

THE WAY

a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits

July 2020

Volume 59, Number 3

MOVED BY CONVERSATION



Foreword

5–6

Psychological Foundations of Interior Movements

7–14

Roger Dawson

In his teaching on discernment of spirits, which lies at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius speaks of ‘movements’ that are experienced within the soul and can to some extent be understood. Here Roger Dawson relates these movements to recent psychological research, particularly to theories of the emotions, both positive and negative.

Communicating Jesuit Mission Today: The Universal Apostolic Preferences

15–22

Damian Howard

In 2019 the Jesuits worldwide adopted four ‘Universal Apostolic Preferences’, intended to guide and shape the mission of the Society of Jesus over the next decade. Using an image from the film *The Matrix*, the British Jesuit Provincial, Damian Howard, shows how these preferences might be used to help communicate this mission more effectively.

The Treasures of Darkness: Poetic Musings towards a Spiritual Theology of Darkness

23–39

Bonnie Thurston

Much spiritual writing presents light as an image of everything good, with its counterpart, darkness, as a symbol of evil, or at least of all that should be shunned and avoided. By contrast here Bonnie Thurston, drawing on both scripture and poetry, finds much in the idea of darkness that is positive, and that can usefully be incorporated into a developing spiritual journey.

*The Spirit in Contemporary Culture****Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Approach***

41–50

Calum Samuelson

Artificial intelligence is at the cutting edge of current technological innovation, and the full implications of its development for humanity are as yet far from clear. Calum Samuelson approaches it as ‘a tool that amplifies human nature and behaviours’, and explores how theological ideas can illuminate aspects of its realisation.

Joining the Conversation

51–66

Robert Green

Robert Green was raised in a Christian tradition that regarded the Bible as a kind of infallible divine instruction manual. He responds to this view here with the idea of ‘sacred conversation’, continuing to see scripture as a bearer of truth while offering a more nuanced understanding of how that truth is conveyed. It is, he holds, the Bible itself that serves to initiate these conversations.

Memory in the Spiritual Exercises and John 21

67–76

Gerald O'Collins

Both Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises and the final chapter of John’s Gospel rely heavily on the concept of memory to make their impact. Gerald O’Collins shows here how memory enables the experience of being a loved and forgiven sinner, with an awareness of all the gifts that God continues to offer, to deepen Christian discipleship.

Helping Others: The Role of Conversations and of the Spiritual Exercises

77–88

Patrick Goujon

At the heart of the Spiritual Exercises lies the experience of conversation: between the director and the one being directed and, more importantly, between the exercitant and God in prolonged prayer. In this extract from a longer work Patrick Goujon considers how these conversations work, in a way that is unique to each person involved.

Thinking Faith

Coping with Insecurity, Uncertainty and Risk

89–96

Helen Freeman

Helen Freeman is both an ordained rabbi and a qualified Jungian analyst. Here she argues that the ‘dominion over creation’ to humans in the Book of Genesis does not allow us to escape through material things from an insecurity inherent in being a creature, and that the security that we crave can only be found in God.

Small Christian Communities: Rejuvenating the Church

97–109

John Zupez

One of the results of the isolation forced upon many by the coronavirus pandemic has been a deepened appreciation of the value of community. In fact the Church had already, in recent decades, been coming to a similar conclusion. John Zupez describes a number of projects from across the world that illustrate this renewed insight.

Book Reviews

Tim Noble on the thought of Pope Francis

Brendan Callaghan on surviving childhood abuse

Peter Groves on Rowan Williams's christology

Patricia Harriss on the writings of Sr Mary David

Henry Shea on death and dying in the Christian tradition

Gavin Murphy on Christianity and mindfulness

David Lonsdale on eschatological ecclesiology and a new book about John
Henry Newman

Alan Salmon on the spirituality of Thomas Merton

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. A Special Issue is planned on Pope Francis, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Jay Carney and Tom Landy for permission to reprint the photograph on page 101. Thanks to Peter Brook SJ for additional illustrations. The scripture quotations herein are generally from the New Revised Standard Version Bible © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Autobiography</i>	'Reminiscences (Autobiography)', in <i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Constitutions</i>	in <i>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Diary</i>	'The Spiritual Diary', in <i>Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings</i> , translated by Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz (London: Penguin, 1996)
<i>Dir</i>	<i>On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599</i> , translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996)
<i>Exx</i>	<i>The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius</i> , translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992)
<i>GC</i>	General Congregation, in <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus</i> (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009) and <i>Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus</i> (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017)
<i>MHSJ</i>	Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu, 157 volumes (Madrid and Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 1898–)

Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va

FOREWORD

SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION was a key skill that Ignatius hoped to develop in the early Jesuits. As men educated in Renaissance humanism, debate came naturally to them, and to this they brought a determination to listen deeply to other points of view, whether those of the Protestant reformers in Europe or of the new and diverse cultures they encountered on their missionary journeys. To engage in spiritual conversation is not artificially to restrict talk to 'holy' subjects, but rather gradually to let a conversation deepen, to the point where both parties are able to recognise the God who is at work everywhere in the world and within each human heart. This conversational art has lost none of its relevance over the last five centuries.

In this issue of *The Way* Patrick Goujon looks at how conversations of this kind have a key role to play in the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Robert Green suggests that such conversation is a powerful way of coming to understand the way in which the truths of scripture are conveyed, in patterns that go beyond a belief in the Bible as simply the 'maker's instructions' for humanity. The contribution by John Zupez highlights the role of small communities within the contemporary Church—communities in which the faith can be shared and spread through conversation, rather than only by one-way preaching.

At its best, spiritual conversation is alert to, and follows, the movements of God's Spirit as they make themselves known in our experience. Roger Dawson relates this idea to psychological theories of the emotions, positive and negative. Bonnie Thurston picks up on the idea that God can be recognised even in experiences that are often rejected as negative, drawing on poetry to find God active in darkness as well as in light. For Gerald O'Collins, memory has a central role to play in enabling a continuing response to the movements of spirit, building on what it is that God is doing, and he illustrates this from the encounters described at the end of John's Gospel.

This view of conversation recognises it as an important way in which the word of God is communicated. Damian Howard draws on a striking image from the science fiction film *The Matrix* to explore aspects of contemporary divine communication. Alan Turing famously suggested that the test for successful artificial intelligence would be whether it

could conduct a conversation indistinguishable from one with another human being. As this possibility comes ever closer to being realised, Calum Samuelson employs theology to approach it with optimism. And Helen Freeman explores the long cultural conversation within Judaism about how the dominion over Creation bestowed by God on Adam should be interpreted and lived.

The limitations on face-to-face contact brought about by the current coronavirus pandemic have had, for many, the unexpected effect of underlining the importance of conversation, and have prompted initiatives to enable it to continue. Zoom webinars have replaced business conferences, Skype calls allow family members to keep in touch, and in religious circles live-streaming of services and virtual gatherings have become much more common. It is too early to say how much of this will continue into the post-pandemic period. But human beings will always be fundamentally social animals, and the God who became incarnate respects these ways of making Godself known. To publish an article is itself an invitation to conversation, if only within the mind of the reader. It is our hope that the varied contents of this issue of *The Way* will stimulate you to respond to what is said here, and thus to keep the conversation alive.

Paul Nicholson SJ
Editor

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF INTERIOR MOVEMENTS

Roger Dawson

IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION, *movements* (motions or *mociones*) relate to the interior experiences of the soul. According to Michael Ivens, they ‘refer to interactions of feelings, thoughts and impulses of attraction and recoil which occur spontaneously in consciousness’.¹ These movements are involuntary and can come from the self, a ‘good spirit’ or a ‘bad spirit’ and freedom consists in the choice we have to accept or reject the direction in which they propel us. These movements or interior experiences can relate to the intellect (thoughts, reasoning, imaginings), the will (urges, impulses, desires) or affect (mood and emotions). Consolation and desolation as understood in the Spiritual Exercises are spiritual because they have God as their object and are felt reactions to God and God’s truth. Consolation is a positive reaction to God, while desolation is a negative reaction to God—pulling away or closing in on the self.

While movements do not solely refer to feelings and emotions, I would like to approach them here through two theories of emotion that come from recent psychological research. The first is Paul Gilbert’s evolutionary theory of three systems or ‘modes’ of affect regulation, and the second is Barbara Fredrickson’s ‘broaden and build’ theory of positive emotions. I believe that both these theories can help us to understand the foundations of the movements or motions that interest us in Ignatian spirituality generally and in discernment specifically. I am taking a strictly incarnational approach: in line with the tradition of Catholic anthropology I am treating the human person as a biological,

This article is based on a lecture offered at the International Symposium on Psychology and Spiritual Exercises (Loyola, 20–24 June 2019), and a Spanish translation will appear in the *Acta* of the Symposium in 2021.

¹ Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), 210.

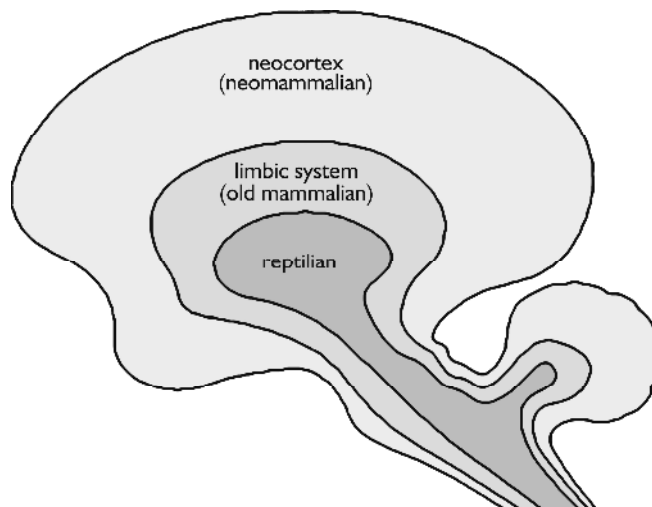
psychological and spiritual unity, and am assuming that very little can be experienced or done without a body and a brain. As far as we can tell, it is only with this body and brain that we can experience interior movements.

Three Systems of Affect Regulation

The first theoretical approach I want to look at comes from research into the development of compassion-focused approaches in cognitive therapy. This takes an evolutionary perspective on the long development of the human brain.

The cognitively modern human brain emerged only about 200,000 years ago but is built on the much older parts that we share with our ancestors. The oldest and most primitive part of the brain is known as the 'reptile brain'. This part is strictly territorial and is concerned with danger and the 'fight or flight' response; its main emotions are anxiety, anger and disgust. Once humans started to live in groups the limbic system developed, a more sophisticated part of the brain concerned with social functioning and belonging, and the emotions associated with kinship. Finally, the outer part of the brain, the cortex, developed and is associated with the higher functions of reasoning, planning and verbal skills.

There is a hierarchy here: it is hard for the cortical brain to override the powerful, primitive response of the reptile brain, largely associated with negative emotions, which may be unpleasant but are powerful signals that all is not well and have helped us to stay alive. Paul Gilbert has identified three 'systems' of affect regulation associated with this brain



architecture.² The first is the ‘threat and self-protection’ system (threat mode) and this is related to the reptile brain. This system keeps us safe by scanning for danger and detecting threats quickly, and it triggers the main emotions (anxiety, anger, disgust). It is associated with physiological reactions (the ‘fight or flight’ response and, in extreme situations, inhibiting or freezing) and the urge to take self-protective action.

The second system is the ‘incentive- and resource-seeking’ system (drive mode). This functions to give us positive feelings that guide and motivate us to seek out resources that we, and those we love and care about, need to survive and prosper. At the basic level this includes food, water and sex, but it also includes needs for friendship, status, recognition and comfort. This ‘drive’ mode leads to high levels of arousal, and the experiences of excitement and pleasure. Desire and motivation are part of this system, but it can become overstimulated, leaving the person feeling frantic or over-excited. When a person is depressed, this system is underfunctioning and the person lacks drive and motivation.

The third system is the ‘soothing-contentment’ system (safe mode). This is related to safety and the emotions of calm, peacefulness and contentment. Because we are safe, there is no defending or attacking, and because we have got what we need, there is no striving. We are content because we are happy with the way things are. It is the experience of being on holiday—and often of those on retreat. This is usually associated with being connected with others and feeling secure, and is linked with affection and kindness. All these experiences are influenced by imagination.

The systems can operate on their own or in tandem with the others. The safe mode may operate alone when we are on holiday, but someone who is happy at work in a busy job will experience this and ‘drive’ mode operating healthily together. If a person feels unsafe at work and his or her job is at risk, or if that person is blocked or frustrated in achieving goals, then the threat system is activated with the drive system and the two operate together in an unpleasant and distressing way.

Threat mode belongs to the old brain, much of which is shared with other primates, and indeed other mammals and reptiles. But we have the more recently evolved ‘new brain’ as well, which is unique to humans. Our brain is about three times larger than a chimpanzee’s brain and

² Paul Gilbert, *The Compassionate Mind* (London: Constable, 2009); and see Paul Gilbert, *Compassion-Focused Therapy* (Hove: Routledge, 2010).

this gives us the advantages of sophisticated higher cortical functions, such as thinking, imagining, planning, learning, reflecting and the ability to use symbols and language. This allows us to be creative—to imagine and bring into existence something that is not there in the present—and is the basis for agriculture, culture, arts and science. The capacity for imagination is also the basis for empathy (we can imagine what it might be like to be another person), and for hope and dreams—to envisage and plan for a better future. However, it also means that we can imagine feared or dreaded future situations, or go over difficult past situations and missed opportunities. So this capacity for imagination can lead to hope and creativity, but it also gives us the capacity to worry about what others might think of us, and can be the source of fear about the future and disappointment about the past.

These are some of the neuropsychological characteristics of the human brain. According to Gilbert, these systems are hard-wired into us, and we need all of them. All of these modes—threat mode, drive mode and safe mode—are available to us, and our responses take place within them. This is part of what it is to be human and has to be part of a Christian anthropology too. It is within these affect regulation systems that spiritual movements occur.

The Three Systems and Spiritual Direction

In relation to the Exercises and spiritual direction, we need to accept the sort of brain that we have got, and we need to work with it. It is an extraordinary part of God's creation but it is, as Paul Gilbert says, a tricky brain, or even a crazy brain, which can present us with challenges and cause problems or difficulties.³ This needs to be understood and

**We need to
accept the sort
of brain that
we have got**

accepted, and not spiritualised. In terms of the spiritual life, threat mode seems to cause most difficulties, whether this system is operating alone or in combination with drive mode. There may be good reasons why we are trying to protect ourselves (the threats and risks may be real), but it is hard to remain in consolation when this system is firing, and desolation is very likely. There is no peace in threat mode, and discernment is certainly very difficult. Perhaps it is for this reason that Jesus repeatedly says, 'do not be afraid' and 'have no anxiety'.

³ See for example Gilbert, *Compassionate Mind*, 35; Paul Gilbert, *Living Like Crazy* (York: Annwyn House, 2019).

Safe mode seems to be optimal, or even essential, for the spiritual life. In some instances, we can exist in this mode alone (such as when we are on retreat), but most of us have to do things, achieve things and get things in our daily lives, so living in consolation may well involve safe mode plus drive mode working happily together. For safe mode to operate, people need to feel safe—in spiritual direction, in the Church and with God. Maybe we need to know not that we are saved but, more, that we are safe.

The ‘Broaden and Build’ Theory of Emotions

Most psychological research has focused primarily on negative emotions but, according to Barbara Fredrickson, positive and negative emotions work in different ways.⁴ The effect of negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety, is to narrow and constrict our attention and thoughts, and they prime us for specific behavioural responses so we can act quickly in a self-protective way. ‘Anger, for instance, creates the urge to attack, fear the urge to escape, disgust the urge to expel’⁵ These responses have survival value as they get us out of life-or-death situations.

Fredrickson’s research suggests that positive emotions are different. Positive emotions *broaden* our attention and thinking in the moment, and open up the repertoire of behavioural responses. They lead to a wider range of thoughts and actions coming to mind. Possibilities and ideas emerge; we become more creative, make links and associations, and gain greater perspective. For example, the emotion of joy leads to play, exploration and the pushing of limits. Contentment and the feeling of safety it engenders lead to a desire to stop and savour and appreciate, and to integrate this experience into new understandings of ourselves and the world.

Positive emotions *build* enduring personal resources, which in turn offer the potential for personal growth and transformation by creating positive spirals of emotions, thoughts and actions. For example, joy can lead to social play, in turn leading to the formation of social bonds and attachments which become a source of social support. These gains are

⁴ See Barbara Fredrickson, ‘What Good Are Positive Emotions?’ *Review of General Psychology*, 2 (1998), 300–319; Barbara Fredrickson, ‘The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions’, *American Psychologist*, 56/3 (2001), 218–226; Michael A. Cohn and Barbara Fredrickson, ‘Positive Emotions’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by Shane J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder (Oxford: OUP, 2009), chapter 3.

⁵ Fredrickson, ‘What Good Are Positive Emotions?’, 302.



lasting, in that they last longer than the emotional states that led to them. Positive emotions also facilitate ‘approach’ behaviour (attraction towards rewarding stimuli) and encourage us to continue the activity that produces the positive emotions, and they are therefore associated with engagement and persistence.⁶

So the experience of positive emotions, in stark contrast to that of negative emotions, broadens our repertoire of thoughts and actions, and builds enduring personal resources. Because this leads to increasing our social and intellectual capacities, it also leads to coping better and increases resilience. Positive emotions do not just signal well-being, but also produce optimal functioning. So, rather than being just pleasant states to enjoy, they promote transformation and growth, in that we become more creative and knowledgeable, and more socially integrated. There is evidence that positive emotions are associated with improved psychological and physical health. Fredrickson has amassed considerable experimental evidence to support this theory, and has found that the experience of positive emotions can even ‘undo’ or repair the after-effects of negative emotions.

So what are the positive emotions that matter? Based on her research Fredrickson has identified a ‘top ten’: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest,

⁶ On ‘approach’ behaviour, see Rachel M. Korn and Andrew J. Elliot, ‘Avoidance and Approach Motivation: A Brief History’, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edn (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 326–331.

hope, accomplishment/satisfaction, amusement, inspiration, awe and love. Interestingly, love is unique in encompassing all the other nine emotions, and can be elicited by each of them. Love is therefore probably the most important and the most experienced positive emotion.

'Broaden and Build' and Spiritual Direction

It will be clear that, because we hope that retreatants will grow and change during the Exercises and that there will be some personal transformation, if this theory is correct then positive emotions are important in the Exercises. Conversely, negative emotions risk defeating their purpose. Whereas the Exercises are a school of prayer, people do not learn well in the absence of positive emotions. Whereas the Exercises are a means of election and decision-making, negative emotions constrict and limit our options and even ideas, rather than opening up new horizons of hope.

This gives us a way of understanding how imagination functions. Positive emotion leads to the broadening and opening up of ideas, to making connections and seeing possibilities. It leads to a cognitive expansiveness—a greater perspective and wider array of thoughts and ideas for action come to mind. Joy and hope, for example, allow for this opening up in a way that is not possible when negative emotions prevail.

Implications

In conclusion I want to make some general comments on what I see as the implications of theories of the emotions for the giving of the Spiritual Exercises. I am conscious that in focusing particularly on affect and the emotions I have neglected the other two elements in interior movements, namely the intellect and the will. Of course, not all consolation is associated with positive emotions, as in 'painful consolation', for example. The role of thoughts and the appraisal of events or situations are crucial to the experience of emotion and, according to cognitive theory, actually give rise to emotions.

I do not want to depreciate negative emotions. As Gilbert reminds us, our brains did not evolve for happiness but for survival and reproduction. The brain gives priority, and more resources, to dealing with threats and danger than to pleasurable things. Negative emotions are a part of the normal range of human emotions and they will often override positive emotions. Positive emotions arise when we are safe and seldom occur in life-threatening situations. We do not experience positive emotions and get their benefits when we are overcome with negative emotions.

This means that desolation may come more easily than consolation—and we need to feel safe. In the Exercises this means that the director has to provide safety, in other words to model the safe relationship with God.

Imagination is crucial in Ignatian spirituality and in the Exercises. Our capacity for imagination means that we can recreate our pasts and imagine situations that have not yet happened. This is the basis of both hope and empathy, but also of remembering our troubles and traumas as well as generating anxieties about the future. Our imagination can put us into threat mode, as well as putting us in touch with our dreams and hopes, or what God wants for us. It is worth remembering that imagination can be used by both the good spirit and the bad spirit.

Finally, ‘broaden and build’ theory underscores how positive emotions are essential for optimal functioning in terms of psychological health; it may well be that they are also essential elements of our spiritual health. Most of the ‘top ten’ emotions will be familiar to any Ignatian director as signs of consolation—joy, gratitude, hope, inspiration, awe and love. It should be no surprise that two of the classic signs of consolation—hope and love—are here. Faith, with the trust that comes from feeling safe, seems to complete the triad of theological graces that constitute the hallmarks of consolation.

Positive emotions are worth cultivating in our own lives and in the lives of others, not just for the momentary positive, pleasant experience or for psychological benefits but because they seem to be spiritually important too. We expect someone to grow and change in the Exercises, and positive emotions seem to be important for that growth and change, for being transformed to become better people living better lives and to become the people God created us to be.

Roger Dawson SJ is director of St Beuno’s Jesuit Spirituality Centre in north Wales.

COMMUNICATING JESUIT MISSION TODAY

The Universal Apostolic Preferences

Damian Howard

CAST YOUR MIND BACK to the year 1999, a time before 9/11 and the financial crisis, not to mention Brexit, Trump and our awareness of climate catastrophe. It was, for good or ill, a world in which the issues that dominate public affairs today were almost entirely absent. To some who lived through the last decade of the twentieth century, the collapse of the Berlin Wall had ushered in what Francis Fukuyama called the ‘end of history’: humanity had at long last come to a place of rest and stability with liberal democracy spreading across the globe and economic neo-liberalism embedded as an unopposed orthodoxy. It seems so far removed from our present age of turbulence and anxiety.

But all was not quite as stable as it seemed. To those with eyes to see, there was evidence of a subterranean restlessness abroad in the culture. If you look at the output of Hollywood around that time, a surprisingly consistent theme emerges. Among the blockbusters of 1998–1999 were *American Beauty*, *The Truman Show*, *Fight Club* and, of course, *The Matrix*, a cinematic bumper crop. In addition to good quality, these very different films share a portrayal of ordinary life as irretrievably sham. And they all offer a recipe for how to get beyond it and through to something more real and authentic. The now disgraced Kevin Spacey plays the role of a middle-aged man casting off his suburban routine by quitting his job and dallying with sexual transgression. Jim Carrey is saved from his phoney, soap-opera world because the facsimile of ordinary life just cannot be maintained convincingly. Ed Norton breaks through to a new, higher but somewhat ambiguous consciousness by embracing a hitherto repressed but redemptive (and über-masculine) capacity for violence and aggression.

The *Matrix* trilogy, in which Keanu Reeves starred as the hero, Neo, is much too complex to summarise here. By far the most philosophically worked-through of all these films, it has been said to echo aspects of ancient Gnostic myth and to recapitulate Descartes’ famous sceptical thought experiment. Daily reality, according to the plot of the movie, is

a computerised simulation played out for human bodies in vats wired up to the matrix—a vast organic ‘battery’ powering artificial intelligences that have taken over the world. The illusory nature of lived ‘reality’ can be grasped only by certain individuals and under the right conditions.

One scene from the first movie has been seminal for contemporary culture in that it has provided both imagery and vocabulary with which to explore the vagaries of life in an age of information saturation. The scene in question depicts an encounter between Neo and the mysterious Morpheus, in which latter offers the hero the chance of enlightenment about the true nature of reality:

MORPHEUS: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work ... when you go to church ... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

NEO: What truth?

MORPHEUS: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself

This is your last chance. After this there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends; you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes Remember, all I’m offering is the truth, nothing more.¹

The expression ‘to be red-pilled’ is part of the argot of so-called cyber-ideologies, and denotes initiation into a new state of consciousness which is at once harsh or even painful yet rooted in truth. The drug metaphor underlines that the imparting of certain bodies of information can radically destabilise and alter one’s purchase on reality, just as does the consumption of drugs, in this case through the traumatic processes of disillusionment and enlightenment.

With the prizing of the red pill and of the courage required to take it comes contempt for those who choose the blue pill, preferring to remain ensconced in illusion and inauthenticity. When this illusory condition is associated with ordinary life, the hermeneutic of the red pill is essentially one of suspicion of the status quo. That could be, as in *American Beauty*,

¹ Larry and Andy Wachowski, ‘The Matrix: Script’, in *The Art of the Matrix*, edited by Spencer Lamm (New York: Newmarket, 2000), 271–394, here 300–301.



directed at the banality of American suburbia or, as in *Fight Club*, at the way contemporary capitalism emasculates men. But it also encourages a wide-ranging disposition of suspicion about ordinary life, about the establishment, the powers that be, even family and friends.

The 'red pill hermeneutic' has been devastating when applied by dissenting Catholics to the post-Vatican II Church. To the extent that the teaching of the council involved a 'turn towards the world', it was bound to find itself vulnerable once the reality and authenticity of that world came into question. One hears it said that not only has Vatican II betrayed the traditions of the Church but it has led to a sham Catholicism ('modernism') or tried to fashion a new Church; that the resulting Church is deeply corrupt (evidence of widespread abuse bolsters that suspicion); that the Church's liturgy has been fatally compromised by the adoption of the *Novus Ordo*; and that those clerics and laypeople who promote it and the conciliar vision in general are frauds. Of course, trenchant criticism of, and opposition to, the Council pre-date *The Matrix*! The red pill hermeneutic is not the origin of theological reaction or restorationism. What it does, however, is to give rise to an all-pervasive suspicion that an entire system is bankrupt and to the hope that the plucky individual might find a way through the conspiracy to something pure and good.

If Jesuits want to walk with young people, it is surely important that they understand the power of this hermeneutic, which is the fruit both of the information age and the catastrophic history through which the millennial generation has lived. This is not least because the Jesuit mission is all too easily dismissed as the 'blue pill': collusion with a bankrupt culture of relativism and moral compromise. To ensure that it is not, we need to communicate our mission bringing to the fore the categories of

truth and authenticity. We must be willing to admit to what is sham in the culture of late modernity. But we must also avoid allowing the hermeneutic to control us. How might this be done?

The Universal Apostolic Preferences

Showing the Way to God

The four Universal Apostolic Preferences provide a powerful response to this challenge. They start by placing on the table as the first preference what we might call the active ingredient of the Jesuit red pill: discernment and the Spiritual Exercises. These two staples of Jesuit practice are, at core, instruments designed to bring about a change of perception in the believer best described as conversion to the challenging and liberating truth, the truth of Who God is, who we are and how we are to be saved.

A learned Jesuit once described the impact that discovering discernment had had on his life:

Before I learned to discern spirits, I used to give equal authority to the counsel of the good and the bad spirits. In ordinary daily life, as well as in prayer, I would experience enthusiasm, hope and joy alongside discouragement, dread and sadness and simply accepted it all as the warp and weft of the human condition. I consequently eked out a typically mediocre spiritual existence. Reading Ignatius, I discovered that a radically different life was possible, one which welcomed the counsel of the good spirit and rejected that of the bad. Not rocket science, you'd have to say, yet it was an astonishing insight and it still saddens me how many devoted Christians have no notion of the power of this idea and its practice.³

Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus

- 1. Promoting discernment and the Spiritual Exercises:** helping people find Jesus Christ and follow Him.
- 2. Walking with the excluded:** walking alongside the poor, the vulnerable, the excluded and those whom society considers worthless, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.
- 3. Journeying with youth:** accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future.
- 4. Caring for our common home:** working, with gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's Creation.²

² See <https://jesuit.org.uk/universal-apostolic-preferences-announced>, accessed 1 July 2020.

³ Based on conversations with Robert R. Marsh.

The red pill of the discernment of spirits was foundational for Ignatius. We actually refer to his first act of discernment as his *conversion*, even though it involved conversion neither to belief in God nor to Christian faith. The path opened up for him by the discernment of spirits was not an easy one. On it he learned to face down his demons and to unlearn patterns of behaviour he adopted when young. He discovered that habits and preferences learned from family, friends and culture were damaging, and he had to repent of them and be reborn as a child of the Spirit. The red pill of discernment led him, as it leads us today, to the grace of knowing oneself to be a sinner yet loved by God and forgiven.

A red pill hermeneutic has implications for the way we talk about the Exercises. We have in the past placed *desire* in the foreground, encouraging people to see discernment and the Exercises as ways of accessing *what we really, deeply want*. I have found that this snags with today's young people; perhaps it sounds too much like the logic of consumerism, which they instinctively recognise as 'part of the problem'. What would it be like for us to speak of the Exercises as a portal to the truth?

Walking with the Excluded

The second apostolic preference asks us to walk with the marginalised and excluded in a mission of justice and reconciliation. Anyone who has made the Spiritual Exercises will recognise in this language the mission of Christ which forms the basis of the Second Week. The one making the Exercises is drawn to the undefendedness of God's incarnation. He or she follows Jesus as he journeys among the poor and outcasts of first-century Palestine, learning of Christ's personal option to live and serve in poverty, and discovering the redemptive power of divine life poured out for sinners.

In the Second Week we find out that, as reconciled sinners, we ourselves are called to serve the reconciling mission of Christ, and so to make His self-denying discipline our own. And this moment involves its own transformation of consciousness: the discovery that huge swathes of our values and appetites are incompatible with the service of the mission of Jesus. Going to the margins and frequenting the rejected ones is not just something we do; it is our re-creation, a rewiring of our brains and hearts. At the margins we are exposed to a reality that is somehow more real than the game playing, the politicking and the masking that go on in Jerusalem and all the other great centres of the world. And when we see marginal reality anew, we instinctively yearn to join in what is the most real action in the world, God's condescension in Christ to save the world God loves.

Journeying with Youth

The third preference places the service of young people to the fore. The wording makes clear that it is not teaching them or transmitting the faith to them that is at stake. The red pill scenario reveals this to be wise. Those who set themselves up as spiritual teachers are as likely to be viewed with mistrust by the millennial generation as anything else. Far better simply to walk alongside, to ‘accompany’ them, in Pope Francis’s language, and gradually to build up trust. Still more important is the reference to the construction of a ‘hope-filled future’. In my reading, this suggests that just as important as administering the red pill is avoiding a certain despair which can take over the heart of the committed disciple.

Cyber-ideology refers to this experience as the ‘black pill’. Awakening to grim reality can be so harsh that it leads to an utterly hopeless state, a nihilism qualitatively different from the experience of the red pill. To be ‘black-pilled’ is to undergo a cognitive conversion which can only issue meaningfully in destruction—of the self or another. Black-pilling is most commonly associated with the devastating conversion involved in various forms of extremism, usually linked to the far or so-called ‘alt’ right. The experience often referred to as ‘radicalisation’ is also relevant: extremist Islamism (which feeds off the view that Western culture is toxic); white supremacism (which sees sinister racial forces at work in the destruction of ‘white’ civilisation); and the ‘incel’ (involuntary celibate) movement of young men unable to find partners who construct a vision of reality in which women are not merely indifferent to but positively out to humiliate men.

For a Christian, it is striking that the distinction between the red and black pills echoes an important element of the traditional religious practice of the discernment of spirits. Both pills present themselves as bringing about a conversion to truth. But discernment would always want to know which spirit (good or bad) inspired that conversion. A movement away from faith, hope and love, which is what black-pilling implies, would be a sign (for St Ignatius of Loyola and others) of demonic influence. That millennials have felt the need to invoke the category of the black pill suggests that they are already to some extent aware of a key difference—already, therefore, discerning the spirits.

This is impressive. The black pill poses as a morally superior path, a highway for the strong. In that sense, it is a manifestation of the demon posing as an angel of light. Despair can seem not only morally superior, but a source of clarity and confidence. It is invulnerable to the appeal

of the good spirit which, by contrast, appears weak and naïve. It is no coincidence that this temptation consistently appeals to young men in search of identity and meaning, assailed by the complexity and moral ambiguity of the world into which they have been flung.

Caring for Our Common Home

The fourth and final apostolic preference is care for the common home. It takes us to the very heart of the matter: how we relate to created things. The worst thing we could do as Jesuits is to treat this preference for ecology as a single-issue campaign, as if it were merely about matters such as recycling or climate change. Admittedly, caring for the common home has to be a practical option or it is nothing. But for Jesuits it is the underlying causes of our present crisis which draw our attention, and which point us towards the deep change required of human societies if they are to live sustainably, respecting the deep structure of reality.

Listen to the contemporary ecologist Rupert Read black-pilling his millennial readers:

I want to start out by addressing younger readers in particular. And what I have to say to you is stark. It is this: your leaders have failed you; your governments have failed you; your parents and their generation have failed you; your teachers have failed you; and I have failed you. We have all failed to raise the alarm adequately; and so of course we have failed to prevent the dangerous climate change that is now here, and the worse climate change that is coming and that is definitely going to get a lot worse still: definitely, because of time-lags built into the system.⁴

The insistence that everyone is a comprehensive failure reflects the world-view of *The Matrix* with which we opened. It can only instil suspicion, contempt and panic in the reader. This is ironic as the writer wants to construct a new society which ‘would probably be as different from our present world as that world is from the pre-industrial-revolution world’. If this is the goal, as it surely should be, what is required is not a panic-stricken reflex response but a reignited imagination able to envision a world where humans unlearn their many bad habits and change their values. But what kind of process could possibly facilitate such a transformation?

⁴ Rupert Read, ‘Climate Change and Deep Adaptation’, *The Ecologist* (8 February 2019), available at <https://theecologist.org/2019/feb/08/climate-change-and-deep-adaptation>, accessed 18 September 2019.

The Spiritual Exercises take the exercitant through a process of conversion which transforms their take on reality and finally brings them to a state of ‘attaining the love of God’. It is interesting to trace in the long course of the Exercises a profound shift that takes place in the perception of ‘created things’. At the start, in the ‘First Principle and Foundation’, Ignatius presents created things as instruments at the disposition of human beings, which God has placed before us so that we might use them (discerningly) to win salvation for our souls. By the final meditation, the *Contemplatio*, created things have become places of divine indwelling, unique and valuable in themselves. This change is possible because the exercitant has become truly free to engage with creation in a way that coheres with God’s creative and redeeming love. Reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with creation.

Catholic engagement with integral ecology is driven by a conviction that without deep attitudinal conversion, human responses to a wounded planet will simply compound the damage already done. They will always prefer technocratic ‘solutions’ because they have become so technocratic in their thinking. But it is the technocratic mentality that massively compounded our problems, as Pope Francis identifies. The Jesuit contribution here is not merely to join others as we seek to respond to the crisis so that human life on our planet might have a future. It is to ask the big questions, to explore interconnections and to bring our experience and love of God to bear as we search for a new and better way of living with less. It is an option that could hardly be more ambitious or daunting.

* * *

Taken together, the apostolic preferences give us an elegantly expressed focus for our Jesuit mission. They enable us to communicate what is important to us and indicate why we live and work the way we do. Reading between the lines, they also offer a compelling agenda for action and engagement which responds fittingly to a powerfully felt need to find a way through a culture which has gone awry, leaving young people feeling suspicious and uncertain, to a place of faith, hope and love. The question for us now is: what will be the ingredients of the Jesuit red pill in each part of the world? And how can we make it as effective as possible?

THE TREASURES OF DARKNESS

Poetic Musings towards a Spiritual Theology of Darkness

Bonnie Thurston

To remain in that place of light, I must know I am a guest brought out of darkness.¹

MY PRIVATE LIFE OF PRAYER and my public life as a poet and biblical scholar have both been obsessed with the reality and images of darkness. Only recently have these become sources of light, have I come to some glimmering insight about light shining *in* darkness (John 1:5). This may be one of the considerable gifts of ageing. Or perhaps the treasure of darkness has been given, as it usually is, by crossing its threshold, or by looking carefully at the biblical metaphors and how some of our best poets courageously inhabited darkness and articulated the experience. In the words of 2 Peter, I suggest poetry can be ‘a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises’ (1:19). Lots of us inhabit dark places, but experience rather less dawning. Why is that?

My introduction to theology was English literature. The classic English poets provided glimpses of what Paul Tillich called ‘Ultimate Concern’, the Great Mystery of God: Caedmon, Spencer, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Eliot, Auden. They are fundamentally theological, not only thematically, but also in the use of language. Two formative theologians of the Western Church, Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, suggest that God is known (if known at all) by comparison. In book 2 of *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine

This article was originally presented as the 2019 University of Melbourne, Newman College, Helder Camara lecture.

¹ Erik Varden, *The Shattering of Loneliness* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 45.

wrote of perceiving ‘through similitude’.² Similitude, or metaphor, is the language of poetry and of biblical theology. Both biblical theologians and poets use metaphorical language to illustrate and suggest things otherwise inexpressible.³ As Dom Michael Casey explains, spiritual and theological language ‘is metaphorical because what is being described is meta-experiential’.⁴

**The Bible
is more like
poetry than
prose**

The Psalter, the prophetic writings and numerous canticles in the New Testament preclude the need to apologise for treating poetry as a source of theology. We *al dhimmi*, people of scriptural books, have always done so. In its multivalency, the Bible is more like poetry than prose, precisely in its extensive use of allusive and metaphorical language to express its truths. The parables of Jesus indicate the poetic nature of Christ’s diamond-bright mind. Indeed, John’s Jesus says explicitly that metaphor is his method: ‘I have said these things to you in figures of speech’ (John 16:25). This may be a dangerous method: ‘Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them’ (John 10:6). Conversely, as the Trappist abbot Erik Varden writes, ‘a biblical mind is alert to a range of associations’.⁵

In his book *The Luminous Dusk*, Dale C. Allison reminds us: ‘Throughout the world’s religions darkness is ... the outstanding symbol of evil’. Although his argument concludes on a different note, Allison gives ‘indisputable reasons’ for ‘the unpleasant associations of darkness so fixed in the human mind’.⁶ When we mention darkness, common connotations are of evil, malevolence, the horrible, if not the disgusting. However, I hope to offer glimpses of another side of darkness here, what St Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, St Gregory Palamas (quoting Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite) in the fourteenth and Welsh metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan in the seventeenth called ‘dazzling darkness’. We begin where we shall end, with this image of ‘dazzling darkness’ in the last stanza of Vaughan’s poem ‘The Night’:

² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, translated by D. W. Robertson (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1958), 2.6.8.

³ I have written about this in more detail in ‘Words and the Word: Reflections on Scripture, Prayer and Poetry’, *The Way*, 44/2 (April 2005), 7–20.

⁴ Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City* (Brewster: Paraclete, 2018), 156.

⁵ Varden, *Shattering of Loneliness*, 90.

⁶ Dale C. Allison Jr, *The Luminous Dusk: Finding God in the Deep, Still Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 53, 54, 58.

There is in God (some say)
 A deep, but dazzling darkness; As men here
 Say it is late and dusky, because they
 See not all clear;
 O for that night! where I in him
 Might live invisible and dim.⁷

I shall start with the Bible and then turn towards three poets who found ‘the treasures of darkness’ and gave us ‘riches hidden in secret places’ (Isaiah 45:3). They awaken us to the ‘dazzle’ in the darkness, which is good news since there is so much darkness.

Biblical Theology (Largely Johannine)

John scholars note the poetic nature of that Gospel’s prologue, frequently calling it the ‘Logos hymn’.⁸ Raymond E. Brown terms 1:1–18 the ‘Introductory Hymn’, structured around four strophes.⁹ Other scholars divide the poem differently, but most agree John 1:1–18 is, or contains, a poem.

John’s poem makes a startling assertion about light and darkness: when the *Logos* entered the sphere of creation, ‘in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.’ (John 1:4b–5) In Genesis, light was God’s first creation. (More on that later.) John suggests the Ur-light is *reintroduced* into creation through the Word, Who has entered its darkness. In discussing Athanasius, Abbot Varden suggests ‘God’s intervention in the incarnation of the Word ... was not primarily a matter of sin or redemption What God had in mind was not so much redemption as re-creation.’¹⁰ John asserts this re-creation through the reintroduction of Light. To clarify the light’s source, he inserts a prose explanation introducing John the Baptist—not the light, but witness to it. ‘The

⁷ Henry Vaughan, ‘The Night’, in *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, edited by Leonard Cyril Martin (Oxford: OUP, 1914), volume 2, 523. And see Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, 2.163; Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 1.3.18; compare Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De mystica theologia*, 1.1.

⁸ C. F. Burney argued that if John’s Greek were translated back into Aramaic a hymn of eleven couplets emerges. Bultmann agreed, adding that the hymn was originally a Gnostic composition by followers of John the Baptist which John the Evangelist appropriated to praise Jesus Christ. See C. F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 40–42; Rudolf Bultmann, ‘The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John’ (1923), in *The Interpretation of John*, edited by John Ashton (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1986), 27–46. More recently George R. Beasley-Murray notes the ‘poetic quality of the prologue is observable, even in translation’ (*John* [Waco: Word, 1987], 3).

⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 3–37.

¹⁰ Varden, *Shattering of Loneliness*, 140.



The Light of the World, by William
Holman Hunt, 1853

true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.' (1:9) John's Gospel declares that Jesus, light in darkness, is God's act of re-creation.

This is important for at least two reasons. First is the equation that *Logos*, Jesus Christ, is light for everyone. Jesus tells Nicodemus, 'the light has come into the world' (3:19). Further on in the narrative (perhaps with growing self-understanding) Jesus more explicitly, declares 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (9:5), and 'I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness' (12:46). John's Jesus is 'the light of all people' (1:5) and 'enlightens everyone' (1:9). Second, the existence of darkness is a given, taken for granted. Near the end of his earthly life Jesus *does not* pray that the disciples be taken out of the world (17:15), nor does he ask

that the darkness be removed. Mysteriously, something about darkness is not optional: *to phos en te skotia phainei*. The light 'shines' or 'is revealed' in the darkness, not elsewhere.

The world of John and Jesus was every bit as dark as ours. Their land was occupied by the most powerful military force the world had ever known. Military occupiers are not known for kindness and consideration. Roman-occupied Palestine was at the edge of empire (which is why imperial troops were there), economically both exploited and fragile. A few fortunate people got jobs in Roman building projects (like that at Sepphoris near Nazareth where St Joseph and Jesus may have worked) or they were quislings, for example, serving as Roman tax-collectors.¹¹ Most

¹¹ For Jesus and Joseph at Sepphoris, see Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

people fished or farmed, had subsistence, 'pay-cheque to pay-cheque' lives. The synoptic Gospels highlight Jesus the healer, proof of widespread disease and deformity at the time; likewise the accounts of his trial and execution demonstrate judicial malfeasance and the corruption of those in power. While the narrative occurred in the late 20s and early 30s AD, the Gospels were probably written *after* the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the disruption and suffering that it caused.

It was not, then, in an ideal world that John espoused a poetic christology of light, and the Johannine community proclaimed (almost unbelievably) 'that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5), that 'the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining' (1 John 2:8). Early Christianity espoused light *in* darkness. God is not a magician, cancelling the effects of human crassness and cruelty, or a cosmic Scotty, beaming up Christians into perfection and unremitting bliss. God comes as light *in* darkness. This assertion of light *in* darkness is the biblical, theological lens through which we may view poets of darkness closer to our own day.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889): Darkness as Process

In *Spiritus mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth and Society*, Northrop Frye introduces a structural principle of literature, the 'principle of polarity', the contrast of opposites.¹² For the Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose experiments in rhythm and sound made him the first modern English poet, the root polarity was between what is outside and what is inside the human person. The 'world without' was a source of fascination, joy and, importantly, connection with God. The great sonnets of 1877 were written the year he was ordained to the priesthood and lived at St Beuno's in north Wales, a place of extraordinary beauty. That year he wrote 'God's Grandeur' ('The world is charged with the grandeur of God' and the 'Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings'), 'The Windhover', 'Pied Beauty' (in which God is glorified 'for dappled things'; 'He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change ...') and 'Hurrahing in Harvest' ('I walk, I lift up, I lift up hear, eyes, / Down all that glory in the havens to glean our Saviour').¹³ They are poems of immense beauty and technical skill.

¹² Northrop Frye, *Spiritus mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976), 155.

¹³ *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: OUP, 1972), 66, 69, 70.

The other side of Hopkins's poetic polarity was the 'world within'.¹⁴ Edwin Muir wrote that 'In nature Hopkins saw the glory of God, and in himself he felt the terror of God'.¹⁵ R. K. R. Thornton observed, 'There is a noticeable changing in the poetry from the earlier happier years in Wales to the sadder years when he felt weighted down by his experiences in Liverpool and his work in Ireland'.¹⁶ And Hopkins's biographer Robert Martin noted that after St Beuno's, 'we are seldom aware of his eyes constantly being lifted in unclouded praise'.¹⁷

The 'Terrible Sonnets', written in 1885, are almost unimaginably different from the sonnets of 1877. The poet's eye has rolled inward and it is now much harder to find the fecundating connection between the natural and the divine. These sonnets echo the classical language of those who have known God, then feel abandoned. They are *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* cast in a nineteenth-century mode. Hopkins 'chose one of the most disciplined verse forms because it best held his explosive emotions in check'.¹⁸ The six terrifying sonnets (numbered 64 to 69 in the Gardner-MacKenzie edition), taken together, trace a pattern of isolation, despair and finally movement towards reconciliation. In 64, 'Carrion Comfort', a rewriting of Jacob's wrestling with the angel which Hopkins described as 'written in blood', the author is talking himself out of suicide.¹⁹ 'No worst, there is none' (sonnet 65, which reminds me of Lear on the heath) expresses absolute abandonment.

Sonnet 66 expresses Hopkins's isolation as an Englishman in Ireland and a Roman Catholic in an Anglican family: 'To seem the stranger lies my lot'. But precisely at his lowest point, in sonnet 67 ('I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day'), the poet admits there are others worse off than he: 'Their sweating selves as I am mine, but worse'. Recognising and articulating the connection of his suffering to that of others is the turning point. 'Patience, hard thing' (sonnet 68) affirms the will of God,

¹⁴ On 'world without' and 'world within' see Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola', in *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Humphry House (Oxford: OUP, 1937), 309: 'We may learn that all things are created by consideration of the world without or of ourselves the world within'.

¹⁵ Edwin Muir, *The Present Age from 1914* (London: Cresset, 1939), 92, quoted in W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1844–1889: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition* (London: Oxford UP, 1969) volume 2, 356.

¹⁶ R. K. R. Thornton, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poems* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), 47.

¹⁷ Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 264.

¹⁸ Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 383.

¹⁹ Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, volume 2, 333.

*No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
 More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
 Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
 My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-
 woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing—
 Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
 ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.
 O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
 Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap
 May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
 Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
 Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
 Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.²⁰*

and sonnet 69, 'My own heart let me more have pity on', ends with a turning outward and, unpredictably, with God's visitation,

... as skies
 Betweenpie mountains—lights a lovely mile.²¹

Terrible as they are (read together, they are very, very dark), Hopkins's 1885 sonnets provide an important example and give an important gift: that of speaking with complete honesty about life's darkest experiences, about questioning faith, about standing at the edge of the chasm of despair. Hopkins gives voice to his experience of moving through darkness, thereby giving others permission to howl.

A certain sanitised public Christian discourse—'happy-clappy', 'healthy and wealthy' cheerful—is, I suspect, an attempt to hide the reality of darkness, the fetid breath of the 'roaring lion ... looking for someone to devour' (1 Peter 5:8). Robert Martin's biography of Hopkins correctly says that, in the Terrible Sonnets, 'Hopkins is speaking for all of terrified humanity'.²² The speaking saves; it keeps the lion at bay. The Psalms of Lament in the Psalter function similarly.

²⁰ *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 100.

²¹ *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 101, 102, 103.

²² Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 387.

The largest single category of Psalms, 70 of 150, are *Klagelieder* (complaint songs), making them the characteristic prayer of faith. Lament, the cry to God ‘out of the depths’ (130:1), the speaking of unrelieved suffering and chaos of Psalm 88 (which closes in some translations with ‘darkness is my only friend’): all express faith.²³ Lament Psalms voice specific, individual situations and speak to the common human experience that Buddhists call *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness or suffering.

The theological message of Psalms of Lament, and of Hopkins’s Terrible Sonnets, asserts that it is appropriate to struggle with God. Lament invites openness to life’s extremes and helps one to experience, to die to and to grieve for old situations that are passing away, thus making room for the God Who makes all things new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Usually we do not experience newness until the old dies. Lament in darkness which leads to recognition of a shared, human experience is the seed sown for death and new flowering. Hopkins articulated life’s dissonances through the poetic principle of polarity. He did not short-change the darkness; he entered into it, recognised its ubiquity, survived it and suggested that darkness might not be an event but a process—a movement towards new life.

R. S. Thomas (1913–2000): Darkness as Presence

R. S. Thomas (not to be confused with his several other poetic contemporaries called Thomas) was born in Cardiff in 1913. He graduated in classics from the University of Wales, Bangor; undertook theological studies at St Michael’s College, Llandaff; was ordained to the priesthood in the Church of Wales (Anglican) in 1936; and mostly served remote rural parishes. The Welsh landscape is the backdrop of his work, though he wrote his poetry in English.

According to the critic Barry Morgan, ‘His poetry grew out of his ministry amongst people and his struggle to apprehend the living God’.²⁴ Thomas won numerous literary awards and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. The themes of his poetry include God’s apparent absence but, paradoxically, given-ness in a suffering world; self-questioning; the challenges of science and technology; and threats to the environment.²⁵ Morgan observes that Thomas writes about ‘the

²³ For example the Christian Standard Bible; NRSV has ‘my companions are in darkness’.

²⁴ Barry Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox: R. S. Thomas and His Poetry of Faith* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2006), 13.

²⁵ Byron Rogers’ prize-winning literary biography of Thomas, *The Man Who Went into the West* (London: Aurum, 2006) is highly recommended.

hiddenness of God, the elusiveness of God, the mystery of God, the silence of God, the darkness of God, and even the absence of God'.²⁶

Thomas's language is less traditionally Christian than Hopkins's. He writes unfamiliar words to familiar biblical and theological melodies. In an essay on Thomas, William McGill distinguishes between *doctrinal* and *religious* poems. Religious poems 'are attempts to describe metaphorically our experience with realities, including our spiritual experience'.²⁷ It is in this sense Thomas is a 'religious' poet. As William Countryman observes, he sees,

... things as they are, which means seeing them in the lights of both God's absence and God's presence, not denying the evil and the ugliness, yet remaining open to the advent of the Holy in the most unexpected of contexts.²⁸

Thomas's work is not unremittingly dark; he is a poet of light, though light reflected rather than direct. And in his work darkness is both literal and a metaphor for the mysterious encounter with God. In 'In Church', the speaker is a priest lingering after a sparsely attended service, wondering if anything really happened. When darkness begins to overtake light in the church, the images change: 'Shadows advance The bats resume / Their business.'²⁹

The poem 'Via Negativa' is a modern expression of apophatic theology, which contends that human attempts to describe God are necessarily inadequate. In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* it is called 'a way of approaching God by denying



St Michael's Church, Manafon, where R. S. Thomas was rector 1942–1954

²⁶ Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox*, 18.

²⁷ William J. McGill, 'A Priest/Poet's Christmas in Wales: R. S. Thomas and the Incarnation', *Theology Today*, 57/1 (April 2000), 79.

²⁸ William Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 184.

²⁹ R. S. Thomas, 'In Church', in *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (Fayetteville, Ak: U. of Arkansas, 1985), 54.

that any of our concepts can properly be affirmed of [God]'.³⁰ The term *apophatike theologia* was first used by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth century) and appears (among other places) in the Eastern Church in the works of St Gregory of Nyssa, St Symeon the Theologian and St Gregory Palamas and, in the Western Church, in John Scotus Eriugena, John of the Cross, Teresa of Jesus (Ávila) and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. John Scotus (ninth century) wrote 'Nothing can be said properly ... of God, because he transcends all understanding ... he is known better by not knowing; ignorance concerning him is true wisdom'.³¹ St Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century) explained that God's essence is unknowable, but God is known through God's energies (which may be why Hopkins, and so many others, find God in nature).

'Via Negativa' opens by addressing an assumed interlocutor. Someone (a parishioner?) has asked the speaker (the priest?) a question to which the poem is the answer. Behind that answer is apophatic theology and Augustine's assertion that the heart is restless until it rests in God. Here God is to be found exactly where the divine is seldom sought: in 'empty silence', in 'the darkness/Between the stars', in echoes, in woundedness.³² The poem illustrates Countryman's suggestion that Thomas invites us to remain 'open to the advent of the Holy in the most unexpected of contexts'.³³ Perhaps unintentionally, it is reminiscent of St Mark's Gospel, which depicts discipleship as following (Greek, *akoulotheo*): 'His are the echoes/We follow, the footprints he has just/Left'.³⁴ God is ahead of us, leaving a trail (perhaps crumbs the Syro-Phoenician woman accepted from the Chosen's Table?), giving hints to be followed, reminding us that God looks at things differently from the way we do.

Lest Thomas' work be considered unremittingly grim, the poem 'Alive' depicts God, both known through creation and unknowable. Here,

The darkness
is the deepening shadow
of your presence; the silence a
process in the metabolism
of the being of love.³⁵

³⁰ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by F. L. Cross, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 88.

³¹ John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, book 1, translated by Edward Yarnold, in *The Study of Spirituality*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 157.

³² *Poems of R. S. Thomas*, 75.

³³ Countryman, *Poetic Imagination*, 184.

³⁴ In the Good Shepherd Discourse in John 10, Jesus says of the Shepherd, 'he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him ...' (10: 4).

³⁵ *Poems of R. S. Thomas*, 101–102.

Thus even in the most positive of these poems, God inhabits darkness and silence. The place the speaker finds 'warm' is the one God has left. A contemporary Anglican priest-poet, David Scott, says of Thomas: 'The narrow way and the dark way is Thomas's way, except occasionally when the light shines all the brighter for the surrounding dark'.³⁶

Thomas also suggests, as did Hopkins, that darkness is a process. His apophaticism maintains the mystery of God while suggesting that we have been looking in the wrong places to find God. We have misunderstood darkness as empty when it is the dwelling place of Presence. In Thomas's long poem *Counterpoint* these lines appear:

I have been student of your love
and have not graduated. Setting
my own questions, I bungled
the examination: Where? Why? How?³⁷

Perhaps the voice is Thomas's. Perhaps it suggests we are asking the wrong questions, which leads us to look in the wrong places. Elsewhere Thomas spoke of 'each one being watched/by the other' and of moving 'from unfathomable/darkness to unfathomable light'.³⁸ He suggests that empty, silent, dark places may harbour the Presence for which we long.

Jane Kenyon (1947–1995): Darkness as Promise

When, at 48, Jane Kenyon died of leukaemia we were deprived of an extraordinary poet. Compared in an interview to Emily Dickinson, Kenyon responded,

Dickinson thinks a lot about her soul, and I think a lot about mine. She thinks about her relation to God—a God who is distant, and rather cruelly arbitrary. In many of my poems I am searching, clumsily, for God. We are both full of terror, finally, and puzzlement at creation.³⁹

With what elegant and exacting language both poets recorded their terror and puzzlement!

³⁶ David Scott, in R. S. Thomas, *No Truce with the Furies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1992), back cover.

³⁷ R. S. Thomas, 'Incarnation', in *Counterpoint* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1990), 34.

³⁸ R. S. Thomas, 'Silence', in *No Truce with the Furies*, 83; 'Crucifixion', in *Counterpoint*, 40.

³⁹ Interview with David Bradt, in Jane Kenyon, *Let Evening Come: Selected Poems* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe, 2005), 169.

Jane Kenyon was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1947, studied French and English at the University of Michigan, and met and married the poet Donald Hall (some years her senior) in 1972. They lived at his family farm in Wilmot, New Hampshire. She loved the sense of community she found there, and the parish church, and noted: 'It makes one less self-obsessed and more concerned about the needs of others. It gives you a feeling that you are part of a great stream.'⁴⁰ In 1980 Kenyon had a prolonged mystical experience of which she wrote in a poem:

Once, in my early thirties, I saw
that I was a speck of light in the great
river of light that undulates through time.⁴¹

In all her difficulties, she never completely lost sight of that vision.

In 1983 it was established that she had bipolar mood disorder with which she struggled for the rest of her life. Her poetry reflects the ups and downs of this illness. Diagnosed with leukaemia in January 1994, Kenyon died in April 1995. In an essay entitled 'Darkness and Light', Jeff Gundy wrote perceptively of the relationship between beauty and sadness in her poetry, 'especially in her awareness of mutability'.⁴² (What is more mutable than a river of light?) In her writing, suffering is not focused on the individuated ego, but on commonality. As in Hopkins's sonnet 67, suffering connects the sufferer to the human condition.

As it was for Hopkins and Thomas, for Kenyon nature is a trysting place, a point of meeting with what or Who is behind it. She explained, 'my poems are full of the natural world. I use it again and again as a way of talking about something inward.'⁴³ In the introduction to a collection of Kenyon's poems Joyce Peseroff noted they 'are not didactic but they always show us where to look'.⁴⁴ The 'where' tends to be outside; and even though her 'interior' subject matter may be her own suffering, depression or approaching death, the poems are not dismal, but remarkably hopeful. As Gundy noted, 'her best poems are treasured by so many readers because of the way they poise between sadness and joy'.⁴⁵ It was her version of the polarity of which Northrop Frye wrote.

⁴⁰ Jeff Gundy, 'Darkness and Light: Jane Kenyon's Spiritual Struggle', *The Christian Century*, 123/2 (24 January 2006), 26.

⁴¹ Jane Kenyon, *Collected Poems* (St Paul: Graywolf, 2005), 232.

⁴² Gundy, 'Darkness and Light', 29.

⁴³ Interview with David Bradt, in Kenyon, *Let Evening Come*, 170.

⁴⁴ Joyce Peseroff, in Kenyon, *Let Evening Come*, 11.

⁴⁵ Gundy, 'Darkness and Light', 29.

The title poem from her 1990 collection 'Let Evening Come' exemplifies these assertions. Obviously, the coming of evening is the coming of darkness. But unlike darkness in either Hopkins's or Thomas's poems, here it is welcome, its coming a gentle closing down, its promise the presence and comfort of God:

let evening come.
Let it come as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.⁴⁶

The voice in another poem, 'Notes from the Other Side', is that of someone dead who is sending messages back to the living. In spite of its gentle humour and suggestion of whistling in the dark, the poem closes with promise and assurance: 'God, as promised, proves/to be mercy clothed in light'.⁴⁷

Kenyon's adult life was stretched between the darknesses of mental illness and terminal disease. Poems we have not included here reflect this, yet in the poem that closed her penultimate collection in 1993, darkness is the fulfilment of promise: 'mercy clothed in light'. Jeff Gundy shrewdly observed, 'her poetry was not merely an expression of faith but a means toward faith'.⁴⁸

Light in Darkness

To some degree this is true of all three poets. Their poems are expressions of faith and signposts towards it even, or especially, for people who would never enter a church or open a 'spiritual book'. For these writers 'faith' is bigger than 'faith in' a particular set of beliefs or practices. Barry Morgan suggests that for Thomas faith is continuing to believe we can catch glimpses of God.⁴⁹ Maybe a glimpse is enough. Maybe to see face to face would be to be vaporised. God tells Moses, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live' (Exodus 33:20). Perhaps darkness protects us from too much light.

These three poets are related to, but not exactly what Paul Claudel called 'poets of night'; Abbot Varden described these as 'troubled by the call of the *Logos*: blind seers who do not know the secret they intuit

⁴⁶ Kenyon, *Collected Poems*, 213.

⁴⁷ Kenyon, *Collected Poems*, 267.

⁴⁸ Gundy, 'Darkness and Light', 28.

⁴⁹ Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox*, 26.

but can teach much to us who claim to know but often fail to see'.⁵⁰ It was, after all, the blind prophet Tiresias who 'saw'. These are poets of 'dazzling darkness', of light *in* darkness, who can make us aware of, introduce us to the search not only for God, but for what God wants to give us, indeed, for why God made us.

I am not seeking to rehabilitate darkness from its archetypically and almost universally negative associations, but to suggest that darkness has other possibilities. Fundamental biblical texts hint at this. We could, for example, interpret the creation story differently. In Genesis 1, God created either from within or from 'formless void and darkness' (1:2). *From* the darkness that 'covered the face of the deep' God drew the light that 'was good', thereby retaining *both* light and darkness. Was the light drawn from the darkness as Eve was drawn from Adam? I wonder. 'God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night' (Genesis 1:2–5).

Later in the week, God made 'lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night' and 'saw that it was good' (1:14, 18). Presumably, God *could* have obliterated darkness and night, left only day, but day and night seemed to be a necessary polarity. In a reflection, 'The Call of St Matthew', the Benedictine sister Genevieve Glen suggests,

... the primal chaos was not nothingness. It was possibility. God looked upon it with love The formless void, the dark waters, proved to be in fact a seething cauldron of prospects awaiting only God's creative word to leap into actuality as sun, moon, stars, and all the rest of creation.⁵¹

Similarly, Dale Allison's *Luminous Dusk* reminds us that the Bible 'speaks of God dwelling in thick darkness'. Preparing to receive the Tables of the Law, Moses 'drew near to the thick darkness *where God was*' (Exodus 20:21; italics mine). The paradigm of wisdom, King Solomon, declared, 'The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness'. (1 Kings 8:12) One could multiply references to darkness as God's dwelling place. As Allison says with such clarity: 'God is a mystery This is reason to love the dark'. If God retained darkness at creation and dwells therein, darkness cannot be unremittingly negative. Again Allison, 'God hides in the darkness, so to the darkness we must go'.⁵²

⁵⁰ Varden, *Shattering of Loneliness*, 155. Claudel's discussion of 'poets of night' occurs in his essay on Mallarmé in *Oeuvres en prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 508–513. Full reference from Varden, *Shattering of Loneliness*, 172.

⁵¹ Genevieve Glenn, *Sauntering through Scripture: A Book of Reflections* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2018), 58.

⁵² Allison, *Luminous Dusk*, 62, 63, 65 (italics mine).

The ancient tradition of apophatic theology avows that darkness is an image for the mystery of God. Mystery is not evil; it is just *unknown*, an enigma. We would inhabit a very different world if the mysterious or unknown were viewed as simply that, not as a threat or danger.

The Greek word *musterion*, of which St Paul was so fond, has as its lectionary definition ‘secret’, but connotes for Paul ‘something formerly unknown but now revealed’.⁵³ For Paul it

***Mystery is
not evil; it is
just unknown***

described religious truth known by revelation. The biblical witness, and our poets, suggest that the source of revelation (‘unveiling’, if you will) is resident in darkness, waiting.

Apparently darkness is not optional. Like death, it is part of a plan. In *Autobiographies*, R. S. Thomas wrote, ‘One of the unfailing rules of the world is that life has to die in the cause of life. If there is any other way on this earth, God has not seen fit to follow it.’⁵⁴ The obvious Christian example of the ‘requirement’ for darkness and death is Jesus’ passion. Think of how darkness functions in that narrative. Matthew’s Gospel reports ‘From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon’ (27:45). And from 3:00 on Good Friday until Easter morning there was an utter, cosmic darkness, beginning with the emotional darkness of Jesus’ friends. But something remarkable was gestating in the dark womb of Holy Saturday only to be revealed, according to St John, ‘Early on the first day of the week, *while it was still dark*’ (John 20:1; italics mine). ‘And when it was *evening* on that day ... Jesus came and stood among them’ (20:19). Other gospel witnesses to the resurrection speak of Jesus’ appearance in early dawning or dawn, not full light.⁵⁵ The greatest mystery of all, the resurrection of Jesus, took place in darkness.

What would change if we shifted our expectations about darkness? What if we allowed the possibility that it contained revelation, gift, God, new life, resurrection? Suppose instead of unremitting suffering and evil, a source of radiance or healing was present there? Suppose darkness were a process, contained a Presence, offered a promise? Certainly that would comfort the desperately ill, sufferers from emotional darkness and depression, and those who carry in their hearts humanity’s hurts, those vicarious sufferers who become our saints.

⁵³ Barclay M. Newman Jr, *Greek–English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 119.

⁵⁴ R. S. Thomas, *Autobiographies*, translated by Jason Walford Davies (London: Phoenix, 1997), 95.

⁵⁵ In John’s Gospel Jesus also appears by the Sea of Tiberias ‘just after daybreak’ (21:4).

In human life and community, darkness seems not optional, but required. 'Things' are resident therein that can be found only there. Through the prophet Isaiah God announces, 'I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places' (45:3). The exact nature of the 'treasures' will be different for every person who enters private and/or communal darkness. I believe there is a redemptive process, presence and promise in darkness which may only be evident in hindsight, and no one can define what these might be for someone else. As the African American spiritual puts it:

You gotta walk that lonesome valley
 You gotta walk it for yourself
 Ain't nobody else can walk it for you
 You gotta walk it by yourself.⁵⁶

James Baldwin, in his 1957 novella *Sonny's Blues*, writes: 'For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.'⁵⁷ Our most enlightening poets, teachers, preachers and wisdom figures tell variations of the tale of finding light in darkness. Waiting for, articulating light in darkness may be the light in darkness, and the darkness itself the secret of radiance. I give the last word to Meister Eckhart: 'where understanding and desire end, there is darkness and there God's radiance begins'.⁵⁸

Bonnie Thurston lives quietly in her home state of West Virginia, having resigned the William Orr Professorship in New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2002. She has written or edited 22 theological books, most recently *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton's Monastic Spirituality* (2020; reviewed below), and six collection of poetry. Her church affiliations include the Episcopal Church, USA, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

⁵⁶ See Richard Newman, *Go Down, Moses: A Celebration of the African-American Spiritual* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1998), 111,

⁵⁷ James Baldwin, 'Sonny's Blues', in *Going to Meet the Man* (New York: Dell, 1965), 121.

⁵⁸ Meister Eckhart, 'Sermon 42', quoted in Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox*, 22.

A Coincidence of Opposites

*Suppose you look into,
or are resident in a place
of unrelenting darkness.
Is it empty or populated?
And if populated, by what?*

*Perhaps by beauty not ready
to be revealed, too tender,
gestating, evolving.
Perhaps by something hard,
bent, warped, malformed,
too horrible for exposure.*

*Suppose denizens of darkness
are a coincidence of opposites,
that the beautiful and hideous
are both cosmically necessary, their tensive existence
life giving yin and yang.*

*Perhaps learning to embrace
our own Janus facedness,
the lovely and the leprous
in our own deepest obscurity,
is life's goad, goal and glory,
the treasure hidden in darkness.*

Bonnie Thurston

St BEUNO'S



JESUIT SPIRITUALITY CENTRE

A place of peace, prayer and beauty in North Wales

*Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit poet

St Beunos is a Jesuit retreat house offering the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, silent individually guided retreats and various themed retreats. We also provide courses and training in spiritual accompaniment.

For the full programme of retreats and courses, see www.beunos.com

Contact: The Secretary, St Beuno's, St Asaph,
Denbighshire, N. Wales, LL17 0AS

Tel: +44 (0)1745 583444

secretary@beunos.com

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A Theological Approach

Calum Samuelson

THE BIBLE PROVIDES invaluable insight regarding who we are as humans. Throughout history, human culture and knowledge have taken many forms and have often progressed; but human nature itself has not changed. Technological innovation can sometimes obscure this truth, especially when it enables humans to accomplish unprecedented feats of power, skill or foresight. However, unless we understand our purpose, weaknesses and trajectory as humans, even the most advanced technologies will simply make us more efficient in repeating the same mistakes we have always made.

This is especially true of artificial intelligence (AI)—which is perhaps the most pressing case in point. Whether from news stories or fiction, most people have by now become aware of AI's purported potential to revolutionise human existence. Indeed, some insist that such a change is already well under way. Cars can drive themselves, robots can perform intricate surgeries, and computers can convincingly converse with people. But what exactly distinguishes AI itself from cars, robots and computers?

At the most basic level, AI refers to the ability of computer systems to perform tasks normally associated only with human intelligence. Yet because this distinction is continually shifting, a better way to understand AI is that it involves computer systems improving their own performance independent of human intervention—otherwise known as ‘machine learning’. While there is little doubt that AI will bring about significant changes to our world, it is more difficult to pinpoint what its main role will be. The most prevalent predictions can be generalised into three scenarios:

This article is an extract (slightly adapted) from a Jubilee Centre publication (Cambridge), Calum Samuelson, *Artificially Intelligent? Grappling with the Myths, Present Realities and Future Trajectories of AI* (2018), available at <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/ebooks/artificially-intelligent-grappling-with-the-myths-present-realities-and-future-trajectories-of-ai>, accessed 9 June 2020.

1. AI will eventually make its biggest impact as a completely autonomous and perhaps conscious entity which overtakes humanity.
2. AI will prove to be most significant when it becomes seamlessly integrated with biological human bodies, vastly increasing abilities and prolonging life.
3. AI will continue to be harnessed by humans as all technological innovations in the past have been—a morally neutral tool that can be used to accomplish tasks with greater ease and efficiency.

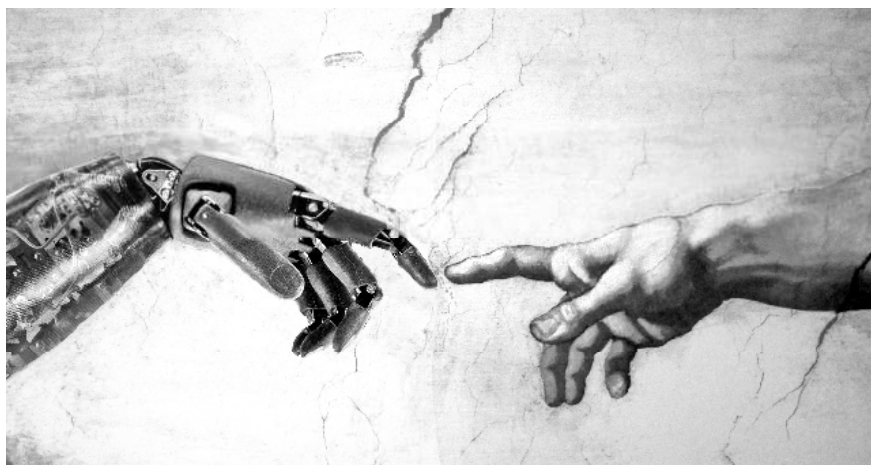
Although the argument cannot be made here, I am convinced that the final scenario is correct and take it for granted in this essay—AI is a *tool that amplifies human nature and behaviours* rather than transforming them.¹ Accordingly, I shall address AI obliquely by concentrating on human nature particularly, focusing on three biblical themes: the *Imago Dei*, the Fall and eschatology. In particular, the *Imago Dei* helps us identify which human qualities and characteristics AI should seek to facilitate or enhance. The doctrine of the Fall helps us diagnose how human imperfections and malevolence influence the development and application of AI. Finally, biblical eschatology helps us anticipate, imagine and yearn for our ultimate destination and think critically about different AI-powered futures.

Imago Dei

Exploring the best dimensions of humanity is essential to the task of using AI tools to amplify good and promote human flourishing. AI experts are eager to parse the distinction between humans and computers. In this effort, it is common to invoke illustrious human feats such as Michelangelo's paintings, Bach's cantatas or Einstein's theory of relativity. This method of distinguishing between human and AI is unsatisfactory, not least because it neglects the majority of people who have ever lived. Most importantly, however, such cursory assessments of humanity's greatness fail because they measure accomplishments divorced from the role of purpose. The *Imago Dei* helps us understand human purpose better.

The belief that humans are made in the image of God has rightly occupied a central position in the Christian consideration of AI to date. Creativity, reason and morality have largely dominated as the primary

¹ This argument is spelled out in sections 1 and 2 of *Artificially Intelligent?*



dimensions of the *Imago Dei* in the last millennium.² Despite their importance, these dimensions may have had more popular currency in the modern period (when there was more social consistency and structure) than they do today in the fragmented and pluralistic world where AI is making its mark. Indeed, considering the perilous state of human identity in the postmodern era, it is hardly coincidental that humans are increasingly compared to computers. Consequently, this section considers the *Imago Dei* through the lens of *relationships, responsibility and self-giving love*.

According to the Bible, humans are explicitly created in the image of a *relational* God, the implication being that we are only fully human when in meaningful *relationship* with others (Genesis 1:26). The metaphor of the Christian community as a body teaches that every member plays an integral role (1 Corinthians 12:12–31). Also, the fruit of the Spirit is always manifested in relational contexts (Galatians 5:22–23). This raises important questions for the development of AI tools.

Moreover there can be no single version of the ‘ideal human’ because each possesses different qualities and gifts in varying degrees and arrangements, and each exists in relationship with others. Consequently, some are suggesting that it is better to design a range of AI tools to do different tasks rather than a single tool that mimics humans completely.³ This also has important implications for current discussions about ‘digital

² Roughly speaking, one can recognise that creativity was explored in the Renaissance, reason in the scientific revolution and morality in the Enlightenment.

³ See G. Andrew D. Briggs and Dawid Potgieter, ‘Machine Learning and the Questions It Raises’, in *From Matter to Life: Information and Causality*, edited by Sara Imari Walker, Paul C. W. Davies and George F. R. Ellis (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), 468–486, here 478.

personhood' and 'digital subjects', since these terms suggest it is possible to know someone apart from a relational context.⁴ Finally, the fact that humans are created for relationships can help explain the tendency to anthropomorphize technologies such as AI, and can also shed light on the human vulnerability to computers that simulate humans by design.

Another implication of humans being created in the image of God is that they have *responsibility*. God is the supreme, faithful sustainer of all Creation but has also entrusted humans with the unique responsibility of caring for and ruling over that Creation. Much more than a mere task or goal, this responsibility requires the entire human being to act like an 'angled mirror' which simultaneously reflects the lordship of God to Creation and the praise of all Creation back to God.⁵ The importance of responsibility in the realm of AI may be the most needed element.

Several Christians developing AI today understand their work as a clear example of subduing the earth (Genesis 1:28); others think of it more as an aspect of serving people and society with love.⁶ In either case, there is a clear difference between designing AI tools to aid in the responsibility of wisely ruling Creation and designing them to rule so that humans can shirk the weight of that responsibility. Already, one can perceive small ways in which humans are abdicating their responsibility for ruling through AI, whether by using autonomous weapons, foetus screening, employee profiling or criminal facial recognition. Increasingly, if the AI says a decision is right, the human users will execute it. This is not only the definition of *irresponsibility*, it also suppresses human creativity by assuming that difficult ethical decisions can be avoided or even eliminated.⁷

The *self-giving love* of God—which has always existed in the dynamic relations of the Trinity—flowed outward in the act of creation and was eternally enacted in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Because they are created in this God's image, one characteristic of humans is the capacity to love in a manner that considers the needs of others above self. Culture at large often only praises this type of love if it takes the form of heroism, as it does in Hollywood—even the deeply shameful crucifixion

⁴ See Olga Goriunova, 'The Digital Subject: People as Data as Persons', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 36/6 (November 2019).

⁵ Tom Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* (London: SPCK, 2016), 100.

⁶ See *Artificially Intelligent?* appendix, 37.

⁷ Whilst advocating a robust understanding of (and emphasis on) *human* responsibility, I do not address the particulars of *how* ethical decision-making algorithms should be constructed here because this will vary across cultures, contexts and organizations. There is already a large body of interdisciplinary work being done in this area, particularly around guidelines for autonomous weapons and self-driving cars.

has been turned into a grand act of courage and fortitude. Others dismiss the value of sacrifice in favour of more empirical, scientific accomplishments, to the extent of marginalising God altogether. One influential statement about AI claims, ‘everything that civilisation has to offer is a product of human intelligence’.⁸

Whatever the world says about love, Jesus claimed that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13). Within this logic, the widow who gave two mites was praised above the lavish tithers (Luke 21:1–4), the quiet tax collector was the one made right with God (Luke 18:9–14) and small children are singled out as possessors of God’s Kingdom (Matthew 19:13–14). Human greatness is not found in mighty, memorialised achievements, but in seemingly ‘small’, self-giving acts of devotion, humility and sacrifice.

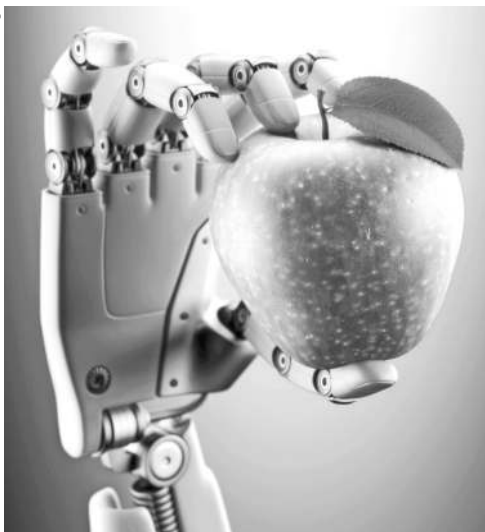
As AI becomes increasingly common, it is important to remember that love always prioritises the other. AI may help people feel happier, be more efficient, obtain more knowledge and even feel more ethical, but if it does not improve human relationships it is ultimately misdirected. Accordingly, people should be very cautious about seeking to outsource or automate the most common and apparently mundane manners in which they give themselves in love to others. The simple gift of listening is rapidly being replaced by AI. The command to weep with those weep (Romans 12:15) is being threatened by AI tools that detect our mood and tell us how to fix it. The practice of hospitality in which we open up our homes is being superseded by virtual interactions. If *agape* love were simply another task that required energy to perform, then it would make sense to continue designing AI tools that preserve energy. But *agape* love is not a separate task to be performed at the end of the day like some leisure activity. It is something that must be *practised and developed*, and often the best way to do this is by washing the feet that no one else wants to wash (John 13:1–17).

***Love always
prioritises the
other***

The Doctrine of the Fall

Whereas the previous section explored the goodness of humanity in Creation, this one highlights its shortcomings. A major concern for Christians who are developing AI is that secular thinking is not equipped to account adequately for or to anticipate the realities of imperfection and malevolence in human nature and the world. Of course, secular

⁸ Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (London: John Murray, 2018), 183.



programmers and developers acknowledge that glitches can plague a computer system and that sometimes criminals hijack a piece of good technology for a bad purpose. But, for the most part, AI development buzzes with an optimism that believes sustained effort and education can eventually help humanity overcome all its problems and perversions.

The Bible sees things differently. God created a world that was ‘very good’, but it has

fallen from that status because of sin—which is anything that obstructs relationship with God. Humankind can naturally recognise entropy, atrophy, disease, corruption and brokenness of all kinds as deviations from an ideal situation, but can also become tragically resigned to the idea that these things are simply woven into the fundamental fabric of the universe. Crucially, the doctrine of the Fall helps make sense of the tension between desired behaviour and actual behaviour, and helps Christians consider how this tension might influence the development and deployment of AI. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine both the *depth* and *breadth* of sin. The *depth* of sin reaches to the very core of our being and cannot be encompassed by a binary system of ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’. Jesus taught that even perfect ‘right’ actions can be sinful if done with the wrong posture of heart. It may be possible to distance oneself from particular external sins, but no one is ever far away from the allure of pride and self-assurance.

Applied to AI, this truth has two major implications. First, it means that attempts to transcend human faults and discover ‘perfect morality’ using AI are misguided. Indeed, perfection should never be attributed to machines, created as they are by imperfect humans. Second, it means that even the best AI developments can have negative consequences. Some of these are caused by glitches or programmer bias. More insidious, however, are AI applications that seem supremely good or helpful but ultimately turn hearts away from God (such as a financial tool that ends up increasing greed or a voice replication tool that ends up enabling deception). Some people fear enslavement to AI through *oppression*, but

we are already becoming enslaved through the subtler route of *obsession*.⁹ It may well be that efficiency and knowledge will be the predominant idols of the AI age.¹⁰

In addition to the *depth* of sin, its *pervasiveness* touches every corner of the world. In a hyper-individualistic age, it is easy to interpret passages such as Romans 3:23 ('all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God') as an indictment against particular, personal failures. But Paul's message carries a sweeping universality from which nothing can hide. *All* of Creation groans for redemption as the effects of sin are felt. This means that sin is encountered both internally and externally, individually and structurally.

Just as an excellent policy or strategy can be thwarted by external factors, so also can AI fail owing to user error, corrupt data or false information. It is conceivable that one party, nation or culture could develop a genuinely productive framework for engagement with AI, only to have it disrupted or destroyed by a broken, sinful mindset or system. The pervasiveness of sin must also be considered in a diachronic sense. One of the great falsehoods connected with modern myths of inexorable progress (whether capitalistic, Neo-Darwinian or even 'exponential') is the idea that human morality itself can continually improve.¹¹ While it is obvious that most humans in the West no longer pillage, rape, burn, imprison or torture other people, one need not look far to uncover modern equivalents in the form of embezzlement, habitat destruction, child abuse, debt slavery and animal cruelty. Humanity does not get 'better' intrinsically, we simply get 'better' at devising ways to justify our crooked actions.

At its most basic level, the pervasiveness of sin confronts the field of AI development, in which progress, success, benevolence and good behaviour are simply taken for granted. One must not only consider the impact of individual sin, but also of sin within every other person and institution with which an individual interacts. One direct implication for AI development could be to design systems in a way that *expects them as a rule* to break down, to be misused and to affect unexpected stakeholders.¹²

⁹ There are valid concerns around AI's potential use for oppression, especially in authoritarian states. The AI-assisted Social Credit Register introduced in China is perhaps the best example of an effective surveillance and social control mechanism, see <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/china-social-credit>. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, chart these trajectories vividly.

¹⁰ Crucially, idolatry or obsession facilitated by AI tools can grow much faster than other types since AI increases efficiency by definition.

¹¹ For exponential progress, see Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (London: Penguin, 2000).

¹² See Parliamentary Select Committee for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, interim report, 'Disinformation and "Fake News"', available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/363/36302.htm>, nn. 67–73 on the misuse of AI and nn. 243–248 for unexpected impact.

If the world was not called ‘perfect’ even before the Fall, we should hardly expect that we can make it perfect through AI now.¹³

Eschatology

In addition to appreciating humanity’s purpose and sinfulness, a holistic view requires comprehension about humanity’s trajectory and ultimate destination. According to the Bible, this trajectory is inseparable from the redemption already inaugurated in the person of Jesus and headed towards a supremely good New Creation after the end of this age. One could even argue that the only type of true inexorable growth that is possible in the universe is growth in Christlikeness, which by the Spirit’s power will continue for all eternity. Regardless of whether a linear or cyclical view of time is espoused, it is not uncommon for humankind to yearn for an ultimate destination beyond time, and many generations have thought the world will end with them. It should be no surprise that much of AI dialogue also yearns for a different future and ultimate end for humanity. Hence there is the need to highlight the gravity of long-term effects and the need for goal-orientated trajectories of AI, and one of the best ways to do this is to consider what the Bible says about humanity’s ultimate end.

First, Paul clearly teaches that resurrected humans will not be spirits without bodies (1 Corinthians 15). This has important implications for various agendas which view the human body as a disposable inconvenience and hope that AI will help humans eventually to discard it. Second, eschatological pictures in the Bible envision the flourishing of non-human Creation. This point has vital implications for the care of animals and the environment, for it seems that ultimate symbiosis with the New Creation is meant to be an outflowing of human interaction with Creation in this life.¹⁴ Third, the Bible portrays a dynamic pan-ethnic relational community existing in the New Creation. This challenges aspirations positing seamless technological uniformity, compatibility or even complete ‘monism’.¹⁵ Last, the Bible emphasizes the importance of simplicity and purity (Ephesians 5:26–27) in the Kingdom of God, which belongs to

¹³ Orthodox Christians have long understood Adam and Eve more as innocent children than perfect humans. Additionally, some would point out that the Garden could not have been perfect if it contained a deceptive serpent and a tree containing the knowledge of evil.

¹⁴ The traditional reading of 2 Peter 3: 10 has tended to emphasize the destructive nature of the fire, but several scholars are trying to recover the true reading as a ‘refining fire’. See Richard Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 160–163.

¹⁵ See Jan H. Naude, ‘Technological Singularity and Transcendental Monism: Co-Producers of Sustainable Alternative Futures’, *Journal of Futures Studies*, 13/3 (2009), 49–58.

the little children (Matthew 19:13–14) whose play characterizes and energizes the perfect peace we will know there (Zechariah 8:3–5). This is quite distinct from some secular narratives which aspire to vast knowledge, efficiency and complexity.

While Christians can be confident in Christ's return, humility and vigilance are the best postures for discussing *how* this will come about. Just as transhumanists and technologists have overestimated the pace at which 'exponential' AI development will usher in a New Age, so some Christians have also overanticipated the full arrival of the Kingdom of God. It is interesting that a (minority) stream of fatalism regarding environmental destruction also runs through both groups. Some fundamentalist Christians in the USA see the destruction of the environment as a step towards precipitating Christ's return. Some futurists believe that biological life will be superseded since machines can run on solar-generated electricity; for them the ultimate demise of carbon-based life forms is what drives the urgent search for life beyond the need for biological resources.

Will AI help us save the environment and usher in a better age, free from fossil fuels, or will it be the only recourse available after we have destroyed the biosphere? Will Jesus return before or after the planet is hit by a super asteroid? The parable of the wheat and the tares can help Christians navigate the conflicting reports about the world's trajectory, as it insists that both evil and goodwill continue to increase in the world until Jesus' return (Matthew 13:24–30). This means that fear, or naïve optimism, or apathy is not an appropriate mindset, because Christians are called to be alert, joining in the work of the Spirit wherever it may be found.

One practical way to live within this tension is by nurturing a theology of surprise.¹⁶ Rooted in God's often unexpected works of redemption, this way of viewing the world *actively anticipates* God doing surprising things as Christians act as salt and light in the world. A theology of surprise protects against excessive commitment to narrow programmes or agendas, as both God's warnings and God's blessings come in ways that cannot be predicted. With regard to AI, this may mean that Christians encounter real hope in the places with which they are least comfortable and fear in the places where they least expected to find it.

¹⁶ Although not known to have used the specific phrase himself, Lesslie Newbigin frequently promotes this idea and discusses the ways he was surprised by God while working as a missionary in India. See *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 61.

Dialogue about what we ultimately yearn and hope for can be powerfully inviting, and some may find that these eschatological topics present a good way of engaging transhumanists and technologists in meaningful conversation. Public dialogue is increasingly turning to questions about what an ideal society *should* look like, and Christians should capitalise on this opportunity by looking forward to what perfect eternity *will* look like. This practice is deeply demanding because it requires the active deployment of our imagination in tandem with the mysterious movements of the Spirit, but for that very reason is also infinitely more valuable than anything Christians do without the help of God.¹⁷

Stewards of Creation and Citizens of Heaven

Leaders of all types have the obligation to ensure that AI does not simply amplify the current trajectory of present realities such as individualistic capitalism, and it has been argued here that a keen understanding of humanity is crucial for this endeavour. In particular, leaders must take seriously humankind's propensity towards malevolence (doctrine of the Fall) while being rooted in its ultimate calling (*Imago Dei*) and directed towards its final end (New Creation). There can be no doubt that AI will transform the world as we know it. As ambassadors and servants of Christ, Christians especially should strive to direct the impacts of AI in ways that help people live life to the fullest and bless the communities, cities and countries where they live. Just as globalisation, despite its benefits, has accelerated the loss of indigenous languages and cultures, it is conceivable that mass, indiscriminate implementation of AI systems could make humans very good at doing things which are not in their best interests. Ultimately, AI tools should help people regain healthier notions about the purpose of life in general. Recapturing both the art of discipline and a sense of human purpose, people can learn to eschew those effects of AI which produce burnout or laziness in favour of those that help them mature and thrive as stewards of Creation and citizens of heaven.

Calum Samuelson is a pastor, chaplain and researcher who is passionate about the intersection of theology with social dilemmas. He lives in Seattle, Washington, and enjoys spending time in nature with his wife and son.

¹⁷ Tom Wright's modern classic, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), offers several inspiring ideas about how this may unfold practically in the lives of believers. And see Psalm 127:1.

JOINING THE CONVERSATION

Robert Green

AS A TEENAGER and young adult I was grounded in the kind of propositional understanding of the Bible which renders it, according to the critique of Peter Enns, ‘... an instructional manual intended by God to give us an unwavering, cement-hard certainty about our faith’.¹ This view is whimsically echoed by the words of Evangelica, the evangelical Anglican lady in a comic song I heard at university: ‘I read my Bible daily, it tells me what to think’.² We might think that the said, and entirely mythical, Anglican lady is offering a simplistic parody until we consult the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which insists,

Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word ... is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.³

This ‘cement-hard’ approach exerts great authority in Christian communities who are taught hermeneutical certainties providing ‘one size fits all’ interpretations of the Bible that remain perennially true in whatever context it is being read—and I can still feel its pull. C. S. Lewis expresses the dilemma when he says of the Bible, ‘We might have

¹ Peter Enns, *How the Bible Actually Works* (New York: HarperOne, 2019), 4.

² The song of Evangelica, with her sisters Anglocatholica and Mediocre, represented a gentle satire on the high, low and central traditions of the Church of England, with the tune sung to an um-cha-cha rhythm. Forty years on I can remember it all word for word. Evangelica’s verse in full reads:

My name is Evangelica,
I neither smoke nor drink.
I read my Bible daily,
it tells me what to think.
I have no need to worry,
for every word is true,
and I know I’m saved, Alleluia!
the question is—how about you?

³ ‘Short Statement’, in International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, 2, available at https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf, accessed 30 June 2020.

expected, we may think we should have preferred, an unrefracted light giving us ultimate truth in systematic form'.⁴ The Chicago statement reflects an unyielding belief that the 'timeless' meaning of scripture must not be relativised: what it said then will always be true now, whenever 'now' is and whatever the cultural setting in which the Church finds itself. I am one of many who have increasingly found that we can no longer occupy such a narrow interpretative space. Yet the desire for a more spacious hermeneutic does not mean that the Bible is somehow diminished; for me it remains sacred in its totality—its thoughts, yearnings, teachings and visions are those God meant us to read, engage with and learn from.

It does not require the kind of infallibility articulated by the Chicago statement for us to affirm that the Bible embodies and speaks truth. It recognises the human experience of alienation and the ensuing tendency to be disconnected from who we really are, rather in the way of Mr Duffy in James Joyce's short story collection *Dubliners* who 'lived at a little distance from his body'.⁵ The parable of exclusion from the Garden with which the Bible begins, in which paradise is lost with a bite of a forbidden fruit (with the resulting complexities and problems in our relationships with one another and with creation as collateral damage) articulates the ongoing tendency we recognise in ourselves and others to spoil what is good. It speaks eloquently of the love of God, the grace of God and the peace of God, seen most clearly in the self-giving love of Jesus, as the divine attributes within which lie the potentiality for restoration.

When we read the Bible there are times when it is as if we hear God speaking only to us and our situation leaving us with the feeling that there is really nothing more to say—when we read Paul's paean to love in 1 Corinthians 13 it is hard not to feel both that we have heard the defining discourse on the subject and that we are being directly addressed and challenged by God! Nothing that follows is intended to deny that the voice of God is heard directly through scripture; it is in fact an attempt to demonstrate that through the many voices we hear there, not all of them synchronised, God is communicating and inviting us into the deep end of the hermeneutical pool where richer and more mysterious truths are to be found.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: HarperCollins, 1998 [1961]), 97.

⁵ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992 [1914]), 104.



© Eduardo Siqueira Filho

If it were possible to find a mutuality of agreement among all biblical authors on every topic with which the Bible concerns itself, then we might feel more confident that it does no more and no less than tell us what to think. Yet recognising that this is not actually what the Bible looks like does not mean we end up with a cacophony of contradiction. It is precisely the inclusive ambiguity we encounter that opens the Bible up in innumerable relevant and enriching ways. Its profound and inspired ways of seeing—which are not always in sync and were never meant to be—open the too-often opaque windows of our souls, enabling us to explore the wonder and mystery of God. Central to this understanding of the Bible is its fundamental character as a book of sacred conversations between people and traditions whose understandings often differed profoundly.

Sacred Conversations

These conversations, which are framed around the gracious act of the Word who, in becoming flesh, speaks with and listens to people like us, are about the things that really matter. Scriptural discourse about life and death, good and evil, justice and peace, wealth and poverty, care for creation, the meaning of human life, suffering, hope, community and freedom contrasts starkly with the superficialities that take up so much of our time and attention today.

Ellen Davies makes the point that the ‘multiple voices’ we hear in scripture ‘attest to the perpetual struggle of the faith community to test different perspectives’. Those continuing the struggle need to be aware

that sometimes the biblical voices ‘stand in sharp disagreement and press us hard to examine entrenched positions’.⁶ So this ‘pressing struggle’ (as it were) to continue the hermeneutical task has to take account of these conversations, including their points of disagreement, which the compilers and editors of scripture clearly knew were there, rather than trying to pretend that they do not exist.

From this starting point, we shall identify four strands in the process of listening to, engaging with and continuing these biblical conversations, bearing in mind that, rather like a theological Venn diagram, they necessarily overlap (as we shall very soon see).

Taking Our Place in the Story

The first strand acknowledges and seeks to understand and find contemporary meaning and relevance in the many conversations taking place within the Bible itself. One such conversation, with powerful pastoral and theological relevance, revolves around the nature of suffering—what does it or can it mean when awful things happen that cause pain and anguish? Within the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs leans towards the ‘official line’ of the ancient world, that you get what you deserve in life: good things happen to good people and bad things to bad people (Proverbs 3:1; 6:12–15). But this view is urgently challenged by the writer of the book of Job, where things are not as straightforward or simplistic as that (Job 27:2–6).

Job’s insistence that he has done nothing at all to merit his dreadful suffering throws the ball of the theology of just deserts (or, as Walter Brueggemann puts it, ‘deeds-consequences ideology’) high into the air.⁷ The main text of Job is framed as a series of conversations with his friends who, in different ways, follow the party line on suffering as in, *Look, Job, it’s time to stop kidding yourself and accept that you’re being banged to rights*. Significantly it is they, rather than Job, who incur divine ire for their folly and are sent off to make expiatory sacrifices (Job 42:7–9). In this story it is clear that God does not follow the party line. Indeed God’s response to Job’s lengthy protest involves several chapters’ worth of rhetorical questions which, while they are designed forcibly to remind

⁶ Ellen F. Davies, ‘Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church’, in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, edited by Ellen F. Davies and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 16.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Fortress, 1997), 385.

Job of his necessarily limited understanding, actually leave the questions he is asking open.

Just imagine, for a moment, that we only had the model of ‘deeds-consequences’ to hand (bearing in mind that there is still an unfortunate tendency in some Christian circles to see suffering through this lens). What implications would it have for the praxis of pastoral care, considered theologically? While we are aware that suffering is sometimes clearly the result of specific behaviours (we know, for example, that those who smoke run a high risk of developing lung cancer), many awful realities, such as childhood cancers, are ineluctable and inexplicable.

When we enter a home where there is ongoing and painful suffering or trauma, must we inevitably conclude (even if we would not, if we had any sense, say as much) that this terrible thing is the result of specific sin? The ambiguity provided by Job enables us to understand not just that there might not be an explanation but that sometimes there *cannot* be an explanation; as Richard Bauckham puts it: ‘it is Job above all that ensures the biblical story is not a comprehensive explanation of reality, even a divinely revealed one. Meaningless innocent suffering is the intractable surd in the story.’⁸

The New Testament extends this conversation, especially as it is gathered around the universe-changing, redemptive and blameless suffering of Christ on the cross. While this fundamentally Christian insight can be transformative, it does not, of course, amount to an *explanation* of suffering—Job continues to be painfully relevant. There is no final resolution, nor can there be—in this context reading the Bible is not about trying to insert one side of a biblical conversation into the complex realities of Christian moral discourse in today’s world. It is attempting to do that that has got the Church into such a tangle in its discourse about (for example) human sexuality and the place of women in the Church and, in the context of suffering, led some Christians back in the 1980s to the grotesque assertion that AIDS represented God’s judgment on the gay community.

If we stay with the New Testament, it is clear that important conversations lie behind the text there also. So, for instance, while St Paul has no theological or moral problem himself with eating food brought from the marketplace which had previously been offered to idols (standard operating procedure at the time), to the writer of Revelation

⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World* (London: SPCK, 2016), 13.

such an action represents unacceptable behaviour (Revelation 2:14). Paul, steeped in Jewish monotheism, could eat such meat with a clear conscience, but we can understand why those coming new to Christianity from a pagan background and attempting to put their former beliefs behind them might really struggle with this issue. Paul, with typical pastoral sensibility, is prepared to abstain himself whenever he feels that his freedom might cause others to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:9–13).

The conversation reflected here (on an issue that seems greatly to have worried the early Church) makes it clear that, in the Bible as in our own lives, where we are coming from profoundly shapes our moral and theological world-view. Vicky Beeching, in her book *Undivided*, quotes the Cuban American author Anaïs Nin who wrote, ‘We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are’.⁹ I remember many years ago a recovering alcoholic joined the church I attended. A group of us were inclined towards popping into the pub just up the road from the church from time to time to put the world to rights over a couple of pints, and there was nothing wrong with that. However to have invited our friend to join us would have been like Paul eating meat offered to idols in front of the newest convert from paganism.

The truth is that, like us, and just as much as the writers and compilers of the Old Testament, the early Christians were aware of some pretty ambiguous issues, some of them very thorny, about all manner of things (the place of women in the Church, the place of the Jewish law and the nature of resurrection to name just a few) and the ensuing conversations,

**The Bible
is not about
other people**

set in the overall context of what Mark Barrett calls ‘the sacred stories of our faith community’, have profound implications for the way we handle scripture.¹⁰ If they are sacred, then we cannot sit outside either the conversations or the stories; we are part of them both and continue them both. The Bible is not about other people with us observing from the outside—it invites us to join the conversation and take our place in the story, an insight that brings us to strand two.

Joining the Conversation

The second strand affirms the need for us to hold our own conversations with the Bible. These dialogues might be personal, or might relate to our

⁹ Vicky Beeching, *Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole and Living Free from Shame* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 173.

¹⁰ Mark Barrett, *Crossing: Reclaiming the Landscape of Our Lives* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), 88.

church community or the wider Church, and can have deep pastoral, ethical, epistemological or missiological significance.

In this strand we might consider our response to Paul's teaching about the nature of sin that leads to the wrath of God in Romans 1. When he writes that, 'Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error' (Romans 1:27), it seems crystal clear and non-negotiable (certainly to those taking a Chicago statement view of things) that this, along with a scattering of other biblical references, represents a prohibition for all time on same-sex relationships. But what about the possibility of actually beginning a conversation with Paul about it, from our perspective? It might start something like this,

Paul, I know that the model of same-sex behaviour that was prevalent in your day was abusive and promiscuous, but we now understand that for some people same-sex attraction is part of who they are—it is natural rather than unnatural as a result of their sexual orientation. As well as this we now know that committed, faithful same-sex relationships that are neither the fruit of nor lead to moral degradation are perfectly possible. So how would you respond to these insights which I fully understand were not available to you?

Of course there is an element of imaginative thinking required for the conversation to continue, but surely this kind of conversation must form part of the hermeneutical process if the Bible is to have a voice today. I would be hopeful that Paul's ability to think inclusively with regard to Gentiles (including those in Athens versed in Greek philosophy), which required, for one so steeped in Jewish tradition, a huge imaginative leap, would lead to an open conversation. As part of that dialogue I would certainly be asking him what exactly he meant by the word *arsenokoitai* (1 Corinthians 6:9) meaning literally 'man bed', a word he seems to have invented. Of course it would be worth pointing out that if gay people are simply living and making love in accordance with who they are and how they are made then Paul's words about 'natural relations' (Romans 1:26–27) could be interpreted, in a contemporary context, as supportive of same-sex relationships. (I would certainly throw that into the conversation.)

The Christian singer and songwriter Vicky Beeching has written about how for many years she tried to repress and hide her sexuality. The resulting physical, emotional and spiritual suffering led her to come out in 2014, with the all too predictable result that she became *persona*



Vicky Beeching performing at the Ignite music festival in 2007

non grata in the evangelical circles she had blessed with her music for so many years. She was sent messages informing her that she was going to hell and even received death threats. Her subsequent reflection includes a crucial hermeneutical insight:

When people argue that ‘the Bible clearly says ...’, it is primarily an individual interpretation based on their own values and life experience. It seemed to me that a huge dose of humility was needed in all discussions of theology; everyone had to be open to the possibility they needed to see things from a different angle.¹¹

Beeching was reflecting on what was for her a personally liberating understanding of Peter’s visit to Cornelius in Acts 10. Just as Peter made the (astonishing and world-changing) discovery that God’s Kingdom included rather than excluded Gentiles, so she came to understand that God similarly includes rather than excludes gay people.

A gay Christian friend whom I had not seen for many years called just as I was reading Vicky Beeching’s book. He told me that significant number of the LGBT + Christian community take antidepressants because they bear the psychological and emotional scars of the non-acceptance of their sexuality—and therefore their identity—by much of the wider

¹¹ Beeching, *Undivided*, 173.

Church. I would also be including his testimony in my imaginative conversation with Paul!

The desire to think through faith in context is common to biblical authors and ourselves alike, and means that it is of the greatest importance that, whatever stance we take on questions involving human sexuality, we do not become 'exclusively inclusive' and end up like the Pope and Patriarch in 1054, mutually excommunicating one another! As Steve Chalke puts it, 'Every exclusion is a failure of understanding and ultimately of love'.¹² The *You aren't proper Christians because you believe (or don't believe) that in the way I do* has bedevilled the Christian centuries and continues to mark too much of our dialogue with one another.

Having Better Conversations

The third strand argues that, as in the case of human sexuality, we need to have more and better conversations with our fellow Christians about the Bible.

The ethical thinkers Paul Ramsey and Stanley Hauerwas, while both grounding their arguments in the New Testament, arrive at very different conclusions on the issue of war and peace. Ramsey begins with Jesus' exhortation that his followers should love their neighbours and notes that this might require, in certain circumstances, an intervention to protect them:

While Jesus taught that a disciple in his own case should turn the other cheek, he did not enjoin that his disciples should lift up the face of another oppressed man for him to be struck again on his other cheek. It is no part of the work of charity to allow this to happen.¹³

This intervention, according to Ramsey, can be justified, not just at a personal level but at a communal, national and international level. In an extreme situation this may involve military intervention and the thread of the argument continues to the point where he justifies the possession of nuclear weapons on the basis that they are 'inherently self-limiting', in other words, the fact that we and those we are in conflict with also have them means that nobody will actually use them.¹⁴

¹² Steve Chalke, *The Lost Message of Paul* (London: SPCK, 2019), 195.

¹³ Paul Ramsey, *The Just War, Force and Political Responsibility* (Savage: Rowman and Littlefield, 1968), 143.

¹⁴ Ramsey, *Just War*, 253–254.

In contrast Stanley Hauerwas focuses on the cross of Christ as a defining act of non-violence that shapes his pacifism:

Thus to be like Jesus is to join him in the journey through which we are trained to be a people capable of claiming citizenship in God's kingdom of non-violent love—a love that would overcome the powers of this world, not through coercion and force, but through the power of this one man's death.¹⁵

For Hauerwas, Jesus' non-violent ethic acts as a deontological imperative to all his followers. Clearly Ramsey and Hauerwas profoundly disagree about the path to peace and we might point to different responses to the Cold War (Ramsey was writing at its height) as being a contextual element in their debate. Yet, in spite of their deeply contrasting views on how to achieve it, we must remember that what they do have significantly in common is a biblical concern for the preservation of peace.

This debate is thrown into sharp relief by the experience of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany, when the immovable object of his pacifism was met by the apparently unstoppable force of Hitler's regime. Although the precise nature of his involvement in conspiracies to kill Hitler is still a matter of debate, he certainly knew of such plots through his work for German Military Intelligence, the *Abwehr*, some members of which worked covertly in opposition to the Nazi regime. Whether or not he had direct involvement, he did nothing to expose them and something of the ethical and theological bind he found himself in can be summed up by his reflection on individual guilt: 'Before other men he is justified by dire necessity; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience, but before God he hopes only for grace'.¹⁶ We can feel the unrelenting pressure that the awful realities of his situation put on his deontological duty as a pacifist and the urgent inner conversation that resulted.

It is worth reflecting in this context that while the Church comprised substantially of the poor and powerless in its early centuries it remained a pacifist faith; but when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire and therefore of those who wielded power within it, things changed radically. Christians do need to be honest that it is not just the Bible, but also the Church, that has violence in its history (the Crusades

¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame, 1983), 76.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 282–283.



© Steve Sandford

Rohingya refugees in Rakhine state, Burma, in 2012

spring readily to mind). Rightly or wrongly, many people today consider World War Two archetypally a war that ‘had to be fought’, and indeed the thought of Hitler’s concentration camps spreading right across Europe and further afield does lend support to this view. However when we look at the reality of war and the ongoing suffering of, for example, the people of Yemen and the Rohingya people of Myanmar, Benjamin Franklin’s aphorism that ‘there never was a good war, or a bad peace’ seems terribly relevant.¹⁷ The bottom line is that a deep and passionate biblical thirst for peace should underpin our sacred conversations (and profoundly affect the tenor of them) even as we acknowledge that a commonly held understanding of how to bring it about is perennially elusive.

There are many other contemporary Christian conversations going on, of course, not all of them as polite as they might be. Christians disagree about euthanasia, human sexuality, abortion, genetic engineering, Donald Trump, Brexit and much else. So does this mean that it is everyone for themselves with regard to biblical interpretation? What about those who have used the Bible to justify such things as slavery and apartheid? It was not only those who campaigned for their abolition but those who advocated them who based their arguments on scripture.

¹⁷ Benjamin Franklin to Sir Joseph Banks, 17 July 1783, and Benjamin Franklin to Josiah Quincy, 11 September 1783, in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, edited by John Bigelow (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons: 1904), volume 10.

This is a salutary reminder that we cannot protect the Bible from being misread; indeed all of us misread it at times. Richard Rohr writes:

For all its inspiration, for all the lives it has changed, the Bible is undeniably problematic. Put in the hands of egocentric, unloving, or power-hungry people or those who have never learned how to read spiritually inspired literature, it is almost always a disaster. The burning of heretics, the Crusades, slavery, apartheid, homophobia, and the genocide and oppression of native peoples were all justified through the selective use of Scripture quotes.¹⁸

This is why using the phrase ‘what the Bible clearly says’ can be problematic. It was the very selective use of the Bible referred to by Rohr that made it possible for slave-owners and the apartheid regime to claim scriptural justification. However, addressing and listening to ‘what the biblical writers say’, in all their unity and diversity, can prevent texts becoming pretexts and help us to see them in context.

Broadening the Conversation

The fourth strand makes it clear that our conversations about the Bible are not private ones confined to the Christian community, but must extend to those of all faiths and none. The Bible itself shows clear evidence of such open and accepting engagements, for example in the clear affinity between material that appears in Proverbs chapters 22–24 and the ‘Instruction from Amenemope’ belonging to the ancient Egyptian wisdom tradition. While not everyone agrees that Amenemope is the prior text (although this is the majority opinion) it tells us at the very least that material from wisdom traditions of various cultures was common currency in the Ancient Near East and that the book of Proverbs is part of that wider conversation.¹⁹

In the New Testament Jesus reaches out scandalously to non-Jews such as the Samaritan woman and the Gadarene demoniac. Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28) involves a significant conversation with an outsider, and it is difficult not to get the impression that, although her own life was clearly turned upside down by the experience, there was also a learning curve, if not for Jesus himself, then certainly for his disciples. Kenneth Bailey suggests that the conversation

¹⁸ Richard Rohr, *What Do We Do with the Bible?* (London: SPCK, 2019), introduction.

¹⁹ See Katherine M. Hayes, *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary*, volume 18, *Proverbs* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2013), 83 following.

assaults their ‘carefully nurtured prejudices against women and Gentiles’.²⁰ The nature of Christ’s crucifixion reminds us that his self-giving love is not found only, or even primarily, within the walls of religious buildings; it is to be found ‘out there’, often in unprotected vulnerability.

We can see this openness in Paul’s mission to the people of Athens during which he made the strategically correct assumption that the kind of religious language that Jews would understand intuitively would leave his sophisticated Athenian audience cold. So he does his research and quotes approvingly the Stoic poet Aratus (a local boy from Tarsus, which may explain Paul’s choice) when he says, ‘we too are his offspring’ (Acts 17:28), which appears in the invocation to Zeus that begins his poem *Phenomena*. Although Paul is without doubt reinterpreting the phrase in terms of Christian proclamation, it is deeply significant for the conversations the Church needs to be involved in today that he engaged with such texts and found them helpful and relevant.

What this says to us is that we should not and cannot understand the Bible as a series of private conversations to which other religious, philosophical or secular traditions have nothing of any value or importance to contribute—that is very far from being the case. This has important implications for the Church’s engagement with other faiths and also, crucially, with science.

Faith and Science

The interpretation of the creation narratives at the beginning of Genesis has long been problematic in the relationship between faith and science. Given what we now know about human origins it is very difficult to envisage an actual garden that was home to the first man and woman as well as a talking snake (which I myself have only encountered in the *Jungle Book* and the Harry Potter novels). Simply dismissing such a huge amount of scientific evidence regarding the evolutionary history of humanity and putting our fingers in our ears ignores the biblical imperative to engage in conversation; we ultimately end up having nothing relevant to say.

Meaningful dialogue with evolutionary science, which is at root a debate about what ultimately defines humanity, can actually open us up to much more profound insights that the writers of Genesis want to communicate about who we are and the nature of our relationships with God, with one another and with the created order. A Christian

²⁰ Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (London: SPCK, 2008), 224.

anthropology brings to the conversation the belief that we are not defined purely by the evolutionary journey of which we and our inherited DNA are the result—we are not *just* what we are made of. In C. S. Lewis's Narnian tale *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Eustace explains that in his world (our world), 'a star is a huge ball of flaming gas', to which the 'star at rest' Ramandu replies, 'Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of'.²¹ This represents a crucial insight as we reflect on what the mysterious stories with which the Bible begins are contributing to the conversation. Equally crucially, it is the ongoing dialogue between faith and science that requires us to think about what place the Bible has in that conversation in new and often exciting ways.

Significantly, the affirmation in the biblical creation narratives that humans are responsible for looking after the world and struggle to make anything like a good job of it (Genesis 1:28; 3:17–19; 23) engages powerfully with the contemporary debate on climate change. The divine command for humans to subdue and rule the earth and the creatures we share it with (Genesis 1:28) cannot justify destroying rainforests and filling the oceans with millions of tons of discarded plastic, causing immense suffering to the species that live there. For Christians the sacred nature of creation and its essential fruitfulness are vital to the ongoing debate about our planet's future.

Although we have plenty to bring to the table in current ecological conversations it is also important that we listen; and of course one of the most articulate and influential voices warning us about the consequences of climate change is the decidedly non-religious Sir David Attenborough.²² A conversation that affects everybody on the planet cannot be a private one, especially when the so called Christian West has been responsible for so much of its despoilation. Neither, of course, can it be a private conversation among the inhabitants of wealthy nations. We need to hear the pain of those who suffer the worst effects of climate change and whose families, homes and communities have been destroyed or are under constant threat. As Leonardo Boff puts it, 'A theology of ecological liberation hears the cry of the poor and the cry of that great poor figure, the earth itself. Both must be liberated.'²³

²¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (London: Fontana, 1952), 159.

²² See *Climate Change: The Facts*, directed by Serena Davies, presented by David Attenborough (BBC, 2019).

²³ Leonardo Boff, 'Ecology', in *The SCM Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (London: SCM, 2003), 81.

Preaching and Listening

Issues such as those considered in the first three strands must also be included in the public conversations that need to take place if the Bible is to be allowed to live and breathe in the twenty-first century. Over more than thirty years I have listened to the stories of many people about their experience of pain in all its forms, including sickness and bereavement which often mirror the ambiguity and pain of Job. I have seen increasing numbers of people attending Remembrance Day services and trying to find the words to facilitate the continuing conversation about war and peace. I have been involved in ministry in a church that has sought to practise inclusion in all its forms and build accepting relationships with members of the LGBT+ community.

Bringing these issues into the public conversation means that those of us who preach must not regard the process as one-way traffic from the pulpit to the pew and further afield. It is worth remembering that the word *homily* derives from the Greek word *homileias*, which means 'to speak with' rather than 'at' or 'to'. Those who aspire to be effective preachers must be prepared not just to listen to their own Christian community but to be part of the wider conversation this strand encourages.

Conversations with God

So where do these four strands take us? They are all part of the ongoing sacred conversation, originated as the creative Word spoke the cosmos into being and brought right down to earth in the Word's incarnation as a builder turned rabbi.

God communicates through the acts of creation and redemption, and invites us to respond by entering into holy and transformative conversations. In the Bible we see divinely authored conversation at its most powerful and poignant woven around the cross and empty tomb. That is why, overarching all the human voices representing many different responses to divine revelation, we can hear God's voice if we are prepared to listen. It is why we call the Bible the Word of God. The Bible, in all its unity and diversity, bears witness to the supreme act of divine love in sending Jesus into *our* world. It is framed around his life, suffering, death and resurrection. It is above all the Christ event that illuminates the whole of scripture, even those parts that seem to be dark and broken.

So, rather than simply seeing the Bible as a set of bullet points telling us what to do and think, we need to unlock the Bible's riches by joining in with the many conversations that it initiates and continues. These

presuppose that God's last word was not the final one in the book of Revelation, which would mean that the conversation had come to an end. Jesus teaches his disciples that the Spirit will guide his followers into all truth (John 16:13), and our continuing encounter with the Bible is at the heart of that divine purpose; as Innocenzo Gargano puts it, 'Without the gift of the Spirit the truth remains far from us, because it is itself the mystery of God, contained within the deep mystery of the Scriptures'.²⁴

This is why part of the value of the Bible is its very provisionality—the conversations that it prompts and informs are open, ongoing and vital. The challenge with this for people, such as me, who were nurtured in a deeply conservative Christian culture, is that this approach to the Bible can feel a bit scary. Like Peter, we sometimes feel we are leaving the safety of the boat and trying to survive on the water with the waves of doubt and guilt swirling around us. Yet, as Barbara Brown Taylor says of journeying on from a settled place of faith, 'as dark as this sounds, it provides great relief, because it now sounds truer than anything that came before'.²⁵ Precisely.

If we are to read the Bible honestly and make it relevant to a society that is not particularly interested in what it has to say, this is a journey we must take. For me it is a journey that has progressed little by little over many years and has deepened my reverence for the Bible as God's word for the Church and the world.

As we open ourselves to the conversations of scripture, as we listen attentively to the words of Jesus, for example, and prayerfully and with humility think about what they might mean for us in the context in which we live, we might not be told what to think but we will certainly discover quite a lot about how to think and how to hear God speaking to us through the truth-bearing Spirit who seeks to open us to change and transformation as we listen and learn together. As Ellen Davies puts it, 'Whenever we pick up the Bible, read it, put it down, and say, "That's just what I thought", we are probably in trouble'.²⁶ Quite!

Robert Green has been a vicar in the Church of England for 36 years, nine of which included running a diocesan training programme for Readers (lay preachers).

²⁴ Innocenzo Gargano, *Holy Reading: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2007), 17.

²⁵ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 140.

²⁶ Davies, 'Teaching the Bible Confessionally', 16.

MEMORY IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND JOHN 21

Gerald O'Collins

REFERENCES TO 'MEMORY' or 'bringing to mind' cluster at the beginning and at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*—creating a kind of 'inclusion' that encourages us to join them together in a mutually illuminating fashion. In the First Week, bringing to mind personal sins aims at arousing not only shame and sorrow but also gratitude for God's constant, loving kindness (Exx 71). In the Fourth Week, when bringing to mind the benefits received, the Contemplation to Attain Love proposes remembering what 'God our Lord has done for me', not only in giving himself to me but also in redeeming me (Exx 234).

The dual nature of what is to be remembered in the *Spiritual Exercises* echoes factually, if unconsciously, the twofold nature of what is recalled at the end of John's Gospel, whose final chapter serves to arouse not only sorrow for sins and failures but also gratitude for benefits received. The double impact of John 21 serves biblically to illuminate what St Ignatius wrote. In exploring the relationship between the two here I will fill out and correct some earlier reflections ('An Easter Healing of Memories') in which I concentrated one-sidedly on painful and sinful memories.¹

Memory in the First Week

It is in connection with the examens, particular (Exx 24–31)² and general (Exx 32–43), and with general confession (Exx 44), that memory

¹ Gerald O'Collins, 'An Easter Healing of Memories', in *Experiencing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1994), 110–116; see also Gerald O'Collins, *Easter Faith: Believing in the Risen Jesus* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 94–102, and Gerald O'Collins, "'His Life Rose with Him"—John 21 and the Resurrection of Jesus', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 84 (2019), 1–17.

² A rich bibliography on the background for the particular examen is provided by Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio. Historia y análisis*, rev. edn (Bilbao: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2009), 131 note 1; while the particular examen's principal elements were found in the tradition, Ignatius was the first to organize the particular examen systematically.

first appears in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The particular examen aims at eradicating some specific 'sin or defect' that the retreatant 'wants to correct or amend' (Exx 24). It involves asking for 'grace to *recall* how often one has fallen into the particular sin or fault, in order to correct it in the future' (Exx 25; emphasis added). Significantly, the memory that comes into play is a graced memory, which will enable 'improvement' that may come within days, or else require weeks (Exx 28–30).

Even if what Ignatius proposes under the heading of 'the general examen' does not evoke memory explicitly, memory affects the 'five points' that outline the way of making such an examen (Exx 43). Giving 'thanks to God our Lord for the benefits I have received' (point one) obviously implies remembering those benefits; so too does what is prayed for, 'grace to know my sins and rid myself of them' (point two). Memory is also invoked by the longest point (point three) which asks 'an account of my soul from the hour of rising to the present examen'.³



*Confession, artist unknown, St Andrew's Cathedral
Lviv*

At once there follows a long paragraph concerning the benefits of making a general confession and receiving Holy Communion immediately after the exercises of the First Week (Exx 44). Ignatius appreciates the benefits of feeling sorrow 'for all the sins and evil deeds of one's entire life'. Making the *Spiritual Exercises* makes it possible 'to know and grieve for the sins more deeply' and, through a general confession, to be 'better prepared to receive the Holy Sacrament' and so helped 'not only to avoid falling into sin, but also to preserve the increase of grace'. Sorrow 'for all the sins

³ Arzubialde helpfully suggests how the general examen anticipates in part what we will find in the Contemplation to Attain Love (*Ejercicios Espirituales*, 156–161). This encourages our bringing together the First Week with the Fourth Week, with the aim of elucidating the role of memory in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

and evil deeds of one's entire life' clearly brings memory into play. Ignatius does not, however, suggest here remembering also all the benefits and graces received from God during 'one's entire [past] life'. Rather the benefits concern the future, when receiving Holy Communion will help the exercitant to 'avoid falling into sin' and 'preserve the increase of grace'.

Ignatius, while not inventing the practice of a general confession of sins, has proved, along with St Francis de Sales, its most notable champion in the history of Christianity.⁴ This practice finds a partial counterpart in St Augustine's 'self-memorialization as his soul's ascent to God'.⁵ What has been called his 'treatise on memory' might be better described as an exercise 'in the redemptive use of memory'.⁶ The first nine books of Augustine's *Confessions* recall the past as he traces his life from infancy to the death of his mother, Monica. In a sense, this work constitutes Augustine making a general confession to the reading public (by telling the story of his journey towards conversion), even if the *Confessions* are much more than that.⁷

Ignatius mentions Augustine by name only late in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*—in the rules 'To Have the Genuine Attitude Which We Ought to Maintain in the Church Militant' (Exx 352–370). Before praising the 'scholastic theology' of St Thomas, St Bonaventure and Peter Lombard, Ignatius commends the 'positive theology' of St Jerome, St Augustine and St Gregory the Great (Exx 363).

Augustine quietly comes on stage, however, with the first exercise proposed for the First Week: 'A Meditation by Using the Three Powers of the Soul about the First, Second, and Third Sins' (Exx 45).⁸ The sins in question are the sin of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, and

⁴ On general confession, see Pierre Adnès, 'Pénitence', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), volume 12, 943–1010, at 985–986.

⁵ James Wetzel, 'Memory', in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, edited by Karla Pollmann (Oxford: OUP, 2013), volume 3, 1389–1393, here 1392.

⁶ Wetzel, 'Memory', 1390.

⁷ See Frederick Van Fleteren, 'Confessions', in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 227–232.

⁸ In his *Summa theologiae*, St Thomas Aquinas discussed the powers of the soul (1, qq. 77–80). He cited Augustine (*De Trinitate*, x. 11) as holding that 'the memory, understanding and will' constitute 'the one essence of the soul' (1, q. 77 a. 1 ad. 1). He interpreted Augustine as differing from Peter Lombard by not regarding 'these three as three powers; he takes memory to express the soul's ability to retain things in the manner known as habit; he uses the word "intelligence" for the act of understanding, and "will" for the act of the will' (1, q. 79. a. 7 ad. 1). Ignatius, however, seems to take memory, understanding or intellect and will as at least three distinct, albeit not separated, powers.

the sin of 'anyone who has gone to hell because of one mortal sin' or 'for fewer sins than I have committed' (Exx 52). The retreatant is to bring the three powers to bear on each of the three cases. Ignatius explains the method as follows: 'to use my *memory*, by going over the first sin, that of the angels; next, to use my *understanding*, by reasoning about it; and then my *will*'. The aim 'in remembering [memory] and reasoning [understanding] about all these matters is to bring myself to greater shame and confusion, by comparing the one sin of the angels with all my own many sins [will]'. By 'us[ing] my *memory*' on the sin of the angels, I can 'use my *intellect* to ruminate about this in greater detail, and then move myself to deeper emotions by means of my *will*' (Exx 50; my italics).

Applying 'the three faculties to the sin of Adam and Eve' begins thus: 'I will recall to memory how they did long penance for their sin, and the enormous corruption it brought to the human race' (Exx 51). Meditation with the three powers of the soul is once again set out in full when Ignatius reaches the 'third sin' or the case of an individual condemned to hell for a single mortal sin. From 'I will call to memory the gravity and malice of the sin against my Creator and Lord', the retreatant moves to 'I will use my *intellect* to reason about it—how by sinning and acting against the Infinite Goodness the person has been justly condemned forever', and then ends 'by using the *will*' (Exx 52; my italics).

The scheme of three powers of the soul enjoys a Christian history that reaches back to the patristic period, above all to Augustine (and beyond him to Plato and Aristotle). His anthropological teaching on 'three, distinct acts within the unity of the human spirit' involves a self-knowledge that originates in self-memory, with the will acting as 'the bond connecting the other two acts'. Augustine understands 'knowledge of the self' to be 'simply memory of the self'; when the soul 'thinks of itself it is simply remembering itself'.⁹

This threefold scheme structures Augustine's account of human beings as images of the tripersonal God; they remember, know and love God. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine uses the scheme to compare the three spiritual powers in the one human soul with the Trinity of divine persons in the one divine nature. To quote Nello Cipriani, 'Augustine's aim is to

⁹ Nello Cipriani, 'Memory', in *Augustine through the Ages*, 553–555, here 554. On Augustine's view of '*intellectus*' or understanding as an activity of the soul, see Todd Breyfogle, 'Intellectus', in *Augustine through the Ages*, 452–454; on his view of the will, see Marianne Diuth, 'Will', in *Augustine through the Ages*, 881–885.

show, within the substantial unity of the human spirit, a trinity of powers or acts that can illustrate, by analogy, the distinction and inseparable unity of the three divine persons'.¹⁰

At the start of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius deploys the scheme of the soul's three powers to promote meditation on sin that will lead to reforming one's life. Memory is to the fore, not least in the second exercise of the First Week, where 'I will call to memory all the sins of my life, looking at them year by year or period by period' (Exx 56). Like Augustine (*City of God*, 22.30), Ignatius knows that this remembrance of one's past life is an enlightenment that comes from the knowledge of God. Like Augustine (*Confessions*, throughout), Ignatius knows that the retreatants' sinful stories have been also blessed by Christ dying for their sins (Exx 53) and by the divine 'goodness' (Exx 59). In fact, the second exercise is to 'conclude with a colloquy of mercy—conversing with God our Lord and thanking him for granting me life until now, and proposing, with his grace, amendment for the future' (Exx 61). It is a remembering that inculcates sorrow for sin, and gratitude.

***A remembering
that inculcates
sorrow for sin,
and gratitude***

Something similar holds true of the meditation on hell (Exx 65–71). It moves from a fear of punishment for my sins, as I 'recall to my memory' how other sinners have suffered, to giving thanks. The meditation ends by thanking God 'for his constant loving kindness and mercy towards me right up to the present moment' (Exx 71). Memory serves to promote both sorrow for sin and gratitude for the divine mercy.

Memory in the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love

Reference to the three powers of the soul and, in particular, to memory threads its way through the Contemplation to Attain Love (Exx 230–237).¹¹ Point one closes with the prayer that begins: 'Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my *memory*, my *understanding*, and my entire *will*' (Exx 234). Ignatius cites 'the three powers of the soul' here, even if, unlike in the heading for the first exercise of the First Week, they are not called 'the three powers' (Exx 45). In the Contemplation to Attain Love, 'my entire will' is stressed by being preceded by the offering of 'all my liberty'. 'Understanding' is preceded by equivalents, 'pondering with great

¹⁰ Cipriani, 'Memory', 554. On the Trinity, see Roland Kang, 'Trinity', in *Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, volume 3, 1821–1825.

¹¹ On the Contemplation to Attain Love, see Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales*, 557–82.

affection how much God our Lord has done for me' and the invitation to 'reflect and consider within myself what, in all reason and justice, I ought for my part to offer and give to his Divine Majesty'.¹² Point one has opened with work for 'my memory'; I should 'bring to mind the benefits received—creation, redemption, and particular gifts' (Exx 234).

Here the bringing to mind of benefits includes that of being redeemed, which implies being delivered *from* various evils, including the burden and guilt of my own sins, as well as being delivered *for* various blessings, above all, eternal life with God. Praying for 'an interior knowledge of all the good I have received' (Exx 233) also entails praying for a knowledge of the blessing of being forgiven my sins and being saved from their burden. The benefits that memory should bring to mind cover forgiveness and healing, as well as such gifts as God dwelling in all creatures (Exx 235).

Memory Recalls Gifts and Heals the Past

Having established the double role that Ignatius assigns to memory, the first power of the soul, in what comes in the First Week of the Exercises and in the Contemplation to Attain Love (placed after the Fourth Week), I suggest that John 21 functions as a rich source for illuminating biblically that double role.¹³ The chapter brings to mind what the disciples of Jesus have experienced in the last three or four years, since their initial call in chapter 1. Extraordinary benefits already conferred are recalled; and past sins are evoked and forgiven.

The Memory of Benefits

John's final chapter opens by announcing that it will describe how the risen Jesus 'showed himself again' to the disciples, in fact to Peter and six other disciples (21:1–2). The 'again' brings to mind the unique graces of the earlier Easter appearances: to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18), to the disciples minus Thomas (20:19–23), and to the disciples including Thomas (20:24–29).¹⁴

The choice of the verb 'manifest' (Greek *phaneroō*) echoes a much earlier benefit in John's Gospel, where we read of Jesus changing water

¹² The following paragraph invokes repeatedly the second power of the soul: 'to see', 'the gift of understanding', 'understand' and 'reflect within myself'.

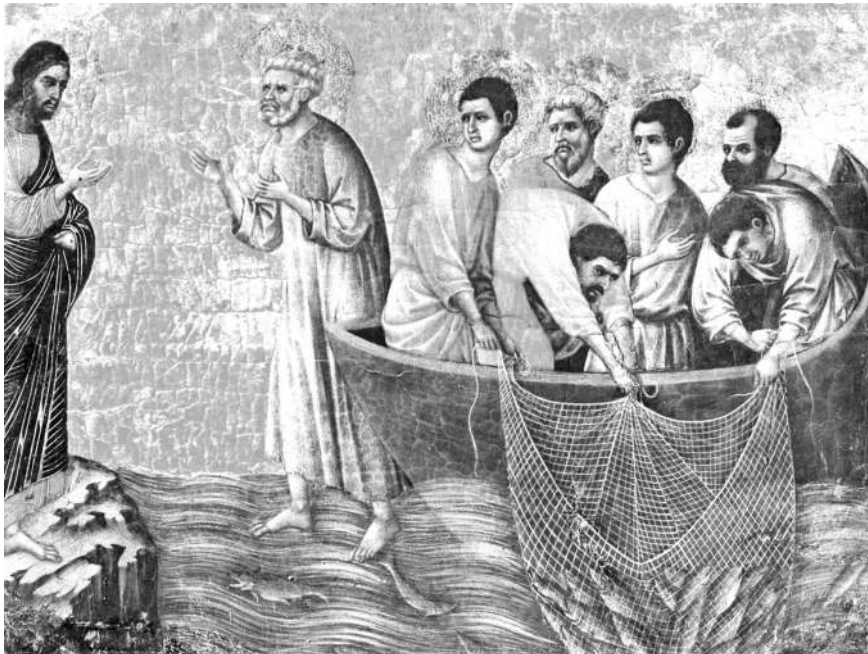
¹³ NRSV translations occasionally modified.

¹⁴ The evangelist remarks that the appearance of Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias was 'the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after he was raised from the dead' (21:14). Yes, it was the third time that Jesus appeared to a *group* of disciples, but not the third time absolutely: he did appear first to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18).

into wine at a marriage feast: 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him' (2:11). The Johannine narrative encourages the reader to remember that episode, by noting that one of the six fishermen who join Peter for a night out on Lake Tiberias is Nathanael, who comes 'from Cana in Galilee' (21:2). Just as Galilee saw Jesus working his first sign to manifest his glory, so now the same Galilee witnesses a new gift: the risen Jesus manifesting himself as 'the Lord' (21:7, 12).

Jesus does so 'just as day is breaking' (21:4). He is there on the beach when dawn comes and the darkness slips away. The scene evokes a past blessing: the cure of a blind man (9:1–41) and Jesus' self-revelation, 'I am the Light of the world' (9:5). The spring dawn at the end of the Gospel brings to mind its very beginning and the Light which shines in the darkness to enlighten and give life to every man and woman (1:4–9).

In the closing chapter of John the seven disciples have fished all night without catching anything. Now the 'stranger' on the lakeside tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. They do so and make an enormous catch (21:6, 8, 11). This brings to mind the gift of 'life in abundance' (10:10), which, right from its prologue, the Gospel has promised that the Light of the world will bring (1:4).



The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, by Duccio di Buoninsegna, *fourteenth century*

The extraordinary catch of fish, the only miraculous or semi-miraculous event in the Easter chapters of the four Gospels, recalls the multiplication of the loaves *and fishes* (6: 1–15). In the discourse that follows that miracle, Jesus spoke of people being ‘hauled’ (*helkuō*) to him (6:44), a verb that turned up later in the promise: ‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will haul all people to myself’ (12:32). Now in the closing chapter of John, the same verb recurs when Peter ‘hauled’ ashore the unbroken net containing 153 large fish. Symbolically Peter the fisherman is engaged in the work of ‘hauling’ others to the Lord.

When the disciples reach land, they see that Jesus has already prepared some fish and bread for them (21:9). Jesus’ words and gestures bring to mind what he has done and then promised when multiplying the loaves and fishes for the five thousand (6:8–11). Asking the disciples to fetch him some of the fish they have just caught and adding them to the fish he has already prepared, he ‘takes’ and ‘gives’ them bread and fish (21: 10, 13). We are asked to remember his ‘taking’ and ‘giving’ to a large crowd during his earthly ministry (6: 11) and his promise that those who come to him ‘will not hunger’ (6:35). ‘The Son of Man will *give* you food that endures for eternal life’ (6:27); he promises that ‘the food that I will *give* for the life of the world is my flesh’ (6:51). By evoking John 6, John 21 recalls the wonderful gift of the Eucharist. As the host at breakfast, Jesus resurrects what he has done and promised as host during his lifetime—on the shore of the same Lake Tiberias. It is only in the Fourth Gospel that this lake is called the Lake of Tiberias (6: 1 and 21:1)—a detail that significantly holds together chapter 6 and chapter 21

Thus 21 brings back to mind many benefits already received, right from chapter 1. Sometimes this happens with deft brevity. When Jesus first met Peter, (a) he called him by his original name ‘Simon, son of John’ and at once (b), without providing an explanation, he indicated the grace of a new function: ‘you will be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)’ (1:42). Now at the end, Jesus (a) speaks to Peter three times as ‘Simon, son of John’, and (b) commissions him to feed ‘my lambs’ and ‘my sheep’ (21:15–17). Peter’s commission will call him to martyrdom in the service of the Lord’s flock (21:18–19). Like Philip at the beginning of John’s Gospel (1:43), Peter at the end receives again a call. It is the simple, radical and uniquely grace-filled call to faithful discipleship: ‘follow me’ (21:19, 22).

During his earthly lifetime, Jesus put questions to various individuals and groups to enable their spiritual growth (see, for example, 1:38; 2:4).

Not least of these is the question to the Twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?', answered magnificently by Peter: 'Lord, to whom shall we go; you have the words of eternal life' (6:67–68). Chapter 21 brings to mind Jesus' habit of asking disturbing and grace-conferring questions, and presents this habit in an intensified way. When asking Peter 'do you love me?', Jesus does so three times—making it the only question he ever repeats (21:15–17).

This way of looking at John 21 accounts for the deeply haunting quality which many readers find in it. It brings back to mind such wonderful benefits already received as the self-manifestation of the risen Christ, the gift of the Eucharist and the call to faithful discipleship in the service of the Lord's flock. The text recalls past graces which can touch us again.

Sinful Failures

The memory exercised by John 21 also allows a broken past to resurface, be healed and form a basis for a new future. The 'charcoal fire' (21:9) around which the disciples take their breakfast points back to an earlier charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard, the scene where Peter three times denied his Master (18:18). The memory of this abject failure is reinforced by the triple denial being now matched by Peter's triple affirmation of his love for Jesus. Peter must acknowledge his sin and receive forgiveness before he begins a pastoral ministry that will eventually lead to his martyrdom.

What should not pass unnoticed is the way the lakeside breakfast recalls earlier meals in John's narratives, meals that should be remembered not only with gratitude but also with shame and sorrow. They have been occasions of deadly threats against Jesus and Lazarus (12:1–11), disputes (12:4–8), betrayal (13:21–30) and misunderstanding (2:3–4). The meal at which five thousand people were miraculously fed was followed by the discourse on the bread of life, which ends with many disciples leaving Jesus and the first warning of Judas' treacherous betrayal (6:25–71). The last chapter of John does explicitly recall the Last Supper (21:20). But the Easter meal at dawn serves to recall and recuperate several other meals and the crises, mainly sinful crises, associated with them.

Exercitants and John 21

John 21 forms a tissue of memories for Peter and the other six disciples—memories of graces received and sins committed. That makes it a rich

biblical resource for those doing the Spiritual Exercises, especially when Ignatius invites them to exercise their memory in the First Week and later in the Contemplation to Attain Love. For them as well, John 21 will bring up memories of Jesus and past encounters with him, memories that concern past benefits and past failures.

Both in the course of the Spiritual Exercises and in other contexts, bringing back to the surface grateful and painful memories can become a rich occasion. Memory can provide the start for a fresh future—through the loving and forgiving presence of the risen Lord.

Gerald O'Collins SJ is currently a research fellow of the University of Divinity, Melbourne and professor emeritus of the Gregorian University, Rome. Author or co-author of 75 books, he has just published *The Beauty of Jesus Christ* (2020).

HELPING OTHERS

The Role of Conversations and of the Spiritual Exercises

Patrick Goujon

NOWADAYS ANYONE who is being trained to accompany others as a spiritual director is usually advised to begin with some experience as a giver of the Spiritual Exercises. However, although it seems obvious that they are connected, Ignatius was careful to distinguish the two activities, even if (as he indicated in the *Constitutions* of the Society) he considered them to have a single common aim: to help the ‘neighbour’. Over the course of time, an abundant literature grew up codifying both activities. It began in the seventeenth century but was greatly revitalised in the 1950s after the encounter with the social sciences and a return to the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves. For Ignatius, however, it was *conversation* that was so attractive as a help to others, and when he came to dictate his reminiscences, he insisted on this aspect.

New Areas for the Unique Mission of the Word

One finds some useful observations in the seventh part of the *Constitutions*: the Exercises are an offshoot of the conversations that bring people towards good works. ‘They will likewise endeavour to benefit individual persons in spiritual conversations, giving counsel and exhorting to good works, and in giving the Spiritual Exercises’ (VII.4.8 [648]).¹

Thus, the Spiritual Exercises are defined as a way of helping people, which accords with the overall title given to the seventh part of the *Constitutions*. The quotation comes in a chapter in which Ignatius runs through the areas where help can be given with the use of two

This article is translated from the first chapter of Patrick Goujon, *Les conseils de l'esprit: Lire les lettres d'Ignace de Loyola* (Paris: Lessius, 2017). A translation of chapter 3 was published in *The Way*, 58/2 (April 2019), 57–71.

¹ In the original French version, the references are given to the *Écrits*, edited by Maurice Giuliani (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), which also contains the *Autobiography (Récit)* and the *Spiritual Exercises*.

methods: preaching the Word of God and holy conversations. He outlines the missionary programme of the Society of Jesus in four short paragraphs where he distinguishes two uses of speech: one public, in sermons (VII.4.6–7 [645–647]) and the other private, ‘in spiritual conversations’ (VII.4.8 [648–649]), which bring together counsel and advice, as in the Spiritual Exercises.

Nevertheless, it is by one single instrument that people are to be helped: the word. This ranges from the public area—the world of preaching—to the private, where conversation takes place. Indeed, Ignatius notes how preaching, both in sermons and in catechesis, may occur not only in the churches that belong to the Society but also in other churches, and occasionally in town squares.

In the church the word of God should be constantly proposed to the people by means of sermons, lectures and the teaching of Christian doctrine, by those whom the superior approves and designates for this work, and at the times and in the manner which he judges to be most conducive to the greater divine glory and edification of souls (VII.4.6 [645]).

Since on occasion it could happen in some places that it is inexpedient to employ these means, or a part of them, this constitution obliges only when the superior judges that they ought to be used. It indicates, however, the Society’s intent in the places where it takes up residence, namely, to employ these three means of proposing God’s word, or two of them, or whichever one seems more suitable. (VII.4.E [646])

The same may also be done outside the Society’s church, in other churches, squares, of places of the region, when the one in charge judges it expedient for God’s greater glory (VII.4.7 [647]).

By moving from a religious space to the public square, Ignatius overcomes an obstacle. From the time of Innocent III, at the start of the thirteenth century, sermons and exhortations were restricted to churches.² Preaching of the Word of God and instruction in the faith had to take place in churches and not in public squares, in order to control the reform movements, such as those of the *humiliati*, thanks to whose inspiration the mendicant orders had appeared. Moreover, only priests who were duly authorised by a superior could preach.³ Ignatius had learnt

² See Joseph F. Conwell, *Impelling Spirit: Revisiting a Founding Experience: 1539 Ignatius of Loyola and His Companions* (Chicago: Loyola, 1997).

³ See Nicole Bériou, *L’avènement des maîtres de la Parole. La prédication à Paris au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Institut des études augustiniennes, 2000).

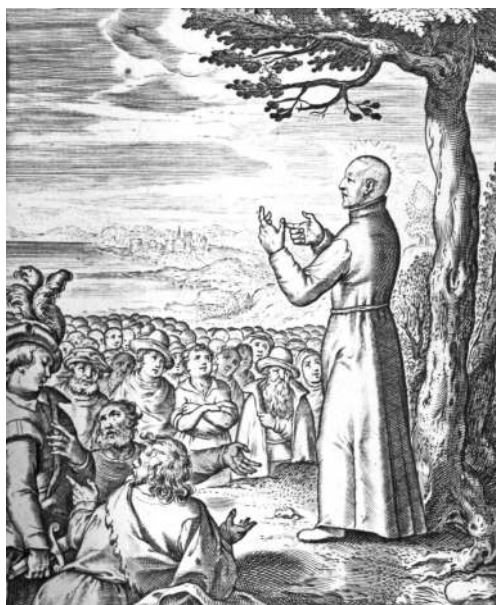
this to his cost: as recorded in his *Autobiography*, the suspicions of the Dominicans of Salamanca can be traced to such rules. While respecting such ecclesiastical regulations, Ignatius kept to his original desire. He set out to study and became a priest. Then, by winning the Holy See's approval for both the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*, he was able to offer spiritual aid to any and all.

By extending the space where preaching might take place, beyond the limits of church buildings and into public squares, Ignatius made it possible for the Jesuits to reach people in the area where they were living their daily lives. The exercises that would be given to them in such public preaching would consist of the examination of conscience and the teaching of vocal prayers. The complete Exercises were not to be given except to a few:

The Spiritual Exercises should not be given in their entirety except to a few persons, namely, those of such a character that from their progress notable fruit is expected for the glory of God. But the exercises of the First Week can be made available to large numbers; and some examinations of conscience and methods of prayer (especially the first of those who which are touched on in the *Exercises*) can also be given far more widely; for anyone who has good will seems to be capable of these exercises. (VII.4.F [649])

Thus, there is a double movement inspiring these four paragraphs of the *Constitutions*: on the one hand, there is a widening out towards greater numbers and less confined spaces (from churches of the Society into public squares or wherever might be suitable) and, on the other hand, there is an inverse narrowing: instead of the multitude there is a focus on a few chosen individuals, those likely to profit from the Spiritual Exercises given in their fullness.

The extension of the area for missionary activity and the diversification of types of word



Ignatius preaching in the open air, Peter Paul Rubens, 1609

(preaching, exhortation, conversation, prayer) are all seen from the same perspective: help to the neighbour. The aim is to provide for all (hence the public square), even though the methods to be used may vary—from preaching to the many to the giving of the complete Exercises to only a few. This contraction from the many to the individual is rooted in a conception of aid that is both spiritual and rhetorical. And this is the next point to be considered.

‘Those Who Want to Engage’

Anyone who has had some rhetorical training knows very well that what is said cannot reach the hearer without some consideration having been given to the sort of person he or she is and to the circumstances in which one person speaks and another listens. Such training was commonplace at the time of Ignatius both for preachers and for those in civic life—lawyers, courtiers, secretaries. The same was true for poets and spiritual counsellors. Rhetoric was the governing principle not just in the educational system but in the social relationships of the time, whether in the law courts, in politics or in ecclesiastical affairs. All culture sprang from this.⁴ The notion that what one says has to be tailored to the sort of person being addressed also lies at the heart of the Exercises. There is no doubt that this is one reason why the Jesuits paid so much attention to rhetoric. It corresponds to a pedagogical theory according to which the person being taught is considered to desire education. And Ignatius was insistent that such was the way in which God proceeded with him.⁵

The measure of what one should give as exercises is determined by taking into account ‘the one who wishes to be helped’:

The Spiritual Exercises should be adapted to the disposition of the persons who desire to make them, that is, to their age, education, and ability. In this way someone who is uneducated or has a weak constitution will not be given things he or she cannot well bear or profit from without fatigue. Similarly exercitants should be given, each one, as much as they are willing to dispose themselves to receive, for their greater help and progress. Consequently, a person who wants

⁴ For a full account of the relationship between rhetoric and culture see *Histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne (1450-1950)*, edited by Marc Fumaroli (Paris: PUF, 1999), and in particular for the link between rhetoric and Jesuit pedagogy, see Marc Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'éloquence. Rhétorique et 'res literaria' de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994 [1980]).

⁵ See *Tradition jésuite. Enseignement, spiritualité, mission*, edited by Étienne Ganty, Michel Hermans and Pierre Sauvage (Brussels/Namur: Lessius/PUN, 2002).

help to get some instruction and reach a certain level of peace of soul can be given the Particular Examen [Exx 24–31], and then the General Examen [Exx 32–43], and further, the Method of Praying, for a half hour in the morning, on the Commandments [Exx 238–243], the Capital Sins [Exx 244–245], and other such procedures [Exx 238; 246–260]. (Exx 18; Eighteenth Annotation)

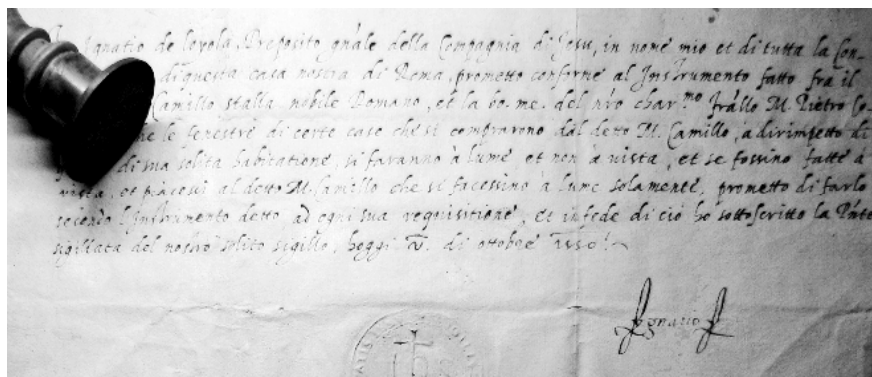
The wording here is worth noting: instead of talking of those *he* wants to help, Ignatius refers to those who *they* themselves want to be helped. Ignatius places the person who is to be helped as the subject of the sentence. It is not the director (an expression never used by Ignatius), nor even the person who accompanies, who comes first, but rather whoever it is who comes seeking for help.

In return, the person who ‘gives the exercises’ (to use Ignatius’ way of speaking) has to decide what circumstances will allow the person to find out how best to proceed. That is the moment when he or she will choose what is appropriate from the variety of exercises outlined in the little handbook. There is, therefore, in this book, which is written to suggest retreats, an important rule of adaptation: the circumstances to bear in mind depend on the person asking for help, and they have to be weighed up by the person consulted.

This Annotation goes to the heart of the practice of the Exercises and indicates the constant adjustment required by the person giving them. The handbook is silent with regard to what Maurice Guiliani used to call ‘the text of the retreatant’.⁶ The text of the *Spiritual Exercises* is organized for the benefit of the person wanting to be helped. The person giving the Exercises does so in accordance with the retreatant’s circumstances—past history, expectations and capacities. The text of the *Spiritual Exercises* requires careful reflection from the person giving them, and he or she will never be able to do so in exactly the same way again.

Experience, ways of speaking and choice must be coordinated during the course of the Exercises along the lines indicated in the book. One finds there the rules that govern this free play between the person giving, the person receiving, and the variety of exercises. With the Exercises different factors come together: the practical circumstances (the particular exercises with all that they imply: a place to make the retreat, persons trained to give them, and so on); and the words to be used (both by the

⁶ Maurice Guiliani, ‘Le Texte du retraitant’, in *L’Expérience des Exercices Spirituels dans la vie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2003 [1990]).



giver and by the retreatant, which are not written down anywhere and for which only hints are to be found in the book itself; they are to be precise on both sides, that of the giver and the hearer, but not mere formulae; they allow great freedom). It is the role of the person giving the Exercises to decide in all these matters what is appropriate, in accordance with what is known about the person asking to make the retreat.

The letters of Ignatius allow entry into situations where he himself put this combination allowed by the *Spiritual Exercises* into action. Only echoes, however, can be heard of what is being said by those to whom his words of advice are offered. To return to the language of the *Constitutions*, we have to recognise that the situation is that of ‘spiritual conversations’, where some of the Spiritual Exercises may be given but not the full process.

The Taste of the Conversation

Although ‘conversation’ might seem to imply the impromptu, there can be no doubt that for Ignatius there is an element of reflection:

One day a rich Spanish man came across him, and asked him what he was doing and where he wanted to go. And learning of his intention, he took him to eat at his house. Subsequently he had him to stay for a few days until things were ready for the departure. Since Manresa, the pilgrim now had this custom: when he had a meal with people, he would never speak at table unless it was to reply briefly. But he would listen to what was being said, and pick up a few things from which he might take the opportunity to speak about God. And when the meal was ended, that is what he would do. (*Autobiography*, n.42)

By listening in silence he is able, in the midst of affairs and casual remarks, to seize on a topic and dwell on it at a more suitable time than

during a meal. Ignatius is on the lookout for whatever will enable his conversation partner to profit from the discussion. This has a reflective aspect and is not just a lively exchange of views.

Ignatius is aware that conversation can be either a place of healing or evidence of being locked in. Indeed, the *Autobiography* recalls how, after he had made his general confession at Montserrat, he was prey to serious bouts of scruples:

Although he would go to confession, he didn't end up satisfied. And so he began to seek out some spiritual men to cure him of these scruples. But nothing was of any help to him. Finally a learned man from the Cathedral, a very spiritual man who used to preach there, told him one day in confession to write down everything he could remember. So he did, but, after he had confessed, still the scruples came back, with things getting more pernicky each time, with the result that he was in a very troubled state. And although he was almost aware that those scruples were doing him a great deal of harm and that it would be good to get rid of them, still he couldn't accomplish this on his own. (*Autobiography* n.22)

Ignatius is caught in a trap, and by himself he cannot get free: conversation here does not release him. The final outcome is an indication of what would become for Ignatius the fundamental element in spiritual help:

He was continuing in his absence from meat, and was firm on that—in no way was he thinking of making a change—when one day, in the morning when he had got up, there appeared to him meat for the eating, as if he could see it with his bodily eyes, without any desire for it having been there before. And together with this there also came upon him a great assent of the will that, from then on, he would eat meat. And although he could still remember his intention from earlier, he was incapable of being doubtful about this: rather he could not but make up his mind that he had to eat meat. And when he recounted this afterwards to his confessor, the confessor's line was that he should consider whether perhaps this was a temptation. But he, examining the matter well, was incapable of ever being doubtful about it. At this time God was dealing with him in the same way as a schoolteacher deals with a child, teaching him. Now, whether this was because of his ignorance and obtuse mind, or because he didn't have anyone to teach him, or because of his resolute will that same God had given him to serve him, it was his clear judgement then, and has always been his judgement, that God was dealing with him in this way. On the contrary, were he to doubt this, he would think he was offending his Divine Majesty. Something of this can be seen in the following five points. (*Autobiography*, n.27)

Liberation for Ignatius comes from an interior movement, 'a great assent of the will', which he examines and which he talks over with someone. He interprets this movement as being a way in which God Godself is acting so as to instruct him. Eventually this fundamental element would be transposed into the text of the *Exercises* and become Annotation 15:

During these Spiritual Exercises when a person is seeking God's will, it is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future. Accordingly, the one giving the Exercises ought not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord.

This non-interference by the giver of the Exercises does not entail silence on his or her part. But certain rules for the conversation are being suggested. As the incident of the meal with the rich Spaniard made clear, conversation required a certain listening on Ignatius' part, whereby he could become aware of a subject and seize the right opportunity to allow his listener to profit from what he has to say. He delays a little before offering a reply.

This can be seen in the way he replies to Borgia and to Vergara.⁷ The correspondence benefits from the lapse of time which it imposes and allows. On the other hand, the role of the one giving help is restrained by the need to take into account the action being taken by God with the person who is being addressed. It is this action that the one being accompanied will be led to discover. Not everyone is able to do this. Therefore, as we saw in the *Constitutions*:

The exercises of the First Week can be made available to large numbers; and some examinations of conscience and methods of prayer (especially the first of those who which are touched on in the *Exercises*) can also be given far more widely; for anyone who has good will seems to be capable of these exercises (VII.4.F [649]).

It is here that the work of the counsellor mainly takes place. The conversation has both active and passive aspects from the angle of

⁷ In the book, these are two letters dealt with in chapters 5 and 6.

the person who is giving help. In the first place, it is necessary to assess the person being addressed and the circumstances of their exchange. Then a theme may be chosen from a chance development that may arise in the course of the measured conversation taking place. And, finally, the counsellor must be convinced that God is at work in each person, and that some of them are able to discover the way in which He is acting and can profit from it.

The letters of Ignatius allow us to capture the variations—in the musical sense of that word—that this spiritual regulation of conversation produces. The one giving help is taking part in ‘spiritual conversations’.

Giving Counsel, Exhortation and the Exercises

When the *Constitutions* spell out what ‘holy conversations’ are, they explain how Jesuits ‘will likewise endeavour to benefit individual persons ... giving counsel and exhorting to good works, and in giving the Spiritual Exercises’ (VII.4.8[648]). The modalities of these various ways of helping are to be found in individual letters. But a preliminary remark is needed on the common nature of these ways of speaking.

When we read spiritual texts today, apart from the special case of the *Spiritual Exercises*, we tend to forget that most of them belong to the type of writing which tries to make the reader do something. Appreciation of rhetoric can help one to understand such writings as instruments that bring pressure on the self or on others.

It will be useful here to call to mind that rhetoric distinguishes between three types of discourse according to their different aims: the demonstrative, which gives information about a person, a situation or a subject in order to praise or condemn; the judicial, where what is sought is the defence of one’s personal interest or that of a client, or where the aim is to accuse someone who is a menace; and the deliberative, aimed at counselling the hearer in favour of, or dissuading from, undertaking some action.

Corresponding to these three types there are three different ways of proceeding: to praise, to judge, to come to a decision. Moreover, each type supposes a different focus that is established between the speaker, the hearer and the topic under discussion. In the demonstrative, it is the topic itself that is the predominant element (that which has to be known so that it can be praised or condemned); in the judicial, it is to the advantage of the speaker (or of the party represented by the speaker);

in the deliberative, attention focuses primarily on the hearer so that he or she may come to a decision.

For each genre, distinctive qualities were expected: in the case of the deliberative, the counsel given—in order to allow the hearer to do something good or bad—had to be useful or harmful, agreeable or disagreeable. Finally, thanks to this classification the orator would know which were the principal emotions to arouse in the hearers: severity and gentleness in the case of the judicial; fear and hope to help in coming to a decision; pleasure when making something known. Attached to these were the techniques of oratory, the elaboration of a speech with the use of figures of speech and forms of declamation.⁸

A table summarises the main characteristics in the practice of oratory:⁹

	Audience	Action	Quality
Judicial	judges	accuse—defend	just—unjust
Deliberative	assembly	counsel—dissuade	useful—harmful
Demonstrative	spectators	praise—blame	noble—vile

This detour on rhetoric would have little justification were it not for the fact that it draws attention to the sharp sense all hearers in previous times (from the classical age until very recently) possessed concerning the linguistic practices being used when addressing a listener in order to produce some social and moral effect.

Spiritual authors slip into this pattern of speaking and make the most of it so as to guide people in their life of faith. We may take as an example the writing of Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*. For Gregory the contents of holy scripture could serve as a guide in the exercise of an attentive meditation, so allowing the reader even now to find in these accounts of an earlier age how to search for God. If they suggest models of virtue and outline how to avoid the traps that may confront anyone wishing to make progress, they are also well aware that their exhortations cannot replace the desire of the reader. To explain this, Gregory borrows an example from the games in the circus: 'Are not my

⁸ Among various presentations, see Olivier Reboul, *Introduction à la rhétorique* (Paris: PUF, 2001).

⁹ The French Wikipedia article on rhetoric, <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhétorique>, is to be recommended [it is summarised in the English version, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric>].

words to you', he says, 'similar to those of the spectators who are convinced that with their shouts they increase the strength of the athletes?'

At horse races the spectators intent on victory shout to their favorites in the contest, even though the horses are eager to run. From the stands they participate in the race with their eyes, thinking to incite the charioteer to keener effort at the same time urging the horses on while leaning forward and flailing the air with their outstretched hands instead of with a whip. They do this not because their actions themselves contribute anything to the victory; but in this way, by their good will, they eagerly show in voice and deed their concern for the contestants. I seem to be doing the same thing myself, most valued friend and brother. While you are competing admirably in the divine race along the course of virtue, lightfootedly leaping and straining constantly for the *prize of the heavenly calling* (Philippians 3:14), I exhort, urge and encourage you vigorously to increase your speed. I do this, not moved to it by some unconsidered impulse, but to humour the delights of a beloved child.¹⁰

At the heart of any exhortation or word of counsel is the kind concern for another's good. However, Gregory of Nyssa raises the question of its efficacy: far from being that which enables the charioteer to increase his ability, instead it displays the common desire for the good being sought (victory, and by analogy, God), as well as the fraternal relationship established in this way. Gregory does not imagine that his words will provide his reader with the power to live according to virtue. He is making plain his hope that his friend will be victorious and persevere in his efforts. Without that élan which inspires his friend—and which Gregory's words can, at best, revive—the text of his counsel, however stimulating, can do nothing.¹¹

The manipulative power proper to rhetoric differs from fraternal and friendly exhortation in that the latter directs the force of words on the basis of the hearer's capacity to make a personal decision. This is what is proper to the deliberative genre to which any word of counsel belongs. It distances itself from any situation where the hearer only has to carry out an instruction (a command may well come under the disguise of a counsel). Spiritual conversation allows for the notion of authority, but not for that of power, and the letters of Ignatius remind us of this

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, translated with an introduction and notes by Abraham J. Malherbe and John Meyendorff (Mahwah: Paulist, 1978), 29.

¹¹ Gregory acknowledges this explicitly.

distinction. Similarly, spiritual conversation is not the occasion for acquiring knowledge (such as takes place with catechetical instruction), even if learning is brought into play with the counsels. The aim of the counsel is that the person addressed will arrive at a decision: words are used to set in motion the use of reason and feeling, and so the speaker has to adopt a particular stance in relation to the person spoken to. The three pillars on which all rhetoric has to rely are character (*ethos*), passion (*pathos*), and reason (*logos*).

It is not our aim to discuss here how far rhetoric plays a role in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Let us simply note that the matter would be complex for the different exercises: each of these is both spoken by the retreat-giver, and offered in such a way that the retreatant may 'speak' it in his or her turn—in such a way that it can be put into practice. 'To ask God our Lord for what I want' (Exx 48); 'Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him in a colloquy' (Exx 53); 'now begging a favor, now accusing oneself of some misdeed' (Exx 54). The *Spiritual Exercises* are written in such a way that the person who speaks them *does* them him- or herself, even while hearing them from someone else as they are addressed to him or her.

This rhetorical economy of the Exercises puts at their heart the untransmissible character of experience: it does this because by leading each person to the invention (*inventio*) of the discourse proper to each, each discovers and enters into a relation with God. It was important at this point to disclose how these ways of speaking actually work, rather than to treat them, as we tend to do, as occasions for discussing values and transmitting ideas. We now have to see how Ignatius introduces us to this practice of the word.

Patrick Goujon SJ is a professor at the Centre Sèvres in Paris. He is an adviser to the journal *Études*, and writes on the history of spiritual direction.

translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ

COPING WITH INSECURITY, UNCERTAINTY AND RISK

Helen Freeman

FOR JEWS, OUR UNDERSTANDING of engagement with the created world goes right back to the creation story in Genesis chapter one. Once the beautiful world and its life forms have been created, God says, in verse 26:

... na'aseh adam b'tzalmanyoo kidmootaynoo u-rdu vidgut hayam, oov'of hashamayim, oovab'haymah oov'khol ha-aretz oov'khol harems haromays al ha-aretz-

... let us make Adam in our image and likeness, and he will rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heaven and the cattle and all the earth and all creeping things that creep upon the earth.¹

The word for human being, *adam*, is related closely to the word for earth, *adamah*, and conveys the earthiness and closeness of the relationship between human beings and the soil of the ground.

The later rabbinical commentators understood the human right to rule over the other creatures to be an ethical imperative; if they did not do so justly, then terrible things would happen. Using a play on the word *u-rdu*—‘and rule’—the fifth-century midrash in Genesis Rabbah 8:12 says this:

‘And have dominion [*u-rdu*] over the fish of the sea etc.’ Rabbi Chanina said: If humanity merits it [*u-rdu*] (it will have dominion); and if humanity does not merit it [*yirdu*] (it will descend/fall). Rabbi

This article was first published in *Thinking Faith* (4 November 2008). It also appears as part of a series of booklets, *Faiths in Creation*, published by the Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life.

¹ All translations are the author's own.

Ya'akov of Kfar Hanan: That which is 'in our image, according to our likeness' [*u-rdu*] (it will have dominion), and that which is not in our image according to our likeness [*yirdu*] (it will descend).²

The challenge to humanity is, then, how we conceptualise our place of dominion over the created world. The difficult verse is Genesis 1:28, just after the creation of human beings, which says

vayivarkh otam elohim, vayomer lahem elohim p-ru ur-vu umiloo et ha-aretz v-khivshooa ur-du vidgat hayam oov'of hashamayim oov'khol khayah haromeset al ha-aretz-

And God blessed them and said to them: be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and you will rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heaven and all living things that swarm upon the earth.

The complexity is in understanding the ramifications of the word *v'khivshooa*—'and subdue it'. The Hebrew root means to press down, or dominate, and might be seen as giving human beings *carte blanche* to do as they will with the created world. So the rabbis came up with a midrashic interpretation that made it clear that human beings had to have humility in their relationship to the created world. In Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13 it says:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first Adam, God took Adam and led him around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: Look at my works! How beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And everything that I made, I created it for you. Be careful though, that you do not spoil or destroy My world—because if you spoil it, there is nobody after you to fix it.³

This midrash clearly puts humanity in our place as caretakers for God's world; the problem is bringing this principle into practice. In Judaism this is done by the medium of *halachah*, a word often translated as Jewish law, but meaning originally the 'right path in which to go'. The clearest *halachah* application of the requirement to cherish God's law is based on Deuteronomy 20:19, where we are forbidden wantonly to cut down fruit-bearing trees, even during wartime. From that, a *halachic* principle was derived called *bal taschit*—a prohibition against waste.

² *Midrash Rabbah*, Vilna edition.

³ *Midrash Rabbah*, Vilna Edition, megillot section, 20 following.

The areas in which this applied were extended during the Talmudic period so, for example, we read:

‘... whoever covers an oil lamp or uncovers a naphtha lamp transgresses against the law of *bal taschit*’ (B. *Shabbat* 67b). These two actions, it turns out, cause the lamp to burn less efficiently; thus necessitating the use of more fuel than necessary Furthermore we are forbidden to dump our well water when another might need it (B. *Yevamot* 11b) and are told on occasion to choose those foods which require the fewest resources to make—barley bread over wheat bread (B. *Shabbat* 140a).⁴

By medieval times, in Spain *Sefer Hahinuch*, the book of education, is offering a more global view of conservation in around the year 1300:

Righteous people of good deeds do not waste in this world even a mustard seed, they become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see and if they can, they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked are not thus; they are like demons. They rejoice in the destruction of the world just as they destroy themselves.⁵

Generally speaking, the rabbis forbade all destructive acts, and they linked one who destroys anything in anger to one who worships idols.

In nineteenth-century Germany, Samson Raphael Hirsch, a modern orthodox rabbi who was known for combining *Torah im derech eretz*, Jewish tradition with courtesy to others, wrote in his book *Horeb*:

‘Do not destroy anything’ is the first and most general call of God, which comes to you, man, when you realise yourself as a master of the Earth God’s call proclaims to you ... ‘If you destroy, if you ruin—at that moment you are not a man, you are an animal, and have no right to the things around you. I lent them to you for wise use only; never forget that I lent them to you. As soon as you use them unwisely, be it the greatest or the smallest, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property, you sin against Me!’ This is what God calls unto you, and with this call does He represent the greatest and smallest against you and grants the smallest, as also the greatest, a right against your presumptuousness.⁶

⁴ Fred Dobb, ‘The Rabbis and Expanding Environmental Consciousness’, in *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought*, volume 1, *Biblical Israel and Rabbinic Judaism*, edited by Arthur Waskow (Nashville: Jewish Lights, 2000), 160.

⁵ Dobb, ‘Rabbis and Expanding Environmental Consciousness’, 161.

⁶ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances*, translated by Isidore Grunfeld (New York: Soncino, 1981), 279–280.

In an enormous extension of the original law of *bal taschit*, Hirsch says that even those who hoard property and do nothing with it, rather than using it wisely, are against the *halachah*. The difficulty we have in modern times is how to dovetail this profound religious sensibility about the beauty of our world and its fragility with a secular environment that insists more is better, and more and more and more are better still.

As far back as the eleventh century, religious philosophers such as Jonah Ibn Janah of Saragossa were trying to heighten human sensitivity to the fact that all belongs to God and we human beings have it only on loan:

A man is held responsible for everything he receives in this world, and his children are responsible too. The fact is nothing belongs to him, everything is the Lord's, and whatever he received he received on credit and the Lord will exact payment for it. This may be compared to a person who entered a city and found no one there. He walked into a house and found a table set with all kinds of food and drink. So he began to eat and drink thinking, 'I deserve all of this, all of it is mine, I shall do with it what I please!' He did not even notice that the owners were watching him from the side! He will yet have to pay for everything he ate and drank, for he is in a spot from which he will not be able to escape.⁷

The urgent question is, how do we increase our sensitivity to the spot that we are in so that we can join together to provide a transformative initiative? A midrash in *Leviticus Rabbah*, 4:6, written about 1,500 years ago, addresses this very concern. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught that we are like a group of people in a boat: one man started to drill under his seat, and when the others intervened to protest, he said: 'What concern is it of yours, I am only drilling under my own seat'. They said: 'The water will rise and cover us all'.

This midrash addresses an image similar to those in which all of the Jewish people are compared to scattered sheep, or when one limb is damaged, the whole entity is in pain. In a globalised society, we might apply the same image to the whole of humanity; when one part is hurt—through the Amazon rainforests being destroyed, for example—we cannot say: you are only destroying your own back yard; it will have a devastating impact on all of humanity. The urgency of the task of bringing together

⁷ *The Living Talmud: The Wisdom of the Fathers and Its Classical Commentaries* (New York: Mentor, 1957), 144.

the ethical and moral imperatives with the practical realities of modern life is perhaps best expressed by Al Gore, who won a Nobel Prize for his urgent commitment to developing ecological awareness

Today, we enthusiastically participate in what is in essence a massive and unprecedented experiment with the natural systems of the global environment, with little regard for the moral consequences. But for the separation of science and religion, we might not be pumping so much gaseous chemical waste into the atmosphere and threatening the destruction of the earth's climate balance. But for the separation of useful technological know-how and the moral judgments to guide its use, we might not be slashing and burning one football field's worth of rainforest every second. But for the assumed separation of humankind from nature, we might not be destroying half the living species on earth in the space of a single lifetime. But for the separation of living and feeling, we might not tolerate the deaths every day of 37,000 children under the age of five from starvation and preventable diseases made worse by failures of crops and politics. But we do tolerate—and collectively perpetuate—all these things. They are going on right now. When future generations wonder how we could go along with our daily routines in silent complicity with the collective destruction of the earth, will we ... claim that we did not notice these things because we were morally asleep? Or will we try to explain that we were not so much asleep as living in a waking trance ... under whose influence we felt no connection between our routine, banal acts and the moral consequences of what we did, as long as they were far away at the other end of the massive machine of civilisation? Modern philosophy has gone so far in its absurd pretensions about the separateness of human beings from nature as to ask the famous question: 'If a tree falls in the forest and no person is there to hear it, does it make a sound?' If robotic chain saws finally destroy all the rainforests on earth, and if the people who set them in motion are far enough away so that they do not hear the crash of the trees on the naked forest floor, does it matter? This rational, detached, scientific intellect, observing a world of which it is no longer a part, is too often arrogant, unfeeling, uncaring. And its consequences can be monstrous.⁸

The problem with the enormity of the questions set by Al Gore and by the religious traditions is that they are so profound, so frightening and so life-changing, that we are tempted to run away and hide. Such an understandable instinct explains the popularity of Channel 4's

⁸ Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance—Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Rodale Press, 2006), 265.

documentary *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, broadcast in March 2007, which attempted to show that global warming was unproven science. When human beings feel insecure, we want to hold on to what we know, to reassure ourselves that our present way of functioning is long-lasting.

It is no surprise, then, that shopping has become a sort of national sport. If life feels uncertain, the very planet is at risk, then we begin to feel empty inside and try to force down that uncomfortable feeling with materialism. G. K. Chesterton is said to have remarked that when we stop believing in God, what happens is not that we believe in nothing; it is that we believe in anything. The national religion now seems to be consumerism: that new car, that cheap sofa, that marvellous trip abroad on the budget airline. But in a time of global financial insecurity even that safe haven where we could fill an inner emptiness with possessions is beginning to feel less secure.

That feeling of uncertainty, of having to express our spiritual needs by a rootedness in material possessions, can sometimes be a particular trap for minority communities, who are more vulnerable to the insecurity of rootlessness. So, Jewish families who celebrate their child's bar mitzvah or wedding in a very materialistic fashion are doing much more than showing off their affluence. They are celebrating a sense of security: that they, as the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of penniless refugees, feel a renewed connection to the earth of the place in which they live. Paradoxically, this sort of rather frantic consumerism is an unconscious attempt to reconnect the connection between *Adam* and



© Kristin Wall @ Flickr

Adamah, between an individual human being and the land on which he or she is living. It is a concretising of a symbolic need, in the same way that a person seeking after spirit can sometimes first find it in a bottle. A person who is struggling with a sense of purposelessness can counter their awareness of living in a dangerous world by surrounding themselves with beautiful and expensive possessions.

Yet, fifty years ago, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was questioning the definition of human beings as those who are able to acquire and consume, and the utilisation of resources as the reason God put us into this world:

In the history of civilisation different aspects of nature have drawn forth the talent of humanity; sometimes its power, sometimes its beauty and occasionally its grandeur have attracted our mind. Our age is one in which usefulness is thought to be the chief merit of nature; in which the attainment of power, the utilisation of its resources is taken to be the chief purpose of humanity in God's creation. The modern man learns in order to use We do not know any more how to justify any value except in terms of expediency. We are willing to define ourselves as 'a seeker after the maximum degree of comfort for the minimum expenditure of energy.' We equate value with that which avails. We feel, act and think as if the sole purpose of the universe were to satisfy our needs We have supreme faith in statistics and abhor the idea of a mystery. Obstinate we ignore the fact that we are all surrounded by things which we apprehend but cannot comprehend; that even reason is a mystery to itself. We are sure of our ability to explain all mystery away Dazzled by the brilliant achievements of the intellect in science and technique we have not only become convinced that we are the masters of the earth; we have become convinced that our needs and interests are the ultimate standard of what is right and wrong. Comfort, luxuries, success continually bait our appetites, impairing our vision of that which is required but not always desired. They make it easy for us to grow blind to values.⁹

Religious traditions can remind us of the sense of humility about humanity and our place in creation. There is a higher standard of what is right and wrong than our own selfish needs. Fulfilling our desire for security can lead to an absolute insensitivity to the destruction of precious habitats, biodiversity and climate. We did not create life on this planet, but we are more than able to destroy it.

⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrer Straus and Giroux, 1959), 33–35.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all founded on traditions that encourage a sense of respect and awe for the created world, an awareness of our own limitations and a relationship with God that sensitises us to the world around us. Our communities can open the possibilities of seeing the world as a place for performing good deeds to build towards a messianic age when we feel rooted and secure in a world of balance. The model for what we might call 'ecological commandments' goes back to rabbinic times when, for example, there was legislation forbidding the location of a kiln within the city borders of Jerusalem to avoid smoke pollution (Baba Kamma 82b). There are also positive commandments such as the requirement for all cities to have greenery in order to be suitable habitations for scholars (Eruvin 55b). The need to plan for our descendants is exemplified by a story about Honi the circle maker, one of the heroes of rabbinic literature:

One day Honi was walking down the road, and he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi said to him: 'Since the carob does not bear fruit for seventy years, are you so sure that you'll live seventy years and eat from it?!' The man replied: 'I found a world that was full of carob trees. Just like my ancestors planted for me, so I plant for my descendants.'¹⁰

Rabbi Helen Freeman was ordained by Leo Baeck College in 1990, since when she has served the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and the West London Synagogue of British Jews. She has qualified as a Jungian analyst and is developing the concept of Jewish healing.

¹⁰ Babylonian *Talmud Ta'anit*, 23a.

SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Rejuvenating the Church

John Zupez

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT epistles and in the Acts of the Apostles we read about Christians meeting in homes and in small communities; and from there the Church grew.¹ In many parts of the world today, the Spirit seems to be leading the Church to the organization of parishes into small communities, to rejuvenate the Church from the bottom up.

The Second Vatican Council issued the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* on the apostolate of the laity, calling on them to take their rightful place as evangelizers of others, by the grace of their baptism. This decree cites eight other documents of the council which call laypersons to exercise their 'proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church'.² *Sacrosanctum concilium* encourages bible services among the laity, and in *Ad gentes* on the Missionary Activity of the Church we read: 'Let associations and groups be organized by means of which the lay apostolate will be able to permeate the whole of society with the spirit of the Gospel'. The decree goes on to say:

The church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot be deeply grounded in the abilities, life and work of any people without the active presence of laymen. Therefore, even at the very founding of a Church, great attention is to be paid to establishing a mature, Christian laity.³

If the laity are to apply their own talents to Christianizing society, they must be trusted and given the freedom to show leadership. In the

¹ Acts 1:13–14; 2:46; 12:12; 16:5, 13, 40; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2.

² *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n.1.

³ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nn.35, 21. And see *Ad gentes*, n.15.

decree on the priesthood, priests are advised to encourage the laity to 'undertake works on their own initiative'. From this encouragement the council fathers sought 'in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders'. Church leaders were to expect submission to the oversight of the hierarchy in activities identified with the Church, but should also 'acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city'.⁴

Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, we have learnt how unlike Christ it is to envision a hierarchical Church where those not ordained to the priesthood are at the bottom. Exclusive emphasis on hierarchy had led to a triumphalism and a clericalism that are largely opposed to what Jesus advocates in the Gospels. While ordination to the priesthood or the profession of religious vows is a public commitment to strive for perfection, Jesus calls all Christians to the same perfection of charity, and graces them to fulfil his command, 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).

Pope Francis is taking up with fresh urgency this issue raised at Vatican II. He reminds us, beginning with his first apostolic exhortation, *Joy of the Gospel*, that the ministry of the clergy is in the order not of holiness but of function.⁵ The priesthood does not constitute a higher class of Christians. And in *Rejoice and Be Glad*, Francis reminds us that

***There are
a variety of
gifts but the
same Spirit***

we are all called to the same perfection of the Christian life.⁶ There are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit, working in all and through all. We need only recall that many of the great saints of history have been women, who exhibited the highest levels of divine charity in their lives and who had a profound impact on the Church of their day, and since. And women have demonstrated, as women best can, the motherly and compassionate care of God for all God's children, for every person on earth.

Awareness of God's care for all peoples, and of our oneness under God, is growing with awareness of our dependence on one another, through internet communication, through worldwide media and through global travel. We are being forced at this moment in history to see beyond our close circle of relatives and friends, and as Christians to have a

⁴ *Lumen gentium*, n.37.

⁵ *Evangelii gaudium*, n.104.

⁶ *Gaudete et exsultate*, n.14.

charitable regard for all peoples. It seems providential that at just this time ordinary lay Roman Catholics worldwide are meeting in small groups on a regular basis to read the words of Jesus and to discuss how they must reach out to others in the way they speak and act, with Christlike regard that knows no bounds of race or creed. To find the first traces of this movement that is rejuvenating the Church from the bottom up, we must go to Latin America in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council.

Origin and Spread of Base Communities

Immediately after the council, Base Communities began forming in Latin America, especially among the poor. People came together for bible reading, to discuss what action Jesus was calling them to, especially in service to the neediest among them, and at times to join with other Base Communities to campaign on social justice issues. Adopting the approach outlined in the Brazilian Paulo Freire's classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* increased literacy and raised the awareness of human rights.⁷ This furthered the Base Ecclesial Community movement and 'provided a springboard for Liberation theologians, most of whom were inspired by the theological insights they learned from the struggles of poor communities'.⁸

In Brazil, several members of the Roman Catholic clergy gained an international reputation as defenders of the poor, such as Archbishop Hélder Câmara, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, Cardinal Aloísio Lorscheider and Leonardo Boff. In their dioceses and throughout the continent Base Ecclesial Communities have been a force unifying and rejuvenating the Church, and a stimulus for social activists. Pope Francis, as archbishop of Buenos Aires, fostered these communities, at times visiting them and leading them in the Eucharist.

Guatemala presents a good example where, among the indigenous Mayan majority, Catholic leaders draw strength from their Base Communities to stand up against government oppression of the poor and defenceless. A single parish among the native Mayans has 100,000 members in 53 distinct communities, served by 3,000 lay ministers.

⁷ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, new edn (New York: Continuum, 2005 [1970]).

⁸ 'Base Ecclesial Communities', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by E. A. Livingstone, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 53–54.

The diocesan bishop here is Álvaro Leonel Ramazzini Imeri, who was made a cardinal by Pope Francis in the 5 October 2019 consistory. The cardinal has long been an advocate for the poor, and has survived several death threats.⁹

This movement which originated in Latin America has spread worldwide. In Eastern Africa over 90,000 Small Christian Communities, as they are called there, have sprung up.¹⁰ Community dynamics easily finds a home in the less individualistic culture of Africa, where the dictum is 'I am because we are'.¹¹ In 1994, at the first African Synod, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar described Small Christian Communities as 'the theological mainstay of the model of Church as Family of God'.¹² They are seen as 'the ecclesiastical extension of the African extended family or clan', where the Christian faith is more intensely lived and shared.¹³

Such communities are also thriving in Asia, especially in the Philippines and India. Pope John Paul II described them as 'a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love'.¹⁴ In 1991 the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines decreed: 'Basic Ecclesial Communities under various names and forms—BCCs, small Christian communities, covenant communities—must be vigorously promoted for the full living of the Christian vocation in both urban and rural areas'.¹⁵ Among Hindus in India, where Christians are a small minority, Small Human Communities, meeting in ecumenical groups, help to humanise impersonal, densely populated cities. In Mumbai, a megapolis of 21 million people, from 1984 to 2006 virtually the whole archdiocese was formed into 1,800 Small Christian Communities.

⁹ Tom Roberts, 'Cardinal-Elect Was a Francis Bishop before Francis', *National Catholic Reporter* (3 September 2019), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/ncr-connections/cardinal-elect-was-francis-bishop-francis>.

¹⁰ Joseph G. Healey, 'How Small Christian Communities Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa', *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, 20/2 (Fall 2010), 43–60. Available at https://www.academia.edu/20499268/How_Small_Christian_Communities_Promote_Reconciliation_Justice_and_Peace_in_Eastern_Africa.

¹¹ This is one translation of the Nguni word for humanity, *ubuntu*, which is fundamental to the theology of Desmond Tutu, among others.

¹² Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, 'Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects', in *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-Looking Church*, edited by Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth (Quezon City: Claretian, 2013), 113–125, here 122.

¹³ Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation, Transforming the Church in Africa* (New York: Orbis, 2014), 43.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 25.

¹⁵ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Paulines, 1992), n. 109.



© Catholics and Cultures

A Small Christian Community meeting in Mwanza, Tanzania

Gathering regularly for sharing in a small community supplements the less personal weekly Mass experience.

If we are to restore our Catholic parishes to places where we all sit together and relate well to everyone else present, then the impetus from Small Christian Communities may be a good place to start, cutting across parochialism and instilling in Catholics the boldness that St Paul looked for in his own communities. The movement towards forming such Small Christian Communities within parishes has spread worldwide. Imagine if Christian communities throughout a whole country advocated what is compassionate and Christlike in governance, studying the present situation at the grass-roots level, looking to the Gospels to judge what Christ would say and to the epistles to learn how Paul exhorted his early Christian communities, seeing and judging then acting on the basis of their shared vision.

RENEW International Programmes

The RENEW programme originated in the archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, in the United States in 1976. Between 1978 and 1980 'over forty thousand people in Newark, including those of 28 different languages and cultures, were involved in small groups'. Materials were produced to support such faith-sharing groups and, by the late 1980s, the non-profit RENEW International organization had been founded to produce and expand the breadth of those materials. By 2019 its programmes had reached an estimated 25 million Catholics in 24 countries, 13,000 parishes

and 130 dioceses as well as at college campuses and military bases.¹⁶ Resources are offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Chinese and Lithuanian, and also in large print. The following programmes are described on its website.

- **Arise Together in Christ**, as RENEW's original programme is now called, is described as unifying parishioners of various ages and backgrounds in small groups that strengthen faith and foster belonging in the parish, through 'the warm sense of welcome provided by the small-group setting, and the opportunities to meet Jesus Christ in scripture and explore faith's connection to daily life'. It produces lay leaders and faith-based action in and beyond parishes. Several workshops are offered to prepare leaders for every stage of this programme, which itself is spread out over three years in five six-week seasons.¹⁷ After Arise, participants are encouraged to continue meeting, perhaps using one of the other programmes.
- **Be My Witness** drew its inspiration from Pope Francis's apostolic letter addressed to laypeople, *Joy of the Gospel*. It begins with parish leaders and then extends to small groups of parishioners to give the entire parish an outward thrust and to incorporate a greater sense of mission into the spiritual lives of Catholics.¹⁸
- **Why Catholic?** is a follow-up to the US Catholic bishops' pastoral plan for deepening the faith of adult Catholics, *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us*. It can also be used in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and for formation of catechists. It consists of 48 small-group discussion sessions on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, with scriptural references and discussion questions.¹⁹

¹⁶ 'RENEW International's History', *RENEW International*, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20190308015732/http://www.renewintl.org/renew/index.nsf/vPages/History>, accessed 1 June 2020 (the RENEW history page has now been revised and the new version gives less information). See also Peter Feuerherd, 'RENEW International Inspires Parishioners through Small Groups', *National Catholic Reporter* (9 June 2016), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/renew-international-inspires-parishioners-through-small-groups>.

¹⁷ 'Overview', *Arise Together in Christ*, at <https://renewarise.org/en/overview/>, accessed 1 June 2020.

¹⁸ See *Be My Witness*, at <https://bemywitness.org/en/>, accessed 1 June 2020.

¹⁹ See *Why Catholic?* at <https://whycatholic.org/en/overview/>, accessed 1 June 2020; US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1999), available at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/adult-faith-formation/our-hearts.cfm>, accessed 1 June 2020.

- **Healing Our Church** offers a six-week, small-group healing process for those hurting from the clergy sexual abuse scandal. It includes sharing of feelings and commitment to becoming part of the solution to the problem.²⁰
- **Ignatian Business Chapters** (or **Balancing Faith and Work**) is an opportunity for small groups to use the method of Ignatian discernment to discuss articles and questions from the business world that offer a challenge to Christians.²¹
- **Creation at the Crossroads** is a programme of small-group discussions created in collaboration with the Catholic Climate Covenant and GreenFaith. It responds to Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*, which brought to the fore the Church's teaching on the care of creation and the impact of environmental change on the poor and vulnerable.²²
- **Luke: My Spirit Rejoices!** is a book offering 36 small-group sessions focused on the Gospel of Luke, with reflections on the Gospel and on the human behaviour illuminated in Luke's work.²³
- **Longing for the Holy** contains twelve small group sessions on deepening spirituality, 'getting your life together'. It is based on the spiritual guidance of the best-selling author Ronald Rolheiser.²⁴
- **Living in the Sacred**, also by Rolheiser, builds on the spirituality of *Longing for the Holy* and offers twelve sessions on the theme of 'giving our life away'.²⁵
- **Campus RENEW** is a two-and-a-half-year (five semester) programme of weekly sessions in a small Christian community on a college campus. It would create student leaders with mature faith and social consciousness.²⁶

²⁰ See *Healing Our Church*, at <https://healingourchurch.org/en/>, accessed 1 June 2020.

²¹ See *Ignatian Business Chapters*, at <https://myibc.org/en/>, accessed 1 June 2020.

²² See 'Creation at the Crossroads', *RENEW International*, at <https://pages.renewintl.org/catc-faith-sharing>; *Greenfaith*, at <https://greenfaith.org/#>; and 'RENEW: Creation at the Crossroads', *Catholic Climate Covenant*, at <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/resource/renew-creation-crossroads>, all accessed 1 June 2020.

²³ Martin Lang, *Luke: My Spirit Rejoices!* (Plainfield: RENEW, 2016).

²⁴ See *Longing for the Holy*, at <https://pages.renewintl.org/renew-longing-for-the-holy>; *Spirituality for Everyday Life*, at <https://pages.renewintl.org/spirituality-for-everyday-life>, both accessed 1 June 2020.

²⁵ See *Spirituality for Everyday Life*.

²⁶ See *Campus RENEW*, at <https://pages.renewintl.org/campus-renew>, accessed 1 June 2020.

- **Theology on Tap**, originating in the archdiocese of Chicago in 1981, in 2003 went nationwide with materials furnished by RENEW. Events can be held in a café, a bar, a parish hall An engaging speaker presents a topic in theology, followed by discussion, faith sharing and community building.²⁷
- **RENEW Africa** offers five six-week seasons of faith sharing for Small Christian Communities in Africa. The themes revolve around claiming Jesus as my Lord; a Catholic spirituality; we are Church; sharing the Good News; and in the service of justice, peace and reconciliation in Africa today. Discussing how the Bible applies to one's life is central, along with African stories to which participants can relate.²⁸

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have popularised similar material, including a guide 'to help small groups to dig deeper into the Church's evangelizing mission', using the process of 'See, Judge, Act, Celebrate, and Take Missionary Action'.²⁹ The English version is based on an earlier version of the guide in Spanish.

What then are some of the changes that we might anticipate as the Church is renewed through bible reading and reflection, from the small community level outward to the whole Church?

Relevance for Church Renewal Today

Who Is My Neighbour

The constant need for fund-raising can turn the Church into a 'non-prophet' institution. In the business of raising money for the parish and schools, for the diocese and for many worthy causes, the pastor must be careful not to antagonize. Raising money becomes a critical priority. But in the parable of the talents, Jesus tells us to use *all* that we are given for the good of others: our time, our talent and our treasure. There are many Catholics who feel that if they give their (often excess) wealth to the Church they are excused from giving of their time or talent. But how sanctifying is such a limited return given to the Lord for all the Lord's continual blessings on us? We might also ask, do most Catholics

²⁷ See *Theology on Tap*, at <https://renewtot.org/en/>, accessed 1 June 2020.

²⁸ See *RENEW Africa*, at <https://pages.renewintl.org/renew-africa>, accessed 1 June 2020.

²⁹ *Creating a Culture of Encounter: A Guide for Joyful Missionary Disciples* (Plainfield: USCCB, 2019).

actually experience the hundredfold promised by Christ, by giving of themselves generously to others beyond family and friends?

Many will see the time given to their family as their return to the Lord. And charity does begin at home. But Jesus gave stern warning that, to the extent that we are able, our charity must not stop there.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:46–48)

If the goodness towards others demonstrated by church-going Catholics does not exceed that of those who have no faith, how can we hope to draw the next generation of young people to Sunday services?

Belief in a charity that extends to everyone as my neighbour is not always seen as connected with being a church-going Catholic. Many of these can be described as Old Testament Christians, focused on the ‘don’ts’ in life: the Ten Commandments. Christians must learn, beyond just observing the mostly negative commandments of the Old Testament law, to love as Jesus loved, observing the positive thrust of his one new command: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ (John 15:12). They should be motivated by his words and example, in sure hope of our heavenly reward. We are to learn to live as a community of saints, through striving to live a life filled with good deeds. And it would be false modesty to shy away from Jesus’ exhortation that such a life lays up treasure in heaven, since he promises to repay everyone according to their good deeds. ‘The measure you give will be the measure you get back.’ (Luke 6:38)

***We are to learn
to live as a
community of
saints***

Does the Church need to emphasize the enthusiasm that comes from faith-sharing more, as an antidote to the rugged individualism of modern society? In Small Christian Communities, one finds support in a broader variety of close relationships. The particular goodness and virtue of each member of the community edifies the whole community with the gifts and talents that the Lord bestows on his people. We are social beings, and are greatly edified and energized by open demonstrations of faith, whether at Lourdes and Fatima, or at Catholic youth conferences, or in the deep faith-sharing of Small Christian Communities.

Community members are drawn to a larger vision of what Christ would do to transform an increasingly secularised world. Their values

shift away from those sold to us through television and its fantasy world, and through consumer society and its version of the good life. Through constant and very meaningful contact with like-minded Christians, they can more easily see through the lure of the happiness that the world promises, to live at a higher level of happiness with that love, joy and peace that only the Spirit can bring (Galatians 5:22).³⁰

Small Christian Communities should be responsive to directives from the pastor of the parish within which they operate. It remains a principle enshrined in canon law that the pastor is responsible for all initiatives of groups within his parish who identify themselves as Catholic. At the same time, it must be recognised that the bishops at the Second Vatican Council showed a freedom in recognising the need to find new paths to the evangelization of diverse peoples and cultures worldwide, and to re-Christianize Western culture with which the Church was losing contact. Catholics needed to return to scripture and to interpret it in terms of new realities in the modern world. Lay Catholics needed to contribute from the perspective of their own expertise and life experience.

It scares some to think that Catholic laypersons are reading the Bible and discussing how to make Jesus' teachings come alive and produce the fruit of charity and good works in the world today. But Pope Francis has by his words and actions encouraged laypersons to a new boldness in addressing the needs of the Church in the modern world. Small Christian Communities must know that Francis has their back as they strive to make more real Christ's vision of the Kingdom, beginning in their own neighbourhoods and working outward. By the grace of Christ's Spirit in each of them, they do what little they can to make 'all things new' (Revelation 21:5).

Paraliturgies in Base Communities

Following the Synod on the Amazon, Sister Nathalie Becquart in an interview for *Crux* brought to my attention a whole new aspect of the situation in which the Church is being inculturated amid an extreme shortage of priests. Becquart is a member of the Congregation of Xavières and was the first woman to serve as the director of the National Service for Youth Evangelization and Vocations in France. Pope Francis

³⁰ See Robert Spitzer, *Finding True Happiness: Satisfying Our Restless Hearts*, volume 1, *Happiness, Suffering, and Transcendence* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015), 67–71; and 'The Four Levels of Happiness', *The Spitzer Center*, at <https://spitzercenter.org/what-we-do/educate/four-levels-of-happiness/>.

made her an auditor for last October's Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment, and last May he named her, along with three other women, as consultors to the Synod's General Secretariat, marking a historic first for the Church. And so I had to take notice of her remark that ordaining women to the diaconate may not be the way the Spirit is leading as a response to the shortage of priests. The Spirit may have something else in store for us that is already becoming a reality in mission situations. She suggests: 'As the challenge is de-clericalization, maybe there could also be another way, ... to imagine the Church with another ministerial system, less focused on ordination', noting that part of the current problem is the focus on ordained ministry.³¹

Not only in the Amazon region but wherever there is a shortage of priests, laypeople lead paraliturgical services in line with the Church's *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.³² When I was teaching theology at our St John's College in Belize in the 1990s, Bishop O. P. Martin asked me to write a booklet containing services that lay ministers could use when a priest was not available. The bishop gave



© Marcelo Sánchez Olazá @ Wikimedia Commons

Holy Week paraliturgy, Mexico

³¹ Christopher White, 'Pope Francis Using Synods to "Build Consensus" in Church, Participant Says', *Crux* (30 October 2019), available at <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/10/pope-francis-using-synods-to-build-consensus-in-church-participant-says/>, accessed 3 June 2020.

³² Available at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/CWC/Directory-SCAP.pdf>, 45.

his approval to my booklet and had copies of it printed. The booklet is entitled *Lay Ministers, Prayers*, and the first section is 'Para-Liturgical Services with Communion'. For this part I used several resources, including some from the Western Liturgical Conference of Canada and parts of an impressive Eucharistic prayer by Peter Fink that had been previewed in *America* magazine but not approved by the USCCB for use in the Mass. This thanksgiving prayer beautifully reviews God's gracious gifts to us throughout history. There is no pretence of celebrating a Mass by those who use such booklets, no simulation of a sacrament (canon 1379).³³ In Belize the booklet was used in a parish where we had thirty mission churches among the native Mayans. Throughout Latin America there are parishes covered by a single priest that serve much larger expanses, organized into Base Communities that hold paraliturgical services.

The effectiveness of sacraments has been greatly emphasized since the Council of Trent in response to those who denied the need for them. Does the missionary situation today call for re-evaluation of the efficacy of more fulsome paraliturgies, as an extension of the grace of the sacraments? These services achieve the goal of forming the faithful into a community that celebrates and lives out the reality of its being one body in Christ.

Looking Ahead

In 1964 Bob Dylan penned the classic tune 'The Times They Are a' Changin''. Few would dispute that there have been great changes in Western society and worldwide, in the turbulent 1960s and ever since. The Second Vatican Council called for a reading of the signs of the times and the adaptation of the Church to modern times. A shortage of priests is a fact of these times which needs to be addressed. Pope Francis would allow for rethinking some current Church teachings in the light of Christ's own emphases and the current needs of the Church. Francis wants a Church where true Catholics are distinguished by a practical love for all others and good works, with especial concern for the poorest and neediest among us.³⁴

Through baptism we have all become disciples of Christ and bearers of his Good News of the resurrection. It is time for the laity to proclaim

³³ See *Code of Canon Law*, available at <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/P52.HTM>.

³⁴ See Pope Francis, audience to representatives of the communications media, 16 March 2013.

‘We are Church’, with the encouragement of Pope Francis’ attack on clericalism.³⁵ The clergy in many countries are struggling to find their voice amid constant media coverage of the sexual abuse scandal. The attitude of separateness and superiority that has been instilled in much of the clergy may melt away in the light of all that the ordinary laity are doing: as a *priestly* people in how they celebrate their faith together; as a *prophetic* people, showing the way along new paths of Christian apostolate; and as a *kingly* people in leadership they exhibit, making the face of Christ visible in our society today.

Those called to the priesthood can be pleased and relieved to have the faithful in their parish as full collaborators, always open to guidance, but with their own insights into how the gospel is calling them to use their time and talent in the service of others. The Spirit would seem to be leading the Church into a future where, amidst a secularised society, people will again say, ‘See the Christians how they love’—how their faith, celebrated with deep effect each Sunday, strengthens them to let the world know that Christ is still powerfully present.³⁶ It is clear that they are in touch with the Spirit in themselves and built up by the Spirit in others, with the assistance of sharing in Small Christian Communities.

The Spirit seems to be renewing the Church not from the top down but from the untapped resources of all the baptized, who are Church. The call of Vatican II was prophetic, to have decreed that it was time for the laity to assume their rightful place as the centre, as the lifeblood of the Church. They are to live in constant hope that the community of saints that they work to build up on earth is the same community that will welcome them and lift them up amidst the eternal joys of heaven.

John Zuñez SJ has written more than fifty journal articles and 390 Wikipedia articles. He has taught in major seminaries, served as pastor, and at 83 is involved in both parish work and prison ministry.

³⁵ For the ‘We Are Church’ movement, see <https://www.we-are-church.org/413/index.php/aboutus/imwac-manifesto>.

³⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, chapter 39.

Spiritual companions connect here.



Seek and Find Guide

Conferences

Workshops

Webinars

Author Readings

Seminars

Open Houses

Presence Journal

Digital Magazines

Newsletters

Videos

Forums

Plug in to sdiworld.org

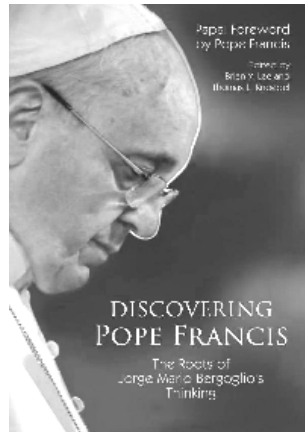


Spiritual Directors International

RECENT BOOKS

***Discovering Pope Francis: The Roots of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Thinking*, edited by Brian Y. Lee and Thomas L. Knoebel (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2019). 978 0 8146 8504 4, pp.272, \$29.95.**

This important collection of essays on the theological and philosophical backgrounds to the thought of Pope Francis begins with a short foreword written by the Pope, included both in the original Spanish and in English translation. Pope Francis introduces the book thus: 'This collection brings to the English-speaking world the richness of the ideas of the men and women who influenced my own spiritual, theological, and philosophical development' (p.xiii). Although one will search long and hard for references to the women in question, the book does indeed fulfil this task.



In the first years of his pontificate, there was a widespread tendency to portray Pope Francis certainly sympathetically, but often in a somewhat patronising way as the purveyor of folk wisdom and homely images that were in sharp contrast with the apparently more intellectually rigorous approach of his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI. More recently, though, a number of books have begun to appear that draw out his background, such as Massimo Borghesi's *The Mind of Pope Francis* (2018). Meanwhile, in Latin America, a positive industry is arising producing books in Spanish and Portuguese that investigate the Pope's theological positions.

This collection contributes eight chapters (plus an introductory one), from a broad spectrum of authors, that underline the most important factors in Pope Francis's thinking. To say 'factors', though, is to ignore the fact that most of the chapters actually deal with specific theologians or philosophers, since the relational dimension of thought is fundamental to Francis.

The first part of the book begins with the Latin American influences on the Argentinian Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Austen Ivereigh, author of probably the best biography in English of Pope Francis, looks at the experiences that have influenced Francis, especially his time as Jesuit seminary rector and as archbishop in Buenos Aires, and also the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007. All three feed into how Francis understands the role of the Church.

A second essay looks at the influence of the Argentinian version of liberation theology, the 'theology of the people', which allows for a more inductive approach, moving from the concrete experience of 'the people' (broadly equivalent to what liberation theology calls 'the poor') to an understanding of God at work in the world. The third essay in this section covers some of the same ground, while emphasizing the importance of the four principles on which Cardinal Bergoglio insisted in his archdiocese: unity prevails over conflict; time is more important than space; realities are more important than ideas; and the whole is greater than the parts.

The second part of the book looks at the European influences on Pope Francis. As is well known, in the mid-1980s he began to write a doctoral dissertation on Romano Guardini. Although he never managed to complete the work, the idea of 'polar opposition', which he found in Guardini and also in the work of a French Jesuit philosopher, Gaston Fessard, has been of vital importance to him. Oppositions are not contradictions, but forms of dynamism. To give a simple example, it is the opposition of foot and pavement that allows us to walk. Another example, which Pope Francis has referred to on a number of occasions, is a Latin epitaph applied first to St Ignatius in 1640: '*Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est*': 'not to be limited by the greatest and yet to be contained in the tiniest—this is divine'.

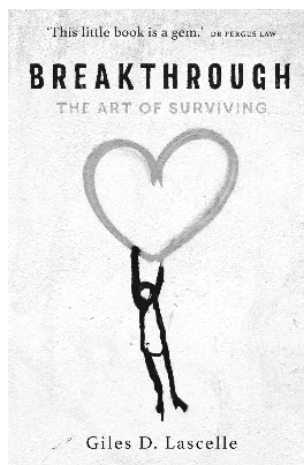
Three other thinkers are referred to, two of whom also had Jesuit connections. One is the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, especially in his understanding of the Church; this, as Susan Wood argues in her chapter, has influenced Pope Francis first in the oppositional way described above, second in understanding what it means to be a person of the Church and third in his honouring Mary as Mother of the Church. The second thinker is Hans Urs von Balthasar. For Francis his influence is to be found primarily in an appropriation of von Balthasar's attention to the centrality of beauty. This is rooted, though, for Francis in reality: in the films and literature and music he enjoys, but even more in the world and in people. The third influence mentioned is that of the founder of Communion and Liberation, Luigi Giussani, especially in his understanding of Christianity as an event. In this respect, it is telling that in his foreword Pope Francis quotes Benedict XVI, referring to being Christian as an encounter with an event.

Ending with a proposal as to what a theology of the people might look like in North America, this book brings a rich collection of insights and background to the key figures who have influenced Pope Francis, in his theology and philosophy, but also in how he has understood and sought to live out a vision of the Christian life that has its roots in the experience of God gained through the Spiritual Exercises.

Tim Noble

Giles D. Lascelle, *Breakthrough: The Art of Surviving* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2019). 978 1 9127 2614 1, pp.304, £8.99.

One in five adults in the UK has experienced some sort of abuse in childhood. Anyone working in the area of spirituality needs to be able to take account of this reality, to help his or her own reflection, pastoral practice or processes of recovery, healing and growth. The experience and aftermath of abuse touch people at central points where the languages of spirituality and psychology intersect and overlap in very particular ways, and where the reflections of survivors have an irreplaceable contribution to make. Giles D. Lascelle is an ordained minister, a highly experienced psychotherapist and a survivor: all three elements feed into this unique book. It is something of a cliché to suggest that a book should be compulsory reading, but clichés can carry truth: this book really should be read by anyone working with others at those levels of the self that are the realm of what we call ‘spirituality’.



In his introduction, Lascelle highlights a quality that makes this book distinctive, and distinctively helpful: his deliberate use of first-person language. Each of the main chapters contains a section headed ‘survivor resources’, and this is explicitly written using ‘we’ and ‘us’, giving it a power and directness that speaks to survivor and non-survivor alike. But Lascelle is also ready to bring his own experience—as a survivor, a minister and a psychotherapist—into those parts of the book which are setting out what we know and understand about both the impact of abuse and the processes by which survivors adapt and cope.

‘We’re not called “survivors” for nothing’, says a man in his 80s in an interview, and one of Lascelle’s key points is precisely that: to be an adult survivor of childhood abuse means that you have resources and strengths that have enabled you to live through what could have been utterly destructive experiences. The strategies and processes that helped ensure survival in childhood and after can become obstacles to healing if they persist unexamined, but their very persistence is a sign of potential strength.

Breakthrough is a resource for those working with their own experience, and for those accompanying them. It brings together, on the one hand, what psychological theory and psychotherapeutic practice provide by way of understanding at a more general level; and, on the other, the lived experience

of particular survivors. The variety of theoretical resources drawn on is wide, ranging from neurophysiology and brain structure to attachment theory and ideas about codependence. Crucially this material is presented in non-technical ways, with its relevance to lived experience made clear to an extent that I suspect only a survivor and therapist could achieve. Inevitably, not every professional will agree with every theoretical insight proposed, but your reviewer found himself more likely to be challenged into new ways of thinking than to get into arguments as to theoretical foundations.

Similarly, not all the pastoral and other church-related observations will be equally attractive to members of our different and varied Christian communities, but all of them are pertinent, and in challenging many unhelpful preconceptions of how Church can be a resource to survivors, they open up radical and positive possibilities. It should be noted that this book is not focused on abuse that has taken place in church settings—nor indeed in any particular settings, institutional or other—nor is it only attending to sexual abuse. Rather it is concerned with how early experience of any form of abuse can set in train modes of defensive behaviour which can become obstacles to fuller human living.

Too frequently, says Lascelle, the Church proclaims what he characterizes as the ‘not so good news’—that ‘God loves only those who show themselves worthy by believing the “correct” doctrines and behaving in the right ways’ (p. 78). When the Church does this, it hooks into one of the most damaging effects of abuse, namely my inability to see myself as having any intrinsic worth. ‘The Church has to start believing that Jesus actually meant what he said’ (p. 79), says Lascelle, pointing to such parables as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, as well as to Jesus’ teaching in the beatitudes, as indicating Jesus’ belief in the radically inclusive love of God—a love that Jesus exemplifies in his life. ‘He included all those the orthodox religion of the day excluded: sick people, sex workers, Samaritans (who were generally considered to be heretics), the hated tax-collectors, lepers, those labelled as sinners, and demon possessed.’ (p. 79)

The greater part of the book is concerned more with practical helps to recovery than with theology, and includes chapters on trauma, communication, boundaries and the restoration of relationships, among other topics. As noted above, these chapters bring together clinical/therapeutic theory and lived experience in powerfully helpful ways, grounding the theory in the stories of real people and locating what might have been no more than telling anecdotes in wider frameworks of understanding.

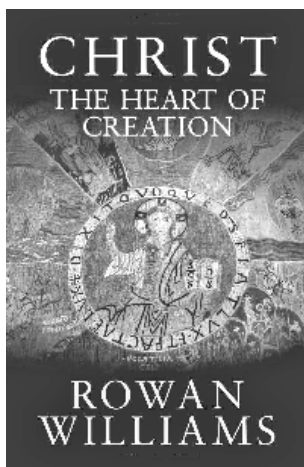
Lascelle offers the reader hope, sometimes explicitly rooted in his own Christian faith, but always hope in the context of open-eyed realism. Two last quotations may capture something of the flavour of his work, and so help

illustrate why I find this such a valuable book for those interested in, or working in the field of, spirituality: 'Recovery ... is as much about learning how to embrace and transform our pain and distress as it is about getting rid of it' (p.90); 'We don't break through to our destination; we break through to our journey' (p.29).

Brendan Callaghan SJ

Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). 978 1 4729 4554 9, pp.304, £25.00.

For readers of Christian theology, the old saying 'God plus the universe does not equal two', is alarmingly instructive. Alarmingly, because it should not need to be said—Christian discourse about God is not talk of an object or agent in the world. Unfortunately, a great deal of reflection on the nature and person of Christ, the category of theology usually called 'christology', has proceeded on the opposite assumption, taking it as read that the 'problem' of traditional christology is the bringing together of two incommensurate opposites. So, for example, much theological ink has been spent worrying whether Jesus had two minds or whether the miraculous constitutes evidential proof of divine status. Readers who recall John Hick's much discussed contention that 'to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square' will be familiar with the problem.¹



Rowan Williams has spent a theological lifetime urging Christians to think differently. The claim that the Second Person of the Trinity is incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth entails neither contradiction nor competition; God and humanity do not compete for the same logical space. But *Christ the Heart of Creation* is much more than a simple theological corrective. It constitutes a profound exploration of christology and its implications for wider Christian theology, especially theological talk of creation, demonstrating at every stage that it is precisely the paradoxical nature of incarnational doctrine—the freedom to speak truthfully of both finite and infinite, of

¹ John Hick, 'Jesus and the World Religions', in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 178.

divinity and humanity in Christ—which enables Christian understanding of creator and creation to develop

Taking his lead from his Anglican predecessor Austin Farrer, Williams sets out the difficulty just summarised, and moves quickly into a close and intricate analysis of Aquinas, whom he (boldly, as he confesses) defends from the influential critique of Richard Cross. What is promulgated is an incarnate Christ whose divine status makes him entirely lacking in the limitations applicable to an individual agent in the world. The model Aquinas develops is the ‘non-competitive relationship of human identity and divine subsistence’ (p.40), and it is this non-competition which enables the transformation of creation brought about in Christ, a transformation which is not constricted by the finite causal order through which it works.

This introductory discussion of Aquinas gives place to a broadly chronological structure. Some interesting reflections on New Testament historiography introduce the writings of Paul and others, and take us into the christological debates of the early Christian centuries. The positioning of the anti-Arian arguments which were to become ‘orthodox’ teaching is essential—if qualifying the divinity of the Word is ruled out, then,

... there is no way in which the Word can be fitted into a gap in the constitution of the human individual Jesus This means that it is the affirmation of unequivocal divinity for the Logos that mandates the affirmation of unequivocal humanity for Jesus. (p.63)

The content of incarnational theology is not the inconvenient coincidence of competing opposites, but the necessary result of refusing to circumscribe our understanding (or lack of understanding) of divinity and humanity in the relational encounter with Jesus Christ.

Williams moves on to trace this central insight through Cyril and then Chalcedon, through the two ‘Leontii’ (Leontius of Byzantium, and of Jerusalem) and Maximus the Confessor, whose terminological refinements close off possible confusions about the language of nature and hypostasis. The book then moves westwards with Scotus, Ockham, Luther and—at much more length—Calvin. A discussion of the inevitability or not of the incarnation places the latter very much in tune with Aquinas (no surprise in the light of recent Calvin scholarship):

The Incarnation is not some kind of fulfilment of a natural capacity, or is it the result of a logical necessity built into the nature of infinitude. It is the bringing into being of a specific and unique relatedness between finite and infinite agency. (p.144)

These historical analyses prepare us ‘to see classical Christology as the proper ground and focus of a whole theology of political and environmental

engagement', and in the examination that follows of Barth and especially of Bonhoeffer and his ethics, Williams confronts us with the difficult acceptance that 'what must die in the encounter with Christ is precisely not finitude or createdness but the delusion that we can live in denial of our finitude, our dependence on infinite agency' (p.191). Bonhoeffer's insistence that the Church must be understood as Christ in and as community offers a variation on the theme recurrent throughout the book: that the impossibility of restricting Christ by the language of individual agency is the very basis of the corporate and relational understanding of the incarnation by which it is redemptive not just of individuals but of creation as a whole.

Christ is 'the heart of creation' because there is,

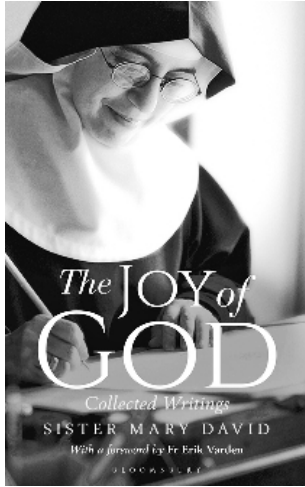
... no sense of 'one and another alongside' between Creator and creation, between Word and humanity in Jesus; just as there is no 'one and then another' in the relation between Father and Son. In neither context can we talk about items that could be added together. But this implies also that creation is most fully itself when it is aligned with, sharing in the kind of dependency which the Son has towards the Father. (p.223)

The final chapter summarises and repeats this central point: misunderstanding christology entails misunderstanding creation. Appropriate reflection on the nature of Christ can and must realign our notion of what it means to be created. Some insightful and even amusing final discussion of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein situate Williams's own intellectual preferences as a coda to his theological arguments.

This is a book one can properly call magisterial: it has so much to teach that no review, long or short, could do it justice. The breadth of Williams's own learning is beyond impressive, and the footnotes alone provide enormous stimulation for anyone wishing to deepen their theological explorations. Williams's command of the history of Christian thought is unrivalled, and the obvious comfort with which he inhabits the disparate surroundings of late antiquity, the high Middle Ages, the Reformation period and twentieth-century modernity is remarkable. The technicalities which can dominate histories of christology are generally kept to a minimum, and explanation is never far away. It will provide rich and rewarding matter for anyone interested in the central claims of Christian theology. That said, this study is not a quick read, nor should it be. Its offerings are too many to restrict to a single encounter—the reader will return again and again, and will continue to be impressed and improved by the patient yet passionate commitment to the reality of Christ in world and word alike. Rowan Williams is perhaps the most significant theologian writing in English today. Certainly this book does nothing to lessen the ambition of that claim.

Peter Groves

Mary David, *The Joy of God: Collected Writings* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019). 978 1472 9713 26, pp.208, £12.99.



The Joy of God is an introduction both to a rich personality and to an apparently simple but profound spirituality. In Erik Varden's intuitive foreword we meet Sr Mary David Totah, born in Philadelphia of Palestinian parents and brought up in Louisiana. She wrote of her relations:

Naturally talkative and hardworking, they radiate hospitality and warmth; they are a people at home in the world, and one of my family's enduring gifts to me was the appreciation of created values, an awareness that God is glorified in our use and enjoyment of all he has given.

She was intellectually gifted, and launched on a promising academic career when, in 1984, she visited a Benedictine monastery on the Isle of

Wight, St Cecilia's Abbey. She realised immediately that this was where she was to live out the invitation given in an experience some years earlier, at home in Louisiana:

... emptying the dishwasher and having this overwhelming and intense experience of the love of God, and a piercing joy From then on God was like a prism through which everything passed, enriching and intensifying life and filling it with wonder. (p.xiii)

She entered the community in May 1985, but was to live in it for only 32 years: in 2012 she was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, but continued to live community life as fully as possible, until her death on 28 August 2017, aged sixty. How she lived this final stage is told by the infirmarian who accompanied her through it, evidently with love and sensitivity.

Until that chapter the words in the book are Mary David's own—but selected, edited and organized by Sr Elizabeth Burgess, with help from other members of the community, including those who gave material from their personal collections of notes from Mary David, who was novice-mistress from 1996 until her death, and also prioress from 2008. That the editors did their work in the spirit of the writer herself is evident in the titles and structure. Joy was central to her experience of vocation and relationship with God: the three parts are 'Called to Joy', 'Journey to Joy' and 'Surrender to Joy'.

The first is a short but sustained piece of writing. Christian joy is given by God, a gift to be lived and communicated; the joy of communion in the one Body of Christ, joy in believing, joy in suffering, which is nothing other than the joy of love. The monk's joy comes from single-minded pursuit of

God, surrendering to God's will, which also brings liberation from slavery to self-will: freedom to be the people God calls us to be. This joy is not an emotion but a choice—to place one's happiness where it belongs, holding on to what is true and real whether we feel it or not. It is not determined by our state of life or situation; it lies deeper than consolation or desolation, pleasure or pain. It is a choice to which God calls us, rooted in the Spirit, in the certainty of truth.

Part two, 'Journey to Joy'—the longest, divided into eight sections—has a different approach. The subtitles follow the experience of searching for religious vocation, deciding to follow it, growing in it—the headings 'Freedom', 'Endurance', 'Mercy', 'Darkness', 'Light' suggest something of what this growth may entail. Each section is of about 15–17 pages, and begins with a series of short passages, evidently taken from instructions to novices or personal notes to individuals in particular situations, and are characterized by practical experience, realism, humour. Vocation, for example:

We mustn't think of our call as something programmed in advance by some Computer-in-the-sky. It's a dynamic thing, and it's important to keep the attitude of one who is called anew each day, of one who tries to be led by God at each moment. (p. 15)

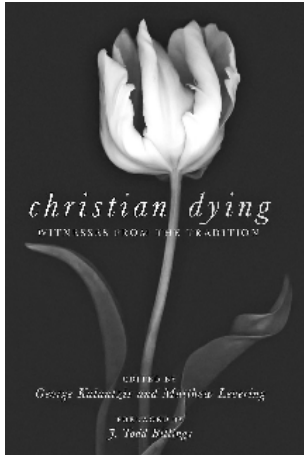
When we stop pursuing little gods and seek the living God, our emptiness is filled. (p. 21)

Then, at the end of the section, comes a longer passage, giving her own, developed thoughts. So, for example, she reflects on how the Lord keeps asking *What do you seek?*, and how many people have secondary goals: God is not enough for them, but they may want pleasure, power, money, fame, success in a career. She reflects also that St Benedict places the monk's search for God in a context of stability—paradoxically, moving from place to place can be a way of evading the real search, through which God meets us in everyday realities, 'persevering prayer and seeking in all spiritual weathers'—sickness, health, light, darkness, strength, weakness. Part three, 'Surrender to Joy', gives some sense of how she herself journeyed through the 'spiritual weathers' of her final years of suffering, to the grace of 'Acceptance-with-joy'.

This is a book to be read contemplatively. Often a sentence suddenly comes across as wise, true, opening up one's own thoughts and prayer. It could be a book for any Christian, but particularly for one thinking of, or beginning, religious life, because it comes to grips in a realistic way both with joy and positive values and with difficulties, temptations and setbacks. Sr Mary David's life and writing show how well she learned the life-affirming qualities that she saw as her family's gift to her.

Patricia Harriss CJ

***Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*, edited by George Kalantzis, Matthew Levering and J. Todd Billings (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018). 978 1 5326 3096 5, pp.284, \$34.00.**



St Teresa of Ávila once observed that the trouble with her fellow sisters was that they did not think enough about death. For those of us vulnerable to similar criticism, this book offers a happy remedy. The result of a colloquium hosted jointly by Wheaton College and Mundelein Seminary in March 2016, it consists of an ecumenical collection of twelve essays reflecting on death in the light of Christian faith. Its diversity of voices—including several prominent Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant scholars—creates a rich polyphony. While the perspectives diverge and even disagree, the collection as a

whole coheres. However morbid, its unifying theme is, after all, of universal applicability. Its essays are preceded by a poignant foreword from J. Todd Billings, a professor of reformed theology diagnosed in 2012 with incurable blood cancer, opening with the piquant reminder: ‘It is a stubborn, indisputable fact: everyone reading these words is dying’ (p.vii).

The theme of this book would make it apt for spiritual reading, perhaps especially on retreat. But a word of qualification is in order: the book is relatively academic in approach. While reflections *de arte moriendi*, or on the art of dying, have long been a part of popular Christian spirituality, reaching a certain apex in the late medieval and early modern period, this book does not quite belong to this genre. Apart from a few lighter pieces, most notably a lovely concluding reflection from Gilbert Meilander, the collection is dominated by academic articles that advance significant theological arguments. As specified by the subtitle, these pieces also engage with a wide array of ‘witnesses from the tradition’, from Irenaeus and Augustine to Luther and Barth, even as, in keeping with the specialisms of the contributors, patristic voices tend to predominate.

In an illuminative tour through the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, Brian Daley illustrates why the ‘immortality and immateriality of the human soul’ serve as an ‘*ontological key*’ to Nyssa’s ‘hope for transformation’. The perdurance of the soul renders ‘bodily resurrection thinkable’: without the continuity secured by its immortality, the life to come would belong to a human race other than our own (p.90). Nyssa’s vision of the transformation thereby effected is marvellously comprehensive: as the work of God in

creation was universal in scope, so must it be with salvation, lest an evil power outpace the divine goodness, which 'Gregory insists is impossible' (p.89).

In an intriguing comparison of Irenaeus and Augustine, John Cavadini presents the two patristic bishops as representative voices of rival theological positions concerning suffering and death. Whereas Irenaeus views these painful aspects of human experience as, to some extent, intrinsic to the divine pedagogy and the developmental process by which creation travails towards fulfilment, Augustine presents them as sheer consequences of the fall. The two positions are, in Cavadini's view, irreducibly complementary. Michel René Barnes provides a similarly synthetic survey of patristic insight, showing how Gregory of Nyssa's characterization of human existence as 'haunted by its own doppelganger, in which joy slides into sadness' (p.52), correlates with the principle behind Augustine's exhibition of all earthly happiness as premature and even false in *De civitate Dei*—'true beatitude' is found only in eternal life (pp.62–63).

In the volume's opening essay, Matthew Levering advances a distinctive interpretation of the book of Job, contending that the true underlying drama of the work concerns the prospect of Job's 'annihilation' in death. Only if death does not mean annihilation, for Job as, by implication, for every human being, may God be shown not to have turned his back on those 'whom he had made to be his people in an intelligent and loving communion' (p.39). 'The book of Job confronts the unbearable darkness of death', Levering indicates, 'and challenges God to defend it' (p.34). Only the divine delivery of life beyond the grave, he posits, suffices to show that God is not finally 'Job's abuser' (p.14). Levering's analysis delivers a richly compelling and evidently original exegesis of a biblical classic. It is nevertheless worth nothing that while Levering opts for the terminology of 'annihilation' rather than 'reprobation'—presumably to leave open the prospect that God allows the latter according to a postlapsarian dichotomy in God's salvific will (see Levering, *Predestination* [Oxford University Press: 2011])—the thrust of Levering's argument in this essay concerning God's steadfast provision of 'loving communion' would seem to apply to the prospect of 'reprobation' as well as 'annihilation'.

The collection also features a few fascinating engagements with twentieth-century thought. Cyril O'Regan places Heidegger in dialogue with Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edith Stein and Erich Przywara, all of whom, as relative contemporaries of the German existentialist, were affected by his philosophy of 'being-towards-death' (*Sein zum Tode*) even as they fashioned subtle yet profound theological responses to its nihilistic elements. Marc Cortez, in an essay designed to raise more questions than it answers, critically

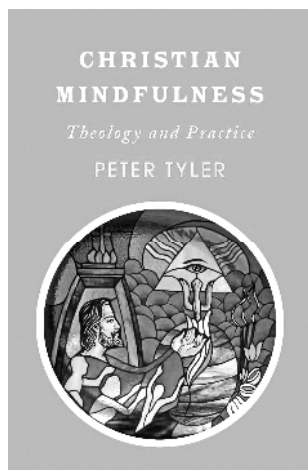
considers Barth's denial of the immortality of the soul. While Cortez applauds Barth's christological focus, the absence of an ontology that would ground continuous personal identity, as Daley identified in Nyssa, renders dubious the cogency of Barth's conclusions.

Perhaps the most brilliant piece in the entire collection hails from Mark McIntosh, whose essay on the divine ideas would alone justify purchasing this book. The divine ideas furnish a vital foundation for all theological reflection on death in so far as the idea of what we are meant to be in God not only grounds our present existence but, as the truest form of who we are, provides the eternal basis of our 'renewal and renovation' in spite of all degradation and loss (p.126). McIntosh does not leave matters there, however, but makes a full christological turn by identifying the Word (*Logos*) made flesh, crucified and risen, as the one in whom we dying Christians finally find our own embodied truth and risen life.

Christian Dying is far from comprehensive, nor does it claim to be. While it could have benefited from an even broader and more diverse engagement with the tradition, including, for instance, the literature of the *ars moriendi* or the mystics, its lacunae do not detract from its achievement. It is not every day that one finds a volume of largely academic essays by historical theologians that bears deep spiritual and pastoral pertinence. We who are dying are in their debt.

Henry Shea SJ

Peter Tyler, *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2018). 978 0 3340 5671 3, pp. 194, £19.99.



Peter Tyler, professor of pastoral theology and spirituality at St Mary's University in London, takes the reader on a journey toward intimacy with God with this comprehensive yet compact publication. The book is in six chapters: an investigation into mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition, the mindful psychology of the desert Mothers and Fathers, sixteenth-century Spanish spiritual masters, the contemplative life of Thomas Merton, and the Indian tradition. There are practical exercises at the end of each chapter in which we are invited to put the theology of Christian mindfulness into practice. Tyler heads

most of the chapters with his own poems, highlighting different elements of his subject.

At the start, we are gripped by the author's own personal encounter with a Buddhist laywoman while training with the Jesuits in the UK. They exchange ideas and share in each other's cultures. It is a reminder that our lives can change when we see beyond the limits of our own knowledge and experience. While looking to the Buddhist meaning of mindfulness in ancient texts and giving some modern context, Tyler opens our eyes to see 'heartfulness' as a more suitable word, especially in the Christian tradition. We realise for ourselves through the first exercise that feelings and emotional qualities can arise during stillness, rather than being a purely cognitive experience.

Intriguingly, we come to understand the desert Mothers and Fathers as early practitioners of heartfulness or mindfulness. The reader may be surprised by their learning and wisdom, for example, in how they turned away from extremes and found balance through a life of stability and silence. It seems that Evagrius of Pontus still has much to teach us today through his understanding of *acedia*, a listlessness or restlessness in the spiritual life. He says that being faithful and staying with this challenging experience, in the face of endless distractions, will eventually lead us to a breakthrough. The accompanying exercise consists of a detailed 'body scan', what Tyler sees as the bread and butter of mindfulness, and can be thought of as a new adventure in attending to and getting to know our bodies.

Tyler draws an interesting parallel between what Spanish writers call 'mental prayer' and mindfulness. García Jiménez de Cisneros, for example, speaks of observing the rise and fall of thoughts as a means leading to the quietening of the heart. Francisco de Osuna talks of a 'tasty knowing' that is direct and experiential, and centred on the person of Christ. The author deals skilfully with St Teresa of Ávila, who compassionately counselled others to be watchful of the 'wild horses' of the mind and turn inward to the heart. Refreshingly, she pointed to fruits of mindfulness outside prayer, such as the qualities of love of neighbour, detachment and humility at the heart of religious life. Exercises such as awareness of the sacredness of the breath and the repetition of a sacred word or phrase reiterate this heartfulness.

The author enlightens us with a clear picture of Thomas Merton's call to silence. From an experience of nihilism as a younger man to his growth as a contemplative monk, Merton developed an eye-opening oneness with other people and religions. It is particularly interesting to the encounter with Zen that renewed Merton's definition of contemplation. His 'mindful

eye' enabled him to see God in all things, whether taking photographs of nature or engaging in a passionate concern for the environment. The helpful accompanying exercise is a 'one-pointed' heart devotion that nurtures a relationship between our heart and God's heart. We can also experience a 'mindful clarity of heart', for example, through the Ignatian method (Ignatian contemplation) that brings a gospel scene alive within our imagination.

Tyler seamlessly immerses the reader in the rich Indian spiritual tradition through the life of Rabindranath Tagore, poet and Nobel laureate, and his explanation of the fourfold stages of life. These move from a high degree of openness to mindfulness as children, finding meaning in the transcendent during midlife, a later loosening of bonds and 'a mindful end' or final renunciation. We learn that both Indian and Christian traditions embrace in love and surrender to the creator. In the profound words of Tagore, 'Death is just another name for what you call life'. An exercise on the bliss of the Lord invites us to step into the shoes of our Indian brothers and sisters by attending to the seven chakras or energy centres of the body. We are also invited to feel the touch of Christ in each energy centre and enter into a prayerful conversation with Him.

Tyler is convincing in establishing mindfulness, through much research and reflection, as an essential part of Christian prayer that can lead to a stronger relationship with God. He shows the depth of mindfulness in the Christian tradition and empowers readers to integrate it confidently into their lives. It is worth noting there are sections of the book which are quite academic, for example, when looking at the meaning of mindfulness from Buddhist sources and in the Spanish translations of some words and phrases. This approach may suit a student interested in practising Christian mindfulness or perhaps a person who wishes to begin teaching it.

Christians will feel at home with the book's consistent emphasis on a mindfulness in action—in service of neighbour and suffering humanity and in line with St Teresa of Ávila's call to 'good works'. The practical exercises have the potential to develop a heightened awareness of the present moment. They can, in the spirit of St Ignatius of Loyola, lead to a contemplative gaze of God's love and a desire to give love more freely. *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice* is a helpful resource, a book we can dip into and out of, and one that can help expand our minds and hearts.

Gavin Murphy

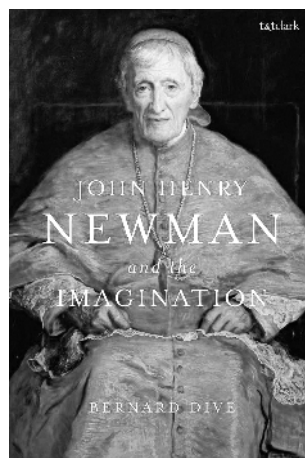
Scott MacDougall, *More than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury T. and T. Clark, 2018). 978 0 5676 5988 0, pp.304, £29.99.

Bernard Dive, *John Henry Newman and the Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury T. and T. Clark, 2018). 978 0 5675 8166 2, pp.x+464, £150.00.

Theologies of the Church as ‘communion’ are among the dominant ecclesiologies of our time. However, views about the meaning and nature of communion and its ecclesial and theological implications differ widely among the proponents of this ecclesial model. Scott MacDougall’s book is strong in several areas. It offers a background history of recent developments of the idea of the Church as communion. Its critique of the work of John Zizioulas and John Milbank is persuasive. The central chapters propose an attractive alternative vision of the Church as communion which, going beyond current communion ecclesiologies, reimagines the Church in the light of its eschatological dimensions.

MacDougall envisages the final *basileia* (he believes the English ‘kingdom’ is misleading) in the form of a fourfold ‘communion’: between human beings and God, among human beings, within individual human beings, and between humans and the non-human environment. The Church of the present is a real, but always incomplete and flawed, anticipation of that final fulfilment. This book sets out a vision of salient aspects of the life of such a Church and although it is never easy reading, it holds rewards for the persevering, who are concerned about the current health of theology and the Church.

An earlier book by Bernard Dive, *Through the Year with Newman*, was a collection of excerpts from Newman’s writings organized according to the Church’s calendar and significant dates in Newman’s life. His latest book focuses on the imagination and its relation to other dimensions of human life and thought, topics which engaged Newman’s mind and pen constantly.

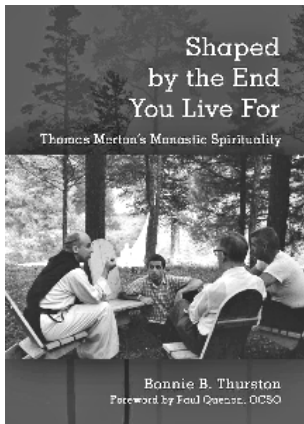


The book's organization is both chronological and thematic. Each chapter focuses on writings from a particular period in Newman's life arranged in chronological order, while also elucidating his views on imagination in relation to Aristotle, conscience and beauty (part 1), the Church, Christ and the pursuit of truth (part 2), faith and civilization (part 3), and the 'visions' underpinning and animating Newman's own life (part 4).

Dive's method is to provide a commentary on selected passages from Newman's writings from each period of his life in the form of biographical information, summary, paraphrase, analysis and intertextual material. The result is a well-informed, very detailed, largely descriptive commentary on Newman's thinking on these topics. On the negative side, readers may well be put off by the amount of précis and needless repetition in Dive's commentary, which could have been cut by judicious editing. And the recommended price for the hardback (£150.00) is outrageous.

David Lonsdale

Bonnie Thurston, *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton's Monastic Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2020). 978 0 8146 8807 6, pp.192, £15.99.



Where does one start with Thomas Merton? Here would be a very good place. Merton wrote so much himself, and there has been so much written about him, that it is helpful to have a good starting point. This book is a heartfelt commendation of Merton, and as such it is also a commendation of monastic spirituality because, as the author points out, it is impossible to understand Merton without facing the obvious fact that he was a monk. The book is a powerful apologia for the idea and ideals of monasticism, to which I have always been

temperamentally drawn, just as I have been drawn to the idea and the ideals of the Catholic Church. Experience of both is more mixed, but the idea and the ideals remain unsullied. This is a view that many others may share.

The book contains ten chapters: 'Merton's Call to the Monastic Life'; 'The Temptation of "Holier Than Thou"'; 'Merton's Presuppositions'; 'Monastic Life: Fleeing the World'; 'Obedience and Silence'; 'Monastic Solitude'; 'Merton's Principles of Prayer' (in two parts); 'The End You Live For'; and,

finally, 'Merton On Saying "Yes": Creative Consent'. I shall elaborate a little on just one of these, as a taster.

Chapter 3 is, by the author's own admission, 'dense'. She articulates three basic tenets of Merton's thought. First,

Merton reverses our usual way of knowing Our discovery of God is ... God's discovery of us He comes down from heaven and finds us We only know Him in so far as we are known by Him and our contemplation of Him is a participation in His contemplation of Himself. (p.40)

Second, there is the notion of true and false self: 'Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self On the other hand our True Self "is hidden in the love and mercy of God".' (p.42) Finally, monastic life is profoundly connected to the world. The end of Merton's renowned autobiography says:

No matter who you are or what you are, you are called to the summit of perfection: you are called to a deep interior life perhaps even to mystical prayer, and to pass the fruits of your contemplation on to others. And if you cannot do so by word, then by example. (p.49)

The book is replete with reiteration—but if something is worth saying at all, it is worth repeating. Copious footnotes abound on every page. Do you remember those? To me this makes perfect sense given the sheer mass of source material available, and I for one welcome the resurrection of this now apparently archaic system of scholarly notation.

The style is described as 'conversational' by Christine M. Bochen. The author uses bracketed comments to give her personal opinions, but I think that is the extent of this 'conversational' style. The writing is accessible, perhaps deceptively so given the deep material under consideration. I am reminded of a college chaplain interviewing me for university and asking me which theologians I had read. As a raw, Welsh country boy I had only read C. S. Lewis, and said so. The chaplain retorted that C. S. Lewis was fine, *but that he was so clear* and as such was not typical. How right he was! Happily, I can report that, in my view, Thurston falls into the C. S. Lewis category of theological writer. Like Lewis, she seems to be able to grasp concepts and articulate them. The subject matter she is dealing with is quite heavy stuff and she helps lighten the load for us.

I commend this book as a little gem; perhaps even a 'pearl of great price'.

Alan Salmon

The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

***The Furrow*, founded in 1950, is a pastoral journal which publishes articles on:**

- ***Liturgy, prayer and spirituality***
- ***Sexuality and social justice***
- ***Reform of Church structures, including the role of women***
- ***Contemporary dialogue between faith and culture***

Features include: *Notes for preaching; Chronicle of current events; serious book reviews*

Editor: Ronan Drury, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, to whom editorial correspondence should be addressed.

Rates: Single copy: €2.75 (£1.90) (+ VAT €37), postage €0.95; Annual Subscription: Republic of Ireland €50.00. Northern Ireland £35.00. Great Britain €58.00/£38.00. Foreign €65.00/\$75.00/Stg£45.00; Student rate: €33.00/\$43.00/£28.00

Subscriptions are payable in advance to:

The Secretary, *The Furrow*, St Patrick's College,
Maynooth, co. Kildare, Republic of Ireland.

Telephone: 7083741, fax: 7083908 (national code 01,
international code +353 1).

E mail: furrow.office@may.ie



Back numbers and advertising rates are available from the Secretary.