

PIERRE FAVRE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

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PIERRE FAVRE CAME FROM SAVOIE; he was a man of tender heart and subtle mind. Driven by the desire for learning, he left his home country and went to seek education in Paris. There it was that this brilliant student met Ignatius Loyola, who was his senior by fifteen years. He became Ignatius' first companion, and throughout ten rich years they shared every aspect of their lives: work at the university, relaxation, prayer, their emerging common 'way of life', the conception and foundation of the Society of Jesus, priestly ordination, and the first Jesuit apostolic work in Rome. Then, in his thirties, Favre was entrusted with delicate missions that were to take him across the whole of Europe as a theological adviser, a retreat director, and a confidant to bishops (just as he had been to Ignatius). This way of life rapidly exhausted him, and he died in Rome in 1546, on his way to Trent as a conciliar theologian. He was forty.

All that we have of this learned man, this apostle, is a few letters and the spiritual notes that he used to commit to paper each day towards the end of his life: the so-called *Memoriale*. The first thing that this journal reveals—something confirmed by the witness of those who knew him—is the paradoxical nature of his life. He was a quiet and peaceful character, yet he found himself engaged in the great struggles of the Reformation and the Renaissance. He was attached to his native country and disinclined to adventure, yet it was his lot to travel throughout Europe, a traveller always on the move, constantly opening up new frontiers for the Society. He was a reserved person, and yet he was sent to the courts of princes and of bishops, and became involved with the great ones of the world. However, in all these situations, he gave off what Simão Rodrigues called a 'gentleness and grace' (*suavitas*

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Pierre Favre holding a picture of Ignatius

et gratia) unmatched in anyone else.¹ Combining as he did doctrinal soundness with human delicacy, he could give guidance without ever seeming overbearing. His acute sense of his own fragility, his clear awareness of who he was, his sensitivity that was touched by whatever happened—all these contributed to his gift for supporting people without dominating them, for understanding them without ever transgressing boundaries, for attracting people without making a great parade of virtue. His acceptance of his own powerlessness and his entrusting of himself to God had enabled

him to find a strength and a peace that radiated from him as a discreet grace—one whose irresistible working was such that it seemed not to be coming from him at all, but rather from within the hearts of those with whom he was speaking.

The *Memoriale* allows us to enter more deeply into his life. If you listen to this journal, and if you try to interpret its silences, Favre's experience comes across as completely dominated by the idea of salvation: a salvation coming from the Lord. This salvation Favre apprehends in *faith*; its workings are *spread throughout the world*; and it makes manifest the *mystery of God*. Favre's whole life can be summed up in these three aspects of the one central experience of redemption.

Salvation through Faith

Even Favre's sentence-structures reflect the movement of his life. Practically every one of the notes in the *Memoriale* begins with 'I': 'I

¹ MHSJ FN 3, 12; ET in *A Brief and Exact Account: The Recollections of Simão Rodrigues on the Origin and Progress of the Society of Jesus*, translated by Joseph F. Conwell (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), here 5.

sensed', 'I recognised', and so on. It all begins within the self; only subsequently does it extend to others.

Favre was a privileged and sheltered young man, but he was also troubled. He himself described his studious youth and his conflicting desires. For all that he loved the place where he was born, he dreamt of leaving. He wanted to change. He wanted to discover a world that was different, corresponding to his desire for 'purity'. But how was he to escape from the impurity that haunted him, in himself and in others? How was he to leave behind the sin of this world in order to dedicate himself to a 'heavenly' existence? He imagined a wide range of possibilities: theologian, doctor, lawyer, monk, and so on. They all fascinated him, but the attraction never lasted. Furthermore, convinced as he was that he had to change his life, he also recognised, as he became more familiar with his experience, that this was impossible. Every lapse served only to convince him that what he thought he had learnt in his previous fervour was in fact empty. A victim of his enthusiasms and disappointments, this man already rich in learning was still, spiritually, a child. Events and the emotional highs and lows they provoked merely brought about transitory enthusiasm or depression. Powerless to make a real offering of what he wanted to give, he fell into doubt and anxiety. He kept on searching but never found. He longed for a paradise, but was always losing it.

Meeting Ignatius in Paris transformed all this. Favre summarised what happened with the clear-sightedness that came from twelve years' hindsight. Ignatius did not force a choice on him. Favre listed the benefits 'which the Lord conferred on me in those days through that man':

First, he gave me an understanding of my conscience and of the temptations and scruples I had had for so long without either understanding them or seeing the way by which I would be able to get peace.²

² References to the *Memoriale* are taken from *Memoriale*, n.9. References to this document are taken from *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, edited and translated by Edmond C. Murphy, John W. Padberg and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996); from now on, the paragraph numbers will be given in brackets in the main text.

The first thing was to get some insight into the nature of the fragility: that was already to become less trapped by it. But he also learnt from his '*maestro en las cosas spirituales*' (8) how to discover in these alternations of fervour and depression the movements of one and the same grace. He was to learn neither to let himself be dominated by the things that were imposing themselves upon him, nor to disregard them.

***Experience showed
him what God was
wanting of him***

They were there not in order to test his strength, but rather to show what God was wanting from him. This new significance that he perceived did not remove him from the reality in which he lived, but it did liberate him from it. He remained in one sense dependent on that reality, to be sure, but only in so far as it was a means of depending on God. In this perspective, desolation became the experience of God, who is always elusive, depriving a person of His gifts, but only as a means of giving yet greater ones. And consolation became a sign of the fidelity of a God who never abandons us, a God constantly giving us new favours so as to open us up to new ways of acting. As God gradually taught him, Favre learnt to become more faithful to what was happening to him, precisely as a means of finding and following this God of steadfast fidelity.

No longer, then, did he feel as though he needed to embark for some enchanted island, only for it then to recede as he approached. Rather, his task was to attach himself passionately to the present, to return to daily tasks, to examine his consciousness regularly and in detail. It was reality to which he had to submit himself, so that in reality he could find God. It was in and through this kind of attention that he approached the majesty and purity of God; this God was speaking in the detail of his life. Paradoxically, his new religious attitude at once rescued him from himself and also grounded him more deeply in the reality of his life. No longer was he at the mercy of events; rather, it was in those events that he received the gift of the Eternal One. The movement by which God gave Himself to Pierre also sent Pierre back to the reality of his own existence, to the reality of the world.

To put it another way, Pierre Favre found salvation by *faith*; and this faith allowed him gradually to discern and to understand his experience. Individual experiences relativised one another, and a meaning became clear through the whole: God was constantly giving Himself within all of Pierre's experience. Experience became a divine

pedagogy: there was a consistent pattern to what it revealed of God's intentions and dealings in his regard. As he responded, his experience led him to choices that had matured slowly, choices that had been born in him at the same time as they had been born in God. Now he was able to take decisions—not without risks, but with an interior certainty. He was no longer putting together 'projects', ideas that might just be wishful thinking; rather, he was accepting a vocation. And the truth of the calling was borne out in his experience.

Salvation Lavished on the World: Ascent and Descent

We can see the rest of Pierre's life as but a commentary on what was happening in these decisive years. It would be easy to show how all the themes of his meditation and his activity flowed from this Ignatian grace. The parable of the talents, a theme which often recurs in the *Memoriale*, restates this basic theme. The talents are the graces which Favre has. They lead him at once back to the Master who has given them and forward to the forms of service that they prompt. What he receives from on high is orientated to the future here below. Small everyday signs become tokens of the power that is gradually transforming him as a person, and also instruments conveying a call which directs him on his journeyings through the world. There is a double movement running through the *Memoriale*, and its religious nature makes it quite unique. The soul is raised to God; the soul is also lowered with God in humble everyday service.

'Ascent' first. This term points to the interior leap by which Favre detaches himself from his immediate feelings, whether of well-being or distress. He lets go of his current emotional state, and entrusts himself to this God who is greater than his heart. He is led to restrain his instinct to grasp simply at emotional security. Instead, by recourse to God, he breaks out of the morass of his inadequacies. 'Accidental' graces may overflow or dry up, but Favre directs himself towards what he calls the 'essential' grace, towards God's fidelity within him. Among the many movements which agitate him, he learns not to be controlled by what is merely peripheral, and instead to hold on to 'the principal spirit', the interior movement of docility and fidelity to God.

This permanent conversion occurs at many different levels, and hence Favre refers to it through a variety of expressions: the movement from the exterior to the interior; the desire not so much to be loved as

to love; the return from what is experienced to what is believed. But it is always an 'ascent', an act of faith:

... we should petition God to raise us up to the world above and to the contemplation of matters altogether spiritual so that in the end all else becomes in some way spiritual and is apprehended in a spiritual manner (108).

Once this happens, then 'stability of heart'—Pierre's name for spiritual freedom—is consolidated. Salvation through faith keeps coming to him, gradually transforming his soul; the spiritual takes hold of his being at every level. His mind, his heart and even his body benefit from this interior resurrection. Virtues, far from being a matter directly of human effort, blossom abundantly, and bear a rich harvest of fruit.

When Favre abandons all security in himself, he does so in order to find, in the world, a security that has come from God. When he renounces the satisfaction of counting up his successes, he does so in order to let the Spirit's power enter the world. When he raises himself up to God, he does so only in order to descend again to the world in the humble state that he finds to be Jesus' own. The private ascent towards the Lord turns out to be only a diversion on his silent path towards the particularities of everyday life, the details in which his fidelity is lived out. The world that he sought to flee turns out to be God's world. And Favre engages all the more ardently with it because of his interior link with God, through a kind of life hidden in God:

... there must first come so many kinds of fear, so many kinds of disgust, repugnance, and aversion concerning those lowest things in which peace cannot be found, even though they are the means to ascend to the love of the Lord and to enter fully into it. But once a person has arrived there, he 'goes in and comes out' with joy, and 'finds pasture' both inside and outside (John 10:9). ... Before having that love, he could but mount up and gaze towards the heights. But once he has entered loving intimacy with God, he will be able to go on increasing in that love while daily getting to the heart of many things in God Himself, and he will be able with more assurance to go down among his neighbours, seeing them and listening to them, and so on. (66)

The truth is that the ascent and the descent are one. The faith which ascends towards God involves also a recognition that God has



A modern statue of Pierre Favre near Annecy

come to us. This religious awareness of the divine descent sees in every event a gift of the Most High, and attaches itself to Christ who, though he does not come from below, approaches us in his own self through love. And as the soul is mysteriously transformed by Christ's invisible presence, it inevitably opens up a path, through its own being and through all things, to the grace being lavished. 'Ascending' and 'descending' are one: both are a joining with this divine movement from on high, which as such is so powerful in its effects on the world.

Thus Favre is neither completely from above nor from below. Because above and below are one, he escapes simple identification with either. What might appear confusion and division is merely the mystery of this life in union with God. To be oneself and yet no longer self-contained; to be in the world and yet not of the world—interiorly this is, for Favre, the experience of the cross. The cross is the supreme

sign of love and the manifestation of God's inner life; but its form is scandalous, shot through with the mystery that it unfolds. Through consolations and desolations alike, Favre is carried inwards—which for Favre means 'along the direction that leads to the cross' (211). Moreover, this movement also takes him beyond the relative simplicities of prayer towards 'this other cross ... the great and continuous labours' of the apostolic life (241).

Favre at one point expresses his spiritual self-understanding through the image of a tree. He is fond of this image, and often uses it to express the hidden harmonies between the life of the Spirit and the life of nature. Here, however, his concern is rather to point up the radical difference between them. He uses the idea of an inverted tree to speak of what is most central to his experience, in such a way that the strange beauty of the writing itself also evokes the paradox:

Up to the present you found more consolation in the splendour of the tree, which proceeds from divine grace, than in its root, where abides its vigour and its power. You had eyes only for the branches and the flowers, for the leaves and the fruit—all very changeable things, inasmuch as they tend to their own perfection. From them no constant and stable consolation can be derived.

Do not seek the root of this tree for the sake of its fruit, but rather the fruit and the other things for the sake of the root. Seek to tarry even longer as days go by and to strike deeper roots where this tree has its roots, but do not seek to have its fruit remain in you. By its root and by its fruit will you be led to the glory of this tree.

Put whatever you can close to the root, for one day it will appear in its glory as it first appeared in its glory in the bosom of the earth when the soul of Christ descended into the lower regions, that soul which is the true created root, and which has become, of all rational creatures, the fruit which is the highest in glory. This tree is then inverted, so that the root attains the highest point, dropping beneath it all its fruit and sending its power out in streams from the heights to the depths.

Here, the spiritual life amounts to a reversal of the natural life. It is not a matter of striving upwards in order to be raised to God. Rather, the spiritual life comes as a *gift* from *on high*, *descending* in blessing and abundance on the earth. It is received in faith; it unfolds from an interior event of reception. The sign of its divine origin is not that it

literally descends from on high, but rather that it emerges invisibly from within the self.

The Redemption of the World

Favre is salvation's herald, not its proprietor. He has to hand on what he has received. Here too, his language, expressed in unedited form in the journal where he records his desires, reveals the movement within: he moves from the self to others. From the point in his personality that is touched by salvation he opens himself out gradually to others, and eventually to all without exception. The words expressing his meditation become enriched with new meanings as he invests external realities with a spiritual *élan*. His sentences become more complex and diffuse as they incorporate a larger number of realities. And this linguistic complexity reflects a spiritual truth: Favre's prayers and desires unfold themselves in all directions and in many different ways to reach an ever increasing number of people—people in their turn called not just to be passive recipients of salvation, but also to hand it on further.

Favre opens himself to all without exception

This 'dilation' (a favourite word of Favre's) characterizes his prayer. He is no longer worried about illusion. Salvation is present: he cannot but seek to spread it. Without departing from his life hidden in God, Favre 'will come in and go out and find pasture'. He refers several times to this phrase from John's Gospel (John 10:9); what it evokes for him is not departure from God but rather a more intimate, spiritual communion with God's action:

When we see a deed of God, when we hear His word or when we touch holy things with our hands, the spirit should come to these things whole and entire, bringing with it the sensitive soul whole and entire so that it too can grasp them. This is indeed 'to go out and find pasture'. In truth, we cannot succeed in this unless we are deeply living within our interior, in other words completely recollected within ourselves. (108)

Once again Favre is on the move. But it is no longer a move from one dream to another: now his journeys take place along the world's dusty pathways. He journeys across the map of Europe, through France and Italy, Germany and the Low Countries, Portugal and Spain. And these physical journeys are a geographical expression of a vast

'pilgrimage' that he undertakes in imitation of the Good Shepherd, searching for 'each and every one'. The integration he has found within becomes a principle of diffusion. Salvation is something to be spread.

But a capacity that Favre had from his youth remains. He is still sensitive to the infinite variety of human beings and to the constant diversity of interior movements. More than others would, he notices detail—he feels it, he notes it, and the detail fills the *Memoriale* in abundant complexity, occasionally too much so. Everything is precious

***Everything is
precious to him,
because everything
is open to God***

to him, because everything is open to God. These little things are crumbs, as it were, from the messianic banquet where Jesus is showing his prodigality as both creator and saviour. They must therefore be gathered up. Each has its value; nothing must be squandered; nothing that the apostle meets in the randomness of his travelling must remain unexploited—no word, no gesture, no deed. Every moment of time has to be used properly—a conviction typical of a man who was precociously conscientious and who is sensing the approach of death. So it is that he reproaches himself with having let one or other of these trivialities go. For each, if we hear them with the ears of Christ, is freighted with a call:

I then acknowledged that I had often been negligent during the course of my numerous and varied journeys up to now—negligent above all in instructing or correcting, admonishing or consoling, those I happened to associate with or greet or merely see. For nothing should come into our sight or to our notice in vain, because our Lord Jesus Christ has permitted nothing to be without a purpose—not the sight of things, nor the sound of any voice. But not without purpose, either, did he pass through certain places, rest his eyes on certain persons, and will to be now on land, now on the sea, at one time in a house, at another out of doors, at times among people, at other times by himself. His standing, his sitting, his walking, his eating, sleeping and so forth were not without a purpose. (434)

Pilgrimage in itself has a tendency to distract a person, especially someone who is as attracted by the sheer variety of things as Favre was. But, amid the diversions, one single concern animated Favre and unified his life: the work of salvation, 'edification'. It was Favre's task to be the minister of salvation wherever the Lord opened the door to

him and drew him on into new pastures—or, to put it differently, wherever obedience led him. Everywhere he moved forward as a bearer of this mystery of redemption. He looked at people just as a saviour, indeed just as *the* Saviour, was looking at them. He was there to support and relieve human beings, both in body and in soul.

There is no point in looking within Favre for any other quality that might explain the fascination he radiated and the friendships that clustered round him. For each person he met, he was a saviour of something deep within that was being lost. He was not eloquent or brilliant; rather he bore, humbly, people's burdens. To each individual soul he was redemptively attentive. And through this attentive submission to the reality of other people, combined with a passion for their restoration, Favre obtained the charism of spiritual direction, a charism which enabled him to discern and uncover in all whom he met the point at which salvation was coming to them from God. That is why Ignatius said that he gave the Spiritual Exercises better than anyone else—these Exercises that were designed to reveal the Redeemer's interior appeal through people's own choices. By virtue of his vows—he addressed his final vows to 'Iñigo of Loyola, Superior of the Company of priests of Jesus'—he wanted both to proclaim himself and actually to be a means of salvation, a priest of Jesus Christ.³ This he wanted above all else.

A Constant Pilgrim

But none of this could happen except through the cross, through a deeper entry into the world's misery. Even the simple activity of travelling was particularly painful for him. Having discovered, with much difficulty, how to unify his heart, he could not but suffer all the more from the constant fragmentation of his life. He would have liked to stay where he was and to establish roots in the place where God had led him. Wherever he went, there was something in him that wanted to settle down and make, through his apostolate, a reality of the stability which his soul had learnt to savour and for which it longed. But every time he had to set off again, in order to carry further the good news which revives drowsy hearts. He always spoke tenderly of

³ For Ignatius on Favre, see Gonçalves da Câmara, *Memoriale*, n. 226. For Favre's last vows, see MHSJ MF, 119.

his native land, but he was never able to remain there or return there; indeed he never had a country in which he could establish himself. He was a constant 'pilgrim'—a word that for him always carries an overtone of grief:

If they accuse me of being unknown and a foreigner, I confess it. I am a foreigner like all my ancestors—I am a foreigner on the territory of this province, and I shall be a foreigner in every land to which God's goodness may lead me for as long as I live.⁴

'Taken away'⁵ as he was from places that he nevertheless never forgot, he turned in each new separation to the One who comes from on high to animate all that exists: 'the Lord's Spirit, which fills the entire world', 'the source where all creatures are more alive than within themselves'.⁶

A still sterner trial was his sense of sin and misery, something that only increased his desire for redemption. In Germany, above all, but in fact everywhere, and indeed in his own self, he discovered inadequacy, weakness, vice—even within those who should be examples of charity. At this time of Reformation ferment, this man whose mind and soul had been nurtured in medieval culture was a witness to its death. He saw, with a clarity that could so easily have become cynicism, the impurity of the clergy and the arrogance of the so-called religious. He simply carried on amid the Church's distress, haunted by the reality that he was forced to encounter every day in his ministry. He suffered from it not only spiritually but also physically: he had a sharp sense of hidden spiritual corruption, a sense that manifested itself in the body and took him over as if it were an illness; it lies in the background throughout the *Memoriale*. The corruption extends even to the invisible realm, to Purgatory, where suffering still reigns because of sin. Words of catastrophe and misery were often on Favre's lips; and they were also present in the depths of his heart.

⁴ Favre to Wendelina van den Berg (Peter Canisius' stepmother), February (?) 1544, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 361-362, here 362.

⁵ Favre to Ignatius, 7 November 1525, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 339-340, here 339: 'Our Lord knows the reasons why I do not deserve to stay in one place for any length of time but am always being taken away at the moment when the harvest begins to peak'. He was one of those 'who are always setting off throughout the world' (Favre, quoting Ortiz, to Ignatius, 25 January 1541, MHSJ MF, 65).

⁶ Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 1 September 1540, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 319-320, here 320; Favre to Ignatius, late May 1544, MHSJ MF 261.

Faith was his only defence. Over and over again he appealed to whatever already bore witness to Christ's resurrection. Whenever we find depression or sin in the *Memoriale*, we also see angels sent to support the Church militant, bearing witness to the Lord's victory as in the Book of Revelation. Favre's prayer was constantly turned towards these angels and towards the saints, because his life was constantly being crushed by the world's errors and its needs. The souls that seemed most lost, the towns that seemed



Favre being guided by an angel

most blighted, found in him a kind of servant of their restoration, a minister of an invisible kindness that had descended from the heights.

Thus it is that in Favre's prayer and imagination the earthly landscape is coupled with a heavenly one. The land has a subsoil of sanctity, a kind of subterranean power for resurrection: the relics and other seeds of life scattered into the earth's depths by the saints where they lived and died. The evil enveloping Favre is thus only part, a provisional part, of the story, a story driven from both above and below by the overflow of divine life which is grace. Our resistance is only temporary; greater powers than those of sin are at work.

Obviously this is a viewpoint informed by faith, but it enables Favre as an apostle to be confident and active. All Favre's 'devotions' draw on his apostolic experience at the heart of redemption's drama. They grow out of his interior life as impulses towards invisible realities already at work in the bosom of the earth, and towards the infinite hosts of angels who are close both to God and to ourselves, and who are guaranteeing that salvation is assured. His devotions represent not an escape from the Christian struggle, but a renewal of hope. Emerging as they do from the reality of this world, and charged with all the

affective resonance that such a vibrant soul can give them, they are cries both of pain and of assured confidence.

Salvation within the Mystery of God

Favre's apostolic life, with all its difficulties, was thus leading him constantly to engage with 'heaven above' in order to return 'here below'. The experience of ministry gradually revealed to him God's own reality, at once infinitely 'above' and infinitely 'below'. It is God's own inner life that is unfolded within Favre's inner life and in that of the world. In the movements he notes within himself and in the surrounding world, Favre recognises the movement of God, of the self-unfolding mystery drawing all people into a shared life.

This God is infinite, surpassing all we might expect of God, both in height and depth:

He is infinite in every way: infinitely above the comprehension and understanding of a created being, infinitely prior to every created capacity, infinitely beyond every created intellect, infinitely before all created beings, infinitely future to all created beings, and infinitely deep-seated in every creature (161)

But given this infinite height and this infinite depth, it is the depth which more captivates Favre, the depth revealed in the very fact of God's dealing with us at all:

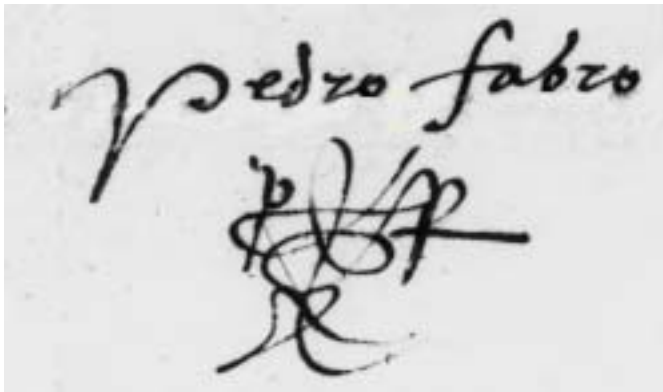
But when He wills to give orders, He is so humble and sets such limits and bounds to his commandments that not one of his obligatory precepts is beyond the powers of any person however weak, aided as a person is by the grace available to them and which they can more easily draw upon than upon their own powers. God commands and makes obligatory nothing that is not within or even inferior to human powers, nothing that is beyond the limits of human capability (161)

The fullness of the mystery is in Jesus Christ. Though he is the fullness of the divinity, he has descended into the depths of humanity. He is present 'beneath me' and 'within me' just as much as 'above me' (307). The divine abundance poured out in Christ moves outwards from him into ourselves, and from ourselves to others beyond us. Initially, Favre simply notes this abundance as a feature of his interior movements of devotion. But gradually he discovers it to be a current

that proceeds from the Father's infinity, that is appropriated in its fullness by Christ, and spreads from Christ among all people until in them it reaches the darkest depths of the human and the material. So it is that the unification of the world is being brought about by the Source from whom all things proceed, the Source whom all things come to mediate:

I wished too that people's bodies, their souls, and their spirits, whose God-given nature is to be vessels of great capacity, could all be filled with graces and with glory from the overflow of that noblest vessel, the humanity of Christ, which contains all the fullness of the deity. May we, in our turn, be filled from his abundance. (275)

As God enters the world, He is drawing into His retinue all those who are born of His living, personal graciousness. The angels are following in His path, exerting a mysterious influence over our existence and having effects, even on our physical powers, of which we are scarcely aware. Within our towns, the saints are forming a city of the living God, a reality to which our acts and thoughts bear witness even without our being able to see it. Even inanimate things bear within themselves this sanctifying power that is consecrating them as means of salvation. Holy water, churches, the aesthetic beauty of liturgy, relics and whatever evokes the saints—all these things are intrinsic to the mystery of God's coming. The natures of things, and the powers that Favre perceives as emanating from those natures, are



natures and powers of God's own self. These realities filled with God represent the very reality of this divine descent, the mystery of the divine coming: God, the true God, is appearing in the world, giving Himself to innumerable created realities, and thus becoming manifest within them.

Thus it is that Favre's prayer and action always begin and end at the living centre of this divine advent pervading all that is, a centre which, for all its visibility, is hidden in its deepest reality: the sacrifice of the Mass. There, at the heart of the humblest realities, the Lord in person is transforming the world and working its salvation. There, God Most High is somehow touching the deepest depths of reality in order to make them live with His own life. It is one single conviction that draws Favre to meditate on the descent of Jesus to Hell and on his eucharistic presence: the furthest reaches of the universe, the inertness of matter, and the deepest pangs of grief are all alike touched by the all-powerful descending impulse of the Creator.

The Interior Work of the Spirit

It is through his Spirit that Jesus is thus impregnating the world with his life-giving activity—for Favre, the Spirit is less a spirit of sonship than a spirit of sanctification and illumination filling the world. What Christ brings about sacramentally in the mystery of the Eucharist finds its complement and completion in what the Spirit is bringing about in each human person. Here too, the infinity of the gift manifests itself in the sheer depth at which it appears. Favre, an active witness of this interior work of the Spirit within himself and others, religiously notes all the different phases of this process: God is coming within him.

The passive nature of these interior events comes out in the language Favre uses. He mentions them one after the other, as nothing but occurrences, in a pattern beyond his design: 'it was given to me ...', or 'then it happened that ...'. What he notes are things received: occurrences one after the other that press themselves on him, irruptions that are secret and always—to use his word—new.

So it is that Favre comes to see a gradual transformation in the three 'powers of the soul' whose subtle interplay scholastic philosophy had taught him to analyze. Just as a new horizon can loom up in the mist, so his memory, understanding and will are gradually touched by a new life welling up from within, and come mysteriously to reproduce the inner life of the three divine Persons. As always, the work of the

Spirit begins with what is the most hidden and distinctive feature of the human person: the will, the affectivity, those obscure and deep movements which emerge into consciousness in the form of emotions, decisions and insights. It is in this subterranean depth of human life that the divine life first enters.



Michel de Certeau

As soon as he begins to become conscious of them, Favre notes these fragile beginnings, and tries to open himself to accept them fully. Thus he ‘notices’ these *affectus*, awakenings at the bottom of his heart arising from a divine presence attracting him through what it is stirring up in the soul—notices them even before he knows what they asking him to do. He receives all these inspirations and interior movements—*spiritus*. They are the signs, at the roots of human affectivity, of a communication between the human person and God; they are impulses provoked by a hidden visitation; they are signs of a renewal coming, as Favre well knows, from outside himself. He also notes the desires he feels that proceed from these impulses—desires that are perhaps less reliable because they are more subjective—and the delicate signs and calls which his listening heart perceives. Of course he also senses within himself, just as in the surrounding world, the influence of evil powers. But experience tells him that these are not coming from such a deep place; they do not enter him with quite the same quality of silence. They may be constraining him, but they do not seduce him. They are not in their native element.

To use a phrase often used by St Ignatius, Favre feels himself to be ‘an instrument united with God’ (*Constitutions* X.3[813])—and this at the very root of his being:

On the holy day of Pentecost, I was borne towards God by keen longings that He might grant me through His Spirit to understand and will in a spiritual manner the things of the spirit. I asked Him

to make spiritual my being, my life, my feelings and my thoughts.
...

I was then given to seek grace from the Holy Spirit in prayer that my being, my life, and my inner awareness of things might be carried away into that Spirit so that the work of the salvation of my soul might be accomplished in those depths that lie open to the Holy Spirit. I begged also to be delivered from all that remains corporeal or carnal in my sensibility (313)

It is there, at the 'centre of his heart' (307), that God appears in such a way as to spread Himself through Favre's whole life, through all his activities, through all those whom Favre meets, even in the bodies of those who have been made open to the Spirit. The self becomes in a real sense the sacrament of a sanctifying movement of descent. Into 'those depths that lie open to the Holy Spirit', the infinite loving-kindness descends from on high in order to diffuse, starting from the interior and secret place where He has appeared, a life that extends to every degree of being.

From between the Father 'who is said to be "above"' and the Holy Spirit 'who in some way can be said to be "below", that is within us', the divine life spreads in silence, as if in a moment of night when only a few signs reveal it. In its very coming, it remains invisible by nature. The Saviour comes from the silence of the Trinitarian fullness; he acts in the silent heart of the world; and he attracts to this interior silence those whom he touches from within—both within themselves and within himself. Penetrated as he was by this mystery, Favre moved through the world as if within a temple that had already been consecrated, an extension here below of the Divine Majesty's heavenly temple. He moved among human beings in silence, as one would be silent in church, with a devout modesty that respected the divine presence everywhere to which he was bearing witness and with which he was working. It is hardly surprising that this contemplative in action admired and wanted to imitate this 'modesty' as it is found in Mary—an image of the prayer of the Church which, along with Mary, adores the God whom she bears and who is growing within her:

During Vespers I remained gazing at a picture of the Virgin Mary, drawn by her look of modesty. I realised then to some degree the great value of that grace from God through which a person's sole concern is to please God alone, to preserve all His grace and retain

it in their heart, like a person unwilling to attract to themselves the love or the attention of others by an open and unrestrained communication of themselves. The beauty of Mary is completely interior, hidden in God. (208)

In the end, anxiety about salvation is transformed into thanksgiving, because the reality of salvation has indeed come. Faith discovers the salvation which comes down to us; memory recalls blessings received; desire yearns in hope for what is promised—and all these things come together in the one act of thanks, grounded in a compelling conviction that the Most High has descended to the miseries of this world. This is what Favre gradually learns in his reflection on being an apostle. Moreover, this divine life planted in the heart of the earth is called to bear all the fruits willed by God; it is this call which evokes within Favre a response that is both his own gratitude and the power of the Spirit.

Favre thus continues to work for the greater glory of God. But when Favre commits himself to this glory—at one point he calls himself ‘a lover of God’s glory’—what matters is not the glorification that might arise out of the homage we might pay, but only the true glory of God’s self-manifestation. The real presence of God transforms the reality of the human world, so that this latter becomes an active witness to the glorious loving-kindness that has descended from the highest heavens to the deepest depths. Favre finds himself drawn into this passion of God that renews the universe. He enters into a hidden life which is gradually becoming visible; he follows its mysterious ways within the depths of human wretchedness, and lets it wrench from him, as he works in his ministry, ‘cries’ of thanksgiving and praise that run in a kind of transforming counterpoint with his constant laments—laments at his illnesses, at the demands made on him, and at the evils of his time.

Favre’s voice has come down to us. It was not that Favre wanted to perpetuate his own memory through his spiritual journal—quite the contrary; he was the quiet companion. The text was not meant for us and it was not passed on to us; it was published only three centuries after its author’s death. But today, thanks to the chance circumstances that have opened this hidden sanctuary of interior meditation, we can

overhear this life hidden within God, and we find Favre on offer as he was, even though he made no display. He is a man hidden within the gift that he transmits. He addresses us as our brother; he does not impose himself; he comes from within—just like the Word whom he wanted to follow, and of whom he is merely an echo.

Michel de Certeau SJ was born in 1925 in Chambéry, France, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1950. His early academic career as a Jesuit was taken up with important work on Pierre Favre and on Jean-Joseph Surin. The study of Surin led him to develop an interest in psychoanalysis, and in later life he became an influential and wide-ranging intellectual, holding professorships in Los Angeles and in Paris. He died in 1986.