables you to live the message in a way that perhaps I could never dream of.

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This article, however, is something other than a further attempt to make that legitimate case. Instead, it will look at the prison letters of Alfred Delp, a Jesuit contemporary of both Rahner and von Balthasar. Had he lived, he too would probably have made a major contribution to Catholic intellectual life. He was no Marxist, but his writings show a critical awareness of religion’s role in society and of the need for correction and purification on the structural level as well as on the individual one. But his life was cut short; he was executed by the Nazis in 1945.

Implicit in von Balthasar’s most extended critique of Rahner’s ideas is a claim that they can never sustain a martyr. In this context, Delp’s case becomes all the more interesting, because he was a participant in the renewal of Catholic intellectual life in Germany between the wars—which in Jesuit circles included the discovery of the Ignatian sources. There was indeed thought in the early 1940s that he might collaborate with both Rahner and von Balthasar on a large systematic theological work, though von Balthasar seems to have been sceptical about Delp’s abilities. Delp was arrested precisely because he was involved in discussions about how Germany was to be reconstituted politically and culturally once the war had ended. He is a witness, therefore, to how the spirituality sustained by that renewal appears when faced with violent political opposition.

We are fortunate to have in English now not only a reissue of Delp’s more extended meditations, but also a substantial collection of the much more immediate and emotionally raw letters that he was able to write to various friends and acquaintances. Delp’s prison writings

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9 An exchange of letters between Delp and the German intellectual Karl Thieme, reproduced in the third volume of Alfred Delp, Gesammelte Schriften, edited by Roman Bleistein, 5 volumes (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1982-1987), contains one of the first discussions of Nadal’s simul in actione contemplativus.

10 The story, which in hindsight seems quite incredible, is set out in Karl H. Neufeld, Die Brüder Rahner: Eine Biographie (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 178-186. A version of the scheme for the project appeared as ‘A Scheme for a Treatise of Dogmatic Theology’, T1 I, 19-37; see also p.14.

11 A conventional review might perhaps express regret that the opportunity was not taken to publish the two together, on the basis of the much fuller Bleistein edition, and also to make a better attempt at completeness. But the nature of the texts makes any edition or translation problematic. Together, these US American volumes provide a serviceable introduction to a figure who deserves to be much better known than he is.
show us that critics—both conservative and liberationist—of Rahnerian theology and spirituality need to make their case more carefully. By no means is this vision politically impotent; by no means has it nothing to say when tested to the uttermost.

**Alfred Delp’s Life**

Alfred Delp was born in the southern German city of Mannheim in 1907. Shortly after leaving school in 1926, he joined the Jesuits, and embarked on the long process of training. He showed particular ability in philosophy and the social sciences, and a piece he produced as a student on what were then the new ideas of Martin Heidegger was eventually worked up into a book: *Tragische Existenz* (1935), the first serious Roman Catholic reaction to Heidegger’s work. He was ordained in 1937, and in 1939 joined the staff of the German Jesuit periodical, *Stimmen der Zeit*.

In 1941, *Stimmen* was forced to cease publication; its offices and the living quarters of its editors were seized by the Gestapo. Delp at this point moved out of community, and took charge of a beautiful baroque church, St Georg’s, Bogenhausen, a district of Munich. The post was also set up in such a way as to leave him free for a wide variety of other work such as lecturing and writing.

One of these freelance activities consisted in work with a group which the Gestapo were later to call the Kreisauer Kreis (Kreisau Circle), under the leadership of a young German count and lawyer, Helmuth James von Moltke, in 1942 and 1943. The Gestapo’s title derives from Moltke’s estate at Kreisau in Silesia, now part of Poland.

What distinguished this particular group was an interest in Christian Socialism transcending confessional barriers in a way that was then unusual and prophetic. Hence its membership included clergy and union leaders. Delp’s major Jesuit superior, Augustin Rösch, had been recruited in 1941; Delp himself joined later in 1942, following a request from von Moltke to Rösch (in the latter’s words)

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14 The English ‘James’ because his mother was South African. His letters to his wife have been published in English: *Letters to Freya: 1939-1945*, edited and translated by Beate Ruhm von Oppen (London: Collins Harvill, 1991).
for ‘a sociologist with whom he could, above all, discuss the problem of the workers and how the world of German workers could once again become Christian’. The group met three times in 1942 and 1943. When Delp arrived in Tegel prison in Berlin, he found that the Protestant chaplain was known to him: Harald Poelchau had himself been a member of Moltke’s circle.

On 20 July 1944, Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, a member of the General Staff, attempted to assassinate Hitler in his East Prussian retreat. The attempt failed, and the result was a wave of arrests among resistance figures. Delp was taken into custody on 28 July after the morning Mass at St Georg’s.

We know almost nothing about Delp’s first months in captivity. He remained in Munich till the night of 6 August, when he was transferred to Berlin. On or around 15 August, Delp was interrogated and tortured, and he remained in a Gestapo prison until September 27, when he was transferred to the civil prison in Tegel.

This was a significant move. Whereas it was almost impossible for outsiders to establish contact with inmates in a Gestapo prison, conditions were much looser in what was still administered as a straightforward gaol for common criminals. It was only after the transfer that Delp was able to celebrate Mass, to keep the reserved

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15 Bleistein, Alfred Delp, 259.
16 He seems to have been arrested because his name was given under interrogation by Count Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, a member of the Kreisau Circle heavily incriminated in the assassination plot. Whether Delp himself knew of Stauffenberg’s intentions seems doubtful. For reasons that are unclear, Delp had indeed visited Stauffenberg on the evening of 6 June, which was of course D-Day. But the evidence suggests that he was not privy to Stauffenberg’s plans. Whatever the truth (and one cannot exclude the possibility that Delp did know, maybe under the seal of confession), not even Nazi justice made that charge stick.
Eucharist in his cell, and to write extensively. The material was smuggled in and out with his laundry.

From here onwards, we can follow Delp's story through his writings. One high point came when he was enabled to take his final vows as a Jesuit. For reasons probably known only to people now dead, Delp's final vows, originally planned for 1943, had been delayed until August 1944, by which time he was in solitary confinement. On 8 December, however, he was visited by Fr Franz von Tattenbach, and was able to pronounce his vows in Tattenbach's presence. Over the Advent and Christmas periods particularly he was able to write the strikingly moving meditations we find in the Orbis Books volume. Eventually he was tried, between 9 and 11 January 1945. In the end, any association with the Stauffenberg plot was forgotten: his crime was simply to have been a Jesuit associated with the Kreisau circle, and for that he was sentenced to death. Normally the execution would have followed almost immediately, but for some mysterious reason he was left alive another three weeks or so, even as the others condemned with him were gradually taken off to be hanged. Finally his turn came on the morning of 2 February, he was taken the short distance from Tegel to the execution prison at Plötzensee. It was both a First Friday—‘always special days for me’—and a day on which Jesuits customarily take final vows.

Walking the Tightrope

The sheer human richness of Delp's writing becomes clear in the first letter that Coady reproduces. It is written to Luise Oestreicher, the secretary at St Georg's, to whom Delp was clearly very close:

Dear L,

I'm writing you a few greetings again. I don't know if they'll get to you. Just as I don't know about anyone at all except the people handcuffed here, who are becoming fewer every day. ‘Unicus et pauper sum ego’, ‘I have become very alone and wretched’, it says in a Psalm. I'm so grateful for the host, which I've had here in my

17 For a judicious and discreet discussion of this issue, see Bleistein, Alfred Delp, 331-332.
18 Coady, With Bound Hands, 107. Subsequent references to the Coady volume are given by page number within the text. Where appropriate, the translation has been modified.
19 Psalm 25:16 (Vulgate).
cell since October 1. It breaks the loneliness, although, shame to say, sometimes I'm so tired and devastated that I simply can't take this reality in any more.

At the moment, I need all my strength to cope with a toothache and the pain from inflammation in my sinuses. I hope it won't fester. That's always nasty for me.

I can't write much to you today; it's not a good day. Sometimes a person's whole fate crowds together in one great heap and settles itself on their heart, and one really doesn't know how long the heart can be asked to take it all.

I still haven't heard anything from you. But it's obviously very difficult now. How's it all going to go on?

I believe in God and in life. And whatever we pray for in faith will happen for us. Faith is the secret. And I don't think that God will let me choke …. Even this situation doesn't turn on more than that. God has radically taken me up on what I used to say: with Him alone one can live, and cope with one's fate. ...

I'd ask very much for a couple of Masses in St Georg's if that's possible. At any rate, I must now rely very much on the communion I share with good people. My own strength is gone. Dios sólo basta—'God alone suffices'. I used to say that in the past when I was very sure of myself. And look at me now. Up till now, everything I have done has been false and it has got worse and worse. But tell Tattenbach and Dold that they should pray in the Society hard. There's nothing more they can do either. Were I worth millions, there'd be some people who'd know ways of getting right to the top, but as it is I am simply a beaten up and failed human being. The way lies along a tightrope—may it be taken in God's name …. (pp.88-89)

Delp is in touch with his conflicting feelings, and gives them powerful expression. Moving testimonies of faith intermingle with desperate desires for self-preservation—he can encourage his Jesuit brethren, for example, to activate indirect contacts with no less gruesome a figure than Himmler.\[21\]

\[20\] Two Jesuits in Munich.

\[21\] Delp, Gesammelte Schriften 4, 58.
Delp writes up his moments of growth in terms that resemble Rahner’s—what is normally implicit, or what has merely been a slogan in our lives, becomes challengingly real:

Life has become so enormously vivid in these long weeks. Much that was previously just on the surface is now experienced in the third dimension. Things seem simpler, yet sharper, more angular. But most of all Almighty God has become so much more real and active. Much that previously I thought I knew and believed—I’m believing and living it now.

For example: how I used to mouth off the spiel about hope and trust. Now I know from experience that I was as stupid and silly as a child. How I have cheated my life of its strength and depth, my work of its fruitfulness, my people of blessing because I wasn’t sufficiently capable of taking seriously, from the heart and honestly, God’s word about the confidence that calls on Him. (p.132)

Imprisonment and the threat of death was something that happened to Delp; he was constantly, dramatically dependent on outer events that he could not control. But these events carried the grace of God for him only because they interacted with the grace within himself. The potential for grace diffused over the creation, and therefore latent in every human heart, only becomes real when confronted with something from outside—something which may be quite unpredictable. Moreover, the process is not static: the self changes as a result. Delp’s writings—whether or not his shortcomings were real—speak frequently of his need for repentance.

Delp will sometimes speak loftily of being the ‘summit of Dasein’, and more generally of high peaks. But what he experiences as a greater closeness to God, a greater spiritual authenticity, is also an enriched experience of the creation. A letter to Luise Oestreicher speaks of three executions that have taken place, and continues:

Inside myself, I have much to do with the Lord God: much to question, much to surrender. One point is clear and palpable in a way as it rarely has been: the world is so full of God. It’s as though from every pore of things God is streaming out and confronting us. But we’re often blind. We remain stuck in the good times and in the bad, and don’t stay with the experiences right up to their source, where they flow out from God. (p.92)
The enriched involvement extends to people and to the Church. To the women almoners who were providing for his needs, Delp wrote:

I make the effort and am discovering ever new sides to God: the world is full of God. Even misery is the coming of God … You've already helped me so much. The experience that a piece of bread can be a great grace is new for me. But just the awareness that there are people nearby who care about one and have a feeling for one is so often a great comfort.

Precisely because Delp's prison letters are so intensely personal and introspective, they are redolent of his relationships. He clearly feels dependent on others' prayers at every turn. It is in this sense that Delp's experience of God is also an experience of the Church, an experience of enriched, indeed definitive, incorporation into the body of Christ. He could write prophetically about the future of the Church, of how it was simply sterile and irrelevant to carry on old interconfessional arguments about who was right and wrong at the time of the Reformation. Rather the love for Christ which led him into resistance enabled him also to discover a kinship across barriers. One member of the Kreisau circle imprisoned with him was a Lutheran pastor, Eugen Gerstenmeier. At the turn of 1944-5, Delp wrote to Gerstenmeier thanking him for a Christmas gift, whatever that could have been:

And when we're out of here again, let's show that it meant and means more than a personal relationship. The historical burden of the separated Churches we'll still have to carry as a burden and a legacy. But this should never again bring Christ into disrepute. I have as little belief as you in idealistic mish-mashes, but the one Christ is undivided, and where undivided love for him leads us, much will turn out better for us than it did for our squabbling predecessors and contemporaries. As well as Mass, I have the Blessed Sacrament permanently in my cell, and I often talk to the Lord about you. He is consecrating us here for a new mission. (pp.135-136)

Yet, as the quotation testifies, this expansiveness was rooted in an ever deeper commitment to the central symbols of Delp's own

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tradition: the Eucharists that he could celebrate at night ‘with chained hands’; the gospels through which ‘the figure of the Lord over and over again finds new ways to touch the soul’ (p.45); the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

**Fixed Points**

I am suggesting that Delp’s story illustrates how we should understand the abstractions of Rahner’s theology. The ‘experience of transcendence’ occurs in and through encounter with the surprises of history. It involves conversion, transformation, and growth in solidarity. It also involves commitment and decisions—but commitment to a God whose designs remain unknown to us, who is Mystery. Rahner’s critics worry that his theology is too tentative, not sufficiently committed to definite options. The truth, rather, is that the commitment is to a God who may indeed be at work in our choices, but in ways that we can never control. We may be confident that God remains with us in life and in death, but our conceptions of how this is so remain permanently provisional, permanently open to correction. The experience of martyrdom is thus an ambiguous, tentative affair, to be endured in trust rather than in confident knowledge. What you are dying for is permanently able to call you into question.

When Delp takes his vows, he rejoices that ‘my life has now taken on its authentic and finally valid form’. ‘The Lord God has given me a fixed point in his universe—something I have long waited for.’

The theme recurs after the trial, in language that uncannily anticipates what Rahner would write some ten years later about ‘transcendence becoming thematic’. During Delp’s trial, it became clear that he was not to die for alleged complicity in the Stauffenberg plot, but simply because he had, as a Christian and a Jesuit, worked for values that the

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23 In letters to his almoners omitted by Coady; see Delp, Gesammelte Schriften 4, 42, 73.
24 It is, of course, quite possible that Rahner’s ideas were circulating informally among German Jesuits in the 1940s.
Nazi regime could not tolerate, and planned for the future of Germany after Hitler's downfall. This consoled Delp uncannily. Previously his suffering and impending execution had had kein richtiges Thema: it had not been about anything sensible, anything of which Delp was really guilty. But now the values that had sustained all his living and acting, had become thematic:

Through the way the process has run, my life has received a worthy focal point (Thema), something for which one can live and die. (p.169)

As God’s grace touches us, it is our relationship that deepens, and hence the authenticity of our choices. As we learn to live more intensely in the reality of God, and abandon what Delp calls ‘a life of halves and quarters’, our options look different. Our perspective changes; we are free to engage with reality more authentically. And this remains so, earthily so, even though God does not—in the way we might sometimes dream of—intervene to make one path plain. Delp is in fact repeatedly aware, even after his trial, of how things could still turn out either way:

25 Delp, Gesammelte Schriften 4, 94.
Almighty God has never put me into such darkness before. But my desire is to stay firm. Either He wants the sacrifice or He wants me to trust right up to the crucial test. My desire is to try. Either he is sowing me as seed or he is preparing me to do something big. (p.193)

I’ll see you again, one place or the other. (p.204)

Moreover, we ourselves never quite have the luxury of being sure we know what we are about. Immediately after the trial, Delp writes:

These last few days I have been doubtful, and wondered if I have become a victim of self-deception, if my will to live has been sublimated into religious illusions, or what it’s all been about. (p.181)

For all the human immediacy of Delp’s texts, we have no conclusive answer to that question. Like Eliot’s Becket, he has to live with a spectre of doubt:

The last temptation is the greatest treason
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.  

All we know—though this is a significant claim—is that such a question is worth asking. Christianity assures us that grace is distinguishable from neurosis, even if we remain tentative about any particular attempt to make the distinction. Faith gives us fixed points that enable us to endure the mystery, in whatever surprising and self-subverting way it might emerge:

Since the Blessed Sacrament has been here, the world has become much better again; and so I want to hand myself over further to God’s freedom and God’s goodness, and make the effort not to deny Him anything. And yet remain confident that he will bring us across the lake without us going under. (p.95)

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Rahner and the Witness of Martyrdom

At least in some respects, Delp and Rahner were kindred spirits. In one of his prophetic pieces, Delp had spoken of the passion and dynamism required for ministry in a post-Christian culture:

The Society must again become a source for springs of creativity. I hope very much Karl Rahner manages that for theology.²⁷

As an old man, Rahner wrote the introduction to the first volume of Delp's collected writings when they appeared in 1982. Delp's work was theologically dated, but,

... these texts nevertheless bear testimony to what Delp lived and died for. As such testimony, they are still worth printing and reading even today. For when one reads them as such testimony, one is not just reading printed sheets of paper. And only when one reads them in this way can one really understand them and value them properly.²⁸

Rahner himself lies buried next to the remains of Johann Schwingshackl, a Jesuit who died of pneumonia in a Nazi prison while awaiting execution. And in 1961, Rahner gave the ordination retreat for the candidates in the Jesuit community in Innsbruck.²⁹ Perhaps symbolically, we only have a fragment of the opening talk of this retreat. The text breaks off in mid-sentence:

The most important Exercises in life are mostly not made during the Exercises as such. Rather they happen where God brings us up against life's final, bitter, serious moment ....

Among those hearing that talk was Ignacio Ellacuría, who would, twenty-eight years later, be martyred in El Salvador.³⁰

The intellectual and spiritual renewal in German Catholicism between the wars led Rahner to develop a theology leading Roman

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²⁷ Delp, Gesammelte Schriften 4, 326. This text was still unpublished when the translation used in Prison Writings was made.
²⁸ Delp, Gesammelte Schriften 1, 44.
³⁰ My discovery of the fragment in the Rahner Archive took place a week or so after Ellacuría's death. The theme of providence and coincidence in Delp's prison writings is a significant one, but there is no space here.
Catholics at once to a deeper grasp of their best tradition and to far-reaching institutional and cultural change. For his part, Delp shows the toughness and challenge of what was being discovered in the ressourcement movement. Far from representing a mere sell-out to modernity, it points us constantly forward to the subversive and surprising ways in which the grace of a God can become manifest—a God who has no favourites, and who is present in all things.

For Rahner, Christian revelation was symbolic in structure. Its function was not to ‘contain’ grace. Rather it purified our commitment; it pointed us forward and outward to a grace present in the whole cosmos; it liberated us for right action. When this theology is placed alongside the witness of Delp, an English-speaking reader cannot but be reminded of lines from another powerful expression of Christian faith to emerge from World War II: Eliot’s ‘Little Gidding’: Eliot muses on those who died in an earlier conflict, the English Civil War, wondering why we somehow celebrate ‘these dead men more than the dying’. It is not that we can somehow revive their struggles:

These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.
Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

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*WITH BOUND HANDS
A Jesuit in Nazi Germany
Mary Frances Coady*

Alfred Delp was a proud German, a Jesuit priest, a resister of Nazism, and a martyr. Executed in 1945 for crimes against the Third Reich, Delp left a legacy in letters written from his prison cell. *With Bound Hands: A Jesuit in Nazi Germany* tells of Delp’s life and his spiritual transformation in the face of imminent death.


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FREEDOM, MARRIED LOVE AND THE EXERCISES

Thomas M. Kelly

I WRITE AS A MARRIED LAY THEOLOGIAN, and as a member of Ignatian Associates.

For me, therefore, the question of the relevance of Ignatian spirituality to a life of committed married love is not an abstract one. How can the Exercises deepen my lived commitments? Should the experience my wife and I have had of the full Exercises in daily life be making a significant difference to our marriage and family life? In this article, I want to reflect on the theme of freedom in the Exercises, and on the ways in which this freedom can be expressed in the commitments of marital love.

Freedom in the Spiritual Exercises

Ignatius presupposes that people making the Exercises already possess their freedom. They are to enter the Exercises in a very similar frame of mind to that in which they are to leave them. The offering of one's freedom stands at the beginning and at the end of the thirty days. Whatever one says about 'freedom' in Ignatius, one cannot say in any simple way that it is the achievement or purpose of the Exercises as Ignatius used that term. Freedom constitutes a presupposition of the Exercises, the condition for their possibility, rather than their product.

Michael J. Buckley SJ argues that the term libertarian (translated as freedom) 'occurs seven times in the Exercises, but at junctures that are

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1 Ignatian Associates are Roman Catholic adults, both married and single. The movement was founded in connection with the 1991 Ignatian jubilee, and decisively encouraged by the 1995 Jesuit General Congregation. Following a two-year formation programme rooted in the Ignatian Exercises, Ignatian Associates may accept an invitation to make public 'promises' of 'simplicity of life, fidelity to the gospel and to our associate and Jesuit companions, and apostolic availability'. See http://www.ignatianassociates.com.

critically suggestive of the peculiar meaning that it possesses for Ignatius.\(^3\) In Buckley’s analysis of the Exercises the goal of freedom is ultimately interpersonal self-donation. In this light, the Exercises appear as a vitally important source of nourishment for married love.

Let us begin with the fifth Annotation:

For the one receiving the Exercises, it does much good to enter into them with great courage and generosity towards their Creator and Lord, offering Him all their will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use both of their person and of all that they have according to His most holy will. (Exx 5)

Clearly, the exercitant already has ‘liberty’ or ‘freedom’. For Buckley, this annotation points to a three-stage process. Firstly the exercitant recognises, acknowledges their freedom. Secondly, this freedom, this ‘liberality and magnanimity’, is offered to God. Thirdly, if God wills, this liberality is accepted by God, so that God can ‘enter, dispose, employ and pattern that life as He wishes’.

A second text on freedom in the *Spiritual Exercises* highlighted by Buckley is the Examen:

I presuppose that there are three kinds of thoughts in me: that is, one my own, which springs from my mere liberty and will; and two others, which come from without, one from the good spirit, and the other from the bad. (Exx 32)

Interestingly, what is truly one’s own is only what issues from one’s free will. ‘By liberty and choice a person incorporates into the self what is to constitute its definition.’ Here Ignatius is *identifying* the self with its freedom—a point that will be important for us as this essay proceeds.

Buckley also refers to the challenge issued in the Principle and Foundation. ‘For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things (in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it).’ (Exx 23) ‘Freedom’ here ceases just to be a possibility that could be used for either good or bad and becomes ‘the freedom that unites with desire and underlies determination’—in other

\(^3\) The following paragraphs derive from Buckley, ‘Freedom, Election and Self-Transcendence’, 68.
words, free choice. Our free choices determine who we become. We literally become that in which we choose to participate.

Buckley then turns to the first meditation of the Exercises to continue his argument for ‘freedom as the ambivalent potentiality for self-determination’. Ignatius writes:

I say draw into memory the sin of the Angels, how they, created in grace, not wanting to help themselves with their liberty to reverence and obey their Creator and Lord, coming to pride, were changed from grace to malice, and hurled from Heaven to Hell. (Exx 50)

In this meditation ‘grace does not substitute for freedom’; even in a profoundly graced life—that of the Angels—freedom ‘is still a question’. The question for Ignatius is ‘what are you going to do with your freedom?’ To answer that question is to actualise oneself profoundly. To suppress that question is to destroy one’s own humanity. The point is confirmed in the ‘Take, Lord, receive’.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all that I have and possess. You gave it to me: to you, Lord, I return it; it is all yours; dispose it entirely to your will; give me your love and grace—that is enough for me. (Exx 234)

Freedom, therefore, is a reality in the person whom the Exercises presuppose. My free choice to become this or that, my answer to the question of what I am doing with my freedom, defines who I am. And my freedom has a specific purpose: it enables me to enter more fully into relationship with God through a surrender of my freedom and will to Him. This last point is crucial. The purpose of freedom in the Exercises is not to achieve more freedom, but to develop the capacity to surrender one’s freedom to the incomprehensible mystery of God. Personal freedom ought to end in interpersonal liberality and mutuality. Indeed, the purpose of personal liberty is nothing other than interpersonal liberality, mutual love.

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For Buckley, therefore, ‘the person is their freedom’. Without freedom, there is no authentic subjectivity or self-responsibility. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of this freedom is self-donation, self-giving love into the freedom of an Other, namely God. But this love for the transcendent God has nevertheless to be shown in deeds and events. It needs to be objectified, and married love is one such objectification. We need, therefore, to explore the connections between the love of God which is the goal of the spiritual life and the objectifications of this love in such vocations as marriage. And we can turn to the theology of Karl Rahner for one classic account of the matter.\(^7\)

**Love of God and Love of Neighbour**

When human life is lived to the full, the ‘I’ is always related to a ‘Thou’. We experience our own subjectivity only as we encounter others, in dialogue and in trustful and loving encounter. Moreover,

\(^7\) I have written on this elsewhere, see Thomas M. Kelly, ‘Love of Neighbour in Karl Rahner’s Anthropology: Implications for a Theology of Marriage’, in INTAMS Review, 10/1 (Spring 2004), 61-73.
human beings experience themselves by experiencing the other as person rather than as thing. Self-discovery is impossible apart from the simultaneous discovery of one's neighbour.  

It follows that the experience of discovering the self's freedom and of giving it over to God that we find in the Exercises depends on how we have donated that freedom to others in the concrete reality of life. One's experience of oneself and one's encounter with the 'Thou' is the 'same experience under two different aspects'.

For Rahner, caritas (charity, love of neighbour) is not something which 'vanishes in its ground, the love of God, dissolving itself or becoming in itself unimportant'. Moreover, neither one's love of neighbour nor one's love of God can be experienced exclusively on their own, as if the other did not exist. Support for this claim, can be found in Scripture. St Paul understands,

... love of neighbour ... as the fulfilment of the law (Romans 13:8, 10; Galatians 5:14), and hence as the 'bond' of perfection (Colossians 3:14) and as the better 'way', in other words as the Christian form of existence simply and finally (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13).

The double commandment expressed in Matthew 22 and Mark 12 is, as a single reality,

... valued in the Synoptic tradition as the life-giving (Luke 10:28) epitome of the Old Testament revelation in the Scriptures and the prophets (Matthew 22:40), greater than which there is nothing (Mark 12:31).

Love of neighbour becomes the only criterion in the gospels by which humanity will be judged (Matthew 25:34-46). In the Johannine literature, the claim is made even more radically:

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12 For the scriptural argument here, see ‘Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God’, 234-236.
According to John, we are loved by God (John 15:12) and by Christ so that we may love one another (John 13:34), a love which is the new commandment of Christ (John 13:34), which is his specifically (John 15:12), and which is the task imposed on us (John 15:17). And so, for John, the consequence of this is that God, who is love (1 John 4:16), has loved us, not so that we might love Him in return, but so that we might love one another (1 John 4:7,11). For after all we do not see God—God cannot be authentically reached just in Gnostic-mystic interiority alone, as if love conceived in this way could really attain God; and hence the ‘God in us’ of mutual love is the only God whom we can love (1 John 4:12), to such an extent that it is really true ... that ‘those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen’ (1 John 4:20).

But just how is this identity between the two commandments to be understood? Does Scripture maintain that the love of neighbour is some kind of preliminary stage prior to a more authentic and purer love of God alone? Rahner does not think so. He notes that the scholastic tradition had always consistently taught that love of neighbour was an aspect of,

... the infused supernatural theological virtue of caritas, by which we love God in His Spirit for His own sake and in direct community with Him.\(^{13}\)

This means that love of neighbour is not simply preparatory to a supposedly higher love of God, nor for that matter merely an outflowing of love for God. Rather, love of neighbour is, in itself, an act of loving God.

If it is only in self-giving that human freedom is realised, and that the goal of the Exercises is attained, then the external world is essential to human flourishing. The experience of creaturely freedom and responsibility occurs only through a particular kind of interaction with persons:

... the loving communication with the human Thou as such (not as mere negation of the 'I' of nor as something different from the 'I'—an 'I' which just wants to find itself, even though in the other).

\(^{13}\) Rahner, ‘Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God’, 236.
Rahner can then conclude:

The act of personal love for the human ‘Thou’ is therefore the all-embracing, fundamental human act, an act giving meaning, direction and measure to everything else.\(^\text{14}\)

It is important to emphasize two points. First, love is never ‘had’ here and now. Love is not a static reality, but rather something that is always in the process of becoming, and of becoming more:

Love today is, therefore, what it should be today only if it acknowledges today that it is something of which more will be demanded tomorrow, if it is really already making tomorrow’s demand of itself today.\(^\text{15}\)

Love even between human persons never rests motionless; it always intends more, desires more, and is more, all the way into that mystery that we call God. Secondly, love of neighbour is not love of God simply because it might somehow intend God as it passes through neighbour. For Rahner, caritas is nothing other than interpersonal love understood explicitly in its full theological context, for the God whom we love in caritas is really present, through God’s self-gift of grace, in the human other.\(^\text{16}\) Moreover we have no other access to God. This openness can only occur in the concrete, with and through a specific person, in specific acts of personal and radical self-donation. It is a specific person who is the goal and end of intentional love, not some distant horizon. It is precisely in the free and loving experience of the human other, of the Thou, that we can embrace and accept—but never control—the reality of God within which we live and move and have our being.

The categorial and explicit love of neighbour is the primary act of the love of God. The love of God unreflectively but really and always intends God … in the love of neighbour as such. Moreover,


\(^\text{15}\) Rahner, ‘The “Commandment” of Love’, 452. This article has an interesting discussion of the place of love in relation to the other virtues, especially in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

\(^\text{16}\) Rahner, ‘Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and Love of God’, 243: ‘... caritas means nothing other than the absolute radicality of this love (love of the human other), given that this love is open to the immediacy of the God who communicates His own Self in grace’.
the explicit love of God has as its vehicle that opening in trusting love to the whole of reality which takes place in the love of neighbour. It is radically true—a matter of metaphysics and ontology, and not merely ‘moral’ or psychological necessity—that those who do not love the sister or brother whom they ‘see’ cannot love God, whom they do not see, either. Moreover, one can only love God whom one does not see in and through, as a loving person, loving one’s visible sister or brother.17

What, then, of marital love? While Rahner limits his consideration of ‘love’ to caritas, I suggest that other dimensions of love, in addition to this one, can be, and indeed must be, part of our journey toward God.18

**Eros and Philia**

Freedom has been given to us so that we may give ourselves in return: we surrender ‘all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all that I have and possess’ (Exx 234). Most Christians live out this self-surrendering love through marriage,19 which involves—even if always in imperfect form—elements of erotic love (eros) and friendship (philia), as well as unconditional love (caritas, agape). Ignatian spirituality can help a person discern how they are to give themselves to the particular other whom they love in a privileged, exclusive way—in other words to their marriage partner. In this context too, the Election can occur, the Election ‘in which the providence of God and the choice of the person become one’.20

Any honest theological consideration of marriage in the light of the Exercises must move beyond idealization to lived reality. The different loves (eros, philia, agape) have often been treated as if they were separate realities—realities which may perhaps coincide in certain relationships such as marriage, but which are better considered

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18 Where Rahner uses the term caritas, I use the term agape.
19 In this essay, I presume a sacramental marriage in the Catholic tradition as the context out of which I write. However, I do not limit these reflections to only Catholic, or even Christian, marriage.
individually, if not indeed as in conflict. I want to argue by contrast that *eros*, *philia* and *agape* are closely interdependent. If, for all their difference, marriage does not somehow unite them, then sacramental married love is neither sacramental, nor married, nor love.

Sexual love at its deepest involves profound reciprocity. One brings one’s entire self, needs, desires, and hopes into the self of another; at the same time, one receives the other’s needs, desires and hopes in a reverent, fitting manner. In an article published some years ago, the French psychologist Antoine Vergote described sexual love (*eros*) in terms very similar to those which Rahner used for *caritas* or unconditional love (*agape*) and warned against idealistic accounts of Christian marriage that ignore the erotic:

> … sexual love, and therefore love within marriage, is made up of the unity in tension of diametrically opposed forces and tendencies: tenderness and aggressivity, sensual taking and gratuitous giving.

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By failing to recognise the dynamic structure of sexual love, one condemns the enterprise of a love marriage to failure.\(^{22}\)

In this context, fidelity becomes particularly significant. Only a relationship of fidelity will enable the trust necessary to express one’s sexual yearnings fully and honestly. True self-communication in sexual love presupposes a freely chosen marriage commitment.

Vergote is here deepening Rahner’s account of *agape* by introducing elements of *eros*. In particular, this account of marital love depends on the freedom which the Exercises nourish. Through erotic desire, sexual love seeks to know and communicate itself dialogically in the context of radical fidelity. It surrenders the self to another, and in so doing proclaims the absolute value of the other. A married person’s freedom, dependence and responsibility come to life in the self-surrender implicit in their marriage commitment—a self-surrender presupposing a basic or primal trust learned through previous relationships. This radical gift of self to the other, and the radical acceptance of the other as gift, is also the visible way in which we make a reality of God’s love for us.

The sexual act brings about union, not fusion. A rightly ordered *eros*, however strong the temporary sense of oneness, involves an acceptance of the other’s distance and difference. The other remains a Thou. The other cannot be reduced to what satisfies my needs, or to what I find useful.

The Irish moral theologian Enda McDonagh complements Vergote’s insight by introducing *philia* or friendship into the picture.\(^{23}\) Friendship mediates and moderates the claims of sexual desire; in turn, sexual encounter can strengthen friendship. *Philia* ‘can provide the proper setting for *eros*-love’, while *eros* can enrich *philia* through ‘the desire for the delight in the company of the other’. Moreover,

\[
\ldots \text{(d)esire-love may develop into friendship love and even Christian love, but unlike them it seeks at first the good of the} \]

\[^{22}\text{From a typescript translation of Antoine Vergote, ‘Eclairage psychologique sur le mariage d’amour et ses conditions de réussite’, INTAMS Review, 3/2 (1997).}\]

desire-lover rather than that of the desired-loved. It is what attracts … the desiring subject that is the trigger. In the further exchange of human subjects, desire may begin to fit into a broader context; \textit{eros} may begin to assume some of the reciprocity and benevolence of \textit{philia}.

Moreover, when we recognise that \textit{eros} and \textit{philia} are mediators of \textit{agape}, we get beyond the destructive rigorism often found in the tradition:

\textit{Agape}-love cannot escape or skip over the human. It must move through these supremely human dimensions of \textit{eros} and \textit{philia}. It does not replace them. It transforms them. In personal and ecclesial history \textit{agape} as love of God has been used to suppress human relations with the neighbour or spouse or children. The corruptions by which people are used as stepping-stones to God, or ignored in the pursuit of loving God only, need the corrections of \textit{philia} and \textit{eros}.

The friendship that occurs within marriage can point beyond itself:

Human otherness in friendship and marriage can open the path to divine otherness. Friendship and marriage draw people beyond themselves. They suggest a transcendence of the human partnership. They encourage the risk of following through to the inexhaustible and finally unknowable origin and fulfilment of such living and loving, the ultimate in otherness. They move people towards the great risk of God, of accepting and delighting in the God who is love.

\textbf{Beyond Perfectionism}

Thomas Aquinas taught that the divine \textit{caritas} was based on a ‘communication’ of God’s own happiness to us. It is therefore not simply transcendent. It includes also a human response to the divine initiative, a response that takes the form of friendship with God. When Ignatius speaks, in the context of a prayer about divine love, of how love is \textit{comunicación} between lover and beloved (Exx 231), he is echoing Thomas’s teaching about \textit{caritas} involving a form of friendship. And what for Thomas distinguishes true friendship from the lesser love

\footnote{McDonagh, ‘Friendship, Marriage and the Risk of God’, 150-152.}
that is merely disguised self-interest is its desire for another person’s
good.\footnote{See \textit{Summa theologiae}, 2-2. 23.1.}

If marriage is a sacrament, it should somehow embody the divine
love, \textit{caritas}, \textit{agape}. This ideal may seem impossibly high. But perhaps if
we understand that in marriage \textit{agape} is inextricably linked not only
with \textit{philia} but also with \textit{eros}, we may be able to develop a more
realistic vision. No-one has ever argued that either \textit{eros} or \textit{philia} must
be perfectly realised in married love. Perhaps, then, the same can apply
to marital \textit{agape}. There is a kind of love, experienced within marital
life, that at least strives towards the disinterested self-giving that is
both \textit{agape} and \textit{philia}. But what might this look like?

Perhaps all we can do is to name some possible instances. The
experience of self-donation not only in moments of marital bliss, but
also, and especially, in moments of real suffering and poverty. The
experience of offering and accepting forgiveness, along with the free
and mutual acceptance of brokenness that such forgiveness implies.
The recognition that the patience, understanding and generosity of
both spouses have limits. The experience of transcending (which does
not mean neglecting) one’s own needs and wants for the good of the
other. If God’s own being is irrevocably united to humanity, then our
attempts to enter into a loving commitment with another are truly
expressions of \textit{agape}, of divine love, however limited and imperfect we
may be. When we make these attempts with all our mind, our spirit,
and indeed with our bodies, we enter at once into the mystery and
irreducibility which is another human being, and also into the mystery
which is the self-giving God.

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Retrieval of Experience} (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 2002). Both he and his wife
of twelve years, Lisa, are members of Ignatian Associates.
John Courtney Murray (1904-1967)

Thomas Hughson

John Courtney Murray, Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner—the three theologians whose centenaries this special number of *The Way* is celebrating—are important figures because they helped the Roman Catholic Church develop, even if rather belatedly, a carefully positive relationship to modernity. All three showed that something in the Church loved something, even if not everything, in ‘the modern world’.

Internationally, Murray may be the least familiar of the centenarians. He was an expert on Church-state relations and on religious liberty, and is best known for his work in producing *Dignitatis humanae*, the 1965 Declaration on Religious Freedom at Vatican II, a document which marked a turning-point in the self-understanding of Roman Catholics within pluralist and secular societies.

Murray’s work is a model of reflective inculturation. He recognised that the democratic heritage of the United States had something to offer Catholic tradition; the flow of teaching between Rome and the local church needed to be two-way rather than one-way.

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1 Of course it was not just Jesuits who were involved in this project, and perhaps we should mention with special honour another great figure born in 1904, the Dominican, Yves Congar.


3 Murray’s *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*, with a new introduction by Walter J. Burghardt (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1988 [1960]) is readily accessible. Other writings have been edited by J. Leon Hooper in *Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism, John Courtney Murray* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) and in *Bridging the Sacred and the Secular: Selected Writings of John Courtney Murray, S.J.* (Washington: Georgetown UP, 1994). Murray’s works are now most easily accessible through the on-line bibliography being developed by J. Leon Hooper at the Woodstock Theological Center in Georgetown University, Washington DC: http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/woodstock/library/0_murraybib.html.

*The Way*, 43/4 (October 2004), 95-109
Murray focused on universal truths spelt out in the Declaration of Independence and implicit in the Constitution and Bill of Rights: that all people are created equal; that all are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these rights are those to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness. The appeal to such truths was, for Murray, a matter of reason, and did not invoke Christian revelation or the Bible directly. Murray’s Catholic, natural-law style of moral theology, informed as it was by a neo-Thomist confidence in reason, overlapped with the Enlightenment deism of Thomas Jefferson. Both Murray and Jefferson tried to ground political claims on beliefs that God existed, that human beings were created, and that to follow the natural law on the basis of reason was to participate in the eternal law of divine reason. Problematic though Murray’s confidence may now seem to some, he was still asking an important question: can an appeal to universal human reason serve as a basis for universal human rights?

Murray’s work was obviously shaped by his experience as a citizen of the USA. But he had broad international experience and a truly catholic breadth of vision. He had studied at the Gregorian University in Rome in the late 1930s as a young Jesuit; he had spent time in Germany while enrolled at the Gregorian; his doctoral dissertation, submitted in 1937, was on Matthias Scheeben’s doctrine on faith.⁴ He

continually read historical works, and throughout his career he pursued an interest in ecumenical and interreligious cooperation for the common good of society. He was well aware of the defects of US culture.

After studies at the Gregorian, Murray began teaching courses on grace and the Trinity to Jesuit seminarians at Woodstock College in Maryland, but rather soon stepped from the seminary into a more public role. In 1941 he took up the task of editing a new journal sponsored by the US Jesuits, *Theological Studies*.

Murray’s research and reflection encouraged Catholic participation in the ecumenical, interreligious and pluralist civil life of the post-war United States, even when it met with some considerable opposition in Catholic circles. In the public sphere, he occasioned controversy by arguing in defence of government aid to Catholic schools. He was also noted for his advocacy of a ‘public philosophy’, grounded in natural law. Meanwhile, Jesuit seminarians knew Murray as a revered preacher of eight-day Ignatian retreats.

Murray might fairly be compared to Robert Bellarmine. Their views on the extent of papal power might have differed, but both were men of high public profile, service to the Church, and profound spirituality. Both, too, were regularly involved in public controversy.

**Murray, Vatican II and Religious Freedom**

By the time Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1959, Murray had become—despite the controversy that his positions occasioned—the foremost US Catholic theorist on religious liberty. Before the 1960 presidential election, the Kennedy campaign staff consulted him on Church-state relations in connection with Kennedy’s famous Houston speech on Catholicism and the presidency. Kennedy here defused fears that a Catholic in the White House would be subject to a Pope telephoning instructions to guide presidential decisions. After the Kennedy victory, *Time* magazine featured Murray on its cover.²

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²The portrait of John Courtney Murray SJ reproduced on the previous page was painted by Boris Chaliapin, and appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine on 12 December 1960, under the headline ‘US Catholics and the State’. The original portrait hangs in the lobby of America House, the office of
At Vatican II, following the second session, Murray was appointed ‘first scribe’ for the commission charged with producing a text on religious liberty. Though he was by no means the only author of *Dignitatis humanae*, he had an important role in shaping it. In the commission, Murray steadily argued through five drafts that religious liberty was best understood as primarily a political and legal reality owing its existence chiefly to modern consciousness and institutions. A decree on religious liberty should not appear as a Catholic initiative. The Council was approving ideas, practices and institutions that were already familiar, and accomplishing a belated *aggiornamento* that would bring the Church abreast with the modern world. Admittedly, Catholic tradition had always taught that faith was essentially free, but it had also consistently rejected, both in theory and practice, the idea of a human and civil right to religious liberty at large. This suggested a need for modesty, and even for a little chagrin. Triumphalism was out of place.

**Religion and Politics as a Dualism**

Murray’s line of argument at the Council was of a piece with his general reluctance to deduce particular political options from Christian sources. Instead he saw the gospel as a biblical leaven working from within upon Western political self-understanding and practice. Unobtrusively, Christianity had helped prepare the modern consciousness of human dignity and also the legal institutions designed to protect that dignity. Murray was well aware of the protracted conflicts between Church authorities and political leaders from the time of Constantine onwards. When popes had asserted their prerogative in teaching and in ministry, they were asserting Christianity’s emancipation from an undifferentiated sacral state which treated religion as just another sphere of existence subject to its authority. The mustard seed sown with the post-Constantinian papal defence of *libertas ecclesiae* (the freedom of the Church) became a tree of faith that sheltered civil society as a whole, and whose shade would nurture demands for individual freedom in religion.
At the same time, however, Christianity would frequently be tempted to go too far, and to seek to control society and culture. Examples are not hard to find. Augustine invoked civil authority against the Donatists; Aquinas argued for governmental action against heretics; Innocent III claimed that all temporal as well as spiritual power had passed from Jesus to Peter and thence to the popes, and on that basis he argued that popes had the right to seat and unseat emperors and kings.

Murray, by contrast, asserted that Christianity had introduced a radical duality between politics and religion:

... the essential political effect of Christianity was to destroy the classical view of society as a single homogeneous structure, within which the political power stood forth as the representative of society both in its religious and in its political aspects. Augustus was both Summus Imperator and Pontifex Maximus; the ius divinum was simply part of the ius civile; and outside the empire there was no civil society, but only barbarism. The new Christian view was based on a radical distinction between the order of the sacred and the order of the secular: 'Two there are, august Emperor, by which this world is ruled on title of original and sovereign right—the consecrated authority of the priesthood and the royal power'. In this celebrated sentence of Gelasius I, written to the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I in 494 AD, the emphasis laid on the word 'two' bespoke the revolutionary character of the Christian dispensation.

New Testament warrant for such a view could be found in Jesus’ saying about rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s (Mark 12:17). It had been Leo XIII’s achievement to retrieve this dualism; developing its modern significance was to be Murray’s task throughout his career. The pluralist democracy of the United States, with its lack of an established Church and its protection of the free exercise of religion, implicitly rested on such a dualism. By contrast, a totalitarian state was always seeking monism: in modernity, the subsumption of the Church’s authority by the state or vice versa.

7 Murray, We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition, 202.
Within such a twofold vision, freedom cut both ways. The state guaranteed the exercise of religion; equally, medieval kings could claim independence from ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the sphere of political judgment and action. Murray came increasingly to follow the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and John of Paris that the political structures in any society are temporal, and can be assessed in terms of the natural law. He came to disagree with Robert Bellarmine’s proposal that in religious emergencies a pope could temporarily or indirectly exercise authority over a political area for a good spiritual end. If apostolic jurisdiction is exerted only on the spiritual level, this purity greatly enhances the preaching of the gospel. Conversely, it is inappropriate for the state or the government to repress heresy by civil means, even if a pope or a bishop demands such measures for the sake of society’s spiritual welfare. Political authority has no mandate from the Creator to define or decide questions of religious belief and practice, or of ecclesiastical order. Its role—an important but limited one—is to provide for public safety, order and morality.

The Richness of the Anglo-Saxon Legacy

Though Murray asserted the relative autonomy of human reason, he was at one with the papacy’s consistent refusal to assign supremacy to individual reason, especially when this was extended in the form of a nation-state’s supreme authority in all zones of social existence (‘totalitarianism’). But the continental state absolutism, which Leo XIII knew from the aftermath of the French Revolution, was not the only model on the Western scene. There was also the Anglo-American tradition of constitutional government, which Murray considered to have been unknown to Leo XIII. There had been a medieval wisdom that recognised the dependence of political authority on the consent of the governed. This wisdom had been lost in the Catholic nations of Latin Europe, but it had been preserved in England, where the Magna Carta of 1215 had been the first of a long series of curtailments of monarchical power. From there, this tradition had passed to the United States.

For Murray, therefore, the Bill of Rights was not a piece of eighteenth-century rationalist theory, but rather the product of a Christian history carrying the idea of a natural law. Latin Europe’s concept of an absolute monarch ruling by divine right was, for Murray, a bad idea with demonstrably negative consequences. Governance under a constitution regulated the exercise of power by the rule of known public law. It protected Pope Gelasius’ concern for Christian freedom in a way that was quite impossible if a king could say, ‘l'état, c'est moi’.

Fostering Political Culture

Murray’s vision required a vigorous public consensus in support of the principles enshrined in a constitution. He was therefore preoccupied, to a quite striking extent, with what today would be called political culture and civil society. The state and the government exist for the good of society and of the people, not the other way around, even if states and governments often develop a momentum of their own that opposes this principle. The external and juridical structures of democracy may be necessary for collective well-being, but they are not sufficient to ensure it. The key to a democratic society’s health lies not simply in the proper functioning of political institutions, but in the vigour and sanity of its social life. General education and culture are as significant as civil structures. In their attempts to support democracies around the world, Western powers may look too much to elections, written laws, and willingness to compromise, while neglecting the essential roles of education, political culture, and formation in human dignity. The founding of the United States emerged from an informal civil and Christian culture, not from a preconceived, doctrinaire plan. Democracy can flourish in a society only if there are cultural resources supportive of self-government.

Conciliar Debates

In Murray’s vision, therefore, religious freedom depends on a recognition that the state’s authority is limited and does not extend to religion. But this was not the only theology of religious freedom to have influenced the final decree of Vatican II. Other thinkers on the relevant commission focused on individual human rights. In this view the human and civil right to religious liberty revolves around the freedom of individual conscience, or—in more Catholic language—the
dignity of the human person in so far as it avoids arbitrary personal preference and follows its innate obligation to the truth. During the final stages of the Declaration’s preparation, Murray fell ill and was hospitalised; consequently, the final text of the Declaration gave greater prominence to this alternative approach than it might otherwise have done. Murray saluted its publication with two cheers, not three.⁹

Murray was not, of course, against freedom of conscience and the dignity of the person. Moreover, he was well aware that Christianity provided a deeper, Christocentric and communal vision of these secular values, one that the Council had rehabilitated as regards life within the Church. Whereas Thomas Jefferson had rewritten the Bible in such a way as to marginalise any claim that Jesus was divine, Murray was a Christian humanist who understood all reality in reference to the incarnate Word, to grace and to the Church. *Dignitatis humanae* was part of Roman Catholicism’s recovery of a sense of Christian freedom after several generations of reaction against the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

For Murray it was a mistake, however, to attempt to ground religious freedom by such means. Appeals to Christian humanism were likely to be problematic in a pluralist society. More importantly, religious freedom emerged from an acknowledgment that the state’s power was intrinsically limited. Admittedly it was in one respect fortunate that Murray’s influence on the final Vatican II text was restrained, for the document as it stands overlaps more clearly with Protestant understandings of religious freedom and so better serves the ecumenical goal of the Council. But Murray’s own approach remains important. It testifies to a vision of personal liberty as both participating in the social and political dimensions of life and transcending them. By contrast, an approach to religious freedom centred on the individual’s dignity will always tend towards making the social and political appear as an extrinsic appendage.

Murray's Conflicts

The importance of the differences between the theologies of religious liberty inside the drafting commission at Vatican II can probably be overstated. True, all Murray’s previous research and reflection came into play; the stakes were high; the differences were real; the arguments were sharp. But the commission’s work was nevertheless, for all its strenuousness, collaborative. The conflict was subordinate to a common purpose.

The crucial conflict on religious liberty at Vatican II occurred not so much between the specialists as on the floor. Ultimately, the question was whether Catholic tradition was to be understood in a classicist way, or rather in terms of historical consciousness. Those bishops who opposed the project of a conciliar affirmation of religious liberty saw it as contradicting Catholic tradition, especially Leo XIII. In response Murray composed ‘The Problem of Religious Freedom’, which became available to the assembled bishops after the third session of the Council, which ended in November 1964. Murray distinguished between Leonine doctrine and Leonine polemic. The Council had the challenging option either of developing the doctrine or of staying with the polemic. The bishops’ ultimate decision to affirm religious liberty was for Murray the signal instance of doctrinal development at Vatican II.

Just as trying for Murray were conflicts that had occurred before the Council. Both before and during the Council, the controversies arose from Murray’s attempt to articulate the originality of US Catholicism, an originality that neither US Protestants nor European Catholics could easily understand.

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Protestants in the late 1940s and 1950s were genuinely doubtful about Catholic commitment to this principle enshrined in the First

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Amendment to the US Constitution. There was no doubt about Catholics’ practice in this regard. But was that practice principled? People in the US could read Leo XIII’s fulminations against religious liberty and Church-state separation, written in almost complete ignorance of Anglo-American constitutionalism; they could remember Vatican policy in making Church-state concordats; they could see how Franco’s Spain was regarded by some in the Vatican as exemplifying the ideal form of Church-state relations. Were US Catholics merely missionaries for these European patterns? Was their conformity to US political culture merely a provisional expediency, an adjustment to national facts that they wished were otherwise and that they might seek to change if they became numerous enough? Would they prefer Catholicism to be established as a state religion? These questions were impertinent when addressed to families whose children had perished in military service under an oath to uphold the US Constitution. Nevertheless, they needed principled, theoretical answers.

Murray’s extensive writing on Church-state matters was a prolonged demonstration that the Church’s reactionary stances were conditioned by particular historical circumstances, and were not intrinsically Catholic. On the contrary, there were deep coherences between Catholicism and the US American experiment. Rome’s condemnation of ‘democracy’ referred primarily to forms of government that had sprung up in the French Revolution and in its aftermath. Anglo-American constitutionalism was different.¹¹

In 1960, Murray published We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition. This was his culminating statement of how and why Roman Catholics could participate with full integrity in US civil life. At its basis was a theory of Church-state relations summed up in four principles:

1) the irreducible difference between Church and state as to their origins, activities and purposes;

2) the primacy in human life of the Church, of faith, and of the spiritual over the merely political—a primacy expressed not so much through jurisdiction or control as through the

witness of Christians, especially the laity, formed in the gospel’s vision and values;

3) the integrity of the political order and its independence from ecclesiastical jurisdiction—the state’s competence is to protect its citizens’ religious liberty, and in performing that function (cura religionis) and no other, it serves the higher end which is Christianity;

4) the existence of some manner of harmony between Church and state, given that people have to belong to both simultaneously.

Much of Murray’s work was concerned with the third principle. For Murray there was a valid modern differentiation between the sacred and the secular, one that was true both to the general Catholic tradition on Church and state, and to the particular development of that tradition undertaken by Leo XIII.

The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 seemed to settle in practice what Murray had demonstrated in theory. The outcome of the voting showed that there was no reason why a Catholic citizen could not be elected President; Kennedy’s exercise of the office showed that a Catholic President was not subject to the authority of the Pope as temporal ruler as if US Catholics were subjects in the former Papal States. On the Church’s side, the Council’s 1965 Decree on Ecumenism marked further progress, and seemed finally to mark the end of antagonism between Protestant and Catholic Christianity.

In 2004, the situation has changed. The campaign of John Kerry has brought to the surface deep conflicts within the Catholic body, as well as in other Christian Churches. Murray’s wisdom might usefully be retrieved as a resource for resolving these conflicts too.

Silencing

Murray’s work led him also into difficulties with Catholic authority. The kind of vision Murray put forward clashed sharply with that of figures such as Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani, pro-Prefect of the Holy Office, and indeed, in the US, the Catholic University theologian
Joseph Fenton, editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*. In 1955, Murray was forbidden by his superiors in Rome to publish an important article, and ordered to stop writing on the Church-state problem. It was only with the election of John XXIII in 1958 that the situation was relaxed.

In the end, Murray’s views carried the day, and the conflicts with Ottaviani were at some level resolved. He became—though only at the second session—a *peritus* at Vatican II; he had a significant hand in drafting the Declaration on Religious Freedom; he received a special blessing from Paul VI. Moreover, Murray was at one with Leo XIII, with the mainstream of Catholic social teaching, and with Vatican II in developing a political theology on the basis of Aquinas rather than on Augustine. For the tradition represented by Murray, the state is part of created human nature, and therefore derives ultimately from the Creator. By contrast, Augustine’s ‘earthly city derives from our turning away from love and its source (God) towards wilfulness’.

**Dialogue and the Citizen**

In a monarchy or non-democratic state, relations between Church and state occur when the legitimate authorities of the two ‘perfect societies’ meet and conduct business together: popes and emperors; popes and kings; bishops and princes; clergy and magistrates. Leo XIII taught that these relationships were not ends in themselves, or mere expressions of the dignity of office; instead, they existed for the sake of the people as a whole. The citizen or subject who was both under state and Church authority, the *civis idem et christianus*, had duties to fulfill in both societies. If Church and state authorities were at odds, and commanded opposed acts, consciences would be divided, in a way that seemed to undermine the peaceful conscience commended in the New Testament.

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Pius XII took this line of thought a step further by identifying the person as the source, agent and end of all societal processes. Implicitly, then, Church-state relations were more than a set of accords made on high and imposed ‘from above’. Rather, Church-state relations passed through the people; ordinary people were their agents. Murray expressed the point by stating that,

... what the Church immediately confronts is not the temporal power in the sense of ‘the government’ or the state in the sense of the constitutional and legal order of society, but rather the citizen ....

The citizen is the state’s representative in its dealings with the Church; the believer is the Church’s representative in its dealings with the state. Church and state meet in the individual who is both baptized believer and public citizen. Conscience becomes the meeting-hall, with believer and citizen in continual, usually quiet, session.

It follows that ecclesiastical authority cannot legitimately intervene in a Catholic citizen's conscience by imposing a command to perform or act on a particular political judgment. Prudential judgment, rather, is an inalienable function of the believer’s own conscience, formed but not determined by Catholic faith and morality. Of course Church authority has the right to preach and teach the gospel in such a way as to bring out its implications for public life and for the political order of society, and therefore to imply judgments on the morality or otherwise of specific public policies. But it may not seek to replace or determine juridically the prudential judgment which the individual believer inevitably has to make. Ecclesiastical authority does not extend to the properly political judgments of the informed citizen. If it tries to do so, it violates the hard-won differentiation between the temporal and the spiritual, and undermines the Church's spiritual mission. Conversely, the state has no right to command citizens to perform religious acts, such as attendance at worship, or the recitation of prayers.

Murray’s idea, following Leo XIII, that Church-state relations should ideally be harmonious so that individual consciences can be

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15 Contemporary Orientations of Catholic Thought on Church and State in the Light of History, Theological Studies, 10 (1949), 177-234, here 223.
untroubled does not mean peace at any price. Nor does it imply that
believers are to treat their faith and their political views as on a par.
Faith and discipleship remain all-encompassing principles of
interpretation, not to be subordinated to political convictions. But one
cannot make a simple jump from Christian faith to prudential
decisions on specific laws or policies. There has to be deliberation,
analysis, discussion, reading, and reflection precisely on the political
level. The use of biblical and doctrinal texts as slogans represents not a
fidelity to Christianity but an irresponsible fideism.

Durable and influential Church-state relationships occur in human
consciences, not in legislatures or Vatican halls. For Murray,
conscience was to be protected, not because freedom was an end in
itself, but because conscience was the area in which the gospel and
political life could meet and interact. Church authorities were simply
to teach, and to help believers form their consciences in the light of
Catholic faith and morality. For their part, believers had a
corresponding duty to learn about what their faith might imply
for the temporal order of society, including its morality.
Prelates, however, were not to seek to influence legislatures
over the heads of believer-citizens, or to steer democratic
processes. Such attempts would violate an important boundary
between Church and state. It would follow—though Murray
never explicitly stated this conclusion—that no Church authority
could ever command believers to vote one way or another, to take this
or that political action. The moral and legal orders are distinct. How
one moves from the former to the latter depends greatly on the
historical, cultural and social context and conditions. Moreover social
peace is in itself a significant value, one that can legitimately restrain a
faith community from seeking to have the law enshrine its distinctive
moral vision.

Nearly forty years after Murray’s death, some of the tensions he
lived with continue. He is a character in a plot that is as yet without a
climax, resolution or denouement, part of the larger historical drama
arising from the tensions between Catholicism and US political life. No
longer are his positions taken for granted.  

16 See Michael J. Baxter, ‘John Courtney Murray’, in The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology,
150-164.
There are some who are concerned by what they see as an increasing secularisation in US political culture, and who have criticized Murray’s vision of Catholicism and US democracy as compatible. There is a serious issue here; clearly, not all of the many different cross-currents within contemporary political culture are compatible with Catholicism or indeed Christianity. But Murray’s claim centred only on the basic institutions of democracy and on the consensus underlying them. The criticisms do not really undermine the traditional Catholic distinction between the moral and the legal orders. Nor should they be taken as a challenge to Pius XII’s position on the high value for any society of social peace—even if Murray’s critics remind us that social peace should not be understood in too static a fashion.

In the present context, Murray’s most provocative contribution may indeed be his insistence that it is specific judgments of truth that can shape national identity and ground a consensus supporting the US constitution—not value preferences, not dominance by interest groups or by a majority, not agreed procedures alone. He was not the kind of foundationalist thinker who held that everything could be derived from first principles, but his basic theory of church, state, society and politics built on the primacy of truths in consensus.

Murray’s message needs to be heard anew, particularly given the increasing religious pluralism not only of the United States, but of the West at large. His careful exploration of how the Roman Catholic tradition can flourish when Church and state are separated may have wider implications for religious traditions in general. A separation of Church and state not only protects a religious tradition from political interference; it also fosters spiritual integrity.

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A SPIRITUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

Eugene C. Bianchi

"The church is not a democracy." Many people think that the values of a pluralist, secular democracy such as the United States are incompatible with Catholic Christianity, and that the Roman Catholic Church is essentially authoritarian. When, through the influence of John Courtney Murray, Vatican II issued its Declaration on Religious Freedom, the Council Fathers were implicitly rejecting this kind of contrast. Instead, they were acknowledging that the whole Church had something to learn from the experience of the United States, where Roman Catholicism was one religion among others, and where the State was religiously neutral.

This essay seeks to honour Murray's achievement by extending it. Murray was contending with an attitude—one that is still, despite the work of the Council, common in official Catholic circles—according to which democracy is alien to the Church. For such people, the Church's present monarchical structure is mandated by God, or at least by centuries of tradition. I want instead to argue that democracy is a vital dimension of Christian spirituality, and I will develop this case by setting out eight key principles for a spirituality that is at once democratic and authentically Christian.

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity tells us that spirituality is both 'within' and 'below'. Both of these words connect with the spirituality of Jesus. When political subsidiarity tells us to look to the local community first for decision-making, it echoes Jesus' central message: the kingdom or domain of God is within us. In the end, our worth comes not from outside authority, but from our intrinsic value. As embodied persons, we are all temples of the Holy Spirit. It may take us some time individually to come to this realisation in a way that counts for us. But
the Jesus tradition is clear about the presence of God within the world and within each creature.

It might be objected that subsidiarity refers to the ‘within’ of local communities, whereas I have been speaking of the ‘within’ of individuals. Yet Christianity also stresses the presence of the divine in groups. ‘For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’ (Matthew 18:20) A major thrust of liturgical renewal after Vatican II emphasizes God’s presence in the whole worshipping community.

The principle of spiritual subsidiarity also indicates that spirituality comes from ‘below’ rather than from ‘above’. It comes from the individual and from the community, and is not handed down to them by established authorities. The parts of the New Testament that show us a pre-episcopal, pre-institutional Church contain teachings of Jesus that support such a religion from below. Jesus appeals to the marginalised, the outsiders in Palestine; he is critical of various aspects of established Judaism in his time. He says that one has to become ‘as a little child’ to recognise his teaching. There is a similarity here with the Buddhist notion that one needs a humble ‘beginner’s mind’ in order to open oneself to the path of enlightenment.

This spirituality from below may well be fostered by a teacher, who as such remains ‘above’. The place of the authentic teacher is vital in all wisdom traditions. The Bodhisattva vows to turn from the singular enjoyment of his enlightened state to teach others ways of dealing with their suffering. Sometimes the teaching role takes on corporate dimensions in councils and synods and other communal forms. Yet the ultimate goal of the teacher in these traditions is to become unnecessary, as learners gradually become their own gurus. Of course, there is always a place for dialogue between those on the spiritual path, and for listening to communal guidelines which may contain the accumulated wisdom of ages. But democratic spirituality resists the rigid imposition of teaching from above, an imposition linked to sanctions and retribution.

Jesus’ friends gleaned grain on the sabbath, and Jesus taught that the sabbath as a religious and cultural event is for the sake of the people, not for the sake of immutable authority. In humanising the sabbath, Jesus was acting in a well-established rabbinical mode. Those in positions of authority were not to impose burdens on widows, orphans and other less powerful people. This stream of Christian
thinking has taken different forms in various periods of history. It can be found, for example, in the movements of lay spirituality in the Middle Ages as well as in today’s liberation theologies. The latter explicitly talk about finding God from below, and privilege the experience of the poor.

Dialogue

In a democracy, traditions are formulated and applied through a process of respectful dialogue. ‘Respectful dialogue’ may sound sanitised and lofty when we think about the reality of democratic politics, in which intense partisanship plays a constant role. Yet the ideal of respectful dialogue remains fundamental; even those who abuse it in practice recognise it as essential to the long-term success of democracy. In non-democratic political systems, a variety of people may be consulted in making a decision, but such systems maintain the intrinsic superiority of the ruler over the ruled. A good ecclesial example would be the 1968 papal edict on the evil of birth control. Dialogue within the papal commission had urged a change in the Church’s position, but the Pope, understood as intrinsically wiser or more valuable as judge of things, decided otherwise. Dialogue here was merely consultative, not truly deliberative. But an authentic process of dialogue implies that all parties involved have intrinsic value, with a right to exchange views and to be involved in the application of tradition to present needs. In church language, such a process privileges the sensus fidelium, the lived experience of the faithful.

What does the principle of dialogue have to do with spirituality? When everyday decisions are taken through a process of dialogue, this implies a respect for the worth and opinions of individuals. We become active agents, rather than passive recipients of orders from those above us. If spirituality enhances the deeper meaning and experience of human life, it is dialogue, both inward and outward, that makes this possible. Inward dialogue is a type of prayer or meditation, a rhythm of listening to the interior spirit and communing with it. Through the processes of listening and communing, we tap into our mystic potential and experience an interrelatedness with others and with nature. Through such inner dialogue, we gradually move beyond our fears of isolation and alienation, our constant attempts to shield our fragile
egos from the threats of life. We have a chance of learning how to live and die in peace.

For Buddhists, such going inward means the gradual dissolution of the false, solid and separate self, and the awakening of a new, compassionate being, in connection and solidarity with others. In Christianity, this inward dialogue is sometimes referred to as an experience of the dark night, or of the cross. Beyond it is a new birth or resurrection in which the fearful ego is released into a union with the divine in the world. The Taoist master sums up the process:

> Each separate being in the universe returns to the common source …. If you don't realise the source, you stumble in confusion and sorrow. When you realise where you come from, you naturally become tolerant, disinterested, amused, kindhearted as a grandmother, dignified as a king. Immersed in the wonder of the Tao, you can deal with whatever life brings you, and when death comes, you are ready.¹

The spiritual life is a process of inward dialogue by which we move from sensations of isolation and threat to the experience of union, from feeling worthless to being 'dignified as a king'.

The outward dialogue of spirituality is strongly democratic. In their origins and in their development, spiritual movements question rigid, hierarchical structures of authority. Jesus attacked religious and even secular authorities that had become oppressive to ordinary people. He respected tradition, but he questioned authority, calling on his hearers to realise their inner kingdom, their own worth both to themselves and to God. If the lilies of the field are excellent in God's eyes, 'how much more [are] you …'? Jesus wants his followers not to lord it over one another, but to live in a fellowship of equals.

The Quakers are an interesting example of a reforming movement in Christian history to which dialogue and democracy are important. In his powerful reaction against the Anglican union of altar and throne, George Fox not only summoned his Society of Friends to attend to the 'inner light', but encouraged them towards dialogue and egalitarianism. The Buddha, while preserving many aspects of ancient

Indian spirituality, made a powerful break with Brahmin hierarchies in religious and cultural life. Enlightenment became a possibility for everyone; it ceased to be determined by caste and condition of birth. Near his death, the Buddha urged his disciples not to fear his leaving them as if he were the superior or unique carrier of the *dharma*. The spiritual path, he told them, was already among them and within them. Buddhist spirituality goes forward through an inward and outward dialogue within the community, the *sangha*.

**Decentralisation**

This democratic principle says that each community should regulate itself. Decentralisation overlaps with subsidiarity in its stress on how communities should be responsible for themselves rather than controlled from above. But decentralisation also involves respect for diversity. Throughout the world today we see violence and social breakdown occurring because of a fundamental lack of respect for diversity in religion, politics, ethnicity and culture. This often happens in countries where democratic ways of life have not been established: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Rwanda and the Sudan are cases in point. Even in places with democratic political structures, such as Northern Ireland, respect for diversity and decentralised rule is difficult to achieve. Throughout history, institutional religion has aggravated the problem of accepting differences. People fear and want to control others, to impose their own doctrine and behaviour on them regardless of differences. Decentralisation implies the honouring of diversity within communities as well as among them.

From the standpoint of spirituality, diversity in teaching, organisation and action is intrinsic to authentic religion. The mystery of divine presence in the world is varied, multifaceted. To claim perfect knowledge of this mystery is a supreme hubris; to impose teaching and norms of behaviour on others defies the gift of faith. Moreover, coercive religious centralisation implicitly denies the limitations of human intelligence and goodness. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, regarding the free exercise of religion, is a political statement of a theological truth: respect for the diversity of religion is based on the limitations of human intelligence, humanity’s history of religious oppression, the nature of faith itself and the ultimate incomprehensibility of divine mystery.
In our age of advanced technology and communications it becomes ever more necessary to respect religious diversity, because people encounter other religions and cultures more frequently than before. Our personal spirituality can profit from knowledge of different wisdom traditions. In recent decades eastern modes of spirituality have come into dialogue with western contemplative traditions. This phenomenon has created a renewed interest in western mysticism; the encounter of similar yet diverse traditions stimulates creative possibilities. Some conservative groups view the development of religious pluralism as a threat to the integrity of their particular heritage; within Roman Catholicism there are tensions between theologians who foster the ‘inculturation’ of Christianity in Asia and critics of such moves. Yet the encounter with a diversity of spiritual traditions can help us to reinterpret our own theology and clarify what is fundamental in our heritage. Appreciating diversity enables individuals and groups to face change and impermanence, and to move beyond the disturbance that diversity provokes in a religious mentality orientated towards certainty and security.

**Participation through Elections**

A key element in democratic government is the process of election. Elections, which give a voice to all constituents, are an important way of enhancing personal participation in democracies. Fairly conducted elections allow contending political groups to advance their programmes through open debate. Elections also permit peaceful change within a society, and they give individuals a sense of worth by emphasizing the deliberative value of each person’s vote. Church history shows that choosing leaders by election was much more common among Christians in an earlier era than it is now, although some religious orders and cathedral chapters have continued the practice.
Though new popes are chosen by election within the College of Cardinals, Christianity’s tradition of electing its leaders has been largely submerged in the Roman Catholic Church. As the Church attained ever greater power in Europe from the medieval period onwards, it imitated feudal and monarchical forms of government. Popes and bishops became lords whose authority derived from on high rather than from the will of their constituents. Theological theories were developed to show how a version of the divine right of kings pertained to church officials.

This turn away from participation is reflected in the often-repeated statement that the Church is not a democracy. Those who oppose the election of officials in the Church allege that there is a danger of encouraging partisan politics. Those who advocate ecclesial elections point out that such partisan politics already exist within the monarchical form of church governance, and that politicking is done in ways which are less open to public scrutiny than they would be under a democratic system.

Moreover elections, which seem on the surface to be a merely political matter, relate to two aspects of spirituality found in different wisdom traditions: participation and inclusiveness. In Christianity, all are called to participate in God’s sanctifying grace. All are children of God who participate in the one creation. Recent expressions of creation spirituality underscore our interconnectedness and our participation in a single, evolving world. Our participation goes right back to our animal ancestry. In the New Testament, Jesus awakens his hearers to their inclusion in God’s domain and breaks down barriers of exclusivity in his work of calling them to spiritual participation. He brings sinners to sit at the same table with the seemingly righteous. He heals people who are outside the confines of the religious community; he talks about a worship in spirit and truth in a place that will welcome the participation of Samaritan and Jew alike. The religion of Jesus has no place for different degrees of participation, for special initiates, or for the privilege of authority. All are invited to participate in the festival, including those outside the circles of power; Jesus wants his followers to pay special attention to the marginalised and the poor.
**Term Limits**

In the political sphere, there are standard arguments for and against term limits. Those who oppose term limits point to the value of retaining experienced people in office without limiting their claim beyond the requirement to stand periodically for re-election. Their opponents insist that limits on office-holding better serve the common good. They hold that such limits prevent the perpetuation of incompetence and restrict power-mongering, and that they allow new energies and ideas to rise in the political process.

Within the Church, the issue of term limits bears on both the individual and the community. Religious traditions encourage individuals to renounce egocentricity and self-glorification. This spiritual discipline works on two levels. First, it helps people towards inner transformation, preventing them from being sidetracked by the desires of the ego, and it enables them to experience union or connection with a wider reality. And on a second level, this discipline helps to turn them towards the humble service of the community. The Church has recognised the need to avoid giving its leaders too much personal power. After Vatican II, a retirement age of seventy-five was introduced for bishops. While this was a move in the right direction, it is not enough to ensure creative and energetic leadership, or to guard against the possibility of mental or physical incompetence. Church leaders need to be able to cope with the challenges of the modern world in order to serve the community fully.

Religious orders, with their frequent changing of local and provincial superiors, have long recognised the importance of term limits to spiritual discipline and pastoral efficiency. It makes little sense today for general superiors and popes to stay in office for life. The case of John Paul II is a clear example of the problem. Here is a leader with a major debilitating illness who thinks that God is calling him to lead the Church into the new millennium. How far is he responding to spiritual inspiration? And how far is he clinging to office from love of power masquerading as pious sacrifice and obedience to God’s will? Would not the witness of a pope who was prepared to step down accord better with the attitude of Jesus, who warned against the dangers of clinging to power? Eastern religious traditions, while not
dealing directly with term limits in office, are virtually unanimous in calling adherents to question the direction of their desires. The Tao Te Ching portrays the master as one who does not lead by dominance and coercion in the manner of the world, but who leads in a humble and self-effacing way:

When the Master governs, the people are hardly aware that he exists …. If you don't trust the people, you make them untrustworthy …. When his [the master's] work is done, the people say: 'Amazing, we did it all by ourselves!'

The point of all this is to see how a topic as seemingly far removed from spirituality as term limits actually can carry significant spiritual meaning.

**Separate Powers**

The US Constitution calls for a separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, along with a system of checks and balances between them. Developed modern democracies adopt this principle to protect themselves against any oppressive accumulation of power in the hands of one branch of government. This is an acknowledgement of Lord Acton’s maxim: all power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The history of absolute monarchies in the West provides overwhelming evidence of the potential for abuse in the concentration of power, and of the harm this concentration does to human rights.

The Roman Catholic Church has retained an absolutist mode of government long after such systems were abandoned in much of Europe, although even in its most centralised periods it has had a variety of ways to resolve conflicts. Two factors may have contributed to the persistence of centralised control. One is the close identification of ecclesial government with the autocratic regimes of the kind common in Roman Catholic countries from the middle ages until after World War I. The other is the tendency for historical contingencies to become sacralised. When the Pope is seen as the vicar of Christ, or when bishops are described as princes of the Church, their offices start

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2 *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 17.
to seem theologically immutable. Roman Catholics are then taught that a centralised, even absolutist, form of government is God’s will. Talk of the separation of powers and of democratic constitutions appears to many to be theologically untenable.

But most forms of church government may also be seen as human, cultural phenomena which are subject to reform. Once this standpoint is taken, then sacred office no longer appears as an unquestionable given, and what we learn from spiritual traditions about the ambiguity of human motives, about sin and destructiveness, becomes all too relevant. The abuse of power to aggrandise the ego and to dominate others for personal or group gain is an aspect of the human inclination towards evil. From this perspective the separation of powers, with its checks and balances, acts as a communal corrective, mitigating abuses. It is a hedge against our negative proclivities.

From a positive point of view, such checks and balances provide a spiritual discipline that can lead to the empowerment of the many rather than to control by a few. Separation of powers entails the election of councils and leaders, as well as the establishment of judicial systems at all levels. It attests to the diverse gifts inherent in people, and allows them to use their gifts. Individuals gain a sense of self-worth from participation at all levels in the three separated powers. They realise that their involvement contributes to the welfare of all. Empowering people to realise their gifts is a goal of many traditions of spiritual wisdom. Christian creation theology would discuss this empowerment as people experiencing their co-creative potential with the Creator. Buddhists might speak of it as realising one’s own buddha-nature. The Tao Te Ching talks about returning self-governance to the people:

> If you want to learn how to govern, avoid being clever, filled with rigid concepts, or rich. The simplest pattern is the clearest. Content with an ordinary life, you can show all the people the way back to their own true nature.3

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3 *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 65.
**Accountability**

This principle states that people in authority will regularly give their constituents a report on their work, including financial accounts, to be reviewed by an outside auditor when appropriate. Like the previous one, this principle seeks to avoid abuses, especially in financial matters. When power is concentrated in one person or group, financial transactions tend to be secretive; only insiders are privy to the use of money. Great scandals, such as the Banco Ambrosiano affair, have befallen the Vatican in recent decades over the misallocation and mismanagement of funds. For the most part, dioceses, parishes and religious orders are not accountable to the wider Church community regarding financial resources and their uses.

Accountability, communal responsibility, can itself be seen as a kind of spiritual discipline. Scripture speaks of Christians as members of one body, an organic whole with many functions. One part of the body must respond honestly and with integrity to other parts of the body for the health of the whole. Such communal understanding has been intrinsic to the Christian movement from its beginnings (Acts 2:42-47; 5:1-11) to the present day (in base and small faith communities). While the transformation of the individual is important to Christianity, it is accomplished in and through community, through responsible belonging.

**Representation**

This principle states that all groupings of the faithful, including women and minorities, should be equitably represented in leadership and decision-making. Patriarchy and eurocentrism within the Church have a long history. We need now to respond to the present. The Church has spoken out in recent decades on the need to respect the rights of minority groups in various parts of the world; and, in limited ways, Roman Catholic documents uphold the rights and the dignity of women. What seems to be more difficult is the implementation of this vision when it comes to minorities and to women within the Church. Progress has been made in bringing racial and ethnic minorities into leadership positions, but women are still kept out of the priesthood and the episcopate. Pope John Paul II issued a declaration barring women from the priesthood on the grounds that women priests would be
incompatible with tradition and with the Vatican's interpretation of the consequences of Jesus' maleness. Homosexuals represent another minority which has an uneasy status within Roman Catholicism. Since gays have been well represented in the priesthood, they have probably in fact participated in the higher levels of Roman Catholic governance. But their ambivalent position in church doctrine (homosexual orientation is seen as intrinsically disordered while homosexuals as persons are pastorally welcomed to the Church) has generally forced gays to conceal their orientation, especially in clerical circles.

The principle of representation is linked to the quest for inclusiveness. Many spiritualities strive for greater connection or union, and a sense of unity in diversity is widespread in the Christian Scriptures. There are many dwelling places in the Father’s house, and the walls dividing peoples have been broken down. Unfortunately, Christians in history have not always fulfilled Christianity’s aspiration towards unity. But the call to fuller interconnectedness and more inclusive representation remains a key ideal of the Christian movement.

There are profound connections, then, between spirituality and democracy. Democracy does not claim to be a spiritual movement, and in many ways it is not. But Catholic Christianity—perhaps as a result of the Reformation conflicts—has been slow to recognise how democratic structures promote spiritual growth and reflect gospel values. John Courtney Murray’s work represented a decisive
breakthrough in this regard. Let us hope that the Church of the twenty-first century can carry his message forward.\footnote{An earlier version of this article was published by the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church: http://arcc-catholic-rights.net.}

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In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the significance of Bernard Lonergan for the study of spirituality. Some important spiritual writers, such as William Johnston, Daniel Helminiak and Bernard McGinn, have indicated their indebtedness to Lonergan’s thought. One must admit, however, that Lonergan’s own approach to spirituality comes more as a part of the general texture of his philosophy and theology than in any sustained systematic treatment.

It is Lonergan’s philosophy of the human person which has been of most help for spirituality. Lonergan focuses on human consciousness, and thereby provides spirituality with a clear and systematic account of how the human mind and heart can operate in an integrated way. Moreover, Lonergan ascribes a high significance to human subjectivity: to our appropriating personally all that we experience, whether externally or internally, and to our drawing what we experience into the processes of understanding, judging and deciding. This stress on the human subject has meant that at key moments of the intellectual process Lonergan turns to the language of spirituality, not as some pious exercise, but as a way of answering needs arising from his philosophy and theology precisely in themselves. For him such notions as religious conversion, the love of God, authenticity and even holiness, are central, not only to the everyday practice of religion, but also to the academic interpretation of religious commitment that we

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2 I have developed this at more length in my article, ‘The Person as Subject of Spirituality in the Writings of Bernard Lonergan’, *Milltown Studies*, 45 (Summer 2000), 66-80.
call theology. In this way, Lonergan points towards a narrowing of the gap between theology and spirituality which has been with us for so many centuries.

**The Levels of Consciousness**

Consciousness is a pivotal notion in Lonergan's idea of the person. Spirituality, Lonergan says in one place, is about the transformation of consciousness. 'There is sought', he writes, 'the transformation of consciousness that makes possible a human life that is a life of prayer'.

Lonergan presents consciousness in terms of four distinct levels of human activity: experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding, with all four of these coming together into a self-assembling unity. Spirituality occurs in different, though related, ways on each of these four levels of consciousness, or, as he puts it on the page just mentioned, 'in the polyphony of its many levels'.

This language of 'consciousness' indicates a shift in Lonergan away from his earlier, more explicitly metaphysical manner towards a more existential kind of thinking. The former approach, which he called faculty psychology, spoke of the person in terms of intellect, will and emotions. The latter speaks rather of the data of consciousness and of the subject they reveal. 'What is given in consciousness is the subject, his various states and operations, and the various relations consciously linking operations with one another'. Since this newer approach sees the processes of human consciousness in an existential and dynamic unity, it is far closer to the concrete movement of thought found in spiritual writers than the old abstract faculty psychology ever could be. At the same time, nevertheless, it maintains the benefits of a philosophically grounded system.

Running through these four levels of consciousness is the notion of desire, desire as the power which fuels their movement—a point which he first came to appreciate in his early reading of Augustine. A spirituality based on Lonergan has to be a spirituality of desire. Desire here, however, is not to be understood as one option among others, but

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as a reality built into the very nature of human consciousness and constitutive of its entire movement. In his earlier writings Lonergan speaks of 'the pure desire to know', but from *Method in Theology* onwards he speaks of 'the pure desire for value'. And since God is the ultimate value, this pure desire for value is tantamount to the pure desire for God, an idea to which we will return. Another way of speaking of this desire is as a movement for self-transcendence. Self-transcendence means going beyond the self. Within us, there is a dynamism to keep going beyond, to be moving from one level of consciousness to another, from one object or set of objects to what lies beyond. Ultimately this dynamism is the human being’s reaching for God, whether or not the individual recognises it as such. Indeed this orientation of our conscious intentionality gives us our best definition of God: God as the reality which fulfils that fundamental orientation. Nevertheless, this definition is negative. 'In this life we can know God, not as He is in Himself, but only by deficient analogy. God Himself remains mystery.' God is always the one who is beyond.

It would be wrong to suppose that the passage from one level to another is always a smooth and unwavering transition. In particular I draw attention to the passage from understanding to judging. The difference here is that between insight and affirmation, between saying what one *thinks* something to be and assessing whether in fact it *is so*. Lonergan explored this distinction of levels particularly in chapters 9-11 of *Insight*. In his system the distinction marks a crucial transition.

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6 *Method*, 341.
from deductivism to existentialist thought, from rationalism to critical thinking, from essence to existence.

**A Basis for Discernment**

A theme in spirituality for which Lonergan’s philosophy is particularly relevant is that of discernment. For many people, experience itself is a form of knowledge; for Lonergan, experience is only an infra-structure of the process of knowledge. Experience is indeed necessary for there to be knowledge, but experience only becomes knowledge in so far as it is illuminated by understanding and validated by judgment. Experience is not autonomous; we cannot legitimately appeal to experience unless and until it has been discerned.

Feelings are, of course, an important part of discernment, particularly for choices made in what Ignatius calls ‘the second time’ (Exx 176). Those who know Lonergan only from his early writings, may well regard him as a ‘head person’. But Lonergan’s abandonment of faculty psychology enabled him to incorporate feelings within his account of human knowledge and consciousness. People writing on discernment are often tempted to divide feeling from thought. Lonergan, while preserving the necessary distinctions, integrates them.

In Lonergan’s approach feelings are an aspect of that ‘experience’ which constitutes the first level of consciousness. Since each higher level in Lonergan’s vision retains something of the richness of lower levels while nevertheless going beyond them, feelings thus remain basic to the whole process. Feelings constitute, Lonergan tells us, ‘the mass and momentum of our lives’. Without them our conscious operations are only ‘paper-thin’. In particular, the feelings that arise on the first level mesh with the judgments of value occurring on the fourth level. Apprehensions of value, we are told, arise from within feelings. Lonergan likes to quote his version of Pascal’s famous dictum: ‘the heart has reasons which reason does not know’. For Lonergan, the term ‘heart’ indicates that the person is operating on the fourth level of consciousness, and is making the discernments of value proper to a

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8 We should note Lonergan’s reluctance to use the expression ‘experience of God’. See Moloney, ‘The Person as Subject of Spirituality’, 75.
person in love. There is a knowledge born of love, especially a grasp of values. As St Gregory put it long ago, ‘Love itself is a form of knowledge’.\(^{10}\)

**In Love with God**

Lonergan is not merely a philosopher, however; he is also a significant theologian of grace. The point becomes clear when Lonergan tries to interpret what happens on the fourth level of consciousness, where our experiencing, understanding and judging issue in decision and commitment to values, values that shape and guide our lives.

Values may be true or false. In so far as they are true, they are grounded in the truly good, and they draw a person out of self-interest into a process of becoming capable of authentic love. Going beyond self in authentic love is the culmination of self-transcendence, and when that is achieved in a stable fashion one falls in love. We have already seen how the notion of God, the ultimate Mystery, arises from within consciousness, and how that consciousness also strives for the ultimate in value. So it is that, for Lonergan, the summit of the interior life consists in what he calls 'the dynamic state of being in love with God'.

Here Lonergan's philosophy explicitly tips over into theology and spirituality. When a person falls in love, there is a new beginning—a point which applies as much to one falling in love with God as to one falling in love with anyone else. As Lonergan puts it, a 'new principle' is introduced. This 'falling in love with God' is not our initiative but God's. God takes over. God's love floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5:5).\(^{11}\)

Lonergan has different ways of speaking of this central event of the spiritual life: 'being grasped by ultimate concern';\(^ {12}\) 'religious experience at its finest';\(^ {13}\) most significantly, 'religious conversion'. This last phrase is almost a technical term for this event. Conversion is a change of direction, which,

\(^{10}\) Gregory the Great, *Forty Homilies on the Gospels*, 27.4 (PL 76: 1207 A). For apprehensions and values see Method, 37-38.

\(^{11}\) Method, 105; 'Dialectic of Authority', in *A Third Collection*, 5-12, here 10. Romans 5:5 is probably Lonergan's favourite quotation from Scripture.

\(^{12}\) Method, 240.

... transforms the existential subject into a subject in love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so an other-worldly love. 14

Elsewhere, Lonergan writes:

Where before, an account of the human good related men to one another and to nature, now human concern reaches beyond man’s world to God and God’s world .... Human development is not in skills and virtues but in holiness. 15

**The Call to Holiness**

We can now see how Lonergan’s philosophy of the human mind and of God culminate in the sense of a transcendent call to holiness. Holiness here is to be understood as a dynamic state of being in love with God, in which we experience a summons to rise out of our egoism and to become a force for love in the world. Once the summons is heard, it becomes the principle of the person’s whole subsequent life, and in particular it sets the pattern for their spirituality:

It is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender, not as an act but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is revealed in retrospect as an undertow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to holiness .... 16

In responding to this basic call to holiness there is a notable ascetical element in Lonergan. Human self-transcendence and religious conversion are always ‘precarious’. 17 There is a constant tension or dialectic between the self as transcending and the self as transcended. 18 Even in his philosophical work, *Insight*, Lonergan spoke of the need for repentance and sorrow for sin. 19 References to prayer are commonly combined with references to self-denial. Lonergan

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14 *Method*, 242. See more generally also 240-244, 101-124.
16 *Method*, 240.
17 *Method*, 110.
shares Aquinas’ view of humanity’s moral impotence when left to its own resources. In *Insight* he gives a striking account of the various biases of human subjectivity, biases which constantly draw us into cycles of decline; in *Method in Theology* he writes of the clash between satisfactions and values. The struggle for authentic living is described with realism and emphasis, and with the overtones of an Ignatian examination of conscience.

Deciding is one thing, doing is another. One has yet to uncover and root out one’s individual, group and general bias. One has to keep developing one’s knowledge of human reality and potentiality as they are in the existing situation. One has to keep scrutinising one’s intentional responses to values and their implicit scales of preference. One has to listen to criticism and to protest. One has to remain ready to learn from others. For moral knowledge is the proper possession only of morally good men, and until one has merited that title, one has still to advance and to learn.\(^{20}\)

Lonergan’s account of this key event of ‘falling in love with God’ is marked by a paradox. According to the medieval metaphysics and theology in which Lonergan was steeped, there is no desire of the unknown, and nothing is loved without first being known. But Lonergan resolves the issue. The old medieval tags about the priority of knowledge,

… do not oblige God to flood our hearts with His love only if first He has bestowed knowledge of himself on our minds. On the contrary, I should say, God operates not first on the mind but first on the heart.\(^{21}\)

This is an aspect of Lonergan’s teaching with which some, even some normally close to him, are unhappy. It seems to me, however, that it can be reconciled with the rest of his thought once one approaches it theologically. The priority in question is primarily a priority of grace, which can dominate all that lies in the person’s intellect and will at the time, and direct it in new paths. There is an apophatic aspect to Lonergan’s thought, to which we shall return below.

\(^{20}\) *Method*, 240.
\(^{21}\) Lonergan, ‘Religious Commitment’, 59-60; see also *Method*, 122-123.
Two Movements

Lonergan’s account of religious experience, and indeed of human consciousness in general, sees them as dependent on two ‘movements’: an ascending one from humanity to God, and a descending one from God to the creation. Religious experience clearly depends chiefly on the descending movement, since it is all God’s gift working itself out on the various levels of our individual and communal life. Nevertheless, there is also an ascending movement, as each level of conscious intentionality comes into harmony with God’s primordial gift, and culminates in the fruits of the Spirit, in love, joy and peace.

But the movement from above remains the more fundamental. What is most striking in Lonergan’s account of this movement is the way in which the notion of love predominates. Lonergan’s is clearly a theology and spirituality of transforming love. Love, Lonergan says more than once, is ‘the superior way’. ‘The strongest and the best of the relationships between persons is love.’

This is very far from an abstract gnosticism and from a mystique of being or of self-fulfilment. It is a topic about which Lonergan writes with eloquence and, let it be said, with feeling. For him the existence of love is the unassailable fact at the centre of all religious experience. There is this ‘charged field of love and meaning’ which pervades the world like a room filled with music; but it is only through ourselves being loving persons that we will be able to perceive it.

Man’s insertion in community and history includes an invitation for him to accept the transformation of falling in love: the transformation of domestic love between husband and wife; the transformation of human love for one’s neighbour; the transformation of divine love when God’s love floods our inmost hearts through the Holy Spirit He has given us (Romans 5:5). Such transforming love has its occasions, its conditions, its causes. But once it comes and as long as it lasts it takes over.


\[23\] Method, 290.

This descending movement is met by an answering ascending one. Lonergan speaks of ‘cultivating’ one’s religious experience. This means letting one’s religious experience enter into harmony with the rest of one’s symbolic system and so into harmony with the culture and civilisation in which one finds oneself. In particular it means letting that downward movement mesh with the ascending movements of deliberation and desire towards development and growth. Here we should invoke all that was said above about feeling and affectivity as integral to the whole movement. Indeed he tells us that, once you love God, ‘affectivity is of a single piece’.

When a person has fallen in love with God, basic features of human consciousness enter into the descending movement of love and grace, enabling this latter to attain a certain level of human development as it flows into the various aspects of human life. Two aspects in particular should be underlined, since these bring out how Lonergan is largely free from that tension between the transcendental account of human consciousness and historical revelation which is a problem, for instance, in the work of Rahner. Firstly, as the person strives to give the inner impulses of grace their necessary human articulation, there is a movement from the inner word of God’s love to the outer word:

When a man and a woman love each other but do not avow their love, they are not yet in love. Their very silence means that their love has not yet reached the point of self-surrender and self-donation. It is the love that each freely and fully reveals to the other that brings about the radically new situation of being in love and that begins the unfolding of its life-long implications.

Secondly, this movement to the outer word is necessarily communitarian, for human beings are by their very nature orientated to the world of inherited language, tradition and society. For Lonergan, a con-temporary notion of person is essentially social and inter-

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27 I have discussed this point at greater length in my article, ‘Rahner and Lonergan on Spirituality’, Louvain Studies, 28/4 (Winter 2003), 295-310.
Wisdom comes not from watching a parade (he said), but from marching consciously, feeling the rhythm and movement in me.

Theology is not carved lapidary from the quarry of eternal truth (he said), but flashes fresh in each new age, dancing just beyond the horizon of longing.

He made a deft incision in my mind, as small and as useful as an episiotomy, midwifing a less painful birth for the unthinkable, cutting the umbilical of fixed assumptions, the tether of unchanged ideas.

A birth but also a death of the great fumbling heresy that faith is blind repetition.

In the end (he said), if the Word had not flamed up and tied himself to the tree of time and place there would be no fixed point.

But now there is.

John Kinsella
Christian, Christ has to be the centre of this process. Christian religious experience comes about, Lonergan says, ‘in so far as you are related to Christ as God’.  

Nevertheless, what we are saying here about the thrust of Lonergan’s vision towards the concrete and the historical needs to be qualified. Lonergan’s talk of self-transcendence is marked by a notable tendency towards the apophatic—a tendency which emerges not only when Lonergan writes about mysticism, but also when he speaks of the love of God in a more general way:

> By such love one is oriented positively to what is transcendent in lovableness. Such a positive orientation and the consequent self-surrender, as long as they are operative, enable one to dispense with any intellectual analogy or concept; and when they cease to be operative, the memory of them enables one to be content with enumerations of what God is not.  

This apophatic tendency should be seen to lie behind the frequent, if incidental, references to progress in the life of prayer as a simplifying one. Religious experience, he writes, ‘is something exceedingly simple and, in time, also exceedingly simplifying’.

The Context of Redemption

Lonergan’s focus on Christ is part of his response to the problem of evil and the doctrine of redemption. In Lonergan’s approach, the doctrine of redemption is the basic context for all spirituality. It is remarkable how, from Insight on, Lonergan’s solution to the problem of evil is consistently focused on the challenge of self-sacrificing love. This solution is one which ties in with that other basic theme of his writings: the movement of consciousness towards self-transcendence,

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31 Method, 290; see also 113.

32 For instance, Insight, 11958, 699-700.
reaching its fulfilment in the dynamic state that is self-surrendering love of God.\footnote{33}{Lectures on Religious Studies and Theology—Second Lecture’, at 133.}

The principle of redemption, Lonergan tells us, is self-sacrificing love. The motive and model is Christ, suffering, dying and rising. In the background here is the considerable work on redemption which Lonergan carried out when teaching the subject in Rome in the early 1960s. Most of Lonergan’s writing is presented with all the calm one associates with the philosopher, but occasionally the evil of the world and the corresponding call to redemption and liberation bring an energy and passion to his pen that betray the religious zeal which is in the background all the time. The human situation, as he sees it, ‘seethes with alienation, bitterness, hatred, mounting violence’. ‘What will smash’, he asks, ‘the determinisms—economic, social, cultural, psychological—that egoism has constructed and exploited?’

In answer to such a question, liberation theology speaks of justice; Lonergan speaks of self-sacrificing love. The only answer to our plight lies in the transformation of consciousness brought about by grace, as it gently and quietly touches the human heart. This leads to, … the experience of a new community, in which faith, hope and charity dissolve the rationalizations, break determinisms and reconcile the estranged and the alienated, and there is reaped the harvest of the Spirit that is ‘… love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control’ (Galatians 5:22-23).\footnote{34}{For the matter in the last two paragraphs see three references in A Third Collection: ‘Dialectic of Authority’, at 10; ‘Mission and the Spirit’, 23-34, at 32-33; and ‘Lectures on Religious Studies and Theology—Third Lecture: The Ongoing Genesis of Methods’, 146-165, at 158.}

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THE TRUTH THAT MAKES US FREE

Bruce Lescher

‘YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, and the truth will make you free.’ (John 8:32) Jesus’ words to his disciples leap from the page and challenge me to the core. I have invested nearly twenty-five years in graduate study and subsequently in teaching: days, weeks and months of reading, of wrestling with texts, of seeking effective ways to communicate concepts in the classroom, of attending seemingly endless meetings, and of searching for words to put on the page. Jesus’ words cut through this welter of daily activities to remind me of what I am about in the first place: seeking liberation. And so I am challenged to ask: how has my experience of study been liberating?

What Is ‘Study’?

I would like to define what I mean by ‘study’. We experience study in all sorts of contexts. Academic study, of course, provides one obvious example. In an undergraduate or graduate setting we focus on a particular subject and on the methods appropriate for exploring that subject. ‘Pastoral’ study also comes to mind. Here we explore a subject, but also consciously seek to apply what we are learning in a communal, ecclesial or ministerial setting. Religious read about the charism of the founder; members of a parish participate in bible study; pastoral ministers become certified through programmes sponsored by their diocese. Finally, study can take place privately: we want to learn more about the Gospel of Luke, and so we slowly read through the gospel text on our own while consulting different commentaries. Study, as I am using the word, is not limited to academia.

Given this understanding of ‘study’, I wish to explore what is liberating about it. I shall reflect on my own experience, but I shall also enrich what I say with comments from colleagues at the Graduate
Theological Union in Berkeley. I asked faculty and students in the Christian Spirituality Area to share their thoughts.¹ My examples are drawn from the field with which I am most familiar, Christian Spirituality, but I am confident that scholars from other disciplines could offer similar insights.

**History**

Learning the history of spirituality has led me to freedom in several ways which I never imagined. Because my research involved historical and archival work, I would like to comment on several aspects of how history can liberate.²

First, I am dazzled by the variety of the ways in which God touches people. For example, Mary Ann Donovan SC notes, ‘What I find liberating is the study of history—knowing the truth of what has been does indeed give freedom!’ The mystics and the great spiritual teachers of the Christian tradition form a diverse lot. They are male and female, cloistered and apostolic, drawn to God by the beauty of creation and by a darkness beyond all senses. They have prayed by walking in the woods, by ruminating on scripture, by following their breath, by going into the void, by singing, by sitting in silence.

This diverse historical witness both frees and challenges me. I am freed from the burden of finding the ‘best’ way to pray or the ‘right’ path of holiness. There is no ‘one’ or ‘right’ way. Seeking the correct formula may be the consequence of a US American predilection for pragmatic solutions, but I suspect that it also haunts people from many other cultures. And it certainly creates a debilitating tension in the spiritual seeker. In classroom teaching and in giving spiritual direction, I have seen people freed as they learned the varied witness of the holy women and men who have gone before us. People have been

¹ In the text that follows the comments of colleagues will be presented as quotations without footnotes.
² For a discussion of how history can be used and misused in the study of spirituality, see Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998 [1991]).
especially liberated in discovering that they can pray with their anger or with their sexual desire or with other feelings that are often regarded as ‘negative’.¹

At the same time, this historical witness challenges me to plumb my own experience, in order to discover how God is calling me to walk the spiritual path. If there is no ‘one’ way, what is my way? Given the variety of ways in which God has spoken to others, how does God’s call reach me? Given the variety of ways in which people have responded to God, how might I respond, especially in prayer? How should I praise the Giver by sharing my unique gifts with others? The witness of history invites me to a free and mature response to God’s promptings.

My colleague Robert Hale OSB Cam, offers a second way in which history liberates:

In my first years in religious life I had absorbed from a somewhat Jansenistic spiritual formation a dark view of creation, of ‘the world’. The study of spirituality, especially of the Greek Fathers and of Teilhard, liberated me into a joyful acceptance of a creation suffused with the risen Christ, and so also of the real value of study and teaching to help witness to the Paschal message in its fuller dimensions. It was like being liberated into Easter joy.

Many of us have similar stories. James and Evelyn Whitehead note that all religious denominations are marked by both ‘grace and malpractice’.⁴ The religious categories which we inherit can be unhealthy and even toxic, and a familiarity with the history of spirituality can relativise these categories. Recently I worked on an article on the spirituality of the diaconate. My research took me into an exploration of the roles of deacons, presbyters and episkopoi in New Testament texts, in the letters of Clement of Alexandria and Ignatius of Antioch, and in other early Christian texts such as The Shepherd of Hermas. The diverse ways in which these ministerial roles were embodied in different Christian communities fascinated me. The research led me to what Johannes Baptist Metz has called a ‘dangerous

¹ A helpful book in this regard is Ann Belford Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

memory. I saw that the static, hierarchic organisation of the Church with which I had grown up was a social and cultural construction reflecting a particular vision of central control. How freeing it was to realise that the Church had not always been thus, and might therefore not be thus in the future!

Third, knowledge of history roots us in a tradition and gives us a sense of participating in an adventure bigger than ourselves. Doctoral candidate Ray Maria McNamara RSM captures this sense of freedom:

> Reading the classic texts in Christian spirituality grounded my own spiritual journey in the rich Christian tradition. This has given me a sense of belonging to something bigger while at the same time stirring a deep desire to continue to participate in and share this tradition with others.

As a student of history, I am invited to interpret my journey in relation to the journeys of those who have gone before me. They have used powerfully descriptive metaphors which can illuminate my experience: interior castles, dark nights, spiritual combat, caterpillars becoming butterflies. They have provided road maps so that I don’t have to find my way through the forest by myself. They have shared their insights about growth in prayer and suggested some signposts to spiritual progress. They have outlined gradations of virtues such as humility and charity. They have given models of how to go about discerning God’s call. This is not to say that we accept the tradition uncritically, because some voices have been left out. But it is to say that history helps us connect our story with a much bigger one.

Fourth, the study of history has taught me the importance of cultural and historical context for the understanding of any spirituality. So Joseph Chinnici OFM writes:

> As an historian, I think the study of the history of spirituality can be liberating in freeing us from the cultural preconceptions which determine much of our thinking today. We inherit from various contemporary disciplines, which themselves are very much socially and politically shaped … certain prejudices with respect to people,

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6 I have explored this in ‘Catholicism and Postmodernity: Faithing Our Practice’, *The Way*, 41/3 (July 2001), 246-256.
movements, texts. But part of spiritual growth itself is a ridding oneself of unconscious prejudices and misshapen intellectual and affective constructs and responses ….

For example, contemporary spirituality, especially in the United States, runs the risk of being co-opted by individualism and consumerism. In the popular consciousness, ‘spirituality’ is often separated from ‘religion’. ‘Spirituality’ involves one’s personal quest for meaning, whereas ‘religion’ involves institutional structures and credal statements. So we often hear, ‘I am spiritual but not religious’. Spirituality runs the risk of becoming just another product to make one feel good.

As a scholar of spirituality, I am grounded in a tradition which frees me from the constructions of my culture and enables me to critique those constructions. I am impressed with the ways in which great spiritual teachers have been involved in the issues of their time. The men and women who fled to the desert in the fourth century were not simply escaping from the world; they were engaged in a radical critique of both their society and their church. Teresa of Avila, in her reform of the Carmelites, opposed the class stratification which typified convent life as she knew it. Sisters from the nobility often had spacious lodgings and even servants, whereas sisters from the lower classes had simple quarters. Teresa’s convents, however, were to be small, so that relationships between the sisters could be based on friendship and mutuality. The list could go on and on: Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton. Again and again, I find spiritual teachers confronting the shortcomings of their cultures. Given this historical witness, I feel called to challenge the privatization of spirituality which I see occurring around me. I am freed from the hegemony of contemporary constructions of the spiritual quest.

**Methodology**

Methodology, too, I have found liberating. A field of study is distinguished by its object (what it studies) and its methods (how it
explores its object. Most fields today employ a variety of methods. Learning methodology requires discipline, and it is to some the least interesting aspect of a field of study. How often have I seen students' eyes glaze over when I've asked them to explain what method(s) they are using! Yet learning and employing a method stretches me. It takes me out of myself. It forces me to be reflective and self-critical about what I am doing and why I am doing it. It gives me a yardstick with which to measure my progress in a research project, and a means of situating myself vis-à-vis other scholars in the field.

In my research I specialised in the history of US American Catholic spirituality, with special attention to two spiritual writers from the early twentieth century, William Kerby and Paul Hanly Furfey. In analyzing my topic I used the hermeneutic method developed by Sandra Schneiders, which involves three steps: a thorough description of a religious experience, a careful analysis of that experience, and an appropriation of the experience to the present. Early in my research I sought to systematize the writings of William Kerby according to categories that I had devised. One of my professors pointed out that this was not fair to Kerby, and that I had, as it were, to allow Kerby to be Kerby even if it

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7 For an overview of methods used in the study of spirituality, see Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1997).

8 Attention to methodology distinguishes the academic study of spirituality. A 'pastoral' study of spirituality (as mentioned above) may or may not attend to method. For a scholarly discussion, see Mary Frohlich, 'Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality: Revisiting Questions of Definition and Method', *Spiritus*, 1 (Spring 2001), 65-78.

The Truth That Makes Us Free

seemed to me that he was inconsistent. My task was to be faithful to his writing, not to reform him according to my preferences. This turned out to be a paradigmatic experience. My method (the first step of which was to describe the other’s experience) pushed me to see the other as other, and to allow him to stand outside my preconceptions. This lesson has been carried over into other areas of my life, from functioning in a classroom with people from many cultures, to teaching in an ecumenical setting with colleagues and students from different denominations, to conversations with friends and loved ones who often enough see things differently from me. How freeing it is to be enriched by the insights and viewpoints of the other! 

**Analytical Tools**

Study has given me analytical tools. These tools can be used to analyze texts, but they have also helped me to explore life. Here are two examples.

During my first year of doctoral studies I participated in a seminar on hermeneutics. The authors (among them Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Ricoeur and Gadamer) provided a difficult and challenging read. Yet the concepts under discussion proved seminal for my later work. For the sake of brevity, I will mention three: horizon, dialogical knowledge and preunderstanding.

‘Horizon’ is the limit of the reality that we see from our viewpoint. On the literal level, if I stand on a beach and scan the ocean, I can see to the horizon. So, analogously, if I scan ‘the world’ from where I stand, there is a limit to what I can see. Other people, looking from other standpoints, have different horizons. When they walk into a store, my students from Africa experience the racial tension in the United States in ways that I do not as a white person. One can also speak of the ‘horizon’ of a text or a work of art, because the author or artist had a view of the world which they embodied in their work.

‘Dialogical knowledge’ is the knowledge that arises from the conversation between horizons. As a scholar, I can read, analyze and question a classic spiritual text such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, but I do not really engage with the text unless I also allow *The Cloud* to question me. How, for example, might this text’s teaching about the prayer of quiet challenge the way I pray? Dialogical knowledge
undermines the old scientific paradigm of a ‘subject’ analyzing an ‘object’. The subject is also influenced by the object.

‘Preunderstanding’ denotes how I bring my personal, ethnic and cultural history to any situation. I do not come to learning as a *tabula rasa*. I am already interpreting before I am even aware of it, and my interpretation is particularly shaped by my language and culture. Standard English, for example, has lost the distinction between ‘you’ and ‘thee’, a distinction which remains in many languages (so in French, *vous* and *tu*). I am, accordingly, less conscious of whether my relationship with someone is more or less personal than a speaker of French would be. Further, the ‘thees’ and ‘thous’ which fill old prayer books seem quaint and outdated to me rather than powerfully intimate.

These concepts of horizon, dialogical knowledge and preunderstanding have not just influenced the way in which I read classic texts; they have also revolutionised the way in which I relate to other people. I seek to understand the limits of my own horizon; I do not think that I have an ‘objective’ view. I allow the other’s horizon to challenge and stretch mine; I rejoice (maybe after an initial complaint!) when my view is widened as others share their horizons with me. I know that my preunderstanding both enriches and limits my approach to others. I try to welcome those irruptions of the other which shatter my preconceived notions. The dynamism implicit in these notions is liberating. Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman provides one example. This gentile woman’s ‘great faith’ challenged and expanded Jesus’ initial understanding that his message was meant for the Jewish people only, and not for the gentile ‘dogs’ (Matthew 15:21-28).

A second analytical tool is *sociology*, which I employed as a cognate discipline to enrich my primary work in spirituality. Again, I will use just one example.

Early in my study I was introduced to Max Weber’s sociology of religion, in which he discusses the different appeals to legitimacy that religious authorities may use: appeals to rational grounds, to tradition or to charism.¹⁰ This typology has proved helpful to me not only in

analyzing the authority of a religious text but also in understanding some of the tensions in pastoral ministry today. We find all three types of authority in the Catholic Church. Authority rooted in rationality relates to those who are certified to work in financial offices or social agencies or educational institutions. One needs the proper credentials to be hired. Authority rooted in tradition relates to ordination: ordained ministers have the authority to preside at the eucharist because they are ordained to do so by a bishop, and this tradition goes back to the beginnings of Christianity. Authority rooted in charism relates to founders and the movements that they started. Charismatic individuals attract followers neither because of their education nor because of ecclesial tradition, but because of their personal magnetism.

These different claims to legitimacy can result in very different views of a given pastoral situation. For example, a pastor, whose authority derives from tradition, and a principal, whose authority derives from certification, might have to work out their respective roles vis-à-vis hiring teachers for the parish school. Applying this sociological tool freed me and enabled me to let go of my own preference, which is for charismatic authority, and listen to the legitimate claims of those with different viewpoints.

Self-Implication

The study of Christian spirituality has been freeing for me because it is self-implicating. Scholars in the field often choose research projects related to the spiritual questions that are particularly important for them. As Sandra Schneiders has noted:

Many of us [spirituality scholars] probably felt drawn into spirituality precisely because our questions about spirituality were not heuristic devices to generate research projects or ways of participating in a scholarly guild. They were real, intensely personal questions that had implications for our own lives.\(^\text{11}\)

The self-implicating nature of the academic discipline of spirituality demands that students strive to be aware of their preunderstanding and prejudices, so that their research is not clouded by their personal

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preferences. Self-implication can either trap one in one’s prejudices or liberate one from them.

I came to the study of spirituality after some years of working with the poor and of trying to raise awareness regarding issues of social justice. I came to see how activists often got trapped in their own anger or frustration, and ended up bitter and burnt out. I sought insights about how to enter and stay in the struggle, insights rooted in a deep relationship with God, and undertook research on the relationship between spirituality and justice. Having the time to explore and write about such personal questions has been very freeing. Ray Maria McNamara captures this sense:

The study of Christian spirituality has been freeing because it has become the place where I can best deal with my own questions related to meaning—specifically meaning in relationship to my experiences of God’s call, God’s movement in my life and my experiences of nature.

The ‘Work’ of Liberation

Early in this essay I suggested that ‘study’ can occur in different settings. But, regardless of setting, ‘study’ connotes for me a process of learning that challenges me to take in and integrate something new. As I grow older, I am more and more convinced that it is my assumptions, rather than my conclusions, which raise the greatest barriers to spiritual growth. It is especially when it challenges assumptions that the ‘something new’ of study engenders growth. During my graduate study, I experienced this challenge most pointedly on two fronts. First, exposure to feminist theology undermined my assumptions about the normativity of maleness and, most of all, about the masculinity of God. Second, close friendships with gay men undermined my assumptions about the normativity of heterosexual experience. At first I experienced these encounters with ‘the other’ as threats to my religious beliefs. At the moment of confrontation I faced a basic spiritual question: am I going to be open to this challenge, or am I going to hunker down and defend myself? If I choose to be open, I do not know where the challenge will take me.
‘Liberation’ might sound like a wonderful experience, and indeed it is. But it is also hard work. We are usually unaware of our assumptions; they are like the water in which we swim and the atmosphere in which we breathe. We don’t see them precisely because they are so close to us, so integral to who we are. They only come into the foreground, where we can see and confront them, when we are confronted by the ‘other’. Some people sit in a classroom, or participate in a bible study, or work through a topic on their own, and simply become confirmed in their prejudices. They seek to strengthen their arguments so that they may convince others of the rightness of their views. Such people are not, in my estimation, really students. One who studies is willing to be liberated from his or her preconceptions.

**Study as Privilege and Challenge**

Writing this essay has given me a chance to review, and even to relive, my experience of study. The experience has reminded me of what a privilege study is. Millions of people struggle to feed themselves and their families each day. Millions more live in temporary, even squalid, shelter, as refugees from war or natural disasters. The threats of terror and war hang over us all, but they endanger the poor especially. We confront the horrifying gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. In such a world, how blessed are we who have the luxury of exploring a subject which is of interest to us. What an extravagance to have time to read, reflect, discuss and write!

If study is meant to liberate us, we must ask for what or for whom are we freed? The privilege of study challenges us to put its fruits to good use. Paul reminds us that gifts are given for the common good, not for self-aggrandisement (1 Corinthians 12:7). I hope and pray that my study may not only lead me to freedom, but may also serve those who suffer from injustice. The truth makes us free; let us hope that our freedom can serve the cause of our sisters and brothers in captivity.

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AN IGNATIAN WAY OF DOING THEOLOGY

Theology Discerning ‘The True Life’

Christophe Theobald

In recent times, theology has become much richer, and much more diverse. But this very diversity raises a question: what, in all this wide-ranging intellectual activity, is in fact specifically theology? What holds it all together? What gives it coherence?

We all know the standard answer: the faith of the Church. But just to say that much is not very helpful, given the vast range of human experience, including spiritual experience, that theologians articulate. Another approach to this question begins by recalling the wide variety of spiritualities and traditions of consecrated life within the Church. Some of these have generated quite specific schools of theology. In this article, I would like to argue that there is an Ignatian way of doing theology—one which has so far been largely implicit, but which is coming into its own precisely now, as theological awareness becomes radically pluralist.

This claim requires us to abandon the sense of sharp separation between so-called ‘academic theology’ and its expression in spiritual literature so sadly characteristic of Christian thought throughout the second millennium. At the outset of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas writes of a ‘twofold manner of judging’, generating ‘a twofold wisdom’. One style of judgment centres on a person’s ‘inclination’: the matter in question attracts the virtuous person to make correct judgments. The holy person operates *patiens divina*—out of receptivity to divine reality. The other style is a matter of ‘knowledge’; correct judgments come from an awareness of ethical principles. And Thomas specifies that his project is of the second kind.¹

¹ *Summa theologiae*, 1.1.6.
Thomas stops short of saying that a theologian does not need to be a believer, because the ‘principles’ of this intellectual theology come from revelation. But later Thomists separate the two styles of judgment more radically. Melchior Cano, the Dominican who repeatedly accused Ignatius of illuminism, excludes theologians known as ‘spiritual’, and even more so spiritual experience, from his catalogue of the sources of theology. Karl Rahner’s theology of the Exercises begins with a trenchant polemic against the habit of seeing Ignatius simply as a spiritual master and not as a theologian. But not even Rahner’s work—or that of figures such as Erich Przywara, Hans Urs von Balthasar or Gaston Fessard—really tackles the question of what the specifically Ignatian or Jesuit way of proceeding in theology actually consists in.

Jesuit theology is not marked primarily by a body of doctrine or by a specific intellectual structure, such as Thomism provides for Dominicans. What one finds, rather, is a ‘way of proceeding’, a ‘way of moving forward’, a theological ‘knack’, a ‘style’, expressive of a particular experience and understanding of God.

In what follows, I shall try firstly to bring out what is distinctive about this Ignatian or Jesuit approach to theology. I will begin by discussing the act of discernment, something close to Thomas’ first style of judgment. Then I want to discuss the idea of an ‘authentic way of life’; this is both the criterion and goal of discernment; it also fuses with the New Testament vision of an eternal life that was with the Father and that is now revealed, seen, heard and declared (1 John 1:1-3). Finally, I shall suggest how the present situation in Europe is revealing theological potentials within Ignatian spirituality that have up till now been hidden, and opening up for the first time a particular kind of Ignatian theological vocation. In general, I want to suggest that

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Ignatian spirituality enables us to imaging in a new way the inner coherence of theology, and the relationships between the different activities that theology involves.

‘Doctrine’ and Discernment

The term ‘doctrine’ occurs twice in the Spiritual Exercises, and both uses come during the central phase when the retreatant is preparing an Election. The consideration on Three Modes of Humility aims at arousing the heart to ‘the true doctrine of Christ our Lord’ (Exx 164), as Jesus is choosing his disciples and sending them out to ‘spread his sacred doctrine’, to use the phrase from the Two Standards (Exx 145).

‘Doctrine’ is connected with the ‘true life’ (Exx 139), with a specific way of relating to God and to human beings. The content of this doctrine is not so important, at least initially. What does matter is that those who teach ‘the true life’ practise what they preach, model what they are saying. Ignatius focuses on the relationships between Jesus and his disciples, and on the contrast between these and the ‘nets and chains’ of the enemy chief.

‘Doctrine’ for Ignatius refers primarily to a process of transformation and conversion, not to a theory which has then to be applied. Like Jesus’ parables, Ignatius’ ‘doctrine’ opens us up to a ‘style’, a ‘way of doing things’. To hand this style on is to form another person in this way of life.

The earliest Jesuit texts confirm the point. The papal bull founding the Society speaks of ‘the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and the propagation of the faith’.3 ‘Doctrine’ is closely connected to ‘life’, and is situated within a process of formation for people everywhere. In the 1550 version, the emphases are already changing subtly: the faith is to be defended as well as propagated, and the progress of souls in life and doctrine appears as secondary and separate.4 In Ignatius’ own texts, too, ‘doctrine’ generally appears in close connection with other aspects of the Christian life,5 but there are

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3 MHSJ 1, 16: ‘…ad profectum animarum in vita et doctrina christiana, et ad fidei propagationem’ (1539 version of Formula, n. 2).
4 MHSJ 1, 376: ‘…ad fidei defensionem et propagationem et profectum animarum in vita et doctrina Christiana’.
5 See, for example, Constitutions 1.4.5 [198]; 4.7.2.D [622]; 4. Preamble [307]: ‘beyond the example of one’s life, doctrine is necessary and a method of expounding it’.
places where the term simply refers to ideas and beliefs in an absolute sense.\footnote{See, for example, Constitutions 8.1. K [672]: ‘all will ordinarily follow one doctrine, that which the Society will have chosen as better and more appropriate for its subjects’. Not only Thomas, but also Aristotle, has a doctrine: Constitutio 4.12.1. 3 [464, 470].}

As the early Jesuits grew in number, a debate arose about these latter references in the Constitutions to ‘uniformity of doctrine’ and to the ‘scholastic doctrine of St Thomas’. It lasted for several decades.\footnote{See Dominique Julia, ‘Généalogie de la “Ratio studiorum”’, in Les jésuites à l’âge baroque: 1540-1640, edited by Luce Giard and Louis de Vaucelles (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1996), 115-130.}

Some Jesuits thought there needed to be a list of ‘opinions that must be supported and taught by our people as true and to be held’;\footnote{From a heading in a decree by Borja, perhaps the first of its kind in Jesuit history, promulgated in 1565; see MHSJ Mon Paed 3, 384.} others preferred general exhortations to prudence. The debate, which has frequently recurred,\footnote{See, for example, Fr General Janssens’ letter on the controversial 1950 encyclical, Humani generis in Acta Romana Societatis Iesu, 12 (1951), 47-72, 72-94.} turns on whether theology is to be understood as a set of propositions or as a method. The contribution of Alfonso Salmerón, one of the last survivors from the first companions, is a wonderful statement of the original Ignatian position and of its underlying rationale:

**Firstly … I think that it does our Society no good if we choose and embrace as our guide some particular teacher or writer of scholastic theology, in such a way that we all swear by their words and opinions, and that we fight on behalf of them as if for our own hearths and homes. For indeed, up till now no author in the Church has been found (and I certainly don’t think there will be one in the future) who has so far excelled in all their writings and opinions as never to have lapsed when from time to time they have suffered human weakness in some respects, or (to put it mildly) as never, at any point, to have argued less defensibly than others. Thus it is no unfairness to them to leave their position aside. …**

I fear that as we want to deal with the disease of dissidence in doctrine, we will merely add to it, and they will say that we have changed by some remarkable process from Jesuits into Thomists or Dominicans. ...

It may one day happen that one of our people will be sent by divine gift to hand on in writing theological doctrine through some new style of argument (nova quadam ratione) and in a better way, as
Blessed Ignatius of happy memory thought would some time happen. It would be wrong to restrain such a person; rather, the matter must be referred to Fr General, who, having taken cognisance of the matter and having consulted others as he saw fit, can encourage the person to the completion of the work that has begun if it is worthwhile and suitable, and foster and help the person to the extent that there is need. For indeed all disciplines have been developed and perfected over the course of time; and human effort is not so exhausted or sterile that it cannot, with God's help, at some point make improvements. Why, then, do we want to deny ourselves this glory, if God deigns to give it to us?

Finally, I do not think that any catalogue of propositions that we should abstain from defending should be compiled. For when this was done some time ago, it was not very successful. ... I think that for us the rules of sacred Scripture, and the definitions of the Church, and the decrees of the popes and the councils regarding right ideas about faith and piety are enough. 

We do not know whether the Jesuits at the time were aware of the difference between their founder’s use of the term ‘doctrine’ and Thomas’ sacra doctrina. But they certainly could have invoked a distinction not only between Thomas’ two forms of judgment, but also between speculative and practical disciplines.

For Thomas, human knowledge is merely a means for coming to the true life which is the knowledge of God. This way of thinking is quite different from Ignatius'. We are well into the Third Part of the Summa theologiae, at Question 42 in fact, before the doctrina Christi appears. At this stage, Thomas deals simply with communication in the abstract, because the content has already been well established in the earlier Parts. Article 40, having introduced the theme of Christ’s way of life, invokes the classic distinction between contemplation and action:

… the contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which people, by preaching and teaching, deliver to others the fruits of their contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a

life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ."

We are here at the heart of the Summa: Thomas is founding the Order of Preachers on the life of Christ. Jesus, the first friar preacher, is uniting the active and contemplative lives in a higher active life of preaching. Thomas’ presentation presupposes that *sacra doctrina* and speculative thought are independent of the practical.

In Ignatius, matters are different. Ignatius discovers Jesus and his apostles ‘wanting to help all’ (Exx 146) in a way of life that goes quite beyond the classic split between contemplation and action. ‘Doctrine’ here is no longer contrasted with practice. Ignatius identifies ‘doctrine’ with the process of ‘formation of a true life’ that occurs when Jesus or his apostles come into contact with people at large.

*The Need for Discernment*

There was nothing new in the idea that the ‘formation of a true life’ involved the reading of Scripture, and that the events of Scripture needed to be re-enacted in the lives of Jesus’ followers. What was truly original in Ignatius was his awareness of the historical distance separating the Scriptures from his own cultural and political space. The *Autobiography* shows us how Ignatius in Jerusalem, under threat of death, had given up trying to follow the biblical text literally (today we would speak of fundamentalism). He discovered that the ‘formation of a true life’, both his own and that of his group, would require inventiveness and discernment.

From now on it is not just the Bible and the reader; there is also the Spirit who mediates the Bible to the reader. The question of interpretation emerges, probably for the first time, as both a practical and doctrinal problem. ‘Doctrine’ has become a complex process of ‘formation in the true life’, set in motion and inspired by a reading of Scripture, and culminating in a veritable (re-)creation of the reader.

How did such a bold conception arise? In the context of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the answer is clear. Now that the saving will of God cannot be derived from the text in any straightforward fashion, people are dependent, in a quite new fashion, on their own freedom to search

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11 *Summa theologiae*, 3. 40. 1.
Ignatius lived in a world becoming broader for this will and find it. We are called to root our absolute uniqueness in God’s own self, and on that basis to order our lives (Exx 1).

Ignatius speaks of the ‘whole plain or circuit of the whole world’ (Exx 101). Ignatius lived in a world that was becoming much broader; no longer, as in Thomas’ day, was the world to be identified with Christendom. No one has better reflected on the significance of this generative moment than Karl Rahner. If the field of God’s presence extends to the whole world, then it becomes vital to acknowledge its essential pluralism. We are making a veritable paradigm shift: the locus of God’s self-revelation is God’s living and working in the diversity of everything and every person (Exx 235-236). It is this to which Karl Rahner responded by distinguishing the particular empirical patterns of human history from the underlying transcendental structure present in all of them.

The radicality of Ignatius’ insight, however, only really comes out when we focus again on how God’s will is to be discerned in this particular situation, with God as the relationship originating and ordering our freedom. Of course neither the Spiritual Exercises nor any of the other foundational Jesuit texts call into question the order of the law and the commandments. The Election puts forward a quite new discovery: the uniqueness of God’s design matching the uniqueness of each individual subject, each individual group.

It was, again, Rahner who brought the point out: Ignatius’ Exercises presuppose a form of moral decision that is quite individual, not simply the application of universal moral norms. And law is therefore not much use when it comes to discerning such choices; nor is it enough merely to note that all the possibilities are morally legitimate and praiseworthy. The person is instead invited, during the Second Week of the Exercises, to base their discernment on a sense of conformity or resonance with the roots of their liberty in God, in the always unique way in which God is structuring the person’s life. Ignatius speaks of peace, repose, quiet and joy in this connection. We should remember that he takes this ultimate criterion of gospel consolation, characteristic of a true life being formed, from an image of Jesus, ‘in a humble place, but he himself being very handsome and always looking kindly’ (Exx 144, Vulgate). One might easily use this Ignatian reading of Scripture as a basis for speaking theologically about authenticity of life.
The Ignatian Way of Theological Proceeding

In at least three ways, this Ignatian experience of God generates a distinctive approach to theology. The first centres on the kind of regulation exerted by theological reason. The *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* are texts ‘to be used’—they have their sole justification in the forms of practice they generate. We can extend the point: theological discourse exists only to enable the process of ‘human and spiritual formation’. The very genre of the Ignatian ‘rule’ indicates that theological thought is precisely not there as a description or representation of the true life, but rather as an invitation actually to experience that life.

The Ignatian approach to theology is therefore essentially practical, and as such it remains dependent on the experiences by which the true life is formed. These experiences—here is our second point—occur in history, and in infinite variety. Because the general law cannot regulate how God’s immediate encounter will occur within a given process, history, in all its singularity, whether of individuals, groups or whole societies, has to be allowed to have its own influence on the ‘regulative system’ that is theology. Theology has to remain supple, ready in principle for whatever might be emerging.

Thirdly, this fluid relationship between Christian experience and its regulation in Christian ideas implies a quite new understanding of what is involved in faith. A feedback effect arises: the regulative system is both confirmed and changed as people and groups structure their lives. And this structuring is itself a truly theological experience, an experience of God. The retreat-giver disappears; the retreatant becomes free enough to internalise perfectly the ‘rules for discernment’ in the structuring of his or her own life, to the point of being able to give the Exercises to others. Similarly, the theologian can withdraw as people and groups become the active subjects, not just of their own history but also of their own theological self-understanding.

At the heart of this process lies a kind of theological reciprocity, with biblical roots in such texts as 2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

… where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.
Such reciprocity seems beyond Thomas, since for him reason is only a means of arguing, an instrument for something else (*theologia subalterna*). It can occur, however, in styles of theology informed by Ignatian spirituality, if those involved are acting freely and in full awareness of what is at stake.

**Discerning the Authentic Life**

So far, this article has explored how Ignatius appropriates the gospel. It is time now to move more explicitly to the ways in which an Ignatian theology can engage the range of contemporary ways of life and of Christianity.

*Christian Perfection*

The Second Part of the *Summa theologiae* begins by evoking the purpose of the Christian life, using the biblical term ‘beatitude’. Thomas deals with the various ‘human acts’ that serve as means to this end, and ends with a consideration of the ‘states of life’, culminating with religious life, the form of life closest to gospel perfection.

In some ways Ignatius is clearly taking up this tradition: he writes of a perfect life that is a happy or blessed life, carried forward by consolation and peace. But its goal is the ‘doctrine of Christ’. Ignatius makes a fundamental distinction between spiritual poverty and the ways in which this poverty is actually lived out. The spiritual poverty of the first of Matthew’s Beatitudes is a gospel-rooted capacity to orient one’s life on God; the other options are specific means of living out this poverty. Ignatius articulates these in terms of the ‘states of life’—social institutions that can contain people’s life-processes. But, quite surprisingly, Ignatius does not connect gospel perfection with consecrated life. He does, to be sure, imply a hierarchical distinction: the general Christian life of the commandments is linked to the childhood of Jesus (Exx 135), while the life
of the counsels derives from his public ministry. But nevertheless, Ignatius insists that the experience of election must allow us to find gospel perfection ‘in whatever state or life God our Lord would give us to choose’ (Exx 135). The various states of life are only means; perfection is for everyone.

The move that Ignatius makes here can help us in our current situation, where the fundamental distinction between ‘states of life’, which has structured Catholic Christianity in the West throughout the second millennium, is now in crisis. Our societies are becoming more individualistic, and confidence in social institutions is diminishing. Religious traditions in the past protected human beings from the sense of their radical contingency. But they are losing their capacity to fulfil this function. As a French philosopher has put it:

We are doomed from henceforth to live in nakedness and anguish—something which since the beginning of the human adventure has so far been more or less spared us by the good offices of the gods. Each person now has to develop their own responses on their own account.12

These personal responses, often quite makeshift, vary: more or less sensitive silence in face of life’s tragic riddle; the kind of stoical heroism you can find among some intellectuals who subordinate all individuality to the great cosmic process; the hedonism of those who, faced with the stumbling-block of contingency, try just to live for the present as fully as possible; a life informed by one of the great religious traditions, but inevitably in a new way, conditioned by this contemporary need to develop a personal response to human life and its problems.

All these attitudes, and many others, jostle together in contemporary society. The grand systems of meaning have become fragile, and the lifestyles they offer their adherents—in the Christian case, the ‘states of life’—are thus also losing their plausibility and their influence. Individuals and groups have therefore been left to their own devices in order to find their own ways, tossed as they are between the

various models that the powerful put forward in advertising, and their fragile, personal desire for something creative.

Some philosophers and social critics have spoken of the death of humanity. What they are really referring to is the structural tendency in our societies towards conformism, even if the standards to which we are being pressured to conform are continually fluctuating. It is in this context that the value of an ‘authentic life’ becomes significant. Faced with the pressures towards conformism, individuals and groups can nevertheless come together and resist the prefabricated models society puts before them. They can seek to live alternatively, wherever they are, in true creativity. Authenticity in this context connotes a coherence between what people or groups say and what they do, a coherence which, simply as such, inspires confidence. Another sign of authenticity is the capacity to be surprised by the bond that is the most fundamental element in human existence: the bond with others.

The crisis of the ‘states of life’ as developed by Western Catholic Christianity is closely bound up with this situation in the wider culture. And Ignatian spirituality offers two important contributions.

The first of these emerges from the way in which Ignatius, at the dawn of modernity, relativised the distinction between the lives of the precepts and the counsels, and instead highlighted what Lumen gentium would name ‘the universal call to holiness’. Any Christianity worthy of the name is called to a form of excess, to the Ignatian magis:

… give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:38)

Now, this call to excess, which Matthew’s Jesus calls perfection (Matthew 5:48), is in no way an incitement to heroism. Rather, what is operative is the mystery of God’s own self: God’s excess. God’s movement outwards reaches within human limits, and shows itself to be accessible to us, accessible in an absolutely unique way for each person. This individual touch for each person is not something that can be legislated or codified. Here the traditional term ‘counsel’ acquires its full significance: the Spirit counsels, indeed consoles, everyone directly; and all need the counsel and consolation of their sisters and brothers within the Church so that each person’s full and unique capacity for God can be revealed in mutuality.
Ignatius' second contribution is his awareness of the logic of his foundation as described earlier. The Ignatian texts are written in such a way that those who appropriate them do not seek to reproduce one model or another, but are rather invited to enter into the founder's generative experience. There is a creativity here which is divine and theological in the full sense. For a long time it remained encrusted within the structures of 'religious life'. But now it has been liberated—this is the positive side of our rather bleak cultural analysis. From now on it can shape the lives of individuals, and inspire many different forms of community. The central criterion for this creativity is the unique authenticity of the figure of Jesus. This leads us from the Spirit of counsel and consolation, a wisdom spread in God's mysterious providence over all humanity, to the Christian life's specific form.

*Practical Theology and the Human Sciences*

In the Ignatian perspective, theology is an open structure, always dependent on how the 'formation of a true life' happens in history. Two consequences follow from this.

Firstly, an Ignatian theology needs to be a *collaborative process*. The 'formation of a true life', of a generative life, is a communal affair: it must be modelled on the communication that took place between Jesus, his apostles, and the persons or groups that they encountered. Often people may weigh pros and cons in best Ignatian fashion, and listen attentively to the movements of the Spirit, but in a way that is still too much influenced by the individualism of our surrounding culture. Theology happens together; theologians, 'formers' of the new life, need to operate in profound reciprocity. This collective approach to theology nevertheless requires the full and inalienable individual participation of all involved, and the counsel or consolation of the Spirit within each. And sometimes there will be no external confirmation or corroboration for an individual's conviction.

Secondly, a theology that goes beyond the dogmatic norms and tries to say something to real human decision-making, and hence becomes involved in the indefinite complexity and pluralism of human
life, will inevitably encounter the human sciences. Linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology, economics, anthropology—all these have made their marks on biblical exegesis and practical theology, and have provoked a series of important crises. Ignatian spirituality highlights the difference between law and counsel. In doing so, it indicates the point at which theologians can and must learn from the human sciences, and allow these sciences, with their awkward and critical questions, to keep reminding them of how their theology must be structurally open-ended.

The Present Moment

In what is called our ‘postmodern’ society, people risk losing the capacity for the concentration so essential to real creativity, as they conform to the fluctuations of manipulated fashion. The conflict here is not merely one in secular society; it also—despite what many say—influences contemporary Church life. The proliferation of texts and Church organizations of every kind (something which was already starting at the end of Vatican II), the tendency to legislate about just everything, the habit of talking about more and more things to fewer and fewer people, the attempts being made to reinforce doctrinal structures in face of the perceived threat from modernity—all these things betoken a serious diminishment in one part of the Church’s ability to focus on the gospel. It represents an attempt to pass on the gospel-inspired creativity of the last Council by drawing on habits and structures dating from a previous era. But the new wine requires new wineskins.

The contemporary crisis of the Church in Europe must surely be linked to this contradiction. Vatican II’s texts presupposed a culturally and institutionally rich Church, in a way that ill matches the poverty of our actual resources. But in the Scriptures true renewal happens in the desert, or on the roads of Galilee. What we are living through today is in fact a quite unprecedented return to the gospel as it presents itself graciously to individuals, both within and beyond Christian communities, in great power and in elemental simplicity.

History and Fundamental Theology

This reading of our contemporary situation brings out strengths in the Ignatian way of doing theology that have so far been only latent, and I
have tried to name these. Ultimately, however, this analysis of our situation puts another and more fundamental question before us, of the kind proper to such desert moments. Is the present crisis of European Christianity the harbinger of its imminent collapse, or rather a sign of profound transformation?

This question leads us to fundamental theology. In the Ignatian theological ‘way of moving forward’, the question of how faith is grounded is answered, in a quite distinctive way, in terms of experience. The only ‘justification’ for the Ignatian apostle’s desire ‘to help souls’ in the contemporary Church is an immediate experience of God—one that our society cannot corroborate. And the only thing which can make God’s Church credible in the contemporary world is a collective capacity to let itself really be interrogated, to be worked over by the gospel. No doctrine as such can be foundational.

Earlier in this essay, I spoke of how the Ignatian ‘formation of a true life’ involves a constant process of interplay between doctrine and experience, with experience both confirming and correcting the doctrine. This can only be known ‘from inside’, as a participant—through Ignatian ‘interior knowledge’. It is this dynamic interplay which is foundational, rooted as it is in God, God’s ‘excess’, God’s ‘stepping out’, God’s being as ever greater—an excess which, paradoxically, lets itself be contained within indefinitely many limited human beings—human beings who become, through this divine action, absolutely unique. And there is also the human experience of shared companionship along the way, with each person moving towards whatever their authenticity will turn out to be. It is hardly surprising that no doctrinal formulation can express this immense test of faith. The theologian’s task is to invite those whom they meet to enter freely into the process, and to explore to the utmost their own awareness as it develops within their own life-experience. Then in time, this experience will come to feel reliable and trustworthy, both for the people concerned and for others who encounter them.

What holds theology together, its ultimate principle, necessarily eludes direct description. Precisely for that reason, it can leave its traces on a variety of intellectual disciplines, including the secular ones (indeed especially these), as the early Jesuit Constitutions and the Ratio studiorum indicate. The Ignatian method specifically in theology can be characterized in three significant ways:
• a cultivation of all forms of human wisdom, reflecting a commitment to the Spirit's work 'in all things';

• a discernment of how 'formation in the true life' can occur, rooted in the life of Christ, and informed by a dogmatic theology which recognises that what its normative force has constantly to be rediscovered in unique situations;

• a fundamental theology which sees faith as centring on a genuinely theological experience of the divine presence within the diverse human life-processes forming the one Church, the one people of God.¹³

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¹³ This essay was first published in Nouvelle revue théologique, 119 (1997), 375-396. We are grateful to the author and to the editors for allowing us to publish this abridged and slightly adapted English version.
WHEN CELL DOORS CLOSE
AND HEARTS OPEN

Lysanne Sizoo

MIRACLES DO HAPPEN. Sweden is arguably one of Europe’s most secularised countries, but miracles are happening here, in an environment where spirituality is often seen as the last item on the agenda. For the past three years, long-term inmates of Swedish prisons have been given the opportunity to follow a thirty-day Ignatian retreat. The project falls under the auspices of Nämnden för Andligt Vård, the body responsible for inmates’ spiritual care. ‘Three years ago, NAV contacted me about finding ways to introduce some quiet time into the lives of our long-term inmates’, explained Leif Nilsberth, who is in charge of E Wing at Kumla high security prison near Örebro. ‘We had noticed how the men benefited from time away from their noisy prison wings.’ Father Truls, a Lutheran priest, had just returned from the UK. ‘Having completed my first Jesuit thirty-day retreat’, he said, ‘I was inspired and looking for a new direction’. Then, out of the blue, he was invited to come and direct retreats at Kumla prison. There were many sceptics, and both guards and inmates laid bets on which of the retreatants would break the silence first. But three years on, the project has received permanent status; a ‘monastery’ has been established behind the prison walls; and the inmates are queuing up to take part.

When I visited Kumla Monastery for the first time, in 2003, I was emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed by the wholeness and the grace that radiated from the eyes of Kumla’s ‘Brothers’. Some forty inmates have now been through the programme, and it is certainly no ‘soft option’. The prisoners give up their few privileges, such as television, radio and newspapers; and contact with the outside world via telephone calls and letters is traded for an undoubtedly painful and confrontational look inside. Father Truls explained that it is about throwing their masks away and building up their confidence:
In prison you can’t trust anyone, because they have a duty to report. But here they can be completely open, show the face behind the mask. The day they start writing down their so-called sins is a tough day. By then they’ve come to know all the good things that God has done for them. Here at the monastery I can put my arm around one of these men, even the most hardened, dangerous criminal, take his hand and say, ‘I can really see you are having hell in your choices today, can I help?’ So it is really hard and honest work, trying to find the truth about ourselves, and the important thing is that it is done in love.

The world’s first prison monastery is located in an old industrial building within Kumla prison. It has eight meditation rooms furnished with icons on the wall and kneeling benches, eight cells, a kitchen and a chapel. Although the chapel contains nothing more than a semicircle of chairs with a small altar and a simple wood-carving resembling a crucifix, the atmosphere there is sacred. The full retreats, in which Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises are followed, are held twice a year. Interested inmates can come and try a short three-day retreat to help them make up their minds. Usually about twelve apply to join the programme, and Father Truls then chooses the final eight. I asked him whether he chose the inmates whom he thought were most likely to become good Christians. But Truls does not see the programme as a Christian conversion course:

We invite the men who seem to have the strongest longing to reach into themselves, or in the words of Ignatius, to conquer themselves. They know they have heavy baggage but they are not that baggage. Do they want to be Christians by the end? I don’t care about that, because I am convinced that behind that longing is the Light of God.

He gave an example: ‘One inmate could not accept it when I talked about God. So I asked him to replace “God” with “Love”, and then it was okay. God is Love.’ Truls reminded me that any form of authority, including God, might have become imbued with negative connotations for the prisoners; therefore he is always ready to find another way in if necessary.

Although the tools that Truls uses are of a traditional Christian nature, as are his own convictions, the experience of the men is truly
personal, and it need not be labelled as Christian in order to be valued by him:

My children taught me—and that was a great gift—to let them go and find their own spiritual and professional paths. It was difficult at first, but it taught me how to meet these men on open terms. Of course it’s quite clear where I stand and where the monastery stands, but I feel strongly that it is my duty, my calling, to meet each person where they are, not where I want them to be.

Truls gave the example of Peter, who is a Buddhist:

The retreat has deepened his faith in his own way, and I gave him Anthony de Mello’s readings to study. Remember, we have people here from all over the world, and our Swedish brand of Christianity is not always for them. …

Peter used to say, ‘don’t talk so much about Jesus’, and yet in the end he himself started to use his words and I teased him, ‘be careful, Peter, just now Jesus is very close to you and you are very close to him’. Peter is still one of the most frequent visitors to the Monastery, using the meditation rooms and studying. The men find that they are whole in themselves. They learn from the inside out, unlike traditional church teaching, which is from the outside in. Ignatius said, ‘Do not enslave the people by institutions and spiritual or religious laws’. This is what I believe.

So what do the men who have experienced the programme say? As the Brothers and I sat sipping our coffee and eating our Swedish buns, I realised that we were a group of like-minded souls discussing life from a spiritual as well as a personal perspective. At the same time, the screaming seagulls flying overhead were symbolic of the gulf that separated my daily life from theirs. Yet something also of the seagulls’ freedom was reflected in the talk around the table. When I asked what the men had experienced, the most common response to my question was ‘goodness’, or ‘the good in me’. ‘Christianity is not really what this is all about’, Stefan said, as he poured my coffee. ‘It’s been about finding myself, and building on that.’

I also asked the men about courage and forgiveness. ‘In prison you’re already at rock bottom, so joining the programme was not about courage for me’, said Peter. ‘My process of questioning started from my arrest.’ I asked him how being a practising Buddhist had affected him on the retreat. ‘I did sometimes feel a little lonely, even amongst my
retreat soul mates, but no one tried to change my convictions.’ Kari, who is Finnish, said that for him the most challenging moment was when they were asked to write their confessions. ‘I found that really hard, to see it there black on white.’ The confessions were later offered at the altar and burned, while Truls spoke the formal words of forgiveness. I asked Andreas, who comes from Germany, how he experienced this. ‘Forgiveness always follows, whatever you have done, but you have to find forgiveness in yourself before you can forgive others.’ As I looked into their eyes I could see that these men were truly speaking from the heart. When Andreas is released, and deported back to his native Germany, he intends to party just a little, and then to enter a monastery to help him make the transition back into real life. I asked him what he had missed most. ‘Tenderness’, he answered, without a hint of embarrassment.

It is interesting to note that there were few Swedes among the first batches of men that came through the programme. ‘Those who come from other countries are more open’, said Truls:

Sweden is a secular society and for the majority of Swedish people the idea of a monastery is neither positive nor negative, it’s neutral. So is the word God. It has taken some years for Swedish inmates to listen to others talk about the retreat, and now they are becoming a little warmer. During one retreat we read the Bible in six different languages. However, this year the balance between Swedes and foreigners is levelling out.

So were the Brothers potential spiritual leaders for other inmates? Andreas, Peter and Kari laughed out loud at my suggestion, finding it hard to see themselves as guides for anyone, let alone for their fellow prisoners. ‘I don’t think so’, replied Andreas, ‘I am just the way I am now, and it’s enough that I’m not going back into the old scene any more’. Francisco, now a deacon at his own prison in Österåker, said:
'you can't go back to playing the game. I would be denying my self, and I could never do that any more.' Imre, a small, quiet Hungarian, told me about the others' fear: ‘I was attacked. Some of the men wanted to kill the new Spirit in me.’ The radical change in these men has the potential to inspire, but also to provoke fear and anger in other inmates. ‘It's hard. The guards know us by our crime and our sentence and we may have discovered that we are more, but others want us to remain as we were.’ When I caught up with Francisco a year later, he told me that the mood has started to change. There is less suspicion on the wings, the guards are more positive, and other inmates now want to come to Kumla. His own work is now focused on facilitating spirituality with a group of men in his own prison, and on setting up a non-violence movement on the outside. On his one ‘free’ day a month he gives talks on the monastery experience.

Of course there are setbacks too: one participant left halfway through the retreat, and another was offered a 'deal' he couldn't refuse. Truls explained:

He was top dog, full of prison talk, and we'd had a very hard time, but at the end I found that there was something in him that was starting to grow. Nevertheless, he succumbed, and now has to serve another ten years. He is in our daily prayers, the other Brothers write to him, and there's always a candle burning for him in the chapel.

Now that Kumla Monastery is no longer an experimental project but a permanent institution, all prisons are obliged to tell their inmates about it, and so the demand for what it offers will grow. At the beginning, Truls did everything on his own, and sometimes found himself working 570 hours during a four-week retreat. Now that the project has received permanent status there will be more funds, allowing him to work together with another Lutheran priest.

Susanne Grimheden, Truls' new female counterpart, has experience of being in retreat herself:

It's about depriving yourself of impressions so that the inner can come to the fore. That is where I can meet my Self. And as a Christian I believe that deep inside ourselves lies the gift that tells us about the miracle that we are. It's a miracle; miracles happen here.
And it seems that the highest (secular) authorities agree. Top-level visitors to Kumla have included the Prime Minister of Sweden, Göran Persson.

One look at the men who have shared their stories might tell me that the programme is a success; but the more established Kumla Monastery becomes, the greater the need to measure success in less personal terms. ‘This is so very different from other programmes and you can’t make a scientific study of what goes on at this mystical level’, Father Truls said. Although the programme is not about prisoners getting an early release, the changes in behaviour that result from it may well count towards a reduced sentence. ‘I got a call from a psychiatrist who reviewed an inmate following the retreat and didn’t recognise his first diagnosis.’ Truls told him:

Those who are in the deepest of themselves are a new creation. Unscientific though it was, that psychiatrist had to agree that something remarkable had happened. When you’ve been in hell for many years, don’t think you can change that in thirty days. You can change the important thing—you can see the Light, and know that it’s there. But it is still a long journey.
Lillemor Högerås works as a psychotherapist at the Hinzeberg female prison. As a psychotherapist and a pastor, she became interested in the work at Kumla Monastery and asked to make it the topic of a dissertation which she had to write. 'I was fascinated to find out about a project where they had a full thirty days as opposed to my weekly 45-minute sessions at Hinzeberg.' She interviewed inmates two days before their retreat, two days after, and then a few months later. Having just finished conducting the last interviews, she could only give her first preliminary impressions:

The men describe an inner calm, something within themselves that they can carefully, carefully continue working with. It's absolutely not a radical change, but a slow, slow processing, that describes new inner tools to meet the self, to recognise and break old patterns, and to slowly build more trust.

She described Father Truls as the classic ‘transitional object’ so often described in Object Relations theory. Another way to describe his role would be as an external unifying centre which can ‘hold and mirror’ the newly emerging centre in the men.

They care a lot about him, and show concern for his well-being. What is most noticeable is that their destructive side has not been removed, there’s no denial, but it’s integrated in a greater whole.

Although what happens at Kumla is close to a miracle, and is certainly infused with grace, it is important to remember that the steps being taken are tiny. Truls emphasized:

I think that it’s a tough retreat, with a lot of rules and structures. It’s afterwards that you start to grow, very slowly, doing small exercises and taking the small steps you have decided on. Therefore we need those separate areas in the prisons that will now become obligatory and to which the men return after the retreat and live in community. They will make food together, clean their own clothes, and make decisions about how to live their lives inside prison. We teach them that first you must care for yourself, then for the immediate community, and then for the outside world. They could support the Childhood Foundation, or Amnesty, or fight for peace, and support a joint project.
In other words, the men need to make their lives meaningful in a larger context, and to take responsibility for themselves and for others.

After my coffee with the inmates, I noticed how they walked freely in and out of the monastery building, carrying the cups back into the kitchen. Truls smiled as he watched them:

Normally the men would be either locked into the house, or into the exercise area. However, I wanted to make life at the monastery as natural as possible, and show them trust, building their sense of responsibility.

According to Leif Nilsberth, the small scale of the monastery means that it is possible to take more risks. ‘The combination of more responsible men and the peaceful environment makes it work.’

Later, we selected some inspirational texts to make a book of readings for when the men are released. Our favourite was the one about an eagle’s egg that is hatched amongst chickens. The eagle chick grows up thinking that he is a chicken, and never discovers his power. We all listened reflectively and smiled, knowing that we all have some of that chick inside us, that we are unaware of our eagle potential and perhaps even afraid of it. A leather-bound book at the back of the chapel showed more evidence of the insights that the men have gained, some profound, some more humorous. Tommy had just been hit by a ball in the eye. He said, ‘Now perhaps I will learn to see life from the inside and not the outside’. Another text: ‘I leave the monastery now to return and nourish that little bit of peace in my soul that I received during this time.’ Stefan wrote, ‘I have come a long way, and I have a long way left to go’. And, finally, Peter: ‘there are many guides, but the goal is the same’. The miracle at Kumla continues.

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