

THE 'TERRIBLE SONNETS' OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF DEPRESSION

Hilary E. Pearson

DEPRESSION IS A VERY LONELY DISEASE. Sufferers are unable to see beyond the blackness enclosing them, even if they are surrounded by loving friends and by a supportive family. It is difficult for them to talk to people who do not share their experience, and difficult for those others to understand how they feel.

Although there is evidence that depression has been experienced since the earliest times, it was only in the twentieth century that it began to be studied systematically and that its symptoms were classified for diagnostic purposes. Even today diagnosis is not easy: sufferers often do not consult a doctor or may present with physical symptoms, making it impossible to assess accurately what percentage of the population suffers from this disease. Estimates range from 3% to 12%.¹

The 'Sonnets of Desolation' or 'Terrible Sonnets' of Gerard Manley Hopkins are a group of untitled poems probably written during 1885-1886. Unusually, these poems were not sent by Hopkins to his friend Robert Bridges, but were found after his death. There are six poems, usually referred to by their opening words as: 'To Seem the Stranger', 'I Wake and Feel', 'No Worst', 'Carrion Comfort', 'Patience, Hard Thing' and 'My Own Heart'. Not all commentators believe that Hopkins was suffering from depression when he wrote them, but the evidence seems strong that he was.

I first encountered the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins when studying for A Level English. He has remained one of my favourite

¹ Lewis Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness—The Anatomy of Depression* (London: Faber, 1999), 3-7, 14-18, 45.

poets. For many years I was plagued with depression related to hormonal disturbances. At times it was so bad I could barely function three weeks out of four, although throughout much of this period I was living the intense life of a litigation lawyer. When I was depressed, I found Hopkins' poems, particularly these poems, to be a source of comfort. He described vividly how I felt.

Was Hopkins Depressed?

The Circumstances of Writing the 'Terrible Sonnets'

At the time when Hopkins wrote these poems he was feeling very isolated. His sense of alienation is expressed in 'To Seem the Stranger':

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
 Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
 Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
 And he my peace, my parting and my strife.
 England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife
 To my creating thought, would neither hear
 Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I weary
 of idle a being but by where wars are rife.

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a thrd
 Remove. Not but in all removes I can
 Kind love both give and get. Only what word
 Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
 Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard,
 Hear unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.

This is a threefold alienation. First, Hopkins is alienated from his family by his conversion to Catholicism. Then he is alienated spiritually from his beloved country, since England had failed to make the return to the Catholic Church for which he longed.² His move to Ireland in 1884 added physical separation from England, the 'third/Remove' of the poem.

The appointment of the English Hopkins to the Classics Fellowship at the new Royal University caused a political row. Desire for Home Rule was growing and Hopkins, an English patriot, was not sympathetic to this movement, so he was alienated from his Irish co-

² See stanza 35 of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.

religionists. His work was not congenial: the Royal University had inadequate facilities and most of the students were uninterested in learning. He had to spend a great deal of time marking examination papers which were generally of a low standard, and he felt that this burden kept him from creative activities. He was not a successful teacher and did not get on with most of his colleagues.

Hopkins' General Psychological Health

Most of the evidence about Hopkins' health while he was in Dublin comes from his letters to his closest friend, the poet Robert Bridges. From the very beginning he complains about weakness, sometimes showing desperation, as in the outburst 'AND WHAT DOES ANYTHING AT ALL MATTER?' About the time the poems were composed he wrote to Bridges, 'I think that my fits of sadness, although they do not affect my judgment, resemble madness'.³ In 'No Worst' he presents a vivid image of the depressive's terror of falling over the edge into insanity:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there

This was not the first time that he had experienced such feelings. Throughout his life his temperament had been sensitive and highly strung. In 1873 he recorded the effect of a strenuous journey:

In fact, being quite unwell I was quite downcast: nature in all her parcels and faculties gaped and fell apart, *fatiscebat*, like a clod cleaving and holding only by strings of root. But this must often be.⁴

The last sentence seems to indicate weary familiarity with this experience. Joseph Feeney⁵ has demonstrated from Hopkins' letters and journals that each period of teaching in his life was accompanied by

³ *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by W. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 199.

⁴ *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 132.

⁵ Joseph J. Feeney, 'Hopkins the Teacher: The English Years', in *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): New Essays on His Life, Writing and Place in English Literature*, edited by M. E. Allsopp and M. W. Sundermeier (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 203-219.



The house where Hopkins lived in Dublin

tiredness, lack of energy and inability to complete anything he took up, although until the Dublin post none of his teaching jobs had been by any reasonable measure onerous.

Some secular commentators regard Hopkins' Jesuit vocation as the sole cause of his mental problems. This view seems to be based more on prejudice than evidence. However, one aspect of this vocation, celibacy, may have contributed to Hopkins' problems. Mary Ann Coate, writing from a Freudian psychological viewpoint, believes that there is a possible link between celibacy and depression, particularly in those (like Hopkins) 'whose sexuality was not fully or indeed ever roused before they espoused the celibate life'.⁶ Another factor in

⁶ Mary Anne Coate, 'Celibacy and Depression', *The Way Supplement*, 69 (1990), 79.

Hopkins' state of mind was his inability to have his poems published except in the few cases where this was permitted by his superiors. John Pick discusses in detail the complex interaction between Hopkins the poet and Hopkins the Jesuit. His conclusion is that, although the lack of recognition given to Hopkins' poetry caused him great suffering, overall 'his spiritual life as a Jesuit gave to his poetry the very qualities which are its greatness'.⁷

The 'Terrible Sonnets' certainly reflect suffering. In 'To Seem the Stranger', Hopkins' poetic creativity, 'what word/Wisest my heart breeds', is doubly frustrated, by 'dark heaven's baffling ban' and by 'hell's spell'. The latter perhaps refers to his dark mood.⁸ The former, however, could refer to the effective ban on publication of his poetry that resulted from his Jesuit vocation. But Hopkins accepted this when he joined the Jesuits—why is he now complaining? It could be that the absence of spiritual consolation made the ban much harder to bear. It could be that he had just entered his forties and was realising that, far from attaining his goals in life, he had built nothing and would be 'Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes'.

There are other clues to Hopkins' state of mind in the 'Terrible Sonnets' themselves. The opening of 'I Wake and Feel' is a vivid description of the sleep disorder characteristic of depression: lying awake for hours with tormented thoughts, finally falling asleep to be haunted by disturbing dreams, then waking in darkness to find the torment still there.

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
 What hours, O what black hours we have spent
 This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
 And more must, in longer light's delay.

Here Hopkins is describing his own experience—'With witness I speak this'—and it is not the experience of just one night.

The beginning of 'Carrion Comfort' may represent Hopkins' struggle with a temptation to utter despair ('carrion' in the sense of dead), even suicide ('nor untwist ... these last strands of man'; 'not chose not to be'):

⁷ John Pick, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet* (London: Oxford UP, 1942), 128.

⁸ Exx 318 teaches that desolation can be caused by evil spirits.

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
 Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
 In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;
 Can something, hope, wish day come, not chose not to be.

It is remarkable how often Hopkins manages to use 'not' in these four lines; they are a cry of desperate refusal to surrender to the darkness pressing in on him.

Symptoms of Clinical Depression

While experiences of depression range across a continuum, a distinction must be made between subclinical depressed moods and clinical states. The accepted symptoms of clinical depression are a persistent depressed mood and lack of interest with no obvious cause, accompanied by one or more persistent and uncontrollable symptoms such as feelings of guilt, insomnia or excess sleeping, fatigue, suicidal thoughts, anorexia or excessive eating, or inability to concentrate.

Perhaps the most painful experience of depression is self-hatred.⁹ Christopher Frost's review of depression literature shows a common view that this disease is rooted in defective self-awareness.¹⁰ Turner sees depression as 'disintegration of an appropriate and healthy sense of self'.¹¹ What he calls the person's 'psychological self', the self as actually experienced, is negatively contrasted with their 'therapeutic self', the self they perceive as 'normal'.¹²

Depression and Other Explanations

Hopkins' poems and other writings seem clearly to reflect most of the symptoms of depression. Letters written in May 1885 complain about an inability to finish tasks, lethargy and a crippling anxiety about work, while 'I Wake and Feel' contains vivid descriptions of self-loathing:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
 Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
 Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

⁹ Dorothy Rowe, *Depression: The Way out of Your Prison* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), quotes a moving description of this state by a sufferer who eventually killed herself (48-49).

¹⁰ Christopher J. Frost, 'Melancholy as an Alternative to the Psychological Label of Depression', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2/2 (1992), 101-108.

¹¹ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 227.

¹² Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 228-229.

It seems likely that Hopkins was clinically depressed when he wrote most, if not all, of the 'Terrible Sonnets'. Robert Martin thinks that Hopkins was subject to cyclical fits of deep depression.¹³

Alternative explanations for these poems seem less convincing. Some early commentators such as Martin Carroll¹⁴ and, more recently, Walter Ong¹⁵ saw them as evidence of the increasing perfection of the Jesuit Hopkins, an example of advanced spirituality and the 'dark night of the soul'. This approach seems merely pious and hagiographical—in James Cotter's view it is 'simply evading the mystery of the real nature of suffering'.¹⁶ John Pick¹⁷ and Donald Walhout¹⁸ are emphatic, moreover, that Hopkins' experience does not fit with the classic 'dark night'. A similarly over-optimistic approach is to see these poems as demonstrating Hopkins' ultimately successful struggle to achieve self-recognition and integration. This is a surprising conclusion which does not seem to be supported by the poems or by his other writings.

Other commentators use Ignatian spirituality to interpret these sonnets in various ways. Paul Mariani argues that they,

... are most clearly read by following the map of St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. With this guide for the way, it is clear that Hopkins ... was going down profound depths only to go upward with God.¹⁹

That Ignatius' rules for discernment, particularly in the hands of a skilled spiritual director, may help Christians suffering depression is not in doubt. However, the question here is whether these poems can be explained as the outworking of these rules in the life of one individual. There are clear signs of Ignatian influence, such as the desire for patience; but in the bleakest poems, such as 'I Wake and Feel', Hopkins appears to have yielded to desolation, and his recital of the

¹³ Robert B. Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (New York: Putnam, 1991), 171, 379.

¹⁴ Martin C. Carroll, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Society of Jesus', in *Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman Weyand (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), 49.

¹⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, the Self and God* (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 1986), 152.

¹⁶ James F. Cotter, *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh P., 1972), 221.

¹⁷ Pick, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 129-131.

¹⁸ Donald Walhout, *Send My Roots Rain: A Study of the Religious Experience in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Athens, Oh: Ohio UP, 1981), 140-143.

¹⁹ Paul L. Mariani, *A Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1970), 241.

reasons for his suffering in 'Carrion Comfort' and 'Patience' sounds unconvinced. Daniel Harris,²⁰ in contrast to Mariani, uses Ignatian elements (in particular the absence of colloquy in these poems) to come to the conclusion that the poems show a failure of consciousness of God's presence and 'a hideous despair at the centre'.²¹

In conclusion, the evidence is very strong that Hopkins was clinically depressed when he wrote the 'Terrible Sonnets'. None of the alternative explanations put forward by various commentators seem to fit this evidence as well as does a diagnosis of depression.

Depression and the 'Dark Night'

Issues for Depressed Christians

Anyone who suffers from depression tends to think that they are abnormal. Depressed Christians are liable to think that their experience is a sign that there is something wrong with them spiritually, for surely depression is not a 'normal' part of the Christian experience. Aren't we supposed to 'rejoice always'? The belief that this is an abnormal experience leads to feelings of guilt and self-loathing. Sufferers feel that they are losing their faith. Suicidal thoughts are particularly distressing to those Christians who have been taught that self-destruction is a serious sin, adding to their guilt and self-hatred. Dorothy Rowe has found in her work with the depressed that those with a religious belief suffer at the hands of both Freudian psychiatrists, who believe that religious beliefs are evidence of neurosis, and Christian ministers, who can only provide platitudes about God's forgiveness.²² Some Churches make this worse by treating depression as evidence of sin, or even of 'demonic possession'.

Christians suffer especially greatly when their depression seems to arise from a life situation which was freely chosen in response to what they were convinced was God's calling. Does this mean that they were mistaken? How could walking in God's will for them result in such suffering? One approach to these questions is the tradition of

²⁰ Daniel A. Harris, *Inspiration Unbidden: The 'Terrible Sonnets' of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1982), 75-125.

²¹ Harris, *Inspiration Unbidden*, xv.

²² Rowe, *Depression*, 37.

apophatic mysticism, the 'darkness of God', as an agent of spiritual transformation.

Depression and the 'Darkness of God'

As Hopkins was a Jesuit, he would have been exposed to Ignatian teachings. Those most relevant to depression are the Rules for Discernment of Spirits, particularly those that deal with what Ignatius calls 'desolation'. 'Desolation' here means feelings and affective movements that tend to draw us away from God and make us more self-centred.

Can 'desolation' be connected with the illness of depression? Gerard Hughes²³ thinks that perhaps it can, although in his experience 'consolation' (feelings drawing us towards God) can also be experienced during depression. The danger of desolation is that, if we yield to it, it can weaken or destroy the Christian life; so Ignatius counsels resistance and counter-attack. He also gives very practical advice, such as not to change decisions made while experiencing consolation. The ultimate weapon against desolation is patience.

There is a strong tradition throughout Christianity which regards 'darkness' as necessary to spiritual growth.²⁴ A developed description of this tradition is found in the writings of John of the Cross. He emerged from the terrible experience of imprisonment and ill-treatment by his own order with profoundly spiritual lyric poems. He later wrote detailed theological commentaries on these poems. He teaches that the soul's movement towards God requires a painful stripping away. This process begins with 'active' purification, requiring ascetic human effort, but this alone is not enough. The 'passive dark night' is God's purifying activity, getting at the roots of sin and 'immeasurably more terrible and costly than the active night alone'.²⁵

John understood that, experientially, what we now call depression could not be distinguished from the passive 'dark night'. He gave three signs for distinguishing between the dark night and dryness from other

²³ Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 98.

²⁴ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990 [1979]), 170. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the complex relationship between consolation, desolation and darkness in Ignatius and how his teachings compare to those of John of the Cross.

²⁵ Some have discerned a relationship between John of the Cross' 'Dark Night' and Jung's individuation process, although Jung himself rejected this. There is not space here to pursue the extent to which Hopkins experienced individuation.



causes, including 'bad humours' (*The Dark Night*, 1.9). First, there is no satisfaction from anything, physical or spiritual. Second, there is consciousness of dryness and a 'painful care' towards God. As these are not sufficient to distinguish some psychological states, he adds a third sign: inability to meditate imaginatively.

Denys Turner discusses the relationship in John's thinking between depression and the 'dark night', concluding that they can only be distinguished in their outcomes and causes.²⁶ When the passive dark night has passed the self is transformed; when depression lifts the previous state of selfhood is restored. The 'dark night' is caused by God; depression is caused by some physical or psychological imbalance. Of course, God can use depression as part of the dark night experience: the differentiating test is the outcome.

Applying this test to Hopkins seems to point to depression rather than a 'dark night' experience. While he hates the self he experiences ('I Wake and Feel'), he clings to it ('Carrion Comfort'), and seems to

²⁶ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 235-238.

be approaching the restoration of what Turner calls the 'therapeutic self' in 'My Own Heart'. It is instructive to compare Hopkins' poems with those that John of the Cross produced while undergoing a terrible experience. John's poetry describes leaving the self and going out into the darkness to search for the absent Beloved; Hopkins' poetry expresses a flight into the self, looking for an escape from the darkness. This difference perhaps results from their different images of God. John sees God as a tender lover, whereas for Hopkins God seems to be dominating, terror-inducing, a potential annihilator;²⁷ it is difficult to search for, let alone surrender to, such a God.

How Can the 'Terrible Sonnets' Help Those Suffering Depression?

Spiritual Help

There are many definitions of spirituality, but they have in common an emphasis on experience and practice in the search for God. For many people suffering from depression, who often have low self-esteem, spirituality depends on their answers to questions about whether they have any relation to God at all, whether God has interest in them and whether they can do anything to reach out to him. Hopkins gives the sufferer from depression help in finding answers to these questions.

First, all the poems show that Hopkins maintained some kind of relationship with God: indeed that is their common theme. The real issue is what kind of relationship this was; for this, we must look at the answer to the second question. As we have seen, these poems and others seem to reveal a relationship with a distant, stern God: a hard taskmaster who must be obeyed. Even in Hopkins' happiest poems, such as 'Hurrahing in Harvest', the imagery is still of remote majesty. I suspect that many depressives have a similar image of God; here Hopkins stands primarily as an example of what has gone wrong in depression.

Can those in depression reach out to God? Hopkins certainly shows that this is possible, even if only in the anguished cries for relief

²⁷ Peter Hardwick, 'The Inward Struggle of the Self with God: Gerard Manley Hopkins and George Herbert', *The Way Supplement*, 66 (1989), 33, draws this conclusion in comparing Hopkins' poems with Herbert's: '... Hopkins is most deeply troubled, indeed almost destroyed, not by a sense of God's absence as a friend, but of his terrible and overwhelming presence as an absolute being, unapproachable but all-demanding ... God the assailant can be felt as God the un-creator'.

of 'No Worst'—'Comforter, where, where is your comforting?'—or the questioning of 'Carrion Comfort':

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-earth right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? ...

In some respects these poems show how Ignatius' very practical but terse principles can be applied to depression. 'Patience, Hard Thing' reflects Ignatius' eighth rule, 'Let him who is in [spiritual] desolation work at holding on in patience ...' (Exx 321):

Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,
But bid for, patience is! Patience who asks
Wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks;
To do without, take tosses and obey.

Hopkins, like most of us, clearly found patience difficult. In his 1879 poem 'Peace' he lamented the elusiveness of peace in himself:

When will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut
Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs?

Instead of peace, his Lord had left 'Patience exquisite,/That plumes to peace thereafter'. But in 'Patience, Hard Thing' even that patience is eluding him. The poem mirrors Hopkins' struggle as he prays for patience—you can almost hear him gritting his teeth. Patience is not a cure for suffering; to ask for patience is like enlisting as a soldier, accepting war, wounds and deprivation as a result of obedience. Nevertheless, Hopkins follows the stark first stanza with images of ivy tranquilly covering ruins, and of honey—a natural antiseptic and source of sweetness. There is hope that, through patience, struggle will end in healing and the return of the sweetness of God's presence.

Donald Walhout offers a detailed study of Hopkins' spirituality, finding in it a three-stage process: 'encagement', 'naturation' and 'grace'.²⁸ 'Encagement' is a sense of spiritual confinement, accompanied by dryness, disappointment, discouragement and despair; 'naturation' is the beginning of recovery through relating to creation; while 'grace' is

²⁸ Walhout, *Send My Roots Rain*, 7-8.

the aspect of recovery that comes from God. While this is a process of moving from desolation to consolation, Walhout admits that it remains abstract:

In actual practice however, everyone knows that personal life is too precarious, too confused, too subject to ups and downs, for anyone to think that an abstract model is precisely duplicated on the slippery slope that is human life.²⁹

This theory is attractive because it provides a more accessible version of Hopkins' spirituality than heroic Jesuit sainthood and is more comforting than bleak despair.

Practical Help

Hopkins also provides practical help for those seeking to escape depression. It is valuable advice to treat yourself kindly:

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.
I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in a world of wet.

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
You, jaded, lét be; call off thoughts awhile
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
'S not wrung, see you; unforeseentimes rather—as skies
Betweenpie mountains—lights a lovely mile.

Hopkins begins this poem by deciding to be more kind to himself, to accept his lot and not make things worse by continually repeating his tormented thoughts. However, his limited recovery from the depths of 'No Worst' and 'Carrion Comfort' is not the result of a restored sense of the presence of God: 'my comfortless' shows that his inner landscape is still desolate, with no sign of the 'Comforter' whom he had so desperately invoked in 'No Worst'. He ends with the hope that he will

²⁹ Walhout, *Send My Roots Rain*, 71.

again glimpse God's smile, 'as skies/Betweenpie mountains', recalling images from happier times.³⁰ Making oneself remember previous experiences of consolation is important in getting through desolation according to Ignatius' principle of 'counter-attack'.

We can also learn from the negative side of Hopkins' experience. Those who have difficulty accepting that God loves them unconditionally, as Hopkins seems to have done, are likely to have low self-esteem, which is an indicator for depression. And an effective remedy for the low self-esteem which characterizes most depressives is belief and acceptance that God does love them unconditionally—something that requires an openness to God but can only be given by God's grace.

Is Hopkins Still Relevant to Modern Treatments for Depression?

Despite a century of study, there is still a stigma attached to depression and it is rarely understood by those who have not suffered it: 'Hold them cheap/May who ne'er hung there'. That stigma may be felt even more acutely by depressed Christians, who can face lack of understanding or even judgmental attitudes in their Church. To avoid the stigma, sufferers may exert costly efforts to conceal their depression from those around them.

In 1885 there was no effective treatment for depression. The twentieth century saw the introduction of anti-depressive drugs, and the use of psychotherapy and ECT to treat depression. Does this modern medical treatment vitiate Hopkins' work as a source of help?

Drugs alone rarely provide more than relief from the worst symptoms of depression, and even the full panoply of treatments does not seem to effect a 'cure'. Anthony Clare, a practising psychiatrist, stresses 'the importance of having someone who is there, prepared to listen, willing to support, able to indicate that he or she understands'.³¹ If nothing else, Hopkins' poems tell sufferers that someone has been in the same situation before them. For Christians, Hopkins shows that even dedicated servants of Christ can suffer depression. While the sense that he had achieved nothing remained, 'birds build—but not I

³⁰ 'Pied Beauty' and 'Hurrahing in Harvest'.

³¹ Anthony Clare and Spike Milligan, *Depression and How to Survive It* (London: Arrow, 1994), 161.

build' ('Justus'), Hopkins was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ too 'was doomed to succeed by failure'.³²

A Spirituality for the Depressed

For centuries Christians in distress or despair have turned to the great Lament Psalms. Walter Brueggemann says:

The faith expressed in the lament is nerve—it is a faith that knows that honest facing of distress can be done effectively only in dialogue with God who acts in transforming ways.³³

In the 'Terrible Sonnets' Hopkins expresses this same faith while struggling with depression, showing those in similar suffering a spirituality that is open even to them. Depression is a disease that brings darkness of mind, self-loathing, exhaustion, despair. Perhaps the most important message from these poems to the depressed is that they can indeed have a spirituality. Although modern drugs and psychotherapy can provide some relief to sufferers, they are not a complete answer. The spirit is just as affected by depression as the mind and the body, and spiritual 'treatment' is also needed. These poems contain an outworking of Ignatius' spiritual and practical advice to those in 'desolation'—be patient, don't despair, hang on to decisions you made when things were going well spiritually, be kind to yourself.

Hilary Pearson has been a lawyer specialising in intellectual property for the last thirty years. She is a professed Anglican Franciscan Tertiary. In 2004 she completed an MA in Christian Spirituality at Heythrop College, and started doctoral research at Oxford in 2006 on Teresa de Cartagena.

³² *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, edited by Claude Collier Abbott (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970 [1935]), 138.

³³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 69.