

# THE WAY

*a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits*

*January 2021*

*Volume 60, Number 1*

## PILGRIMS AND MIGRANTS



© Andrey Popov

**Foreword** 5–6

***The Gift of a Stranger: Forcibly Displaced People and Hope-Gifting*** 7–20

*Sacha Bermudez-Goldman*

Hope is, according to St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, one of the abiding virtues. Yet, in the face of the challenges of human suffering, it may be difficult to sustain a hope-filled attitude. Here Sacha Bermudez-Goldman outlines a spirituality of hope drawn from the experience of those forcibly displaced from their homes and homelands.

*Thinking Faith*

***Saving Liberalism from Itself*** 21–27

*Damian Howard*

Last October Pope Francis wrote a major letter, *Fratelli tutti*, as a further contribution to Catholic social teaching. In an article reprinted from the British Jesuits' online journal, *Thinking Faith*, Damian Howard offers an initial response to the new social and political challenges addressed by the Pope, in the spirit of the saint, Francis, whose name he chose.

*Our Common Home*

***To Care for the Garden: From a Pandemic to an Ecological Election*** 28–38

*Eric Jensen*

One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to make many people more aware of the natural world and the place of humanity within it. Starting with the Genesis creation story, of man and woman placed by God in a garden, Eric Jensen considers how the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises can be adapted to encourage and sustain a deeper ecological concern.

***Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled*** 39–46

*Kevin Leidich*

In his ministry, as recorded in the Gospels, Jesus does not hide from his closest followers the fact that they will face troubled times in their attempts to live out his message. In this article Kevin Leidich draws on the thought of the late Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco to present seven strategies for Christians to employ in facing such times.

***The Trinity, the Virtues and More***

47–56

*Robert E. Doud*

It is often said that Trinity Sunday is the most difficult feast of the Church's year for preachers. A regular contributor to *The Way*, Bob Doud, has spent a lifetime thinking about the implications of this area of Christian doctrine. In dialogue with Karl Rahner, whose thought inspires him, Doud considers something of what it means to profess a Trinitarian faith.

***Vocations Animation as Witnessing***

57–67

*P. Y. Kipro-Mbaaga*

P. Y. Kipro-Mbaaga is a diocesan priest who works as spiritual director in a seminary in Kenya, and has been part of a 'vocations animation' team, helping young people to discern where God is calling them in their lives. He explains here the thinking that underpins this work, emphasizing the need of those involved to offer witness from their own experience.

***A Pilgrim People: A Disturbing Image***

69–77

*George B. Wilson*

When considering the nature of the Church, the Second Vatican Council favoured the image of a 'pilgrim people', very different from the previous model of a 'perfect society'. While approving of this change of outlook, George Wilson argues that its implications have still to be fully appreciated. What does it mean to belong to a group that is forever 'on the way'?

*Spirituality and Living****Locked-Down Prayer***

79–88

*Ian Coleman*

The current pandemic has introduced us all to the language of 'lockdown', and necessitated finding new patterns of living and working. For a person of faith, this is likely to challenge existing habits of prayer as well. Ian Coleman describes how he has responded to this challenge, drawing on elements from a variety of Christian spiritual traditions.

***A Story of Our Time: A Psycho-Spiritual Interpretation of the Prodigal Son***

89–99

*Brendan Cook*

One of the reasons that the parables of Jesus have proved so enduringly popular is that they can be endlessly reinterpreted in the light of the concerns and patterns of thought of every age. Here Brendan Cook offers a reading of the parable of the Prodigal Son shaped by the findings of contemporary psycho-spiritual storytelling.

## ***Walking the Spiritual Exercises: Praying with Scripture on the Pilgrim Trail*** 100-110

*Susan S. Phillips*

Two spiritual disciplines which have become very widely practised over the last half-century are the Ignatian Exercises and pilgrimage, in particular along the Camino trails in northern Spain that lead to Santiago de Compostela. Susan S. Phillips describes a recent group experience that proved fruitful in uniting these two practices.

### **Book Reviews**

**Paul Nicholson** on the art of spiritual direction

**Susan Hysten** on gender and sexuality in the New Testament

**Anne Inman** on the ageing process

**John Pridmore** on C. S. Lewis

**Peter Tyler** on the wisdom of Edith Stein

**Anthony Nye** on pastoral ministry

**Peter Davidson** on the art of the Jesuit mother church in Rome

### **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 Ignatian themes, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We are grateful to María Figueroa Sánchez for permission to use the images on pp.9, 13 and 18, and to Michael Torevell for that on p.90. 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**

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

*Papal documents may be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)*

## FOREWORD

We go seeking a city that we shall never find.<sup>1</sup>

THIS LINE FROM JOHN MASEFIELD'S POEM 'The Seekers' might suggest a despairing cry on an impossible quest. Yet the poem as a whole speaks rather of an inspiring ideal, the dream of the City of God, that draws the eponymous seekers onwards despite all the hardships they encounter. Many of the contributors to this issue of *The Way* consider the journeys of those similarly drawn onwards, by choice or by necessity, whether on pilgrimage or in seeking a better and fuller life.

If the pursuit of a distant goal is not to curdle into despair, the theological virtue of hope is needed. In our opening article Sacha Bermudez-Goldman describes what that virtue looks like when encountered in the perhaps unlikely context of refugees forcibly displaced from their homes and homelands. The gospel story suggests that, in being forced to flee to Egypt as an infant with his parents to escape King Herod's persecution, Jesus himself shared this experience. Certainly he did not hide from his disciples the likelihood that they too would suffer as a result of their decision to follow him, and Kevin Leidich spells out a range of strategies by which such suffering may be confronted with hope.

During 2020 the whole world shared in a strange and unanticipated journey, into a global pandemic and the measures taken to combat it. The latest encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, draws lessons of human solidarity from this time, as Damian Howard relates. Eric Jensen, too, reflects on the wider implications of COVID-19, anticipating a deeper ecological concern as a possible, and desirable, outcome of the experience of recent months. He shows how the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola might help promote this concern. The Exercises are just one of the elements of the Christian spiritual tradition on which Ian Coleman draws in arriving at a pattern of personal prayer to sustain him during the periods of lockdown decreed as a response to the pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> John Masefield, 'The Seekers', in *The Collected Poems of John Masefield* (London: Heinemann, 1930), 62.

Journeys need not be forced upon the traveller; freely chosen expeditions may be equally life-enhancing, as the current renewed interest in pilgrimage demonstrates. Susan S. Philips joined a group walking the Camino de Compostela. Her experience of making the Exercises along the way profoundly influenced this particular pilgrimage. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the errant young man, having come to his senses, freely chooses to return to his father's house. Brendan Cook considers the dynamics of such a journey from a psycho-spiritual perspective. When the Second Vatican Council wanted to move away from a static, overly hierarchical understanding of the nature of the Church, its preferred image was that of a pilgrim people. As George Wilson shows here, this allows for a radically open idea of the ways in which the Church relates to the world that it passes through on its journey to God, an idea with which John Masefield would certainly have empathized.

Recognising a God of three persons allows for an understanding that even within the Deity there is room for travel or movement, a concept contained in the theological term *perichoresis*, derived from dance. In his wide-ranging and autobiographical exploration of the implications of espousing a Trinitarian faith, Bob Doud quotes Thomas Merton's definition of prayer as an invitation to join 'the dance of the Lord in emptiness'. When such an invitation is taken as the basis of a whole way of life, it is recognised as a vocation. An African seminary professor, P. Y. Kipro-Mbaaga, gives an account of what it is like to accompany those setting out on such a life journey.

Although 'The Seekers' ends with a focus on 'the hope of the City of God at the other end of the road', its picture of the conditions encountered on the way is rather bleak. This may resonate well with much of the experience of the last year. Yet many of the journeys described in the essays gathered here are sustained in hope, not simply by the anticipation of the goals they are seeking, but by gifts encountered in the journeying itself. In particular, they are supported by the companionship of fellow-travellers. Setting out on the journey of a new year, this may serve as a useful reminder for God's pilgrim people.

**Paul Nicholson SJ**  
**Editor**

# THE GIFT OF A STRANGER

## Forcibly Displaced People and Hope-Gifting

*Sacha Bermudez-Goldman*

**B**ETWEEN 2008 AND 2011, I served as director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Sydney, Australia. As part of our advocacy efforts, our staff spent a good deal of time giving talks to various groups—schools, parishes, other organizations—about the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in our country. One of the hardest groups I had the privilege of addressing during that time was a class of kindergarten students at a parish school, whose teacher was a friend of mine. It was hard because I needed to find a simple way of presenting complex issues to these very young children and also because the last thing I wanted to do was to traumatise them in any way!

We talked for a little while about conflict and war, and together we ‘brainstormed’ about all the things that refugees had to leave behind, only being able to grab in a hurry whatever little they could carry in their hands and on their shoulders as the sound of fighting quickly approached their villages. Most of the children seemed to ‘know’ about war, or at least had heard what a war was like, and could actually imagine themselves grabbing that special toy or pet or blanket as they rushed out of their homes in their parents’ arms. After a little while, a pensive five-year-old boy, who had been eyeing me with great intensity all along, raised his hand and asked me: ‘Does that mean their houses were all destroyed, that they won’t have a place to go back to?’ I replied that in most cases this would be so; that some of them might not return until years later, or perhaps never again. The image of children his age without a home must have struck a deep chord because he said: ‘then I’ll talk to my parents when I get home tonight and will ask them if some of those children can come and live with us’. A wonderful example of solidarity!

Sadly, one little boy who never made it back to his home country was Alan Kurdi. On the morning of 2 September 2015, the world woke up to images of the lifeless body of this three-year-old toddler—one of at least twelve people (including his five-year-old brother) who drowned attempting to reach the Greek island of Kos, en route from the northern Syrian town of Kobani. Of Kurdish background, Alan and his family were Syrian refugees, fleeing the tragic war still raging in that country today. The picture showed the little boy, wearing a bright red T-shirt and shorts, washed up on a beach, lying face down in the surf not far from one of Turkey's most fashionable beach resorts. The image, depicting the full horror of the human tragedy unfolding on the shores of Europe (and other parts of the world), and encapsulating the extraordinary risks refugees take to reach the West, went 'viral' on Twitter within hours of first appearing under the hashtag #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik ('humanity washed ashore'). Alan's father survived the shipwreck. I cannot begin to imagine the grief he must have felt at the loss of his two small children and his inability to save them; wanting to save them—from war and persecution—was what had impelled him to embark on the extremely perilous journey across the sea in the first place.

Alan's tragic death is just one example of the pain, suffering and even death that face many forcibly displaced people during their displacement journeys. Much has been written about their plight, but sadly in most cases the focus has not been on trying to find ways to alleviate their suffering but rather on the so-called burden they place on the resources of countries that feel forced to open the door to them. Some people even consider them a threat to their way of life, mostly because they see forcibly displaced peoples as 'different'—in culture, race, religion, traditions.

Little or hardly anything is ever reported about the benefits and gifts that the forcibly displaced bring to their new countries. But what if forcibly displaced peoples were to be viewed as assets instead of a threat or liability? What if, because of what they have gone through, forcibly displaced people could in fact be bearers of one of the greatest gifts our world needs today: the gift of hope? I explore here some of the characteristics of a spirituality of hope in the forcibly displaced, and then suggest some 'lessons of hope-gifting' that we can learn from them—lessons that we *need* to learn to overcome the pervading sense of despair and hopelessness in our world today.

### ***In Need of Hope***

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, in the world today we are becoming more and more a *depressed community*.<sup>1</sup> The Dominican theologian Albert Nolan speaks of our times as the ‘age of despair’.<sup>2</sup> We look everywhere for people, things and experiences that might help us overcome this sense of hopelessness, but to no avail. Yet, a place to which most people have not yet turned is the lives of the forcibly displaced; while, for those of us who have had the privilege to be invited into their lives, this is in fact an obvious place to look. I would like to argue that the best response we can offer to the hope that forcibly displaced people have in us—as developed nations of ‘the North’ and sought-after places of asylum—is the gift of hospitality and solidarity, and that, through this welcome, forcibly displaced people offer us a great gift in return: the discovery and increase of our own hope, through their spirituality of hope.



© María Figueroa Sánchez

<sup>1</sup> According to the Australian Psychological Society, significant levels of depression affect approximately 20 per cent of Australian adults either directly or indirectly during their lifetime (Vijaya Manicavasagar, ‘A Review of Depression Diagnosis and Management’, *InPsych*, 34/1 [February 2012]). Its prevalence is similar elsewhere in the world, and worst among women and the socially and economically disadvantaged (World Federation for Mental Health, *Depression: A Global Crisis* [Ocoquan: World Federation for Mental Health, 2012], 9).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Nolan, *Hope in the Age of Despair* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2009), 3.

Broadly, spirituality is understood in terms of experiencing and responding to what is most profound in human persons: what brings up our deepest emotions and engages our conscience at that level. We see things through a certain framework or perspective which has become our habitual way of interpreting all reality. Then, because we see things like this, we habitually act in a particular way. These two things, our vision or *outlook* on life and the response or *way* of life which flows from it, make up what we call our spirituality. Defining spirituality in this way allows powerful images to arise connected to the lives of forcibly displaced people, which in turn speak of several possible *spiritualities of displacement*: a spirituality of sacrifice, of the desert, of the cross, of gratitude, of hope.<sup>3</sup>

### ***A Spirituality of Hope in Displacement***

A first and fundamental aspect of the spirituality of hope in forcibly displaced people is that they must literally hope against all hope. They must continue hoping even when there are no visible reasons to hope anywhere around them. Living in extremely harsh environments, in many instances lacking the basic requirements of water, food and shelter, they often struggle to survive. Sometimes they do not. Particularly vulnerable, as we would expect, are the elderly and younger children. Despite acknowledging the darkness, bleakness and the apparent hopelessness of their situation, forcibly displaced people must continue 'walking', placing all their trust in the God of life, even when death is all around them. Their hope is then based on the *possibility of the impossible*, of believing that the impossible does happen.

Secondly, a spirituality of hope in the forcibly displaced is characterized by a great deal of paradox. This paradoxical character of hope points to the possibility that realities which, in principle, should be bearers only of damnation and death can become bearers of life and blessing: it is possible to love our greatest enemy, who by a twist of fate becomes our neighbour in a refugee camp, who offers a piece of bread or a blanket that saves the life of our dying child. It is possible that a life could be turned upside down and transformed as the fruit of an encounter—a child soldier who refuses to kill his brother and thus begins a journey of healing and reintegration.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Groody, 'Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People', *Theological Studies*, 70 (2009), 302–306.

Thirdly, this must be a spirituality of hope based on belief in a God who never abandons forcibly displaced people despite all evidence to the contrary: a God who is present in their extreme suffering—because God has lived it—and who will somehow make sense of that suffering, even if there does not seem to be a conceivable way for this to happen; a God who always finds new ways to come and meet them, who never gives up on them and never stops caring for them.

And fourthly, this spirituality of hope must be based on companionship, solidarity and relationship: forcibly displaced persons may not survive on their own. And if they do, they may never recover from the trauma they have experienced, for invariably their survival will have been at the cost of someone else's loss. Hope that is shared is hope that is nourished and nurtured, especially when it is the last thing that is left.

The hope of forcibly displaced people is a hope that has had to survive the unsurvivable. And this is the reason that their testimony of hope is so credible. The key in the proclamation of hope does not reside in the consistency or the quality of its content, nor even in the way that it is transmitted, but in the credibility of the witness. In the case of forcibly displaced people, this credibility means that their hope can simply be expressed through a smile—words are not needed—because someone who has lived through hell and can still smile is an icon of hope.

### ***Lessons of Hope-Gifting***

Mark Raper, former international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (1990–2000), was asked whether JRS staff and volunteers brought hope to a refugee camp, or whether they found it there already:

The richness of human spirit that we discover among refugees, including a vibrant hope, is always a surprise .... While there may be no rational grounds for believing that what a refugee longs for will actually come about, we also find hope .... Hope is a virtue grounded in suffering. It is a grace which gives strength. Hope is a promise that takes root in the heart and is a guide to an unknown future .... Hope is what enables us to live fully in the present moment .... The refugees have a message that our world needs to hear [and] learn from.<sup>4</sup>

I like to think of this message as the lessons of hope-gifting that the forcibly displaced can teach us—lessons that are offered to us, by them, as gifts. Here are some of these lessons.

<sup>4</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service, *Everybody's Challenge: Essential Documents of the Jesuit Refugee Service, 1980–2000* (Rome: JRS, 2000), 86.

*Hope in the Lord, Jesus*

Dostoevsky wrote: ‘life without hope is impossible’.<sup>5</sup> The hope of forcibly displaced people of Christian faith is in Jesus, in whom they see their own lives reflected. From the beginning of his life, Jesus had to flee into exile with his family to Egypt, escaping persecution and death. As they look at Jesus’ stepfather, a poor tradesman, and his teenage mother embarking on a terribly perilous journey, many survivors of forced displacement see themselves. And that enduring memory shapes how they see themselves, as people who profess the Christian faith, in a way nothing else can.

Jesus’ incarnation is also a story of displacement, of God’s migrating from a remote existence of divinity towards humanity, to be part of human history, not in an abstract manner, but in the concrete experience of establishing a dwelling in our midst (God is always with us) in time and space. This choice for *us* would end in Jesus’ passion and death. For many forcibly displaced people of faith, it is this connection with the paschal mystery that gives them the greatest of hopes, for through it their suffering is united with Christ’s suffering and finds its meaning. They affirm that their hope is sustained by their belief that God always fulfils God’s promise: ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (Matthew 28:20). *God does not abandon us*. Some people might wonder how survivors of forced displacement are still able to say this despite all they have suffered. But they will say that God has not been the cause of their suffering, humanity has.

*Listening*

Christine, a Sudanese refugee in the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, wrote:

The life of a refugee is not easy. What I would say to people who work with refugees is that they should be patient enough to listen with care to what we have to say. Many refugees feel their needs and views are not considered.<sup>6</sup>

From the very beginning, listening has been a practice intrinsic to the exercise of hospitality. In attentive listening—listening with the heart—we are recipients not only of peoples’ experiences but also of their suffering and joys, and of their own lives.

<sup>5</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 1986), 305.

<sup>6</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service, *War Has Changed Our Life, Not Our Spirit: Experiences of Forcibly Displaced Women* (Rome: JRS, 2005), 53.

Often, survivors of forced displacement are asked to share their stories, to reveal their identities, their origins, their personal journeys, so that relief workers may get an approximate idea of what they have lived through, of what their needs might be. Many forcibly displaced people would say that through the gift of others' listening to their stories, they have felt transformed from needy strangers into people who no longer felt so distant, to people who felt welcomed. At the same time, the 'listeners'—companions and supporters—have often expressed how the words and stories of the forcibly displaced have also changed them: how, somewhere along this process, their way of listening changed. They stopped asking so many questions and taking so many notes, and became more comfortable with the silence, which often expressed more than any words could. And then they began to ask different questions, whose answers, it seemed, they needed to hear as much as the refugees needed to say them: *How were you able to survive such pain? What sustained you? Where did your strength come from?*

Listening is an art that must be developed. It requires the full and real presence of people to each other. When done well, listening can also provide a healing service to others and, from this point of view, every human person has the capacity to be a healer. In listening with attentive interest, to someone's joys and sorrows, pleasures and anxieties, people discover the wounds that need healing and are able to offer their solidarity with another's pain. This, paradoxically, is the beginning of the healing process—to heal one's pain one must share the experience of that pain with others. If one wants to learn about the hope of the forcibly displaced, one first needs to listen to them and to their stories. But one also needs to learn to listen to the hope that dwells in those around them. Listen to one another with ears touched by the Spirit and then allow grace to find a channel and let it flow, freely and abundantly.

#### *Humility and Vulnerability*

How difficult it is for those who lack humility to hope! How difficult too for those who see vulnerability as weakness and will not allow themselves to be vulnerable. This might be one of the main reasons that there is so much hopelessness in the world. Pride takes over our lives when we believe that we are superior to others because of what we have—prestige, looks, intellect, material resources. We experience 'in-vulnerability' when we believe that what we have can protect us from all harm, when we feel self-sufficient, when we judge that we do not need others (including God) for our well-being and happiness.

Hope, on the other hand, is precisely what we have when we have nothing: when we have no control over our lives, not enough resources to cover our basic needs, no prospects for today or for the future. Hope is then what forcibly displaced persons have, since they have little or nothing else. They know that God is with them and present somehow in their lives, even if they lack the capacity to see how God's ways will affect their future. Does this mean that only the dispossessed and the marginalised can have hope? Of course not. But it might be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is proud and invulnerable to experience hope (compare Matthew 19:24).

Christian love is rooted in humility, as Jesus showed at the Last Supper, washing his disciples' feet. To maintain an attitude of Christian love requires great generosity and a constant struggle against our own selfishness and desire for self-affirmation. This is another lesson the forcibly displaced can teach us: that if people want to grow in hope, they must grow in humility and have the courage to make themselves vulnerable. Only then will they be able to see life—and all that it entails—through the lens of hope for what it really is: sheer gift.

### *Gratitude*

'There is no better gift for people in exile than the hope of peace' wrote Miriam, a young woman refugee from Africa.<sup>7</sup> As we have said, human

© María Figuerola Sánchez



<sup>7</sup> Lluís Magriñà and Peter Balleis, *In the Footsteps of Pedro Arrupe: Ignatian Spirituality Lived in the Service of Refugees* (Rome: JRS, 2007), 43.

beings cannot live without hope, for without it the human spirit dies. People need to do all that they can to keep hope alive, and the forcibly displaced assure us that one of the best ways to do this is through being people of gratitude. They have seen the difference this makes in their refugee camps and urban dwellings, over and over again. Those who are able to find reasons to be thankful seem to grow in hope. It is not simply a matter of being optimistic, of deluding themselves into thinking that things are not as bad as they are, but rather it is about being realistic, with a hopeful attitude towards the reality that is all around them. It is about learning to 'count your blessings', to discover them and then to share them.

People need to do all that they can to keep hope alive. The quality of our hope is manifested in our capacity to take risks, to face adversities with fortitude and patience, but also in our capacity to continue giving thanks for life, even when life feels unbearable and seems to lack meaning. We must give thanks and do it often, and also do it together. In learning this, people have also learnt the meaning of gratuity: to give of ourselves in love without expecting anything in return. A lesson that the forcibly displaced have learnt through their painful experiences is that the more we become 'gratitude people', the more too we will become 'gratuity people'. We all are called to live our lives also in gratuity, modelled on the gratuity of God, who gives of Godself to us at every moment, in love.

#### *Keeping Hope Alive for Others*

In an open letter to *The New York Times* (February 2000), Adelaide Abankwah, a refugee from Ghana, wrote:

As a refugee who spent two years and four months in Wackenhut Detention Centre in Queens before I was granted asylum, I know how important it is to have support from people who come to help keep hope alive. I am a Christian, and I went to Bible study sessions in detention, which kept my faith alive when it was challenged every day. Refugees come to this country thinking it is a land of freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from persecution.<sup>8</sup> Detention almost killed my soul. Prayer and humanity saved me.

Simone Weil once observed, 'the extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering but a

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Jesuit Refugee Service, *War Has Changed Our Life, Not Our Spirit*, 119.

supernatural use for it'.<sup>9</sup> Christianity has never promised a life without suffering. The Gospels in fact clearly state that in order to attain salvation one has to lose one's life, take up one's cross and follow Christ. But the message of the Gospels is that all this suffering should not be considered as loss. Suffering can surely cause bitterness, but have you ever met people who in the midst of their suffering have become a wonderful grace to others? I have, and many of them have been forcibly displaced persons.

**God has  
been there,  
all along, tied  
to that cross**

For those who embrace the Christian faith, only Christ can give meaning to their suffering. How often so many people have found the strength to bear their suffering simply by bringing their fingers up to the crucifix around their neck and holding them there, for as long as they needed to do so? This is difficult to explain to people who do not share this faith, who are puzzled by others' finding solace and comfort in looking up at Jesus, the Son of God, on the cross. Some would say, as others have before, 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross' (Matthew 27:40). But the gospel message, the message that gives strength and hope responds, 'Because I am the Son of God, I remain on the cross'.<sup>10</sup> Yet, how often so many people seem to forget this message when adversity and suffering enter their lives! When they ask: *why has God done this to me?* or *why has God abandoned me?* Forcibly displaced people, through their suffering and their hope, are vivid reminders that God has not done anything or gone anywhere, for God has been there, all along, tied to that cross.

*Hope Goes beyond Optimism*

The optimist builds himself safe inside a cell  
and paints the inside walls sky-blue  
and blocks up the door  
and says he's in heaven.<sup>11</sup>

Optimism is not the same as hope. It is not that being an optimist is necessarily something bad or wrong. Optimism as an attitude and way of looking at life can be a factor in well-being and happiness, and can

<sup>9</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, translated by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002 [1952]), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Piet van Breemen, *As Bread That Is Broken* (Denville: Dimension, 1974), 143–144.

<sup>11</sup> D. H. Lawrence, 'The Optimist', in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Penguin, 1988 [1962]), 515.

actually improve one's health. The danger lies in its degenerating into a refusal to see reality as it is and an insistence that all is well, even when it clearly is not. Believers are not optimists; they have hope.

Optimists are those who, analyzing the situation of the world, find in it sufficient courses of action to foresee success. They believe that things will go their way or turn out well. Believers, instead, hope—not because of their analysis of reality, but because they believe in God's promise and commitment to them that everything in their lives—joys, pains and challenges, and even their suffering—will make sense and is worth the cost, regardless of how things turn out. The analysis of the situation of forcibly displaced people has rarely led them to find 'sufficient courses of action' to expect success. But their hope has kept them constant and unwavering in believing that what they have gone through, and continue to endure, will unveil its meaning at the appropriate time.

### *Advent Time*

Advent is one of the most beautiful seasons of the Church's liturgical year. It is associated with special colours, rituals and celebrations. The word *advent* derives from the Latin term meaning 'coming'. And of course, *what* (or rather *who*) Christians expect to come is the Lord. It is then a period of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

With improving technology and communications we keep finding ways to reduce 'waiting time' to a minimum. And this is a pity, because as the capacity to wait is lost, the capacity to hope is also lost. The forcibly displaced, on the other hand, are *advent people*. Many have spent a great deal of their time 'in waiting': waiting for something to happen to them or for them, because they have little control over their lives. This can be very hard and frustrating, but they also seem to have discovered a hidden treasure beneath this painful reality.

Perhaps a way to explain it is to say that although they live in real time, they also live in 'suspended' time. They live their own time now, but also live in hope for their children's time in the future. They hope for the time in which their children will not have to suffer any more. They hope that their children will have the home that they have lost, and perhaps have an even better home; they hope that their children will have the education they have been denied and will be able to fulfil their vocation; they hope that their children will have the peace that was taken away from them through the violence and hate of others. Of



course, they hope for all these things for themselves too! But they do not limit themselves to what they need or want. And that is part of what this hidden treasure has revealed to them: *time-in-waiting* makes more sense, has more meaning, when one waits in hope for others. So, while the forcibly displaced live in suspended time, they also live in real time.

### *Prayer*

In the letter to the Romans we read: ‘Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer’ (12:12). Karl Rahner used to say that praying consisted simply in opening one’s heart up to God.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the point of departure for our prayer should not be letting God know the things we need, but taking cognisance of them ourselves so that we can then open ourselves to God.

Many people have wondered how, after all that has happened to them, many forcibly displaced people can still pray. It would seem that the only possible answer is that the invincible power of faith in their lives impels them to hope against all hope and to pray against all apparent failure. And they could have learnt this only from Christ. His prayer during the passion, full of realism (*take away this cup*) was filled with total trust in his Father (*I know you always listen to me*) and of unconditional surrender (*not my will but your own will be done*). Christ’s prayer teaches us that we need to centre our own loving in God and in God’s love. Only

<sup>12</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Need and the Blessing of Prayer*, translated by Bruce W. Gillette (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997), 3.

in this way are people able to hold the two things together: anguish and trust; will to live and readiness to die; surety in being heard and absolute surrender of their need to be heard according to their own plans.

This is the mystery, and the lesson, of forcibly displaced people's lives as people of faith and of their prayer as Christians. Who can understand this? Only the one who prays and pleads. If you want to understand it, do what they do every day: pray, beg and weep if necessary.<sup>13</sup> Pray, and wait, as they also do every day. Prayer is not about searching. Searching suggests an activity—I *have to do something*—an impatience. Prayer is waiting. As we have just mentioned, the act of waiting places the emphasis on the other person who is to come, and all we can do is to wait for him or her to arrive. Through waiting we express our powerlessness and our inability to make things happen, and this should be our attitude towards God. We cannot make God come to us. All we can do is wait and be present. Prayer is, then, to lose control, become vulnerable and allow God to guide us. Prayer is waiting, and this act of waiting moulds and shapes our personality. If we learn to wait, we will become different people—more attentive, contemplative and receptive; we will stop asking and will instead worship and love.

### ***The Gift of a Stranger***

I have attempted to present briefly what a lived spirituality of hope through the eyes and experiences of forcibly displaced people might look like, how that spirituality sustains them and what it can teach us as we continue our journey together towards God. In summary: trust in Jesus, listen, strive to be humble, allow yourself to be vulnerable, be grateful, be a source of hope to others, let hope take over when optimism fails, learn to become advent people and never cease praying. These are some of the lessons of hope-gifting that the forcibly displaced offer to us. Personally, my life has been changed by the forcibly displaced people and ex-refugees whom I have met. They have taught me about hope simply through being present to one another; I have witnessed their courage and strength in the midst of suffering, and I have experienced hope, especially, as God's gift in our companionship.

To be sure, forced displacement brings out the best and worst in people, and two temptations should be avoided: either romanticising them, their lives and motivation, or judging them and their actions.

<sup>13</sup> Rahner, *Need and Blessing of Prayer*, 58.

People who have gone through so much suffering, who have lost loved ones to violence and have experienced violence, are not immune to turning violent themselves. Experience, however, has shown that for forcibly displaced people of faith this has not usually been the case. I believe this has to do with their faith and their hope, which in turn has led them to act with charity and care towards those around them. Not all forcibly displaced people can sustain that faith. But I speak here of those who have; for them faith, hope and charity have helped them stay true to who they are and who they have been created to be. While hope does not take away their pain and suffering, they welcome it as God's gift. That gift is enough to know that 'God knows' them, loves them and cares for them. That is the greatest lesson they share with us.

*Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ* completed a PhD in spiritual theology in 2019 at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas and is currently on the staff of the Jesuit College of Spirituality in Melbourne, where he lectures on Ignatian spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises. He lives at Newman College (the residential college of Melbourne University) and contributes as one of the Jesuit chaplains there. His main ministries have been with young adults and with asylum seekers and refugees.

## **SAVING LIBERALISM FROM ITSELF**

*Damian Howard*

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING just keeps coming these days. That should be no surprise at a time of such upheaval. Only five years ago, in what seems like a different world, *Laudato si'* prophetically placed the ecological crisis centre-stage for the Church and the world. The enormous agenda that teaching document mapped out seemed at the time more than enough to be getting on with. Since then a whole new vocabulary has come into being, expressive of a set of new social and political challenges: Brexit, MAGA, COVID-19, BLM, lockdown, cancel culture, QAnon .... Pope Francis is surely right to think that a confused world urgently needs some Catholic common sense, and that is precisely what his new encyclical *Fratelli tutti* provides.

Politics today functions across the globe as if there were only two visions for the future of humankind: to persevere with the four-decades long project of neo-liberal economics, with its succession of ever-deeper economic and debt crises, its austerity regimes and the cold, technocratic globalisation that is so rapidly erasing cultural differences and empowering a new class of the super-rich; or to resist all that by promoting national populisms of various sorts which foment propaganda, talk of empowering ordinary people against the social, financial and educational elites and their ridiculous 'woke' concerns, all the while colluding with corrupt financial interests. We are told it's a choice between Fox News and a hundred new gender pronouns.

It doesn't take too much effort to realise that this dichotomy is a mirage. These are only the noisiest and laziest options on offer, the easiest to caricature—and to communicate in a tweet. In many ways, they are two sides of the same coin. But they pose a problem. As the 2020 US presidential debates (which were neither presidential nor debates) showed, politics in some parts of the world is getting very close now to mutually assured destruction, so powerful is the toxic effect of this incessant antiphony.

A not unusual Catholic move to make in such a situation is to try to locate on each side some reflection of a resplendent truth and then to see if, instead of insisting on the 'either/or' of binary opposition, there might in fact be greater wisdom in a 'both-and' approach. And this is precisely what this long encyclical, the third of Pope Francis's pontificate, sets out to do, sketching out in the process a vision that is conscious of its own ambition and yet intensely practical.

'Liberal' has become a dirty word for millions of people all over the world whose every instinct is in fact liberal. The Enlightenment vision of a society founded on the principle of the freedom of individuals has combined with an economic orthodoxy committed to the ideal of the universal operation of free markets as the most effective way of distributing goods, to create a powerfully attractive model for the organization of human relations. Most of us who inhabit the rich countries of the world would find any other way of being quite intolerable, even though its shortcomings are so tangible: painful inequality, banal materialism, the lack of any shared vision of the good life to unite us ...

Yet the value of liberal culture does not simply boil down to a taste for creature comforts and a life of do-as-you-please. There is a nobility to the story of the post-war efflorescence of human rights, to the spread of the rule of law across the globe, to the many international institutions which have been put in place to safeguard the common good, and to the shared disgust aroused by the Shoah and the wartime use of thermonuclear weapons which crystallized an appetite for racial equality and peace. And the Church has always seen these things and valued them, even if it has also been only too aware of the flaky underpinnings of liberal theory.

In *Fratelli tutti*, the very liberal-sounding idea of universal fraternity is put into dialogue with the gospel message which points so strikingly in the direction of the brother- and sisterhood of every human being. A more triumphalistic pontiff would have insisted that the gospel was the ultimate source of all that is good in the Enlightenment, including its vision of human equality. But Francis does not play those sorts of games, preferring instead to scratch his head in disbelief at how long it took the Church to realise that slavery and Christianity were incompatible (n.86).

Essentially, Francis believes that the gospel can give a soul to the idea that we are bound to respect one another's inherent dignity, to work for a society in which everyone is included and for an international order in which cultural and other differences are sources of enrichment

rather than resentment. The liberal vision on its own is dry, formal and abstract. It over-reaches itself when it envisages a universal civilisation of peace because it leaves love out of the picture, and love is the only thing that can bring the liberal virtues to life. The love of humanity in general, as Dostoyevsky pointed out, all too readily cohabits with a scorn for the real, flesh-and-bone human beings who surround me.

The fact that so many who would gleefully class themselves as ‘global citizens’ do not get beyond merely proclaiming universal human dignity is what makes them sitting ducks for ridicule as bourgeois virtue-signallers, woke adolescents and self-serving hypocrites whose progressive opinions serve little function other than to make their hearts feel warmer than they are. And it’s that jeering critique of a ‘globalisation’ at the beck and call of a disingenuous elite which today sustains a whole series of movements, more or less inchoate, which seek to bring an end to the liberal project and to put something more sinister in its place. Francis is keenly aware of the dynamics at play here and the complex way in which righteous indignation fuses with malign opportunism to create modern-day populism, a phenomenon he finds as distasteful as soulless, technocratic liberalism.

But if universal love is to be more than a pious soundbite, one is entitled to ask what it looks like in practice and how one learns to act on it. In answer to the first question, Pope Francis offers one parable and two Christian lives. The parable, of course, is that of the so-called Good Samaritan, which is the scriptural heart of the encyclical, carefully read in chapter two, ‘A Stranger on the Road’. The two lives are those of Francis of Assisi and Charles de Foucauld, the nineteenth-century founder of the Little Brothers of Jesus, both radical men of God whose missionary activity notably included outreach to the Muslim world.

Most of the encyclical is an answer to the second question: how do we become practitioners of a universal love? It is not a question our civilisation often asks. Francis thinks that it has to be worked at, it doesn’t just happen of itself. It is definitely not just a matter of being nice. We have to be formed by our family and educated into the practices and virtues of universal love. But where to begin? Francis’s Catholic ‘both–and’ strategy enables us to see that the actual starting point for the journey into universal love is our learning first to love our own roots, our own culture, our own homeland, in short to become happy members of a people.

***How do we become practitioners of a universal love?***

But isn't this precisely the trap of populism and nationalism? Not at all. A true love of such things does not close us off from the universal horizon but actually blossoms into a concrete universal love appreciative of other ways of being human. It's a corruption of my sense of being part of a people that turns it into an exclusive identity. Taking a swipe at the modern Catholic followers of Carl Schmitt, Francis says that other cultures 'are not "enemies" from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life' (n.147).

The rest of the encyclical could be said to flow from that insight, which gives not so much radical novelty but a new edge to aspects of Catholic teaching. Social teaching, for example, has previously affirmed both the so-called universal destination of goods and the right to private property. But this passage is stark enough to ensure that it will not go down well in some parts of the Church:

The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. This has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society. Yet it often happens that secondary rights displace primary and overriding rights, in practice making them irrelevant. (n.120)

A large section of the encyclical is devoted to the plight of refugees, and 'the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfilment' (n.129). There is also a powerful treatment of the duty to remember the horrors of human history: notably the Shoah, Hiroshima and slavery (n.247 following). Memory of such things, Francis points out, is an essential component of social and political love.

Those who truly forgive do not forget. Instead, they choose not to yield to the same destructive force that caused them so much suffering. They break the vicious circle; they halt the advance of the forces of destruction. They choose not to spread in society the spirit of revenge that will sooner or later return to take its toll. Revenge never truly satisfies victims. Some crimes are so horrendous and cruel that the punishment of those who perpetrated them does not serve to repair the harm done. Even killing the criminal would not be enough, nor could any form of torture prove commensurate with the sufferings inflicted on the victim. Revenge resolves nothing. (n.251)

From there, the Pope segues into his recent modification of the Church's official teaching on the death penalty so that the Catholic position

now is to rule it out entirely. The logic for this—the inalienable human dignity even of murderers—is carefully articulated towards the end of *Fratelli tutti*, in tandem with an ominous condemnation of war. These will be controversial passages for some. Anyone who thinks such positions platitudinous has not been paying attention to the increasingly startling views of those Catholic pundits who view neo-liberal economics—and US foreign policy—as the optimal implementation of Catholic social teaching.

Many of Pope Benedict XVI's concerns are echoed, in clear continuity with his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009), after *Laudato si'* the second most cited document in the whole letter: the importance of attending to a new global political order (n.138), of social action governed by the logic of gift (n.139) and of combining private charitable action with political effort to change social structures (n.187). But Francis has his own personal touches to bring to the tradition. He stresses the importance of meeting others, of creating a culture of encounter in which we really get to know each other in all our complexity.

In the era of COVID that sounds as desirable as it is—temporarily, we hope—impossible to realise. He is committed to the notion that being human means being part of a people—an altered populism, if you like—with its own 'mythic' character (n.158). He envisages the inclusive society as 'polyhedral': respectful, in other words, of categorical difference and abstaining from the imposition of homogenising frameworks (n.215). And his desire for understanding between Christians, Jews and



Muslims frames the whole document, peppered as it is with references to the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* which he and Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

With much else worthy of exploration and meditation, from kindness to concupiscence, from religious freedom to forgiveness, this letter proposes an incremental expansion of the tradition of Catholic social teaching which carefully lays bare its logic and gently radicalises some of its implications. But its real value is its coherent reiteration of the essentials of the gospel message at a time when so many of us, for good reasons and bad, risk becoming fatally distracted by non-essentials.

When Pope Benedict wrote his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, in 2005, he wanted to focus on the central tenet of the faith, to give the People of God that 'back to basics' summons which we, the Church's daughters and sons, need every now and again. The proof of the need for such a call will be the plentiful online venting of spleens that *Fratelli tutti* is almost certain to provoke, either by virtue of its title or its trenchantly 'left-wing' positions. Let's hope that once the storm has subsided it will help some of the Church's vitriolic commentators to stand back for a moment from their vicious name-calling, in most cases a habit only recently acquired, and to ask themselves how a life ostensibly devoted to universal love and reconciliation could ever have come to such a pass.

One of the complaints sometimes levelled at the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is that it is redolent of the hippy-dippy optimism of the 1960s. The author of *Fratelli tutti* is well aware that his idealism, his dream of a new culture of universal love, his confidence that the obstacles to world peace can be faced down, all guarantee that he will be charged with an unseemly naïveté. Yet no one, not even his fiercest detractors, can accuse him of hitching himself to the optimism of the age. This is an encyclical for tumultuous times, for a pandemic wrapped inside a financial crisis encased in impending ecological catastrophe. But the road map is sober and practical, if seriously challenging:

We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man's injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts. Difficulties that seem overwhelming

are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence. Yet let us not do this alone, as individuals. The Samaritan discovered an innkeeper who would care for the man; we too are called to unite as a family that is stronger than the sum of small individual members . . . . Let us renounce the pettiness and resentment of useless in-fighting and constant confrontation. Let us stop feeling sorry for ourselves and acknowledge our crimes, our apathy, our lies. Reparation and reconciliation will give us new life and set us all free from fear. (n.78)

What is the source of such vision and encouragement at a time when hope seems impossible to come by? Whence the confidence in ordinary human goodness to send us all back to our families, to our neighbourhood and towns to work humbly wherever we are for the global common good? The answer is, of course, Francis of Assisi:

In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and defensive walls, cities were a theatre of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading through the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all. (n.4)

The profound spirituality of *il poverello* is palpable throughout *Fratelli tutti*. That, I imagine, is why the title, a quotation of the saint, has endured in spite of valid objections to sexist language in ecclesial texts. It's the key that holds together the lure of a simple life, universal love and openness to Muslims. The multi-faceted revolution which Francis and his new order brought to the Church of his age was so steeped in the spirit of the poor Christ that it sparked off expectations that a new age of history was at hand. The name 'Francis' which the then Cardinal Bergoglio chose on accession to the See of Peter may not, it turns out, so much stand for a mere programme of ecclesial reform as offer a window on to a mystery of providence. Perhaps the Jesuit pope is refining the famous final paragraph of Alasdair McIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). What we have been waiting for is not a Godot but another—doubtless very different—St Francis.

## **TO CARE FOR THE GARDEN**

### **From a Pandemic to an Ecological Election**

*Eric Jensen*

**T**HE SECOND STORY OF CREATION (Genesis 2:4b–25) opens with the Earth already in existence but desolate—with no plants, no rain, and no one to till the ground. After a stream rises and waters the surface of the ground, God forms the first human being, a man, and plants a garden full of trees ‘pleasant to the sight and good for food’ (2:9). Then, ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (2:15). There follows the creation of animals and birds, and finally of the first woman to be a partner with the man. The divine command is very clear: human beings are meant to care for the Earth, to tend the Garden and not allow the Earth to become desolate again.

In a previous article I wrote about *ecological conversion* and the stages leading up to it. I concluded by saying that Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, which are meant to help someone make a free decision or ‘election’, could lead to what might be called ‘an ecological election, a decision to serve the Creator in serving creation out of love for all that God has made’. This would be a decision ‘to help heal a broken world, promoting a new way of producing and consuming, which puts God’s creation at the centre’, as a Jesuit General Congregation recently suggested, a decision ‘to surrender to God’s protective love all that has been lavished on us, so that we in turn may emulate the Creator in protecting and caring for creation—the task first given to humankind in the beginning in Eden Garden (Genesis 2:15)’.<sup>1</sup> What does the biblical story of the garden reveal that can help us carry out this task?

<sup>1</sup> Eric Jensen, ‘Ecological Conversion and the Spiritual Exercises’, *The Way*, 59/2 (April 2020), 7–18, here 18, and quoting GC36, decree 1, n. 29.

Claus Westermann has shown that the second account of creation presents us with a set of five archetypal relationships that human beings have: a relationship with the environment (the garden itself), a relationship with food (the fruits of the garden), a relationship with work (by which we grow and gather our food), a relationship in community (with one another) and, finally, a relationship with the Creator—with God. Westermann adds, ‘God has created the human race as a totality that includes these elements of its existence; if they are disordered, humanity is disordered’. He continues, ‘Work here takes on a significance that does not depend on human values. It is a commission received from the Creator.’ He concludes by saying,

The word pair ‘till and watch over’ makes it clear that tilling without watching does not fulfil the commission humanity received from its Creator. Spoliation and exploitation of the earth and its productivity show disrespect for the Creator’s commission, and must in the end operate to the detriment of humanity. When humanity fouls and pollutes the earth that has been put in its charge,<sup>2</sup> it destroys the environment that God entrusted it to watch over.

In considering these five integral relationships today, we see that all five of them are disordered. Some people have an overabundance of food, with much of it wasted, while others have little or none and are starving. Some people make huge profits from their work, while others are virtually enslaved and still others go jobless. When we look at our relationships with one another, we often see conflicts, ranging from family break-ups to ethnic rivalries and outright warfare. The present climate crisis is the result of our disordered relationship with the Earth itself: we have not cared for the Garden as we should have. When, finally, we consider our relationship with God, we often find apathy or ignorance—and atheism on the part of many.

Two recent catastrophes can help us understand what happens when we are careless, uncaring or not careful enough in our relationships with the Earth, with food, with work and with one another. The first is the wildfire in Paradise, California, during November 2018; the second is the pandemic of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, which began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and has spread across much of the world.

<sup>2</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 19.

### ***Fire in Paradise***

*The New York Times Magazine* carried a horrendous report on the Camp Fire (named after Camp Creek Road, where it started), with shocking photographs taken a month or so afterwards. Sparked by a snapped hook on an electrical tower north-east of the town of Paradise in California, the fire began early on the morning of 8 November 2018 and, with high winds, was soon growing by the area of one football field per second. ‘For eight hours last fall’, the article begins, ‘Paradise, Calif., became a zone at the limits of the American imagination—and a preview of the American future’. The devastation was overwhelming: at least 85 lives were lost and dozens of people were injured; the town itself was almost totally destroyed; its population (52,000 people) tried to flee, with many trapped in cars on the roads out of town; 153,336 acres (62,053 hectares) were burned, and 3.6 million metric tonnes of greenhouse gas were sent into the atmosphere. The cost to insurance companies was 16.5 billion dollars. ‘How did it end? It hasn’t. It won’t.’<sup>3</sup>

Grass fires in California, like forest fires in Canada and bush fires in Australia, are a common occurrence; in the past they were usually caused by lightning strikes. The natural pattern of such fires is called a ‘fire regime’. Early indigenous peoples learnt from them to set fires of their own—targeted fires—in order to clear forests of dry brush and fallen branches, thus making hunting easier, while renewing healthy



© Forest Service Photography

<sup>3</sup> Jon Mooallem, ‘We Have Fire Everywhere’, *The New York Times Magazine* (31 July 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/07/31/magazine/paradise-camp-fire-california.html>, accessed 14 November 2020.

undergrowth for foraging and leaving less tinder for future lightning strikes. This use of fire was a way of caring for the land. European settlers, lacking the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples, stamped out existing fire regimes, and present-day North Americans have allowed the natural environment of their towns to become dysfunctional. 'We effectively turned nature into another colossal infrastructure project and endlessly deferred its maintenance.'<sup>4</sup> When we do not care for the natural world around us, when we fail to see it as our home and as the larger community of which we are part, we can eventually end by destroying our family homes and even our home the Earth.

### ***Death in the Family***

This same neglectful attitude can come to include not just our relationship with the surrounding woods and fields but also our relationship with one another and our own family members. Though we will never know for sure, the COVID-19 coronavirus, whose spread has been compared to a wildfire, seems to have had its source in the open markets of Wuhan, where food of all kinds, including live wild animals, was piled close together, allowing the virus to spread to those who crowded the markets to shop.<sup>5</sup> Travel by air soon brought the virus to other parts of China, the Middle East, Europe, North and South America, India and Africa. Attempts to contain it were made in one country after another: sporting events were cancelled, schools and theatres were closed, bars and restaurants were shuttered.

The greatest danger was thought to be in institutions where people are closely confined in large numbers, such as prisons and hospitals. In Canada some prisoners were granted early release (though eruptions of the virus did occur later in prisons), and hospitals struggled to equip themselves with protective masks and ventilators. Loyola House, in Guelph, Ontario, where I work giving retreats, sealed off its 48 bedrooms from the rest of the building and opened them as shelters for homeless people while they were being tested for COVID-19.

What is most disturbing is how the virus found its way into long-term care facilities and retirement homes for the elderly, infecting staff as well as residents, and leading to many deaths among the most vulnerable.

<sup>4</sup> Mooallem, 'We Have Fires Everywhere'.

<sup>5</sup> See Graham Readfearn, 'How Did Coronavirus Start and Where Did It Come From? Was It Really Wuhan's Animal Market?', *The Guardian* (28 April 2020), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28>, accessed 14 November 2020.

In a survey of fourteen countries, Canada had the highest proportion of deaths from COVID-19 of those in long-term care. The president and CEO of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario was quoted as saying, 'It's like somebody sat in a room and said, "This is a population we can live without"'.<sup>6</sup> Recent data reveal that up to 81 per cent of the deaths Canada has suffered from the virus are linked to long-term care facilities.<sup>7</sup> When we do not care properly for those who are nearest and dearest to us, this is what can happen to them. This is not to say that we do not love them, but rather to say that we have entrusted their *care* to others and hope they are well cared for.

Personal care workers, usually women, are often poorly paid and overworked. Until new laws were hastily passed, some held down jobs in more than one institution or home, becoming carriers of the COVID-19 virus, spreading it to those they tended, and sometimes coming down with it themselves. Meanwhile,

Three of the largest for-profit nursing home operators in Ontario, which have had disproportionately high numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths, have together paid out more than \$1.5 billion in dividends to shareholders over the last decade.<sup>8</sup>

Patty Hajdu, the Canadian federal minister of health, was quoted as saying, 'this is an opportunity for Canada to think about how we value those who serve the most vulnerable in our societies'.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Dysfunctional Relationships***

We have failed so badly in carrying out the divine commission to care for the Garden that wildfires and pandemics are the result. Together they

<sup>6</sup> Moira Welsh, "Everyone Knew This Could Happen": The Deadly Spread of COVID-19 through Canada's Seniors' Homes', *The Star* [Toronto] (4 May 2020), available at <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/04/15/everyone-knew-this-could-happen-the-deadly-spread-of-covid-19-through-canadas-seniors-homes.html>, accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See Kevin A. Brown and others, 'Association between Nursing Home Crowding and COVID-19 Infection and Mortality in Ontario, Canada', *JAMA Internal Medicine* (9 November 2020), accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Marco Chown Oved, Kenyon Wallace and Brendan Kennedy, 'For-Profit Nursing Homes Have Had Far Worse Covid-19 Outcomes than Public Facilities—and Three of the Largest Paid out \$1.5 Billion to Shareholders', *The Star* [Toronto] (16 May 2020), available at <https://www.thestar.com/business/2020/05/16/for-profit-nursing-homes-have-had-far-worse-covid-19-outcomes-than-public-facilities-and-three-of-the-largest-paid-out-15-billion-to-shareholders.html>, accessed 14 November 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Arthur, 'The Coronavirus Is One Perfectly Built to Prey on the Elderly. Long-Term Care Homes Are the Front Line', *The Star* [Toronto] (15 April 2020), available at <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2020/04/14/the-coronavirus-is-one-perfectly-built-to-prey-on-the-elderly-long-term-care-homes-are-the-front-line.html>, accessed 14 November 2020.

have revealed dysfunction in four of our five integral relationships: the relationship with the environment (as seen in Paradise, California), the relationship with food (for instance, in the markets of Wuhan, where it was not protected from contamination), with work (especially in many long-term care facilities in Canada and elsewhere, where it was not sufficiently valued and justly compensated), and with the community (that is, with our elders, whose welfare we did not sufficiently watch over).

The divine commission to *watch over* the Earth means to ‘keep under careful or protective observation or look out for’ those who are weak and vulnerable and who need protection, especially children and the elderly, and even the Earth itself.<sup>10</sup> What the pandemic has done is to open our eyes to what this watchful care actually demands of us: a rethinking and restructuring of our daily lives, and a transformation or conversion with regard to *all* our human relationships. As Pope Francis has pointed out, ‘Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God’.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Our Relationship with the Creator***

In his introduction to Genesis, Claus Westermann looks at the fact that creation stories ‘are spread over the whole earth and throughout the whole of humanity’, and asks whether the Christian confession of faith in God the Creator ‘does not serve to link the Christian with so many other people both of today and of all stages in the history of humanity’.

The original function of the creation stories, he goes on to say, is to focus on ‘the question of existence itself’. The Garden did not always exist; there was a time when the Earth was desolate. ‘This way of speaking about transformation prevents the world and its existence from being taken for granted.’<sup>12</sup> For the Earth could, once again, become desolate.<sup>13</sup> Westermann concludes, ‘It is in the affirmation of the creator that humans realise the meaning of God; in distress and despair people look to the creator and find in him the God who saves’.<sup>14</sup>

***The Earth  
could, once  
again, become  
desolate***

<sup>10</sup> *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), s.v. *watch*.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 119.

<sup>12</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 19, 20, 21, 44.

<sup>13</sup> See William J. Ripple and others, ‘World Scientists’ Warning of Climate Emergency’, *BioScience*, 70/1 (January 2020). The article is endorsed by 11,092 scientists from 153 countries.

<sup>14</sup> Westermann, *Genesis: An Introduction*, 66.

To speak about creation, therefore, is to speak also of a creator, of the Creator, of the God who saves. And to speak about caring for the Garden, that is, about caring for creation, is to speak about *working* in a new way with one another and with the Creator, who alone can make our work salvific. To do so requires a decision—an election, to use the Ignatian term—one which can emerge from the making of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius in a new way, that is, with a focus on the Earth at their centre.

But this will require a new and deeper understanding of the Earth. As a former research scholar at Campion Hall, Oxford, Joshtröm Isaac Kureethadam, has pointed out in a powerful set of reflections on the coronavirus emergency, ‘we cannot be healthy unless the planet and its ecosystems are healthy’. He goes on:

It is clear that the origin of the present coronavirus—as with its predecessors like the SARS and the MERS and analogously the outbreak of the Ebola—has to do with human interference in the intricate balance of natural ecosystems through wildlife trading, deforestation linked to mining, logging, animal husbandry, etc. and the consequent destruction of biodiversity .... We need to reflect more on the impending biodiversity crisis—as serious as the climate crisis and closely linked to it—with Earth threateningly poised on the verge of a sixth mass extinction of species. The Covid-19 pandemic is a stark reminder in this regard and a clarion call to act.

Kureethadam says, ‘It is important to remember that, like its predecessors, the novel coronavirus is a “zoonotic” disease—passing from wild animals to humans and then leading to human-to-human diffusion’.<sup>15</sup> Loss of biodiversity is directly related to human health as well as to the health of the planet. The Brazilian journalist Nadia Pontes observes:

The world’s forests act as shields, keeping humans safe from coronaviruses and other diseases. Their destruction can unleash devastating consequences for global public health. Scientists have been repeating the warning for at least two decades: as humans encroach upon forests, their risk of contracting viruses circulating among wild animals increases.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Joshtröm Isaac Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections on the Coronavirus Emergency from an Ecological Perspective’, n. 3. available at [https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/Kureethadam\\_Seven\\_Reflections.pdf](https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/Kureethadam_Seven_Reflections.pdf), accessed 15 November 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Nadia Pontes, ‘How Deforestation Can Lead to More Infectious Diseases’, *Deutsche Welle* (29 April 2020), available at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-deforestation-can-lead-to-more-infectious-diseases/>



A better relationship with our home the Earth must require at least some understanding of the importance of biodiversity for our physical, emotional and spiritual health: 25 per cent of plant and animal species are currently threatened with extinction.<sup>17</sup> We face more additions to the 300 new pathogens that have emerged in past decades as a result of the destruction of habitats.<sup>18</sup> Besides these new pathogens, others that are thousands and even millions of years old are emerging from the permafrost that is rapidly melting because of climate change.<sup>19</sup> If we cannot change our way of relating to the world, the world will certainly change—and is already changing—its way of relating to us. All this may seem discouraging, to say the least, but we must go on, like Abraham, hoping against hope (Romans 4:18). For, to quote the title of Greta Thunberg’s recent book, no one is too small to make a difference.<sup>20</sup>

### ***A New Way of Giving the Spiritual Exercises***

And no one is too small to make an ecological election. From the beginning, of course, the Spiritual Exercises were meant to be ‘adapted

a-53282244, accessed 15 November 2020. See Ephrat Livini, ‘The Japanese Practice of “Forest Bathing” Is Scientifically Proven to Improve Your Health’, *Quartz Daily Brief* (12 October 2016); and Diana Beresford-Kroeger, *Arboretum America: A Philosophy of the Forest* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019), chapter 2.2, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections’, n.3.

<sup>19</sup> See Jasmin Fox-Kelly, ‘There Are Diseases Hidden in the Ice, and They Are Waking Up’, *BBC Earth* (4 May 2017), available at <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20170504-there-are-diseases-hidden-in-ice-and-they-are-waking-up>.

<sup>20</sup> Greta Thunberg, *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* (London: Penguin, 2019).

to the disposition of the persons who desire to make in them, that is, to their age, education and ability' (Exx 18). 'The process of adaptation' as Michael Ivens observes, 'has continued into modern times'.<sup>21</sup> For quite some years now the internet has allowed for ongoing spiritual direction of individuals using e-mail; many directors are already accompanying others through the Exercises in Daily Life (that is, according to Annotation 19) in this way. The COVID-19 crisis is accelerating this process, as lockdowns force people to live more of their lives online from home. At Loyola House some of us are exploring the possibility of offering individually directed eight-day retreats using Skype or Zoom, which allow for some degree of face-to-face interaction, and we are looking at how we might give the full Exercises using this technology.

Some have gone beyond adapting to reinventing. A decade ago, Louis Savary published his *New Spiritual Exercises*, and a Guelph colleague, André Auger, has brought out his edition of *Praying The New Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life*.<sup>22</sup> To offer a new way of making the Exercises that puts creation at their centre, however, is not to reinvent them but rather to make explicit what is already implicit. It should not involve a huge shift in focus. The Exercises begin, in the Principle and Foundation, with a statement about creation:

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord .... The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. (Exx 23)

This opens up 'a whole God-centred vision of reality'.<sup>23</sup> It also raises the question of how we can learn better to understand and cooperate with these other creatures in all their amazing diversity, rather than exploit them, so that they can truly help us as they were meant to do. In this venture, indigenous peoples the world over have much to teach us.

If 'the spirituality ... of the Exercises in their entirety is both Christocentric and Trinitarian', it is in 'the call of Christ to the service of the kingdom' that we will find a way to put creation at their centre without displacing Christ.<sup>24</sup> In an earlier article, I suggested that Christ's

<sup>21</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Louis M. Savary, *The New Spiritual Exercises: In the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2010); André Auger, *Praying the New Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life* (Guelph: privately printed, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 76, 78.

call ‘to conquer the whole world and all my enemies ...’ (Exx 95) might be rendered as ‘It is my will to *save the Earth and overcome all her enemies*’.<sup>25</sup> In making a deliberate decision, an ecological election, to labour with the risen Christ to save the Earth and overcome the destructive forces at work in our world, we would at the same time be trying to fulfil the divine command to care for and watch over the Garden. Such a decision would be reinforced in the Contemplation to Attain Love, where we see how God dwells in all creatures and labours and works in them (Exx 235, 236). To find God in all creatures is to find all creatures in God and, ‘To find all creatures in God is to find all creation in Christ’.<sup>26</sup>

Such an election can help us to put the Earth at the centre of all our major life decisions. A Second Week election made during the Spiritual Exercises, one based on reform of life (Exx 189), could well focus on our lifestyles—which the coronavirus has forced us to alter drastically. As Kureethadam remarks, ‘We have learned to return to the basics of life—huddled together in our homes and living on essentials when it comes to dining and travelling .... We need to regain sobriety in living if the planet is to survive.’<sup>27</sup>

As groups of retreatants make the Spiritual Exercises, the focus on Earth at the centre could increase their union in the common cause of saving the planet. Kureethadam says:

It is heartening to see that Churches and Religions are coming together in the wake of the present crisis and calling out to humanity to walk in solidarity. We need to strengthen this collaboration further in order to meet the even greater challenge of the climate and biodiversity crisis facing humanity today.<sup>28</sup>

For while the pandemic has caught the world’s attention, these bigger challenges, as Kureethadam notes, have failed to do so.<sup>29</sup> He continues,

The sheer and near total absence of perspective on the Covid-19 crisis from the vantage point of the weakest members of our society like refugees, the migrant labourers, the daily wage earners, the homeless, the subsistence farmers, indigenous communities, et al. is greatly worrying.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Eric Jensen, ‘The Kingdom Exercise: Two Suggestions’, *The Way*, 57/2 (April 2018), 105.

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 135.

<sup>27</sup> Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections’, n. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections’, n. 5.

<sup>29</sup> See Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections’, n. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Kureethadam, ‘Seven Reflections’, n. 7.

To bring some of these issues explicitly into the making of the full Exercises may require us to offer the Exercises as preached or with at least one talk each day to highlight the topics for prayer and reflection. At Loyola House we already offer weekend and eight-day retreats on ecological themes, and so this would be a fairly simple development. We are blessed to be on 500 acres of land that support several ecosystems and microclimates. Wooded trails for walking (as well as skiing in winter), orchards, gardens and farmland, a clear flowing creek with brook trout, pollinator gardens and an apiary—all provide plenty of ways for people to get in touch with the healing properties of nature and to learn something about biodiversity. We simply need to be more intentional in our approach by guiding people to appreciate these things.

Many retreat houses in North America, however, have closed over the past decades; as we wait for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic, we face the future with many unanswered questions. While Loyola House is unable to welcome retreatants our deficit mounts up, and since we cannot know exactly when, or under what conditions, we will be able to reopen our doors and rooms, *on peut s'installer dans le provisoire*—we can plant ourselves in what is temporary and learn to treat the present situation as though permanent.

Yet now more than ever the world needs the Spiritual Exercises, and so we must find new ways to present them to people. To put the Earth at their centre and make our following of Christ more ecological would be one way to make real our commission to care for the Garden.

*Eric Jensen SJ* was born in Montreal in 1936 and entered the Society of Jesus in 1958. He has served as a high-school teacher and pastor in Winnipeg, and lives and works in Guelph, Ontario. Now, in his third career, he gives the Spiritual Exercises and writes in his spare time. His most recent book is *Ignatius Loyola and You: Learning to Become a Reflective Christian* (2018).

# DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED

*Kevin Leidich*

‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will raise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name.’ (Luke 21:9–17)

**T**HE WRITERS OF LUKE’S GOSPEL collected and preserved these words of Jesus because what is described here corresponded to the ‘troubled times’ that they actually experienced. This passage from Luke gives us a just a glimpse of life in the early Church, but also gives us words of hope and a vocation: ‘an opportunity to testify’ (21:13). Like the first-generation Christians, believers throughout history have faced their own particular troubled times, and we still face our own today, in a world marred by violence and war, international tensions and rivalries, deteriorating ethnic relations, large-scale displacement of people, political fragmentation and the ever-increasing physical, social and economic effects of climate change as well as other natural disasters, and most recently the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. In addition to these global calamities are the various personal troubled times caused by illness, loss of employment, the death of loved ones, addictions and family divisions. Unfortunately, no one is immune from any of these troubles, or from their consequences for society.

Jesus also faced troubled times throughout the Gospels. He was born into a contentious and divided Jewish community with various factions; politically, he lived in an imposed Roman occupation under violent and arbitrary local civil authorities such as Herod and Pilate. Through the jealousy and mistrust of local leaders, the ministry of Jesus was often

disrupted, and his preaching, such as that about the Good Shepherd (John 10:19–21), was distorted and misunderstood. A few verses after this passage, Jesus attended the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem, but his presence and preaching stirred up so much opposition from the Jewish leaders that his life was threatened (10:31, 39). He subsequently journeyed to the safety of Galilee, but then, in the following chapter, he received news concerning the illness of his friend Lazarus. Jesus boldly decided to visit Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary in Bethany. His disciples tried to deter him from this dangerous return to the vicinity of Jerusalem. ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and you are going there again?’ (11:8) When Jesus decided to minister to his friends in Bethany, ‘Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him”’ (11:16).

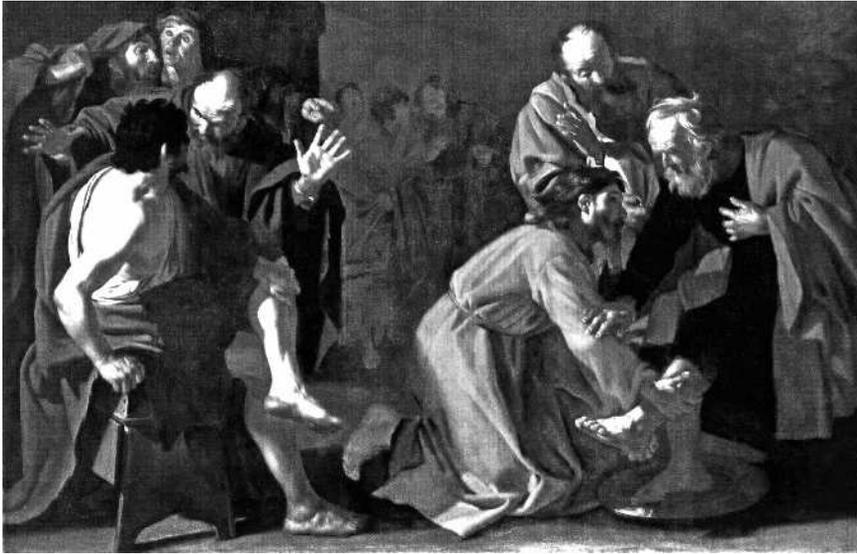
Jesus was keenly aware of the dangers that he faced. John’s Last Supper scene specifically states: ‘Jesus was troubled in spirit’ (13:21). He subsequently warns his disciples twice in chapter fourteen: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled’ (14:1, 27). How did Jesus respond to the various troubled times that he confronted? What example and advice does Jesus give to his followers, who also face their own personal or communal troubled times—whether those among the first generation of the Christian community or believers down through the centuries?

### **Seven Strategies**

The late Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco proposed that John chapters thirteen to seventeen, containing the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, were composed to provide a gospel response to whatever troubles a Christian might face. These chapters are not merely a collection of unrelated sayings of Jesus; rather, we can derive from them seven practical strategies that can be adapted as a response to any troubled times that confront us. By taking up these strategies, we are also responding to the ‘opportunity to testify’ by our words and actions (Luke 21:13).

#### *Allowing Jesus to Serve*

‘Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.’ (John 13:5) When Peter balks at Jesus serving him—‘You will never wash my feet’—Jesus responds, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me’ (13:8). The first strategy in facing troubled times is to allow Jesus to minister to us, to labour for us in whatever situation or context we face. In



Christ Washing the Apostles' Feet, by Dirck van Baburen, c. 1616

allowing Jesus to serve him, Peter gives us an example of how to live and how to love. Jesus desires to serve us in order to deepen our intimacy with him through faith and love. The disciple who faces any hardship must ask him- or herself a series of questions. Do I allow Jesus to serve me? How is Jesus constantly labouring for me, guiding me, and encouraging me to love more deeply?

#### *Seeking to Serve Others*

'So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.' (13:14–15) The second strategy during times of difficulty and trouble is simply to follow the example of Jesus and seek to serve others. A disciple should be willing to assess the needs of others, to be available, to take the initiative, to exercise creativity within the context of troubled times and to meet those needs in generous service. How am I called personally by the Lord to serve others each day, especially in helping to identify and meet their needs?

#### *Living according to the Spirit*

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14: 16–17)

The third strategy is to live according to the Spirit that is dwelling within us.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (14:26–27)

At all times, we are encouraged to have confidence and faith that Jesus remains in us always through the Holy Spirit. Jesus continues to assure us of this promise in the following chapter of John. ‘Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.’ (15:4)

Do I live according to my basic belief that the Spirit is dwelling within me? How am I called to calm my ‘troubled heart’ and to set aside any fears that may be obstacles to the Lord’s call to love more deeply?

***Jesus has made  
an everlasting  
promise to  
remain with us***

Do I live confidently in the Lord’s bold and foundational promise that ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live’ (14:18)? Through the gift of the Spirit, Jesus has made an everlasting promise

to remain with us. ‘Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and make our home with them”.’ (14:23)

*Identifying Evil*

‘The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me.’ (John 14:30) The fourth strategy is to identify the work of the evil one—‘the enemy of our human nature’, as spiritual masters down through the ages have called those forces that oppose the work of God. No matter how we specifically imagine that force which is contrary to God, in times of trouble we are especially prone to the effects of the evil one. These effects can be identified through noticing and describing their general pattern of influence; some enticements are mentioned by Ignatius Loyola in his Rules for Discernment of Spirits, found in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Among other ways, the force of evil will always seek to attack our weaknesses (Exx 327); endeavour to act secretly (Exx 326); try to pressure us like a bully (Exx 325); minimise the good that we do; and always tempt us to make efforts to change the things that we cannot change.

As the first epistle of St Peter warns us in very vivid imagery:

Cast all your anxiety on him [God], because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. (5:7–9)

How is the enemy prone to attack me, specifically during troubled times? Am I receptive to the Lord blessing me with greater self-knowledge and insight into how both God and the enemy influence my life and decisions? Do I have confidence in the victory already won by Jesus over the enemy of our human nature? Be strengthened that ‘the ruler of the world has been condemned’ (John 16:11) and that ‘when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth’ (16:13).

#### *Being Chosen*

‘You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.’ (John 15:16). The fifth strategy is to live strengthened by the knowledge and experience that I am personally chosen and sent by Jesus. Using the analogy of St Paul, we are called to be ‘ambassadors of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 5:20). ‘I have chosen you out of the world’ (John 15:19) implies a relationship of partnership with Jesus in the activity of his vineyard. This work of Jesus will ultimately not fail. ‘While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost ...’ (John 17:12)

No matter how the context of our life or how the troubled times that we meet may change, Jesus constantly chooses and sends each person through the invitation to deeper intimacy and co-partnership. We are encouraged by the prayer of Jesus in John chapter seventeen: ‘As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world’ (17:18). Jesus states his desire for us a few verses later: ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world’ (17:24).

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that

you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (17:20–23)

### *Being in Community*

Following the example of the intimate relationship of Jesus with the Father, all believers are called to community, and to be in union with God through the formation and sustenance of community. This is the sixth strategy when faced with troubled times. The Lord promises to be present to us whenever we gather in his name (Matthew 18:20). The Lord strengthens us through each other. How do I specifically cooperate with the Spirit of Jesus and build up his community of love and faith in whatever context I find myself?

### *Union with God*

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you .... I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours .... I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word .... (John 17:1, 9, 20)

This part of the Last Supper discourse is commonly known as the High Priestly prayer of Jesus. In this chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus exemplifies how we are invited to be in union with God through prayer. This is the seventh strategy. When encountering any struggle resulting from ambiguity or a difficult situation, do I turn to the Lord in prayer? How often do I pray? Is my union with God characterized by personal prayer? How do I foster prayer in the lives of others? Do I call on the Lord to minister to me by guiding the style, subject matter and pace of my prayer?

### ***Sharing in the Victory***

As Christians, we should not be surprised by troubled times and the struggles that we encounter, individually and communally. Throughout the Last Supper discourse, Jesus prepares the disciples for future hardships and tribulations. ‘I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is

coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.’ (John 16:1–2) At the end of this chapter, Jesus once again seeks to strengthen his disciples: ‘I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!’ (16:33)

The ‘evil one’, the force that is contrary to God, is always present to place obstacles and to lead disciples astray. Troubles will come to each person and community in different ways—in varying ages and contexts. Yet, with the timeless example and words of Jesus contained in John 13–17, we have been given a programme through which to



The Last Supper, by Daniele Crespi, 1624–1625

approach and endure troubled times in faith and confidence. We have been given a promise to share in the victory of the Risen Lord. We can echo the confidence of St Paul’s testimony in the letter to the Romans:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:35, 37–39)

This victory is also presented for our contemplation in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the First Contemplation of the Second Week, Ignatius gives an example of how the Trinity identifies and seeks to transform the disorder that lies at the root of troubled times in our world. When the Trinity ‘gazes on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people’

and identifies or discerns the disorder of the world, the Trinity does not ostracize, shun, destroy or kill the disordered persons. Rather the Trinity labours to transform the disordered and troubled world, sending Jesus in the Incarnation. By this decision, the Trinity gives us an example to love more deeply, especially as we face our own personal and communal troubled times (Exx 102.1–2).

Archbishop Quinn's reflections communicated much spiritual wisdom and insight from the Last Supper discourses. Previously I had always regarded them as a compilation of random sayings attributed to Jesus—presented simply so as not to lose them from memory—or themes treasured by the early Christians as a glimpse into the political and social pressures and hardships they encountered. Now, I have a richer regard for them.

Irrespective of how these specific chapters were preserved and formulated, the Archbishop noticed a thread binding their various themes together into a comprehensive programme for Christians to follow, in imitation of Jesus as he faced his own troubled times. In the several years since he offered his insights, the staff of the Jesuit Retreat Centre of Los Altos where I work have presented this programme to various groups of retreatants in different formats and contexts. These insights have greatly enhanced the prayer of our retreatants and continue to bear much fruit for those who pray the complete Spiritual Exercises, enhancing the graces of the Third Week or passion. May these insights into the Last Supper discourse be fruitful for your own prayer. May they enhance your own giving of spiritual direction and also your teaching and preaching during Lent and the Easter season when daily and Sunday liturgical readings place much focus on the discourses of John's Gospel.

*Kevin Leidich SJ* is a member of the pastoral staff of the Jesuit Retreat Center of Los Altos, California, where he presents weekend retreats and gives individual direction. He also oversees the Center's summer thirty-day programme of the Spiritual Exercises. In addition, Kevin teaches on the Center's Favre Programme which trains directors in the Spiritual Exercises.

# THE TRINITY, THE VIRTUES AND MORE

Robert E. Doud

I MIGHT BEGIN MY MEDITATION on the Trinity with considerations about the Holy Spirit. Certainly, we must begin in prayer: *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. But we cannot think about the Holy Spirit unless we think of the entire Trinity. After all, the divine Threesome abide in perfect commonality and act outside themselves, in the realm of created finitude, as one. A theological axiom says that all the external and saving actions they perform are ones they enact in common.<sup>1</sup> The Three have been called *persons*, which means that they relate to one another in ways analogous to the ways in which human beings relate to one another.<sup>2</sup>

We Christians claim generally, and at times quite specifically, to act in the name of the Holy Spirit. As I sit down to write my thoughts about the Trinity, hoping to have others read them and learn from them, I pray that the Spirit of God will act in my mind and brain and in my fingertips as I use my computer keyboard. Like the philosopher Descartes, as he wrote his *Meditations*, I too have thought for a long time about a subject dear to me, the Trinity, and now feel ready to write. I am helped by the theology of Karl Rahner, as I understand it.

## ***Becoming a Trinitarian***

Connecting with my own history, I recall my contacts in my seminary days with a spiritual group called the Cenacle, in Brooklyn, New York. People in the group, the religious sisters especially, spoke often about

<sup>1</sup> See 'Trinity', in Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, translated by Richard Strachan and others (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 471: 'God's self-communication to his creature has been so absolute that the "immanent" Trinity (existing in God himself) is the "economic" [Trinity] (that which deals with men and brings about their salvation ....'

<sup>2</sup> Cathrine Mowry Lacugna, 'The Trinitarian Mystery of God', in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, volume 1, edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 180: 'Trinitarian theology helps to emphasize the inherently relational aspects of person'; and also, '*person* indicates relationship, freedom, ineffability, mystery, the capacity to love and know, and the capacity to be loved and known'; and then, 'Trinitarian theology is therefore inescapably a theology of personhood, regardless of how this is formulated'.

the Holy Spirit, and most of our prayers in common were directed to the Holy Spirit. There is a passage in Acts (19:2) that tells of Christian people who had never heard of the Holy Spirit until certain of the apostles came to them and told them. The mission of this group seemed to be to do just that, to tell people about the Holy Spirit, and thus to unleash the working of the Holy Spirit within them.

These sisters, back in the early and mid-1960s, were the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity. They represented one part of the Missionary Cenacle Family. The priests and brothers, not yet living in Brooklyn, comprised a religious congregation called the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. The most active and dynamic unit of the three was the lay branch, called the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate. Neighbourhood teens thought the sisters were cool, and congregated often in and around the house they lived in. The sisters commuted daily out to poor neighbours as social workers and community organizers.

The Brooklyn Cenacle soon started to attract vocations. It took seriously the God-invited vocations of all three groups, and lacked the hierarchical tone of all previous sermons on vocations that we had heard. There was a new spirit blowing in the wind in those days. A diocesan seminarian myself, I eventually became a Trinitarian priest. I went south to enter the novitiate in Holy Trinity, Alabama. I had read a book on the Trinity while I was a seminarian, and was slightly familiar with talk about hypostases, filiation, spiration, missions, processions, *filioque*, circumincession and *perichoresis*.

In general, the Trinitarians assumed a devotional approach. We said prayers to the Trinity, and referred to the Trinity often, also referencing the Holy Spirit in particular. In every circumstance and in every relationship, we attuned ourselves to the music of the Trinity and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Experience was often mentioned in our conversations about the Holy Spirit, a word I was not at first used to hearing in a religious context, and the importance of *my* experience was accepted and encouraged.<sup>3</sup> Cenacle houses were places of hospitality, we thought, where everyone who visited was a guest sent by the Holy Spirit. This attunement was casual and habitual, rather than intense and self-conscious.

Eventually, having been ordained, I left the priesthood, married, and took up teaching in a series of colleges in Southern California. My

<sup>3</sup> 'Experience', in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, 162: 'supernatural realities are revealed in these "responses" [virtues and human acts] by the experience of peace, joy, confidence, consolation, light, love'.

prayer and discernment were always Trinitarian and orientated towards the Holy Spirit. I felt that my choices in life, sometimes difficult and anguished, were ones offered to me by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit urges and challenges us to grow towards spiritual maturity and to use the freedom that is rooted in our conscience.<sup>4</sup> The Spirit, that is, the Trinity, places us in new situations in which we can witness to the gospel, often in our attitudes and actions without using words.

The doctrines and speculations about the Trinity in scholastic theology always seemed to me to be remote and contrived.<sup>5</sup> Some very good people I knew had a taste and curiosity for such formulations, but Trinitarians, as I knew them, were interested in a communitarian and missionary piety, rather than metaphysical preciseness. We knew that God is love, and that it makes sense to say that God is, most radically and internally, a web of loving relationships that took into Godself the creatures they had commonly created, redeemed and sanctified.

Thomas Augustine Judge, the founder of the Trinitarians, himself always a member of the Vincentian religious order, was a missionary in



*Thomas Augustine Judge outside his chapel in Holy Trinity, Alabama, 1924*

<sup>4</sup> 'Holy Ghost', in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, 211; 'He who causes the fruits to mature in us—love, joy, peace, patience, chastity—is the Spirit'.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, translated by William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 134: 'we still have to admit that the assertions about the Trinity in their catechetical formulations are almost unintelligible to people today'.

the southern United States, especially in very poor areas. Many of his missions were in remote places, or in churches that served Black congregations. In general, bishops in the south were very glad to have priests, sisters and brothers who were ready to work among their poorest people. My idea of the Trinity is inseparable from this missionary mentality of working among the poor and improving the lives of destitute people.

### ***The Doctrine of the Trinity***

As I think of the vastness and magnitude of the Godhead and of the eternal Trinity, I think of the separateness and transcendence of each member of the Trinity over the others. Each is a person in each divine person's own right and distinctiveness.<sup>6</sup> Then, I think of their shared glory and transpersonal love as unitary and unifying. The Father's love overcomes His separateness so intensely as to generate the Son. The Son's love is equal to the Father's love and is returned with equal intensity. Then, the Father and the Son generate the Holy Spirit, who returns their over-abounding love. Thus we have the processions and reciprocations within the Holy Trinity.

When we think of individuals, we tend to think of them as static and self-contained. When we think of relationships, we think of them as fluid and interdependent. As separate and distinct, the persons in the Trinity might be thought of as *others to one another*. The Three are truly and eternally distinct and three. Their mutually transcending otherness is the ground of their relatedness, as each person gives itself freely in love to the others and freely accepts the others in return. Loving self-donation is matched dynamically by humble reception of the others as contributing to the individual's self-constitution. There is no relatedness except in so far as it is grounded in otherness. And, this otherness is constantly transcended in spontaneous charity.

Relationality is always the overcoming of particularity and of the otherness or separateness that defines particularity. There are no relationships except between particulars. Particularity is not dissolved or eliminated by the fact of relatedness but, indeed, separateness is enhanced by the kind of relationship that is love. The love that makes us serve the wants and needs of others enhances, and does not diminish

<sup>6</sup> 'Person', in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, 353; 'These three aspects of the divine plenitude of being and life which possess an ultimate inalienability through their relative [and relational] opposition to one another'.

or detract from, our own self-love and self-interest. Love can transform sacrifice into joy. To affirm relationality is to presume particularity.

It is appropriate to assign the creation of all things to the Father, although we know that the work of creation is common to all three. Even so, the mystery of the Trinity seems to demand that the axiom about common external operations, while valid in some ways, allows particular operations within the created world. It is acceptable to appropriate the incarnation and the work of redemption to the Son, although we know that the work of redemption, too, is common to all three. Although only the Son is made flesh in Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are also active *ad extra* in the work of incarnation. It is common to assign the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit, although we know that becoming holy involves the indwelling of the whole Trinity.

Thus we have, as closely as we can have, an understanding of the Holy Trinity that is in compliance with Catholic doctrine as it evolved in the first centuries of Christianity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit working in the name and power of the Triune God. The relationality within the Godhead is analogous to, and therefore serves as an inspiration for, the relationality of human beings in the Church and as Church, in the family and in society at large. Thus, the love of God and the love of neighbour are at the heart and are the basis of Christianity.

### ***The Trinity and the Virtues***

Accompanying sanctifying grace (the life of the Trinity) in the soul is an infusion of virtues that work organically, that are in harmony with one another, to sanctify the soul and to inspire and initiate actions and good works. Virtues are also relational in nature and begin inside people as a function of the indwelling of the Trinity and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of freedom and loving spontaneity. The virtues work through our human freedom and help to shape our attitudes, thoughts and emotions. Love brings us into eternity and into the heart of the Trinity, the place of boundless love. Indeed, human love and its attendant virtues, by analogy, tell our devoted hearts volumes about the Holy Trinity.

First come the *theological virtues*: faith, hope and charity, or love (1 Corinthians 13:13). *Faith* establishes a trusting and believing relationship with God as Trinity. The fullest articulation of faith requires belief in the Blessed Trinity. *Hope* places our confidence in God into time and history, yearning for eventual completion in peace and bliss. It also helps

us to retrieve aspects and elements of the past that enrich our present moments of action and understanding. With hope, we expect to increase endlessly in our capacity to give and to receive *love*. Love extends our love for God and God's love for us towards our neighbours in the world. The theological virtues are our vital connections in grace and in trust with our God and beloved neighbours.

Lists of the virtues we need to live happily and to behave properly were found in the ancient philosophies. The writers of the New Testament knew about these lists and used such pagan wisdom, working under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to form the first Christian teaching about the virtues. Wisdom itself is the first of the so-called *cardinal virtues*: wisdom, understanding, fortitude and counsel. Sometimes prudence replaced wisdom as the first of the cardinal virtues. To us today, the word prudence may seem more practical, and perhaps, more self-protective or self-interested than does wisdom.<sup>7</sup> In the Bible, we have the sapiential books, and the idea that wisdom is the chief attribute of the divine mind. Wisdom does not begin in reason, but rather in prayerful contemplation.

Wisdom is also the first of the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*, closely related to the cardinal virtues, alongside understanding, fortitude, counsel, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). Thus it connects human and worldly knowledge and cleverness with existential knowledge of the divine Trinity. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are gifts of the Trinity as well. The Trinity gives itself as the sanctifying presence and indwelling of grace. Just to remember, to list, or to name these virtues is to put oneself prayerfully into the presence of God and into the heart of the Trinity.

And just to think about the Trinity, even if only out of curiosity or intellectual interest, is to begin a process that soon becomes prayerful and devotional. Knowledge about the Trinity quickly becomes a *loving* knowledge, in which one experiences unity with God and immersion in the boundless sea of glorifying grace. Love and devotion, on their part, afford an ever-deepening knowledge of mystery. We drown in love and breathe a new air of life-giving, joyful grace at the same, timeless, time. The mind explodes with joy and fulfilment. This is what the mind at its height and the heart in its depth have been created for.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Prudence', in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, 390; 'According to Scripture, the prudent man is one who can interpret his own concrete situation and discern spirits'.

### ***The Trinity and the Second Vatican Council***

No doubt, the mystery and reality of the Trinity constitute a paramount doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. There is often, however, an awkwardness about speaking of the Trinity, beyond stating basically what the doctrine means. Scholastic theology, which is absent from the documents of Vatican II, had a great deal to say about the Trinity in terms of internal relationships, outward processions, the *filioque* controversy and circumincession. A pastoral council, Vatican II seldom uses the word *Trinity*.<sup>8</sup> It is hardly possible that this omission in the council documents is unintentional. What then could be the reason for such an egregious absence?

The council fathers must have regarded the word *Trinity* as problematic or unnecessary in a council that called itself a New Pentecost, and that did not want to point the minds of the faithful in the direction of obscure metaphysical opinions and speculations. Perhaps the most pertinent and sustained treatment of the Holy Trinity in the documents of the Second Vatican Council is contained in *Lumen gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church). The three members of the Trinity are mentioned by name in reference to the foundation of the Church. ‘Thus, the Church has been seen as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”’ (n. 4). Chapter 1 of *Lumen gentium* is entitled ‘The Mystery of the Church’: it is very fitting to find the mystery of the Church rooted in the mystery of the Trinity. Karl Rahner and other theologians often refer to God as the *Holy Mystery*. The term includes all three members of the Blessed Trinity, as they are internally and *immanently*, and as they work outwardly and *economically*.

If we take *Church* to indicate a certain set of relationships, and *Trinity* to indicate another set of relationships, then we have a co-interpreting pair of terms that focus not on multiple human individuals in comparison with three divine individuals, but rather on the two sets involved, that is, on the relationships that comprise the two sets. Just as the Trinity is about the dynamism of relationships, so the Church is about the dynamism of relationships.

Since the Second Vatican Council, we take the Church to be at the service of humankind. The Church does not exist for the good of the Church alone. The Church exists to fill the universe with grace; the

<sup>8</sup> *Lumen gentium*, nn. 47, 51, 69; *Unitatis redintegratio*, nn. 2, 14, 15.

Church exists to name and to recognise the grace already at work in the world, to make explicit the subtle and pervasive work of the Holy Spirit everywhere. The Trinity is a God in all things, always already there at work, quietly indwelling and sculpting creation, so that it can be recognised explicitly as Church and as Kingdom.

### ***The Mass and Other Mysteries***

The Mass itself, which represents the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is also an action *ad extra* of the Trinity and is the work of all three members. If we think of the Mass as God's self-communication to us as grace, and we think of grace as the very life of God in which we share, we can think of the Mass as nourishing our life in the Trinity and the Trinity's life in us. The incarnation, the eucharist and the Trinity may thus be contemplated and appreciated as one Holy Mystery. Also included in this mystery and in our contemplation of it are the mysterious aspects of revelation, redemption, and the Church. Our life of prayer is our conscious participation in the one holy and living mystery of the divine and its radiant truth. Somehow, the simplicity of the Godhead abides and remains uncomplicated by the plurality of its mysterious aspects.

Mutual indwelling is the key to understanding the relationship between the Trinity and the Church. It is also the chief clue to understanding grace and our personal relationship to the Trinity. The universe exists in God and God exists in the universe. Grace conditions the universe as well as enlivening human beings supernaturally. Understanding these things is the basis of the supernatural wisdom that is necessary even to begin to comprehend the natural world. We belong to a Trinitarian universe, and the cosmos is God's self-chosen and self-created home. We are part of that universe.

***The cosmos is  
God's self-chosen  
and self-created  
home***

Accordingly, it is wrong to condemn the world as intrinsically evil and corrupt. The world is the creature of the Trinity, always in the process of being created, being redeemed and being sanctified. The incarnation is a present reality, as new and exciting as it was on the first Christmas Day, or on the first day of creation when the incarnation began in time. The world is the theatre of the Trinity's work: creating, redeeming and sanctifying. In a certain sense, these three divine, self-assigned tasks or missions are one assignment.

The career of the Trinity, three as one, in time and history, is to supply the power of transformation of the natural order of things into

the supernatural order of grace, without loss to the naturalness of the natural. The world does not await its own destruction, but rather groans in expectation of a new birth and transformation. As St Paul attests in Romans: 'where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (5:20). Mystically contemplated, sin is bound to decrease and grace is bound to increase. In the meantime, our prime vocation is one of prayer and patient endurance.

The Trinity works together as one force, and serves the world as *paraclete*. The paraclete exhorts from without, consoles and energizes from within. The Son is a paraclete. This we imply when we call the Spirit *another paraclete*. When we observe that the Threefold divinity always work together externally as one, we also accept the idea that the Father is in some sense a paraclete. The Father sends the Son, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit. Although the Father is not thought of as *sent*, the Father accompanies the Son and the Spirit in all operations *ad extra*. Thus, the Father is also involved in the work of revelation, exhortation and consolation.

In our ordinary spirituality and in our consciousness as we pray, we probably think primarily of the Father when we pray for matters of providence and protection. We probably think of Jesus as we seek understanding and forgiveness. For inspiration and enlightenment, energy and courage, we go to the Holy Spirit. Even as we do so, we contemplate the Trinity as loving each other and radiating that love out to us as grace and care. We have individual relationships with each member of the Trinity, even as we know that they enter our lives as triune love and saving penetration.

### **Perichoresis, Dance, Devotion**

Karl Rahner reminds us in his *Theological Dictionary* that *perichoresis* means *penetration*.<sup>9</sup> Another (etymological) translation of perichoresis is *rotation*. Literally, it means *dancing around*, as if several people were performing a circle dance. As an image, the dance suggests people having a good time or celebrating something. The dance involves movement and dynamism, music and rhythm. Dance can be an art form and a thing of beauty. It can be a fitting image as we try to picture the Trinity, an image for the jubilant dynamism of heaven as an eternal dance.

<sup>9</sup> 'Perichoresis', in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, 350.

Christian prayer is an entry into the companionship of the Trinity. The invitation to pray is always present and generously extended. Prayer also invites the Trinity into our heart or adoring core. All prayer is eucharistic, and all prayer is Trinitarian. All prayer is ecclesiological, as the whole Church prays with us. Our personal prayers are joined to the work of the praying Church. We never pray alone. In prayer we join in what Thomas Merton calls 'the dance of the Lord in emptiness'.<sup>10</sup> Prayer is communitarian and joins us to the cosmic body of Christ. Prayer is experiential; and in prayer our experiences commune with the ever-praying Christ. Praying, we penetrate the Trinity and we swirl awash in its life and energy. The virtues give direction to that energy and vitality.

The Trinity as all-pervading and all-penetrating mystery is both immanent and transcendent. It is incomprehensible and beyond human understanding, yet it invites our devotion and adoration. It is accessible, not in our intellect by itself, but in our souls, hearts and affections. Prayer can approach the Trinity and enter it, but reason alone cannot penetrate its abyss. The Trinity enters us and transforms us. We may pray to the Trinity as one all-loving God, or we can invoke each Member in terms of a relationship that seems to overflow and escape the axiom that says all actions of the Members *ad extra* are common.

**Robert E. Doud** is emeritus professor of philosophy and religious studies at Pasadena City College in California. He has a particular interest in bringing together philosophy and poetry, using poetry to offer insight into philosophy and philosophy as a tool in interpreting poetry. His articles have appeared in *Process Studies*, *Review for Religious*, *The Journal of Religion*, *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Philosophy Today*, *The Thomist*, *Religion and Literature*, *Horizons*, *Soundings* and *Existentialia*.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 297.

# VOCATIONS ANIMATION AS WITNESSING

P. Y. Kiproop-Mbaaga

VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH are essential and critical for its existence here on earth. A vocation, which always has an aspect of wonder, is 'a call from God, including the call to life, the call to friendship with him, the call to holiness'.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, Christian *witnessing* is about this universal call to holiness.

Vocations are grounded in *love* or *charity*: 'It is love that prompts men and women to marry and form a family, to have children. It is love that prompts others to embrace the religious life or become priests.'<sup>2</sup> 'God is love' (1 John 4:8), and the love of God is a call to mission as a vocation: this is one of the expressions of the Word of God. A vocation is a process of full communication: God speaks and we respond. It is therefore necessary for us to identify the language and the message of God in order to respond appropriately, and live that vocation as witnesses, in actions that flow from the Greatest Commandment (John 13:34).<sup>3</sup> God calls an individual to know, love and serve, and ultimately to be in communion with God for eternity (John 15:16). This resonates with the universal call to holiness: 'with their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness'.<sup>4</sup>

Truly, each one of us is different and unique. We are endowed with different spiritual gifts. 'God calls some people to one way of life, and some to another; sometimes by planting a deep desire in their hearts, or sometimes by pulling them in a new and unexpected direction'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 248; and see P. Y. Kiproop-Mbaaga, 'What's Love if Not ...' I and II, in *Beauty*, book 1 (Milton Keynes: Lighting Source, 2015), 36–39; *Lumen gentium*, n. 39.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, homily, eucharistic celebration for young people, New York, 7 October 1995.

<sup>3</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 16; and Kiproop-Mbaaga, 'A Vocation's Wonder!' in *Beauty*, 43–44.

<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Wang, *How to Discover Your Vocation: Marriage, Priesthood, Consecrated Life, Permanent Diaconate, Single Life* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2009), 11.



These are the different ‘states of life’ that God can call us to embrace individually and so give a befitting witness. This is for the general good—‘To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.’ (1 Corinthians 12: 7)—and nothing else.

We are called collectively to guard and foster vocations, that they may bear abundant fruit. Their nature is that ‘they are “uncut diamonds”, to be formed both patiently and carefully, respecting the conscience of the individual, so that they may shine among the People of God’, for God’s glory.<sup>6</sup> Vocations come from the Lord who said: ‘ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’ (Matthew 9: 38). This underlines how vital being passionate about them is.

But whenever the expression *vocations animation* is invoked, it seems to have a bias towards priestly and religious vocations. This disadvantages the vocations of the laity. It means that the deeper meaning of ‘the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit’ is yet to be fully grasped. As John Paul II wrote:

The participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: New Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2017), n. 1.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Christi fideles laici*, n. 14.

This participation is about being baptized and sent.<sup>8</sup> Priestly and religious vocations have the laity for their source and sanctuary, and as collaborators in the Christian calling and mission.

From ancient times, the Lord who decreed, 'I will give you shepherds after my own heart' (Jeremiah 3:15), upholds inclusivity and collaboration.<sup>9</sup> In the fullness of time we see God collaborating with Archangel Gabriel and the Blessed Virgin Mary at the annunciation (Luke 1:26–38). As ever faithful to his Church, 'the Lord cannot fail in his promise to provide the Church with shepherds, for without them she would not be able to live and carry out her mission'. In other words, 'he never ceases to care for his beloved Church'.<sup>10</sup>

However, in my own experience, vocations animation or promotion, in some diocesan settings, may be less inclusive and collaborative than it should be. This translates into ineffectiveness. Vocations animation cannot be the work of one person or just a handful of people, but requires an inclusive parish vocations animation team (PVAT).

By its nature the parish is the ordinary place where the faithful worship and live their Christian life .... The parish is the place which manifests the communion of various groups and movements, which find in it spiritual sustenance and material support.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, it is the place where parishioners witness to their respective callings concretely and actively. They undergo 'the process of ongoing conversion' which brings the realisation that 'each of us is a mission to the world, for each of us is the fruit of God's love' in a way that 'touches us personally'.<sup>12</sup>

Inasmuch as the Lord gives a vocation to an individual and that person is the one who at the same time chooses, some human element and agency are involved. The human element is at the heart of vocations animation, which comes from the workings of the Holy Spirit. But guidance and accompaniment in *discernment* are also needed. This is what the process of vocations animation—which is also about awareness, marked by joys and sorrows—entails.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Pope Francis, 'Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World', message for World Mission Day, 9 June 2019.

<sup>9</sup> See John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 1; Genesis 1:26a; Isaiah 11:1–3a; John 17:11, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 275.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, 'Baptized and Sent'.

<sup>13</sup> See *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4; and Timothy Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 1.

### ***Discernment in Vocations Animation***

Discernment as an in-depth process of decision-making is guided by the Holy Spirit, and is integral to our Christian vocation. 'Discernment is the process of gaining insight into a situation in order to arrive at a proper judgment, often times in view of taking or not taking action' which has an impact in our lives.<sup>14</sup> It 'is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but recognising how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at baptism', through varied and enabling gifts.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the various hierarchic and charismatic gifts in the Church, 'good discernment is a path of freedom that brings to full fruit what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it'.<sup>16</sup> The discernment unfolds as we respond to our Christian calling and engage in mission by witnessing. This is part of us as Christians from the very beginning, thank to our baptism: 'By the virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son'.<sup>17</sup>

Our personal experience should lead us to the realisation that life is an unrestricted gift from God for our Christian fulfilment.

To strive for a vocational existence based on the deep desires of our heart is truly a response to a gracious God's invitation to be co-creators of lives that speak of the marvelous gifts and opportunity that human life is.<sup>18</sup>

Through our various vocations, we are to rise to a level of consciousness that elevates us to fulfilment in living out our Christian lives (John 10: 10b). But to arrive at this level, striving is both a prerequisite and a necessity. For, though the subject of discernment is attractive, it can be challenging at the same time:

Not everyone who wishes to detect the motions of the Holy Spirit does detect them. Diligent dialoguing, even when interspersed with earnest prayer, is no necessarily sure path to the divine mind. Techniques and processes may be useful, but, like recipes, without ingredients they are useless.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Theodore W. Walters, *A Guide for Spiritual Direction* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2015), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 174.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 295; see *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 768, 688.

<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 683.

<sup>18</sup> Wilkie and Noreen Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path* (New York: Paulist, 2006), 129.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Dubay, *Authenticity: A Biblical Theology of Discernment* (Denville: Dimension, 1977), 89.

‘Docility which is born of humility is a crucial sign of genuine discernment’ in our Christian calling and witnessing: ‘the genuinely discerning soul should always be marked by ... an openness to be guided by the Lord through others’.<sup>20</sup> This is about discerning what the Spirit is saying to the whole Church today, and responding accordingly. Truly, ‘the Church is called to discernment, but it is always in the process of learning how to do it better’, by listening better to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it will be able to distinguish ‘among inclinations that may be of God, of the evil spirit, or of oneself’, and embrace God’s will.<sup>22</sup>

We need to be insightful, as ‘insights transform both our understanding and our feeling about our concerns, interests, and values, and they also transform our understanding of and our feelings about other people’.<sup>23</sup> Here is where we are likely to find the meeting point between our individual aspirations and the goals and expectations of Church and society.

*Bernard Lonergan*

Bernard J. F. Lonergan (1904–1984) has delved into the questions of insight and discernment.<sup>24</sup> To be inspired by patience and co-responsibility in discernment is vital. It is about that,

... essential period of waiting as a time to allow the Holy Spirit the opportunity to act on our behalf .... In the work of discernment we look to one another to maintain hopeful spirits, while we await clarity for our decisions.<sup>25</sup>

According to Lonergan, we have *direct* and *inverse* insights. ‘Direct insights can occur dramatically, in those moments of discovery’ that transform our feeling of surprise and confusion into comprehension.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, inverse insight, rather than hitting upon a solution, recognises that a particular line of questioning does not work. It discovers

<sup>20</sup> Thomas H. Green, *Weeds among the Wheat. Discernment: Where Prayer and Action Meet* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1970), 66.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Austin, ‘Discernment as a Work of the Church’, *The Way*, 58/4 (October 2019), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: A Psychiatrist Explores Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 41.

<sup>23</sup> Cheryl A. Picard and Kenneth R. Melchin, ‘Insight Mediation: A Learning Centered Mediation Model’, *Negotiation Journal*, 23 (2007), 52.

<sup>24</sup> See Terry J. Tekippe, *What Is Lonergan Up to in Insight? A Primer* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Dwight Judy, *Discerning Life Transitions: Listening Together in Spiritual Direction* (New York: Morehouse, 2010), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Picard and Melchin, ‘Insight Mediation’, 42; and see Cheryl A. Picard, ‘Learning about Learning: The Value of “Insight”’, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 20 (2003).

that intelligibility does not lie in the direction we have been going but somewhere else; and it is in this rediscovered direction we must go!<sup>27</sup>

Loneragan presents us with four phases of discernment: experience, understanding, judgment and decision. *Experience* is about getting the ‘data’ for the operations of understanding and judgment. ‘It requires that we immerse ourselves in such experiences as seeing, hearing, feeling, imagining, and remembering.’<sup>28</sup> For vocations animation, awareness is equally a critical starting point. ‘*Understanding* is about getting insights that either answer our questions or set our questioning on a new track. Here, our goal is to find answers to the “What is it?” question’, and to related questions: *Why?* and *How?*<sup>29</sup> According to Lonergan, ‘like the acts of direct and introspective understanding, the act of reflective understanding is an insight’.<sup>30</sup> These insights are also worth attention in vocations animation. With regard to *judgment*, ‘we reflect on the insights and inverse insights and make judgments verifying whether they are correct. This level asks the “Is it so?” question.’ Thus, in vocations animation, what we are seeking is *certainty* about the insights that have come our way. The level of *decision* is where action takes place. ‘It involves reflecting on whether we will follow through on our understanding and judgment, taking responsibility for ourselves and our actions, deciding and then acting.’<sup>31</sup> Decision itself ‘is an act of willing’ on our part.<sup>32</sup> It is a discovery process that leads us to a deeper understanding of ourselves, and an act of commitment to be a witness to what we cherish and hold as precious.

In sum, Lonergan’s phases of discernment are about maturing in decision-making. This requires ongoing growth in specific directions:

- Movement away from façades, from a pretended self that we are not.
- Movement away from inner ‘shoulds’ that originate from some idealized sense of what we must be to be acceptable, lovable, and worthwhile.
- Movement away from conformity for the sake of acceptance.

<sup>27</sup> See Picard and Melchin, ‘Insight Mediation’, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Picard, ‘Learning about Learning’, 478; see Raymond Moloney, ‘Conversion and Spirituality: Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984)’, *The Way*, 43/4 (October 2004), 126.

<sup>29</sup> Picard, ‘Learning about Learning’, 478.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 279.

<sup>31</sup> Picard, ‘Learning about Learning’, 478.

<sup>32</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 612.

- Movement away from a compulsive need to please others that robs us of freedom.
- Movement toward greater openness to experience.
- Movement toward greater trust of self.
- Movement toward greater trust in God's ongoing faithfulness.
- Movement toward being self-directed and Spirit-led.<sup>33</sup>

These movements are at the centre of vocations animation. They are important to both animators and aspirants. Truly, discernment 'enables us to recognise the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions', as far as witnessing to our Christian calling is concerned.<sup>34</sup>

Coming to a crossroads in life or facing a critical decision can happen at any time. This informs the need to be equipped to handle such situations when they arise. For instance, in 'privileged places of personal development' such as educational institutions there is a need to nurture 'lasting experiences of faith', which means that educators must witness to their Christian calling. They should be rest assured that 'one of the greatest joys that any educator can have is to see a student turn into a strong, well-integrated person, a leader, someone prepared to give'.<sup>35</sup>

### ***The Team-Building Model for Vocations Animation***

The influential team developmental model (TDM) of Bruce Wayne Tuckman (1938–2016) has much to offer vocations animation. Originally, this model had four stages, which Tuckman called *forming*, *storming*, *norming* and *performing*. Later on, he added a fifth, the *adjourning* or termination stage.<sup>36</sup> Another variation on the model categorised five stages of group development on the basis of how a group relates to its leader: initial complaining, premature enactment, confrontation, internalisation, separation and terminal review.<sup>37</sup>

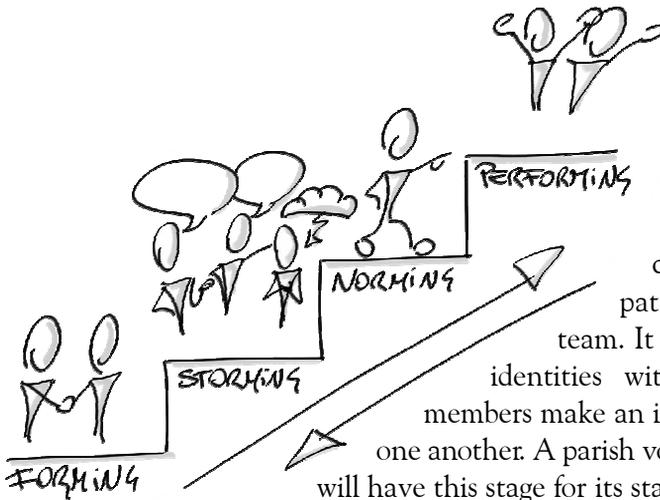
<sup>33</sup> Au and Au, *Discerning Heart*, 10–11.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 169.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, *Christus vivit*, n. 221.

<sup>36</sup> See Bruce W. Tuckman, 'Developmental Sequence in Small Groups', *Psychological Bulletin*, 63/6 (1965), 384–399; Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen, 'Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited', *Group and Organization Studies*, 4 (1977), 419–427.

<sup>37</sup> See Richard D. Mann and others, *Interpersonal Styles and Group Development, an Analysis of the Member–Leader Relationship* (New York: John Wiley, 1967).



© Luigi Mengato

Tuckman's *forming* stage consists of *orientation*, *testing* and *dependence*. This aims to understand the purpose, definition, title, composition, leadership pattern and lifespan of a team. It establishes the personal identities within the team, as its members make an individual impression on one another. A parish vocations animation team will have this stage for its starting point. The team is expected to be inclusive in its membership, comprising individuals with diverse backgrounds and across age groups, and from the parish team there will be an upward structural movement to the formation of a diocesan vocations animation team (DVAT) through the deaneries.

The second phase of team development,

... is characterized by conflict and polarization around interpersonal issues, with concomitant emotional responding in the task sphere. These behaviours serve as resistance to group influences and task requirements and may be labelled as *storming*.<sup>38</sup>

Since the envisioned parish vocations animation team will be diverse and inclusive, some tensions at the beginning are anticipated. However, this is taken as part of the growth process: when people meet as a team for the first time, reservations are expected, even suspicions. But this should settle down and give way to cohesiveness.

Tuckman continues:

Resistance is overcome in the third stage, in which in-group feeling and cohesiveness develop; new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted. In the task realm intimate, personal opinions are expressed. Thus, we have the stage of *norming*.<sup>39</sup>

The vocations animation team is now expected to come up with its guiding principles, which ultimately form the pillars of its constitution.

<sup>38</sup> Tuckman, 'Developmental Sequence in Small Groups', 396.

<sup>39</sup> Tuckman, 'Developmental Sequence in Small Groups', 396.

This is the stage of spelling out clearly *what* the team should do and *how* to do it.

Finally, the group attains the fourth stage, in which interpersonal structure becomes the tool of task activities. Roles become flexible and functional, and the team's energy is channelled into the tasks. Structural issues have been resolved and structure can now become supportive of task performance. This stage can be labelled as *performing*.<sup>40</sup>

*Adjourning* involves dissolution. It entails the 'termination of roles; completion of tasks; reduction of dependency' among team members.<sup>41</sup> Some have called this stage 'mourning', since former team members may experience a feeling of loss. Accordingly, leaders make space for the recognition of achievements within the group and give value to members' contributions. Then the team dissolves.

It is at this point that I advance a modification to transform the team developmental model into the *team-building* model (TBM). The envisioned parish vocations animation team, and consequently the diocesan team, are expected to assume a slightly different path, not just dissolving but *handing over* structurally to an incoming team. Some members of the outgoing team are retained for continuity. Thus, I propose two successive stages in place of *adjourning*: *transforming*—consolidating the uniqueness of each team and its functioning; and *transitioning*—ensuring continuity through the handover. In this way the team-building model takes into account the crucial developmental stages in the formation of a team and the realised uniqueness of a team in the course of its lifespan.

### **Proposed Actions and Suggestions**

Having delved into what a vocation is, and what discernment of it means, and having explored the value of Tuckman's theory for vocations animation, we can draw some principal conclusions.

It is clear that the team-building model can be a valuable tool in vocations animation. We are challenged by the times in which we live, and there is always more to be done. This model can bring a dynamism to the work of vocations animation, and its insights may be appreciated and appropriated by various diocesan and congregational pastoral agents; there is a need to foster inter-diocesan and inter-congregational exchanges

<sup>40</sup> Tuckman, 'Developmental Sequence in Small Groups', 396.

<sup>41</sup> Donelson R. Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 2nd edn (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1990), 77.

on matters concerning vocations animation. There is also a need to conduct periodic and regular studies of the sustainability of vocations animation approaches. This in itself is a spirit of transformation, and sustainable witnessing in our Christian calling.

Since vocations animation is underpinned to a great extent by *discernment*, this area needs to be considered when looking at how to nurture appropriate skills. Closely related to this will be the anchoring of vocations animation to chaplaincy apostolates in the Pontifical Missionary Childhood, secondary schools, colleges and universities. As educational institutions, these are privileged places for mentoring the next generation.<sup>42</sup> The team-building model also tries to approach vocations animation without undue bias towards any of the vocations. This is part of the call to the renewed commitment to the *new evangelization* which ‘is an urgent task ... to reawaken [our] enthusiasm for being members of the Church’ as committed *witnesses*.<sup>43</sup> This ‘new phase of evangelization [is] one marked by enthusiasm and vitality’.<sup>44</sup>

In forming a vocations animation team, some parishes will have the privilege of the entire People of God—laity, religious and clergy—being represented. However, this should not prejudice the formation of teams in parishes where there are only laypeople and clerics. Here the team may focus its activities on Vocations Sunday and Mission Sunday, and on major feasts in the Liturgical Calendar. Equally, creative approaches that bring our different talents on board can be welcome.<sup>45</sup> The team-building model seeks to nurture a spirit of inclusivity and collaboration in vocations animation, within parish teams and consequently in diocesan ones.

**P. Y. Kiprop-Mbaaga** is a priest in the Roman Catholic diocese of Kitale, Kenya, who has served in the vocations office. Currently he is the general spiritual director and formator at St Augustine’s Senior Seminary, Mabanga. He is the holder of diplomas in philosophy and religious studies, and in sacred theology; BAs in cultural studies and sacred theology; an MSc in human resource development; and an MA in spirituality and religious formation. He also writes poetry, and has published the collection *Beauty*, book 1 (2015).

<sup>42</sup> See Tom East and others, *Effective Practice for Dynamic Youth Ministry* (Winona: Saint Mary’s, 2004), 15; Mike Higgs, *Youth Ministry from the Inside Out: How Who You Are Shapes What You Do* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2003), 124.

<sup>43</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, n. 171.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 17.

<sup>45</sup> See Kiprop-Mbaaga, ‘Introduction’, in *Beauty*, xvi–xvii.

### ***A Prayer for Vocations***

*O God, your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, taught us to pray to you as the owner of the Vineyard where the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. For this, we pray, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for vocations to the various states of life in the Church—lay, religious and clerical—that your flock will always be served and accompanied on their salvation journey.*

*We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.*

*St John Paul II, pray for us.*

# 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](http://www.beunos.com)

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

Tel: +44 (0)1745 583444

[secretary@beunos.com](mailto:secretary@beunos.com)

# A PILGRIM PEOPLE

## A Disturbing Image

George B. Wilson

THE NEVER-ENDING DEBATE about the meaning of Vatican II has been dramatically changed by the recent groundbreaking work of the historian John O'Malley. Turning our attention from the content of the council's teachings to a focus on the medium through which they are expressed—the *genre* of the decrees themselves—changes everything. An issue can no longer be addressed simply by citing differing interpretations of the text of the conciliar decrees: the way the concepts are communicated substantially affects the message being offered for our reflection.

The importance of this methodological shift can hardly be over-estimated. The council fathers not only moved away from the typical conciliar method of focusing on contested positions and declaring them either orthodox or else outside the bounds of acceptable understandings of Roman Catholic faith. They also moved away from the language of abstract theological concepts. Instead, they invoked the sensibility and approach of scripture and the early Church. They challenged not only our minds but, more importantly, our spirits and affect, with evocative *imagery*. They invited us to view the Church—*ourselves*—as a pilgrim people, a people on pilgrimage.<sup>1</sup> We are not to see ourselves, for example, as crusaders, storming a secular citadel. Nor are we the serfs of an ancestral family estate being overseen by feudal lords. Nor, again, are we spiritual tourists, making a fifteen-minute stop at Chartres to buy some postcards for when we get home.

No, precisely as Church, we are *pilgrims*, not simply 'People of God'. That would constitute a dramatic shift all by itself, even if we were to stop there. But there is more: we are a people *on the way*, people in movement, people of *the Way*, just as the first followers of Jesus saw themselves.

<sup>1</sup> See *Lumen gentium*, chapter 7.

### ***The Nature of Images***

By contrast with concepts, images, by their nature, can create movements in our spirits. To use the language of scholarly analysis: images are essentially *polyvalent*. They harbour the psychic energies of more than a single possible meaning. An image—especially a foundational one—is like a multi-branched cave, each branch opening on to different mysterious questions and meanings. Unlike concepts, they are not tightly boundaried, yes-or-no, black-or-white. They are not confined to the limits implied in the wording of the original questions that gave rise to them. Instead of giving us yes/no clarity on answers, images carry the potential for unsuspected pockets of mystery. Whereas both a conceptually framed question and its orthodox answer have been ‘settled’, perhaps for centuries, the image promptly upsets that satisfied state. To turn to it does not mean that our answers to questions of doctrinal obligation were *wrong*. But the power locked in an image can burst through the constraints of our analytical minds. It can lead us to wonder *if we had asked the most productive question in the first place*.

There is a new human (and theological) anthropology at work in the council’s movement towards imagination. We humans reason with concepts, but we live the greater part of our lives out of images. They are the initial medium that springs into being in the face of our questioning spirits. They provide the first form of external expression for the psychic energies that swirl within us. Images come first; conceptualising is then the attempt to interpret what they might be ‘saying’. The image enables us to capture and communicate *something* of those primitive energies without prematurely squeezing them into the binary, either-or constraint of analytical thought. Images are frequently the squishy way we try to express intuitions we are as yet unable to ‘nail down’ in concepts.

To be sure, the process of transforming an image into conceptual language is obviously necessary if we are to engage in the rational conversation required to produce rational answers to rational questions. But, all too often, while indeed producing intellectual clarity, the process of conceptualisation squeezes the life-promising energies out of the original; we are left with a dry husk that leaves us humanly untouched.

### ***The Image of a People on Pilgrimage***

To appreciate the full impact of the image of Church as a people on pilgrimage we need to remind ourselves that in the pre-conciliar cultural milieu the prevailing idiom was radically different. The Church was viewed

then as a *perfect society*. The expression conveyed a sense of completion. We do not attribute 'perfection' to that which is still unfinished, much less *imperfect*. The Church, as a society already perfected, with its monolithic structure, was seen as set in bedrock and unchangeable. It had only to work out some incidental filigree. We do not usually try to improve that which is already 'perfect'.

In contrast, the image of a people on pilgrimage speaks precisely of that which is unfinished, still imperfect, yet to be completed. Whether our pilgrimage is directed towards Assisi, or Santiago de Compostela, or 'the heavenly Jerusalem', the energies it elicits suggest a goal still off in the distance. When it comes to Church, the answer to the perennial question of the kids in the back seat, *Are we nearly there yet?* is *no*.

This image addresses, not specific elements in the Church but, rather, the Church as such. The adoption of such a basic image must necessarily have consequences for every aspect of our life as Church: our theology; our approach to common worship; our interaction with other Christian denominations and world religions; our relationship with secular society and its institutions in the pursuit of the justice and peace of a future Kingdom. (And note that the council fathers devoted a separate document to each of these areas.) Someone needs to elaborate the potential implications of the pilgrim people image for the most serious issue of our time: the destruction of our common home.



The Pilgrims, by Jan van Eyck, from the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432

It is my conviction that the full ramifications of this image—baptized by the highest teaching authority of the Church—have yet to be explored. Every nook and cranny of our theological (and magisterial) world must be scoured for traces of subtle signs of *finishedness*. We live as finite beings within a divine mystery. And any pretence that in the least way suggests that we ‘get it’—definitively—bears with it the taste of idolatry.

### ***A Long Journey***

The sturdy mindset that was constructed on the foundation of the ‘perfect society’ definition was centuries in the building. It settled into the very pores of the Church of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholics, becoming all but impregnable. It solidified the clericalism of both the clergy and the laity. It imprinted itself on external forms of behaviour that people who were minimally catechized easily accepted and internalised as ‘the way Jesus meant it to be’, forever and ever, Amen.

The sour fruit of perfect-society thinking is a culture of triumphalism. Once embedded in the life of the Christian community, it does not die easily. It shows up when church leaders claim certitude on matters beyond their competence. It expresses itself in witch-hunts launched against committed theologians who dare to suggest that we need to reopen issues and questions once deemed definitively answered. It explodes in thunderbolts of potential excommunication hurled at public servants who disagree with political stands taken by bishops on matters of legitimate disagreement. It seeps into solemn rituals draped in over-the-top ecclesiastical pageantry that is justified because ‘the people want it’. (Have you attended an ordination recently? The tympanists’ union must be having a ball.)

### *An Objection*

It might be objected that I have placed too much emphasis on just one possible meaning of the polyvalent image of a people on pilgrimage. In

***While we are  
in this life we  
have no  
finished vision***

defence of my argument I point, not to a different concept, but to two further biblical images. Scripture tells us that we hold the treasure of the Gospel in *clay jars* (2 Corinthians 4:7). It also reminds us that while we are in this life we have no finished vision: we ‘see’ only in fragmentary glimpses ‘in a mirror, dimly’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is clear that this set of images—being ‘on the way’, serving as a fragile container, being intrinsically limited in our visual capability—cumulatively reminds us that faith is not

vision. Faith can serve as reliable guidance for our spiritual life and mission on earth, for sure—but only if its nature is respected and not distorted into supposedly clear sight.

### ***Implications for a Theological Understanding of the Magisterium***

Over the years I have wondered whether, in our efforts at developing a theology of the magisterium, we have been attempting to understand its binding character totally on its own analytical terms—quite apart from what we might conclude if we were to examine it from the perspectives of other major realms of Christian thinking. After all, Vatican I's decree on faith and reason speaks of the understanding that can be achieved through our natural reason and 'by analogy from what it knows naturally, or from the connexion of these mysteries with one another'.<sup>2</sup>

One area that is overlooked, but particularly intriguing when the magisterium is treated in isolation from the rest of the deposit of faith, is the pervasive reality of our human sinfulness. I fear that we have unconsciously treated the magisterium as if the development and protection of orthodox teaching were in the hands of pure spirits, not embodied, sinful human beings. Ideas are juxtaposed with other ideas; rules of logic are applied; boundaries and terms are more tightly defined; errors are ruled out and orthodoxy is established. Finished; end of search. The fact that these mental processes take place in the minds of fallible humans burdened with all sorts of unexamined (and potentially pernicious) interests, projections and distorting psychic and spiritual tics—with sin, to be precise—is rarely, if ever, adverted to.

For example: one traditional criterion frequently applied to separate possible heresy from orthodoxy is that derived from Vincent of Lérins: 'what all men have at all times and everywhere believed *must be regarded as true*'.<sup>3</sup> The possibility that 'all men' might find it too humanly challenging to examine the assumptions that undergird apparently self-evident propositions is never entertained (not to speak of the possibility of distortion from the fact that the subjects involved were, precisely, 'all men').

The search for truth is a complex process. It is too easy for us to settle for ideas held for centuries, especially when the effort to dig

<sup>2</sup> *Dei filius*, n. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium*, chapter 2, translated in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1914), s.v. *St Vincent of Lérins*.

beneath them might unearth still larger areas needing to be painfully called into question. Certainty is a seductive siren, and intellectual laziness, or even arrogance, is always a possibility.

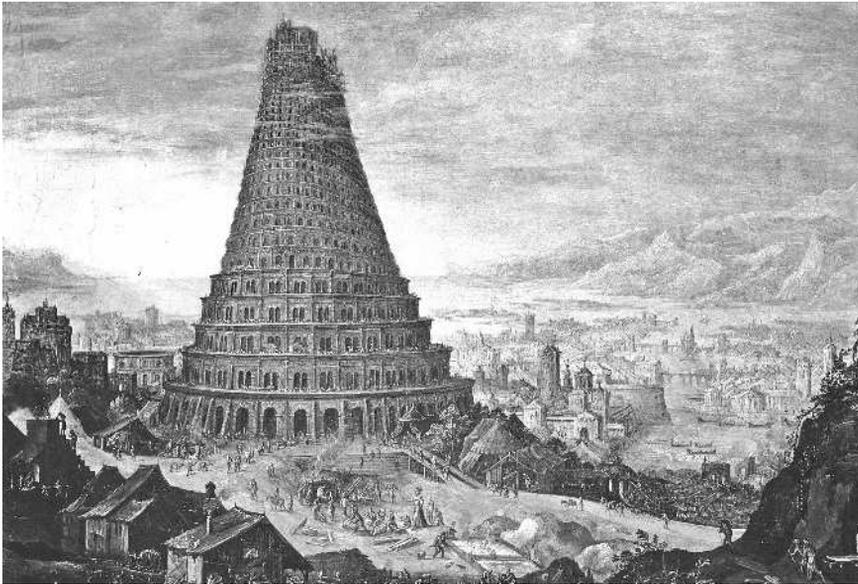
The assistance of the Spirit and the role of grace in protecting the Church from error remain a bulwark of Catholic thought, to be sure. I am not denying the binding character of magisterial pronouncements arrived at by the efforts of theologians and councils. I would suggest, though, that if grace is construed in such a way as to transform *faith*—subtly, of course—into a form of *vision* that is unattainable in this life, we have fallen into a form of pride.

### ***The First Commandment***

What might the first commandment have to do with all this? I have often wondered about the relevance for today's believers of the command that we avoid 'strange gods'. In its original context, of course, the first commandment was referring to the adoration of physical objects: Baals and such. That fact gives rise to the question: what might the first commandment mean for a modern people that feels little or no temptation to offer worship to physical objects (or, indeed, to anything)?

The commandment actually forbids humanity to place anything *before* the all-holy One. And a long tradition in Christian spirituality has held that the sins of the spirit are far more dangerous than those of the flesh. Should we include under 'sins of the spirit' intellectual laziness: the avoidance of the process of allowing new realities to challenge the surety of 'established' positions? To uncover our previously unchallenged assumptions is a psychologically costly and difficult task in any case. We should not be surprised that it might be avoided even by a large body of theological experts, over a long time.

I have come to believe that the reason the worship of false gods is listed first in the order of commandments is that it makes us confront the most powerful, sinful drive of finite creatures: the will not only to be *like* God, but to *be* God. We chafe under the reality of our finite creaturehood. Artists go mad when the limits of created matter resist all their efforts to produce with canvas or stone or oboe the perfect replica of our inner spirits. Is the drive for intellectual certainty about issues that are within the realm of *mystery* another manifestation of that same primordial urge? The enemy or 'Satan' has traditionally been depicted as capable of tricking us—devilishly—at the deepest level of our souls; why should the intellect be exempt from those strategies?



The Tower of Babel, by *Lucas van Valckenborch*, late sixteenth century

### *Another Image*

Let us look at one more foundational image provided for us in scripture: the tower of Babel. The proud builders proposed to build a tower ‘with its top in the heavens’ (Genesis 11:4). One of the possible meanings of this polyvalent image must surely be that they, *as a people*, were attempting to claim the power that belonged solely to God. It is surely a safe bet that the temptation described in Genesis was not restricted to the physical building they were attempting to build.

### ***Worship for People on Pilgrimage***

Suppose we turn then to what the image of a people on pilgrimage might say about the way such a people worships. We come up against a very common, very sad story. How often has our Church witnessed the sad phenomenon of one generation absolutising a particular set of liturgical texts and waging holy war against those of a later generation who dare to suggest that changed times might call for new forms?

Every concrete attempt at expressing our worship of the Lord is time-bound. The missal was crafted by a body of finite humans, acting under the holiest of intentions, within a given time and spiritual context, to offer fitting worship. Some aspects of Christian life come to be

highlighted while others, in use for perhaps centuries, are judged unsuited to the realities confronted by the pilgrim of a new era. Others will be allowed to retire after many years of praiseworthy service.

Perfect societies are impervious to such temerarious change. Witness the energies poured out, over centuries, in the effort to continue to employ in common worship a language which few of the people of the day can understand, instead of the language of their personal daily prayer.

### ***Costs for Our Spiritual Well-Being***

It is not easy to be an individual on a shared pilgrimage, whether physical or mystical. The call runs up against a sinful tendency at work in each and every one of us. Our longing for the experience of wholeness becomes distorted into an attempt to transcend—through our own powers—the limits of our nature as humans. Dig deep enough and it is unmasked as our primordial desire to be God. The snake in the biblical garden may be only a mystical representation, but what it represents is something all too real: the temptation to idolatry.

Pilgrimage—being still on the way—would be difficult enough if we were travelling alone. It is even more difficult to be just one member of a *whole people* that is still on the way, still being *gathered*. We are not all equally aware of our incompleteness, much less equally prepared to live at peace with it. We are at different places along the Way. Some of us are more tempted to absolutise the finite than others. And yet we are each challenged to love all the other pilgrims journeying with us, regardless of their differing stages of spiritual questioning. *Why can't she see what I see?* Why do *they* see every proposed change as hitting an electric fence that will cause a painful shock, when *we* see only a adjustable guideline? As Rodney King famously asked, 'Why can't we all just *get along*?' Jesus posed a far more demanding standard: that we *love* all our fellow pilgrims, that we *identify* with them.

The pilgrim character of Jesus' people means that the values and norms for belonging to the society we call Church are universal in their abstract definition, but they are enormously varied in their incarnation. The earliest disciples knew that. The phenomenon of Church was always designated, not as *the* Church but, rather, as the Church *at Corinth* or *Philippi*. In that era to speak of the-Church-*as-such* would have caused your listener to wonder what you were talking about. The people in pilgrimage at Corinth are not the body of pilgrims at Philippi. Or Peoria, for that matter. Yet all are called to identify as a single 'we'.

To live at peace with shades of grey is difficult enough in matters of little moment; how much more difficult when the shades show up in our responses to the far more significant questions touching on our relationship to the divine?

If I may use yet one more image: Jesus might have chosen to construct his Church as a gated community. He did not. By virtue of his profound respect for our freedom he insured that the gathering process—drawing us out of our isolated selves into a unified people—would be messy. Sometimes it is so messy that we begin to hurl painful excommunications at one another, which must surely run counter to the genius of Christianity. (Often enough, at a later date, we have had to acknowledge that the breakdown of this process did not really happen on the basis of faith, but rather as the result of misguided hubris or ugly political self-interest. Think of Galileo, Luther, St Antonio Rosmini.)

### ***Blessings***

And yet, being on pilgrimage is not simply burdensome. How amazing that the Father chose to endow us—the people still in process of being gathered as Church—with the gift of freedom: the very same freedom with which the only-begotten Son was empowered. Inviting us to be joined together as a people, the Lord does not compel us into a sterile uniformity. We bless His name by freely choosing to embrace our holy finiteness. Jesus calls us to be ‘perfect’, but the ‘perfection’ the Lord asks of us in the Gospel turns out to be not a futile, unending effort at divinisation, but simply to love the humus that we are: the uniquely limited individuals and the gathering Church he loves and for which he gives his life.

**George B. Wilson SJ** is an ecclesiologist living in Baltimore, Maryland.

# *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 €0.37), 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](mailto:furrow.office@may.ie)



*Back numbers and advertising rates* are available from the Secretary.

## **LOCKED-DOWN PRAYER**

*Ian Coleman*

**T**HE SUSPENSION OF PUBLIC church services during the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled us all to find different means of continuing our lives of prayer and praise to God. While there have been many and varied ways presented to us of participating in online celebrations, I suspect many people, like me, have found themselves turning inwards, so to speak, and searching for ways of praying individually or within our households, ways which can work within the limitations under which we find ourselves.

In my case, I have the great luxury of a piece of overgrown common land just at the back of where I live. The history of this little bit of green is intriguing; it lies over one of the tunnels of the main East Coast railway line from London to Scotland, and so cannot be built over. As a result nature, in the form of oak, elder, hawthorn and ivy, has taken over and provided a little linear wild park, following the straight course of the buried tunnel from above.

I decided, then, to use this piece of ground for some of my permitted outdoor exercise during this time of pandemic. At the same time, I decided that I would also use this time and space for prayer—in particular, for praying the old Latin Offices of Matins and Lauds. This led to some humorous comments from my family as to how I would reply if the police asked what I was doing: *Officer, it's my spiritual exercise hour . . .* In spite of its humorous tone, this comment evoked in me a very powerful memory:

By the term Spiritual Exercises we mean every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities, such as will be mentioned later. For, just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of spiritual exercises given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul. (Exx 1)

‘Taking a walk’, ‘traveling on foot’, ‘running’; ‘preparing and disposing our soul’, ridding the soul of ‘disordered affections’, ‘seeking and ending God’s will’: Ignatius is making a very profound comment here, perhaps taking his cue from St Paul:

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. (1 Corinthians 9:24–25)

There is the same contrast in both Ignatius’ and Paul’s use of the athletic metaphor: the physical as against the spiritual, the perishable wreath of victory as against the imperishable. And surely both authors would agree that self-control is at the heart of all ideas of exercise.

But there is, perhaps, in both writers, an exaggerated sense of the division between the exercise of the body and that of the spirit—between the reward of an earthly crown and a heavenly. After all, for this metaphor to function at all, there must be some spiritual virtue in the self-control that physical exercise demands. Such a strong division becomes very problematic once you start singing rather than saying the Office. Here I speak as a church musician—specialising, it is true in organ and choral directing, but also, inevitably, a church musician who is a singer. For it is the human voice, above all, which is the starting point of all sacred music; and singing is, above all, a physical process.

Setting out, then, to sing rather than say the psalms, lections and prayers of the Offices of Matins and Lauds makes one immediately aware of the physical. This is even more apparent in the Old Rite (actually last reformed in 1960, so not that old!) than the New, because here Matins comprises nine psalms and frequently a canticle (*Te Deum laudamus*), and Lauds five psalms and the Canticle of Zechariah (the *Benedictus*).<sup>1</sup> This is a seriously large slice of singing, which is partly why the whole enterprise appealed to me!

One thing that became immediately apparent once I put my plan into action was that beginning Matins was a tricky proposition. My voice, like most people’s, is not at all flexible or amenable first thing in the morning. Good Friday, when the two Offices constitute the sublime masterpiece of *Tenebrae*, was especially challenging, as I had not eaten

<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the Office are from *Breviarum Romanum* (Tours: Mame, 1960).



before starting singing. I was forced to adopt a very gentle ‘half-voice’, slightly like a falsetto register, for the first psalms of Matins—what professional singers often call ‘marking’ rather than singing fully on the voice.

To do this successfully and without straining the voice, it is essential to breathe and support just as much—if not more—as when singing normally, but to remove the power from the sound. In other words, I needed to observe my own physicality in a very precise way, making sure that my breathing was deep and nourishing, my throat relaxed and my voice placed correctly, even though the power of the sound I was making was greatly diminished. This turned out to be quite a counter-intuitive procedure—especially when my ears told me I was not producing the ‘right’ sound, and the instinct came over me to push harder—an instinct which has, at all costs, to be resisted when the voice is not warmed up.

But two extraordinary discoveries resulted from this difficult process. First, I found out that the psalmody of Matins helped me along. Much less declamatory and proclamatory than those of Lauds, the Matins psalms often follow a sort of gentle pilgrimage or progression in their structure. Sometimes this is because they are consecutive in the psalter, like Psalms 1, 2 and 3 on Sundays; at other times it is because they recount the history of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, like Psalms 77 (78 in Hebrew) or 104 (105). The gradual progression of these psalms mirrored the gradual warming up of my voice, so that after nine of them it was ready for the stately glory of the *Te Deum laudamus*, or the more extrovert psalmody of Lauds.

Secondly, I realised how little attention is paid, even by those who do sing the Office regularly, to the physicality of singing, and to the disposition and preparation required. Broadly speaking—and without meaning to be offensive—singing by clerics and religious often seems to fall into one of two camps: either reedy and thin, the sign of a lack of proper breath-support, or oppressively forced, the result (perhaps) of years of having to ‘give a strong lead’ to congregations or communities. In this quarantined time, such pressures vanish, and the psalmody of Matins invites the singer gently to break these bad habits by preparing the physical exercise of the voice gradually.

Another parameter I set in my ‘Sing the Office’ project was to go systematically through all eight of the Gregorian psalm tones.<sup>2</sup> So, I would start with tone 1 for the first psalm, tone 2 for the second, and so on. This was not as predictable an exercise as it sounds, as the longer psalms (such as Psalm 77 mentioned above) are divided into smaller sections, and therefore keep the same tone even after a doxology (*Gloria Patri*/Glory be to the Father) has intervened. So, I would find myself singing the same words to a different tone more often than not.

There is no doubt that the Latin of the psalms fitted the melodies of the Gregorian tones perfectly, but this system did throw two further challenges at me. First, preparing the (surprisingly diverse) modulations of the melody of each tone so as to fit the very variable half-lines of each psalm required careful concentration, and secondly, preparing and using the breath so as to produce a good, supported rendition of the sentence or clause—not running out of breath in the middle—also exercised my mind.

But, yet again, I found the psalmody itself helped me, and in a rather unexpected way. The Gregorian psalm tones all have two sections—a sort of ‘call-and-response’ form. But when chanted by a divided monastic choir, each verse is sung by only one side, the other side taking up the next verse immediately. This is called antiphonal singing, and it goes back as far as can be traced in the Church, and probably also to the singing of the psalms in the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>3</sup> However, because of this prompt ‘hand-over’ and ‘take-up’ of the chant from one side to another, the mid-verse break within each psalm-tone (sometimes called

<sup>2</sup> The psalm tones are the traditional melodies used for singing psalms.

<sup>3</sup> It is hard to reconstruct the exact form of the temple liturgies. John A. Smith is more successful than most in ‘Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?’, *Music and Letters*, 71/2 (May 1990), 167–186.

a caesura) becomes quite lengthened, which gives rise to a particular meditative technique. This meditation works in the following way:

- side A (traditionally, Cantoris) sings the first half-line, pauses, then continues;
- side B (traditionally, Decani) immediately responds, pauses, then continues;
- side A as before ...
- side B as before ... and so on, to the end of the psalm.

The pause at the caesura, a tiny moment of silence, allows the sound and sense to echo for a while, both in the physical surroundings (often a resonant monastic building) and in the singers' hearts and minds—a startling example of the physical and the spiritual coinciding. Then the text and melody are immediately passed across to the other side. It is this reciprocal rhythm which constitutes the motive force of monastic psalmody, and which turns it into—in St Benedict's memorable phrase—the 'work of God'.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, on my own, I could only be one-sided! But, by observing the pause at the caesura and the swift passage on to the next verse, I found my mind was thereby alerted to the length of the next line, and could 'instruct' the breath and the melody accordingly. So, although my breathing was not strictly regular (owing to the wide variation in line-lengths), on a bigger scale, it was regularly structured, not unlike the breathing of an athlete.

I added one further element to my practice of singing these Offices: movement. I walked back and forth, extremely slowly, along a reasonably extended (and somewhat overgrown) path. Inevitably there were a few disagreeable encounters with low branches and tenacious ivy in the undergrowth, as well as a more amusing one with someone smoking a solitary joint in the bushes, but this gentle pacing added another dimension to my prayer. This, of course, is not an unusual thing to do: many people who say the Office find themselves almost automatically doing this.

Such movement finds its formal liturgical expression in Processions—although these do not usually accompany psalmody, but hymns or litanies. Combined with stopping and bowing my head at doxologies

<sup>4</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 16 and elsewhere.

(usually the *Gloria Patri*), I found I had a powerful repertoire of gentle physical gestures. Bowing at the doxology has ancient roots—it is found in accounts of the pronouncing of the Divine Name at the Day of Atonement, as well as in the Book of Revelation (19:4).<sup>5</sup> In physical effect—though not really in historical origin—it also resembles the rapid bowing motion ('shokeling') which certain orthodox Jewish groups adopt in prayer. Some of this ritual movement has been formalised and preserved in the rubrics for the Office; for instance, 'Fit reverentia' (a bow is performed) is an instruction which accompanies psalm verses such as 'Sanctum et terribile nomen eius' ('holy and terrible is His name) in verse 9 of Psalm 110 (111), or 'geneflectitur' (the knee is bowed) at 'et genua flectamus Domino' ('and let us bow the knee to the Lord') in Psalm 94 (95). The 'Te ergo quaesumus' section of the Te Deum also contains this rubric. I always find it slightly disappointing that in traditionalist celebrations of the Office these observances are often reduced to the mere raising of the biretta. That said, in most vernacular celebrations they are omitted entirely.

Movement very definitely added to the holistic experience of my 'spiritual exercises'. I did not feel reduced to a disembodied chanting voice, or a slavishly reading mind, but was encouraged to engage my whole self in the act of praise. Proprioception—the faculty of being aware of one's physical location in a particular space—is greatly enhanced by movement, a fact which has become better appreciated more recently in the experience of people on the autistic spectrum.<sup>6</sup>

It is strange—and delightful—that, here again, there are echoes of this in St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, most especially in the 'Additional Directions' to the meditations of the First Week:

I will enter upon the contemplation, now kneeling, now prostrate on the floor, or lying face upward, or seated, or standing—but always intent on seeking what I desire. Two things should be noted. First, if I find what I desire while kneeling, I will not change to another posture; so too, if I find it while prostrate, and so on. Second, if in any point I find what I am seeking, there I will repose until I am fully satisfied, without any anxiety to go on.

<sup>5</sup> See *Mishnah Yoma* 6: 2.

<sup>6</sup> See Emo Imperator Blanche and others, 'Proprioceptive Processing Difficulties among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Disabilities', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 66/5 (September–October 2012), 621–624.

After finishing the exercise, for a quarter of an hour, either seated or walking about, I will examine how well I did in the contemplation or meditation. (Exx 76–77)

It is true that Ignatius only mentions walking after the meditation proper is over, but even in the considerations of posture he shows himself aware of the effect that movement between different bodily positions has on the ‘praying I’. He implies that postural changes in meditation should be led by ‘seeking what I desire’. I will return to this insight of Ignatius when I consider the Invitatory Psalm a little later. For now, it is worth noting that the essential difference between what Ignatius suggests and what I was doing in my experiment lies in the subject-matter of prayer: the Psalms ‘walk’ all by themselves, as it were, whereas the great set-pieces of the Spiritual Exercises have a more static intensity that bind together the one praying and the prayer-matter for a certain fixed period.

Strangely enough, when it came to ‘static intensity’ in my way of praying Office, I found it happened, once again, at the *Gloria Patri*—the doxology. There is a further ancient tradition of praying this element more slowly than the Psalm or Canticle which precedes it, and this has the effect of highlighting the act of Trinitarian praise, ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit’, in a way which would be impossible if either the psalm were sung without doxology (as happens in *Tenebrae*, as a sign of the destitution of Jesus as he approaches his passion) or the doxology without the psalm.

The psalm gathers itself towards its doxology—the doxology pays homage to the psalm. In the physical enactment of this, through the slowing of the pace of the chanting, a whole typology of Old and New covenants is traced, lightly and without insistence. A more limited example of this same effect can also be experienced when certain set prayers occur—such as the Introduction to the Office (‘Deus in adiutorium meum intende’—‘O God, come to my aid’) or the forms of dismissal and blessing (‘Benedicamus Domino’—‘Let us bless the Lord’). In all these instances, one emerges from the thick foliage of the psalm texts into familiar clearings of standard prayers. The parallel with the Ignatian Exercises is again easy to find; after the ‘colloquy’ or dialogue prayer with God, or with the person suggested in the relevant meditation, Ignatius succinctly instructs us to ‘Close with an Our Father’. Sometimes this is altered to ‘Close with a Hail Mary’ or with the ‘Anima Christi’, but the point is that we conclude with a familiar prayer (Exx 43, and elsewhere).



In the context of this unexpected period of lockdown, it is very timely to recall that the besetting danger, not only of the spiritual life, but of all life, of all our lives, can be summed up in a terrifying word: *sclerosis*. We know it nowadays from its use to characterize a frightening disease, multiple sclerosis, and it may seem tasteless to use it out of this context to describe problems and phenomena which are much less devastating. And yet, sclerosis is simply a process of progressive hardening—that is the root meaning of the word. Hardening can have terrible effects but often happens in tiny, incremental steps. Lockdown is, of course, a hardening of our own physical constraints, our local area, our own room. But hardening, with the very word *sclerosis*—or rather *sclērunēte*—is exactly what we are warned against in the very first psalm of Matins—Psalm 94 (95), said as an introduction to the whole day’s Office.

Because of its introductory role, this psalm is often known as the invitatory; it invites the participant into the celebration. And the relevant verses are:

O that today you would listen to his voice!

Do not harden [*sclērunēte*] your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. (vv. 7–9)

It is no accident that the psalmist places this warning against sclerosis of the heart in the context of Israel’s journey through the wilderness. Massah and Meribah, meaning respectively ‘proof’ and ‘contention’, are

the names Moses gives to the place where the Lord causes water to spring from the rock as a response to the Israelites' complaint that they are dying of thirst (Exodus 17:7). This admonition is repeated to those praying their way through the wilderness of the psalmody of Matins, but also, surely, to all of us praying our way through the wildernesses of life: 'Do not harden your hearts!'

The *hardness* of religious observance is something everyone experiences, whether in themselves or in the encounter with someone else. Once again, we encounter it in Ignatius' annotations to the *Spiritual Exercises*, here in the form of a 'Presupposition':

That both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. (Exx 22)

Putting a good interpretation is the clearly the opposite of hardening your heart against another person. Such a Presupposition is also, clearly, an Invitatory, and we may surmise that both admonitions, Ignatius' and the psalmist's, arise out of an intimate understanding of what a serious dose of spiritual commitment can do to a human being—yes, wonderful things, but also terrible hardenings, terrible sclerosis.

The journey of the retreatant through the Spiritual Exercises is the same as the journey of Israel through the wilderness and the journey of the singer through the Office in a fundamental sense: it is the search for what I desire, and movement characterizes that search, just as stillness characterizes the experience of finding what was desired. In each case, and all the more so in the strange time of lockdown and quarantine, the whole human person, body and spirit, must be engaged in this search, so as to escape any hardness, any sclerosis.

So, perhaps, the most surprising conclusion of my little ongoing spiritual exercise-time is that the strands and threads of what appear to be radically different ways of prayer, St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises and the Offices of Matins and Lauds, turn out to be woven together and knitted as one in these hidden ways:

- Exercise, involving self-control, is truly the same virtue in the bodily and spiritual realms; indeed, both in the rubrics and customs of Matins and Lauds, and in Ignatius' wise 'Additional Directions', there is a keen awareness of how body and spirit are bound together.

- The action of singing the Offices in a bodily attentive way itself reveals how to pray them. At the same time, the fundamental genius of the book of Psalms as the pilgrim-manual of life becomes more and more apparent.
- This physical attentiveness unexpectedly reveals the remedy for the sclerosis that can afflict our lives, including our prayer lives, for it opens up both the limited and limitless sides of our human nature. And this leads, equally unexpectedly, to the remedy for the sclerosis for our locked-down condition as we traverse the unknown consequences of COVID-19 as well.

I am aware, of course, that few of us are as lucky as I am, in having a little ‘prayer park’ on hand. So, it may be hard to open up the voice through the Matins psalmody if you are confined to a small apartment—at least for the sake of your neighbours! Maybe we would have to confine our singing to that supported but reduced half-voice I mentioned. It may be even harder to walk around while praying. So, we may have to be content with the little observances of the bowing at doxologies, or the changes of posture recommended by Ignatius. Nevertheless, I can confirm that adding even gentle physical exercise to our spiritual exercise enhances the prayer-life of all beyond measure. Try it!

*Ian Coleman* is a permanent deacon of the diocese of Westminster, and is also director of music at the church of Holy Redeemer and St Thomas More, Chelsea, London.

# A STORY OF OUR TIME

## A Psycho-Spiritual Interpretation of the Prodigal Son

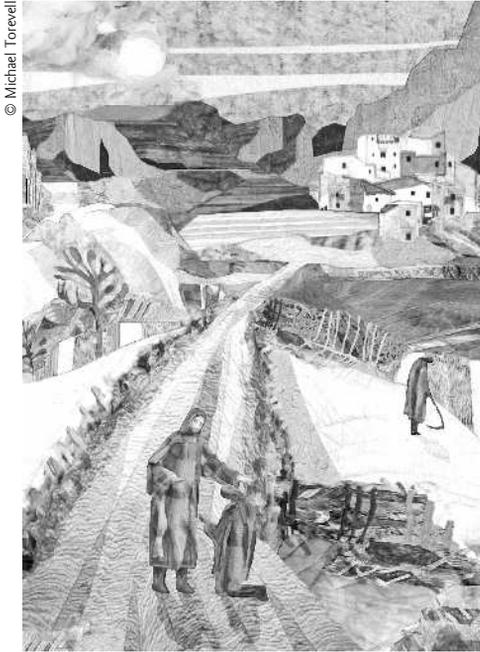
*Brendan Cook*

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON was originally directed towards a Jewish audience separated from us by 2,000 years. What, then, can it teach Christians living today? This is a personal interpretation of the story that tries also to remain faithful to what Jesus intended. I will consider its content as a literary work with a plot, characters and, importantly, an interior psycho-spiritual meaning still being played out now. Essentially, it is a story about the human need for relationships and the hope of healing the damaging consequences when relationships become strained and break down.

The main characters are two sons and their father, who is the central character. The plot concerns their experience of strain and separation in their relationships, and reveals the deep desire of the father to heal these conflicting elements and restore unity. I will focus on the character of the Prodigal Son, then and now, in relation to the experience of two interior psycho-spiritual movements. One is the movement of 'flight' from the father to a 'distant country', marked by envy and hatred, and the other is that of returning home to the father, marked by humility and gratitude.<sup>1</sup> I will focus upon how these two movements play out in human relationships today, especially within families, and their impact upon human health and well-being.

The psycho-spiritual movement of the Prodigal's flight represents the development of toxic systems of relationships whose spiritual root-cause is diabolical. Returning home to the father represents a process of deliverance and healing from the evil and damaging consequences

<sup>1</sup> See Max Picard. *The Flight from God*, translated by Marianne Kuschnitsky and J. M. Cameron (South Bend: St Augustine's, 2015), 7. Reflecting on the rise of secular culture marked by narcissism, Picard writes, 'In the world of faith, all conflict, all wavering—to flee or not to flee—was within man: it is now carried over into the dynamic of the Flight outside him. The Flight has made itself independent. It is as though it had never dwelt within man. It has now come to be something with its own structure and laws.'



*The Prodigal Son*, by Michael Torevell, 2019

of these relationships. Yet the movement of flight itself always carries the hope of repentance, and of turning back by taking ownership of complicity in the causes and maintenance of toxic relationships. Paradoxically, this applies equally to victims or scapegoats taking ownership of their state and condition, as Jesus did, in order to be delivered and healed. Each relies upon God's providential grace and mercy.

Consciously or unconsciously, the two movements of flight and return signify the experience of frustration and the threat of complete failure, and conversely a real progress in the pursuit of happiness. The elder brother goes

through both simultaneously. He remains with his father, yet also becomes subject to envy when he sees his father celebrating his younger brother's return. Progress is always threatened by natural and malign spiritual forces set on frustrating and stopping travel back to the father's house.

### ***The Fall of Humanity***

Secular society today is increasingly disconnected from the religious beliefs of the parable's original audience, who saw God as inseparably interwoven into every aspect of daily life. Reflected in my understanding of the diabolical spiritual source and origin of the toxic passions of envy and hatred, the religious beliefs of the parable's original audience related back to the book of Genesis. In it, God is the source and origin of the life and health of the whole of creation. The human person is its apex, vividly portrayed in the story of Adam and Eve living in perfect harmony with God in the garden. Critically, God's centrality is displaced by their disobedience—destined to be played out in the flight from the father of every subsequent prodigal.

Envy was introduced into human relationships when Satan deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ... the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ....' (Genesis 3: 1–5)

Through lies, Satan instigated the first act of joint disobedience, followed by mutual efforts to avoid blame. When God asked Adam, 'Where are you?', inviting him to confess his wrongdoing and seek forgiveness, he blamed Eve: 'she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate' (Genesis 3: 12). Eve said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate' (Genesis 3: 13). Satan's envy and hatred have now begun playing out in human relationships, with devastating consequences. This will flower in the rise of narcissism and come to bear fruit outside the Garden of Eden in the seven deadly sins.

Satan, the diabolical spiritual father of the passion of envy, through envy reduced human life to one marked by sweat and toil, culminating in death. Correspondingly, the Prodigal Son's flight from the father is propelled by envy of the 'dissolute living' apparently enjoyed by those living in a 'distant country' (Luke 15: 13). This envy moves the Prodigal Son to wound his father's heart by rejecting his love and hospitality, and setting off alone down a road that will end with living and eating among swine.

Despite the fall of Adam and Eve, Jewish tradition placed hope in God's covenant to re-establish God's sovereign rule, and deliver humanity from the evil that had inflicted a mortal spiritual wound on each person's relationship with God. This hope became focused on the Temple at Jerusalem, seen as the dwelling place of God and a microcosm of heaven and earth.<sup>2</sup> Allied to this, there was hope also in the coming of the Messiah. He would heal sickness and restore the integrity of the human person before God.

This hope was realised for Christians in the incarnation, resurrection and ascension into heaven of Jesus, the new Adam and new Living Temple, first fruit of a new creation in whom God re-established his rule. Jesus' humanity became the source of every prodigal's return home to the father. The flight from the father would therefore represent the wilful frustration of God's covenantal plan fulfilled in Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> See James T. Turner Jr, 'Temple Theology, Holistic Eschatology, and the *Imago Dei*: An Analytic Prolegomenon', *TheoLogica*, 2/1 (2018), 95–114.

### ***The Fall of the Angels***

The Church Fathers retained the focus of the parable's original Jewish audience on the account in Genesis of humanity's fall from grace. This account was also central to their understanding of the role and mission of the angels in creation. The flight from the Father plays out here once again in a diabolical spirit of refusal to accept the dignity of the human person, destined to be further elevated in Jesus.

Drawing heavily on Genesis, Irenaeus writes that, before the creation of humanity, God had brought into being 'great creations'.<sup>3</sup> Among these were the angels, one of whom was an archangel entrusted with maintaining and governing the earth, with other angels under his authority. However, seeing that God had created man in his image, this archangel,

... became envious of him and began to murmur. He brought about the ruin of man and made him a sinner by inducing him to violate the commandment of God with full malice .... This angel, since he had followed his own inclinations in revolting and abandoning God, was called Satan in the Hebrew language, the same angel whom we call the devil.<sup>4</sup>

When Michael asked Satan to follow his example and pay homage to Adam, Satan refused to defer to someone whom he regarded as lower than himself. Satan's refusal was compounded by seeing the prospect of the Father's only Son becoming incarnate as a human person, raising the status of humanity even further above that of the angels. Satan became even more envious:

Thus, the sin of the angels was that they were jealous of man. A whole theological tradition will retain this idea in the form of a refusal on the part of Lucifer to accept the future prospect of an Incarnation of the Word.<sup>5</sup>

The prospect of the human person enjoying superior divine qualities by being perfectly embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ pushed diabolical envy into hatred. Jesus saw Satan's envy turn to hatred of the human

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *A Discourse in Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 11, quoted in Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*, translated by David Heimann (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 2009), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Irenaeus, *Discourse in Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 16, quoted in Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission*, 52.

person, and his fall to earth: 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning' (Luke 10:18).

The Word becoming flesh was now the primary target of Satan's envy and hatred. Satan, as the 'ruler of this world' (John 16:11), is reflected in these words of Jesus to his disciples, 'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you' (John 15:18). Satan's diabolical ill will towards humanity would eventually find its primary target when, through Judas (Luke 22:3; John 13:27), it instigated Jesus' death on the cross. This was the culmination of Satan's envy and hatred of the human person. The cross would become both the most significant symbol of the diabolical passions of envy and hatred and the sign that they have been decisively overcome, offering real hope of deliverance and healing from the toxic relationships that they create. Jesus, the victim and scapegoat, was established as the only way back to the father.<sup>6</sup> The Prodigal's flight from the father was now, therefore, also a flight from the shadow of the cross. It became a refusal to accept humanity's elevation, in Jesus, to his true home in the highest heavens. Jesus' ascension into heaven made it possible for humanity fully to return home to the father's house.

### *The Lost Sheep*

The envy of the fallen angels caused man to be expelled from paradise, his true home, and snatched away from the company of those in heaven. The Fathers say that this explained the angels' joy upon seeing Jesus ascend into heaven and reinstate humanity in their midst.<sup>7</sup> This joy and celebration of the angels is expressed by the early Fathers using other biblical images as well. Most notable is that of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12–13; Luke 15:4–7), with strong allusions to the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parallels are clear. The good shepherd abandons the 99 sheep—who are the angels. He sets out in search of the one lost sheep—humanity, which has strayed far from the father and the company of heaven: 'When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices' (Luke 15:5), and goes home.

Gregory of Nyssa mingles the image of the Lost Sheep with that of the Prodigal Son. Likewise, representing humanity, he 'strayed far from the father's hearth',<sup>8</sup> and upon his return the father said to his servants, who were the angelic hosts: 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—

<sup>6</sup> John 14:6: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'.

<sup>7</sup> See Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission*, chapter 4, 'The Angels of the Ascension'.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eumoniüs*, 4.3, quoted in Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission*, 55.

and put it on him .... And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' (Luke 15:22–24). Despite Jesus' offer of eternal life in heaven with the angels, humanity remained free to continue 'straying far from the father's hearth' and living in a 'distant country', inspired by the devil's unrepentant envy and hatred.

### ***Pathological Narcissism***

Despite today being largely hidden from view, these diabolical passions are still playing out in human relationships, and their the toxic effects are certainly not hidden. They may be seen in the Prodigal's flight from the father taking a decidedly narcissistic turn. Having identified the diabolical spiritual father of narcissism, this is no surprise. Its association with the devil finds support in Paul, when he writes about, 'the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient' (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus says of Satan in John's Gospel: 'there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' This is a characteristic of narcissists; accordingly today's narcissists might warrant Jesus' rebuke: 'You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires' (John 8:44).

Hidden beneath the secular façade of material comfort and self-reliance, Satanic envy and hatred are flowering in his spiritually narcissistic children. Especially within families, this diabolical spiritual root cause of narcissism is the dark, wilful, unrepentant, underlying psycho-spiritual cause of toxic systems of relationships. This is evident in John Paul II's description of the world as:

... the theatre of a never-ending battle being waged for our dignity and identity as free, spiritual beings .... There are those who reject the light of life, preferring 'the fruitless works of darkness' (Ephesians 5:11) .... The paradox of the Christian message is this: Christ—the Head—has already conquered sin and death. Christ in his Body—the pilgrim People of God—continually suffers the onslaught of the Evil One and all the evil which sinful humanity is capable of.<sup>9</sup>

Some recovery and application of the tradition of Christian spiritual warfare seems inescapable, if the Prodigal Son is to embark upon returning home to the father.

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, homily, eighth World Youth Day, 15 August 1993.

Irrespective of whether one believes that the devil is the spiritual father of narcissism, the worrying prospect of its rise throughout the West is widely recognised. Among others, Christopher Lasch has argued that US culture has experienced the cultural normalisation of pathological narcissism.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Narcissistic Personality Disorder and Spiritual Evil*

Modern psychology states that Narcissistic Personality Disorder is indicated if five or more of nine criteria are present.<sup>11</sup> Four of these clearly reflect the Judaeo-Christian view of the devil. The first is feelings of grandiosity and superiority, with the demand for that superiority to be recognised. The second is interpersonal exploitativeness and using others to achieve one's own ends. The third is lack of empathy: being unable or unwilling to identify with, acknowledge or accept the feelings, needs and choices of others. Fourth is constant envy of others and seeking to hurt or destroy the objects or persons that are envied.

These psychological criteria resonate with the picture I have painted of a devil whose core passion is envy, turning to hatred at the prospect of the incarnation. The writer Sam Vaknin, who has been diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, has some insightful comments about the experience of pathological envy: 'It is misery and humiliation and impotent rage and a tortuous, slippery path to nowhere. The effort to break the padded walls of this self-visited cell often leads to attacks on the perceived source of frustration.'<sup>12</sup> And the psychiatrist Scott Peck explicitly links pathological narcissism to evil. In *People of the Lie* he writes: 'It would, I believe, be quite appropriate to classify evil people as constituting a specific variant of the narcissistic personality disorder'. Encounters described in his book forced him to ask the question as to whether there was such a thing as an evil spirit or devil. He concluded, '... obscure though it might be, I do believe there is some relationship between Satanic activity and human evil'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectation*, rev. edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); see also Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria, 2010); Anne Mann, *The Life of I Updated Edition: The New Culture of Narcissism* (Melbourne: Melbourne U, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Sam Vaknin, *Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited* (Prague: Narcissus, 2005), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (London: Arrow, 1990), 145, 211.

This linkage of spiritual evil with human evil is central to my understanding of the psycho-spiritual movement of the flight of the Prodigal today; a purely psycho-social view fails to offer insight into the role of spiritual evil. Central to the parable is the identification of spiritual evil and its remedy in the Prodigal's movement back to the father's house.

### ***The Prodigal Son and Mimetic Theory***

The significance of the psycho-spiritual dynamic of the Prodigal is also reflected in disciplines other than psychology. The influential mimetic theory of the philosopher René Girard is a prime example. Drawing inspiration from great literary masters such as Dostoevsky, Shakespeare and Proust, Girard proposed a social theory arguing that desire is both *mimetic* and *triangular*. By this he meant that we rarely desire objects straightforwardly; rather, we desire them because others desire them. As we *imitate* another's desire, we establish a *triangulation* between self, other, and object. In his flight from the father, the Prodigal Son may be viewed as expressing the imitation of another's desire. Here, though, the effect is compounded because the other's desire is that of the devil, rooted in envy and hatred of the human person. The devil's desire and passions become central in establishing the relationship between the self (Prodigal), the other (devil), and the object (the distant country and its enticements).

The combination of these relationships propels the flight of the Prodigal from the father today along a narcissistic spectrum producing broken systems of relationships and their scapegoats. Conversely, the psycho-spiritual movement of returning home is propelled by the father's desire to be reconciled and restore unity. This is realised in Jesus' humanity through grace. Importantly, this movement in response to the father's desire for the Prodigal to return home offers the most effective antidote to the rising tide of narcissism produced by the flight from God.

Girard maintained that desiring what others desire inevitably leads to rivalry and violence, and to what he called the scapegoating mechanism. This described how those in power offload culpability and blame on to a third party—the scapegoat—whose sacrifice and elimination help to discharge tension and maintain unity. Jesus' crucifixion is the most significant example illustrating the scapegoating mechanism. However with Jesus, unlike many victims, the diabolical spiritual desire of the other becomes fully exposed and stripped of power. This naming

or exposing and incapacitating of spiritual evil is critically important today to deliver and heal its many victims.

Consciously or unconsciously, direct participation in the spiritual power of the desire of the other by willing followers continues. This is central to understanding the psycho-spiritual dynamic still propelling Prodigal sons and daughters down two opposite and opposing paths. The flight from the father remains rooted in the spiritual power of the devil's desire to create dysfunctional relationships. Choosing to return home, conversely, is rooted in the supernatural spiritual power of the father's desire to deliver them from evil and erase its effects upon human health and well-being.

Girard's work reflects the reality and consequences of these two psycho-spiritual movements as they are experienced today. He held up the gospels as mirrors that reveal a humanity that is broken, along with a new reality in Christ that is not. Importantly, this new reality is resolutely on the side of the victim or scapegoat, and not of those in power who create victims. Therefore, unsurprisingly, Jesus' death does not bring about the envisaged reconciliation of the whole community; it does not have a cathartic effect. Instead it creates two camps—those who were for Jesus and those who were against Jesus. Girard says the explanation of this is the resurrection!<sup>14</sup> These two camps forever represent the two opposite and opposing psycho-spiritual movements of the Prodigal Son.

Drawing on two books by Scott Peck with the apt titles, *The Road Less Travelled* and *People of the Lie*, I have reflected the division between these two movements and two camps here. The first camp represents the Prodigal returning home to the father down a *road less travelled*.



Satan Descends upon Earth, by Gustave Doré, 1866

<sup>14</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 2.

The other camp represents their ‘flight’ from the father, today becoming increasingly narcissistic. In the first book, written in the 1960s—the era of *I’m OK, You’re OK*—he courageously argues that life is difficult, and that personal growth is a complex and an arduous lifelong task that most people attempt to avoid.<sup>15</sup> In *People of the Lie*, he describes those set against engaging in this arduous work who, he argued, were not merely ill but manifestly evil.

### **Spiritual Needs**

The insights that I have drawn from the Prodigal Son choosing two different paths in his relationship to his father remain relevant to us today. His narcissistic flight from the father, marked by the devil’s envy and hatred of the human person, ends in isolation, living and eating among swine. By contrast, his choice to return home and restore his relationship with his father is marked by humility, gratitude and joy. I have shown the psycho-spiritual movement of flight to shed much light on how toxic systems of relationships are created, especially within families, linked to their impact on the health and well-being of victims and perpetrators alike.

However, this psycho-spiritual understanding of broken relationships remains largely hidden from view. This is reflected in a landmark study led by Vincent Felitti linking childhood adversity with detrimental health outcomes across a lifetime. It found that ‘health behaviors and lifestyle factors’ were the leading determinant of the health and social well-being of the nation, and that ‘potentially damaging childhood experiences ... should be recognized as the basic causes of morbidity and mortality in adult life’.<sup>16</sup> However, this still remains largely unrecognised within health and social care, as does the link between adverse childhood experiences and spiritual and human evil.

In 2014 Dr Harold Koenig spoke of, ‘the failure of the grand experiment of separating religion from medicine about 200 years ago’ and of the importance for health professionals of identifying and addressing the ‘spiritual needs’ of patients.<sup>17</sup> Attempting to meet these spiritual needs,

<sup>15</sup> Compare Thomas A. Harris, *I’m OK, You’re OK* (London: Arrow, 1995 [1967]).

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Felitti and others, ‘Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study’, *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 14/4 (1998), 245–258; and see Nadine Harris. *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity* (Boston, Ma: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Koenig, keynote speech, European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health, University of Malta, 22 May 2014. Koenig is considered one of the world’s experts on medicine and religion. See <https://ecrsh.eu/mm/ECRSH14ConferenceFolder.pdf>.

which this psycho-spiritual interpretation of the Prodigal Son parable aims to do, will help to redress these problems within healthcare.<sup>18</sup> This means being freed from any problem of a spiritual nature or cause and healed of the damage to human health and well-being resulting from it. A growing body of evidence shows that addressing spiritual needs within the therapeutic process helps to heal the damage to human health and well-being which finds its source and origin in them.<sup>19</sup>

I have argued that the parable of the Prodigal Son, his flight from the father and his decision to return home, represent a psycho-spiritual story of our time that desperately needs telling. The application of the insights that I draw from it offers to help growing numbers of victims of the evils of narcissism who are trapped within the damaged and broken systems of relationships it creates. Given that spiritual factors are linked to the causes of much sickness and disease, the future of healthcare in the community needs to take account of them in order to deliver care that is truly centred on the whole person.

*Brendan Cook* worked in mental health before embarking on a course of studies culminating in a PhD at Liverpool Hope University. With the support of his wife Jacqueline, who is a nurse, he has since been interested in applying insights from his studies within healthcare. This has led to seeing great benefits both personally and professionally from taking 'spiritual needs' seriously. Both remain involved in efforts to establish this dimension of whole-person-centred care more widely.

<sup>18</sup> Spiritual needs' assessment should form part of a truly whole-person-centred care plan within healthcare, but in practice in the United Kingdom there is widespread ignorance about how to implement this dimension of care fully. It aims to link the core beliefs and values which motivate a patient's life and behaviour to their health and well-being outcomes.

<sup>19</sup> See Harold Koenig, Dana King and Verna B. Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

# WALKING THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

## Praying with Scripture on the Pilgrim Trail

*Susan S. Phillips*

BEGINNING IN LATE MAY 2019, my husband and I, with a group of friends, began the walk of about 470 miles along the Camino de Santiago. We had longed to take this spiritual journey. As we dreamed and planned, it occurred to me that the number of days for the pilgrimage was a near match to the length of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, traditionally given as a thirty-day sequestered retreat.

For five years I have led a nine-month (thirty-week) version of the Exercises and have always wondered what it would be like to undergo the discipline over thirty days. I plotted out the thirty-day Spiritual Exercises, allowing for a few preparatory days and a few post-Exercises days of reflection, and taking every Sunday as a Sabbath free from particular assignments. We prayed with Kevin O'Brien's *The Ignatian Adventure*. This book maps out the thirty-week version of the Exercises, which is what most of us are able to do in our daily lives, and I would recommend it.<sup>1</sup> We, however, had the rare gift of being able to do a more concentrated thirty-day retreat, so each day we read the seven text-related prompts that O'Brien recommends for a week.

### **Mary's Freedom**

Generally the prompt consisted of verses of scripture plus a reflection question. So, for instance, one day during the first week of our walk we were at Week Five in his book. (To confuse you even more, we were still in the Preparation Week before the Four Weeks of the Exercises themselves.) One of the seven prompts was:

Read Luke 1:26–38. Pray over the story of the Annunciation and marvel at Mary's freedom to say, 'Yes!' Notice how she deals with her fears and keeps her focus on God. Pray over the words of the

<sup>1</sup> Kevin O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola, 2011).

Gospel slowly,<sup>2</sup> meditatively, or use your imagination to place yourself in the scene.

Of the seven possible texts and prompts for that section, it was the annunciation to which I felt most drawn.

That morning I had got up at five o'clock to pray and prepare for the day. I read the text of my every-day lectionary, *Give Us This Day*, and noticed that it was Ascension Day—Ascension Thursday, when the Church remembers Jesus' final moment on earth. Then, when I turned to the Spiritual Exercises readings for the day, my awareness of the day in the church calendar made me curious to pray with the Annunciation, paying attention to Jesus' first spark of human presence on earth while remembering the day of his last.

In my journal that morning I wrote about the Annunciation:

*Mary was troubled, wondering. The angel Gabriel perceived her fear and addressed the feeling. Mary questioned. The angel allowed her thoughtful question and responded to it. Then Mary responded obediently, vowing herself to be first and foremost 'the Lord's servant'. I'll ponder that as I walk today.*

And I did. On the side of a building in the middle of a wheat field I noticed a painting of Mary holding the Christ Child on her lap, and I took a photograph of it. As we walked on in the bright sunshine, talking about the passages with which we were praying and enjoying the beauty of the countryside, we came upon a mother walking with her three-year-old daughter, Hannah. The mother was pushing a stroller and had a backpack with their pilgrimage gear.



<sup>2</sup> O'Brien, *Ignatian Adventure*, 58.



Hannah knew the rule that on uphill stretches she was to get out of the stroller and walk. Climbing one hill my husband and I held her hands, and she walked between us, sometimes, at her request, being swung. Our friend helped the mother push the stroller uphill.

Later, in my journal entry about the day, I wrote:

*How lovely that Steve and I had time with a sweet little girl when I was pondering how God came to us as a child . . . . I also noticed how the angel tended to all aspects of Mary. Feelings: Do not be afraid. Mind: He answered her 'how' question, mysterious as the answer was. Social: Elizabeth, too, is miraculously with child. And Mary, saint that she was,*

*responded out of love of God. More than her identity as a young woman and virgin, she was a servant of the Lord. May I, too, respond out of my identity as Your servant and friend.*

At dinner that night we spoke about how God had framed our experience of the day through the Exercises. One of us, owing to an injury, was unable to walk that day and took the bus to the next town. She was praying the same verses with us, all of which were about being freed from confining roles and concerns so that we might find the freedom to respond to the grace God extends to us in the moment. Arriving in town she had thought about how she might be open to another person, and turn away from the temptation to focus on her own injury and her regret at not being able to walk. Her mind went to other people who could not walk and who might appreciate loving attention.

So she sought out a nursing home, went in, and said she would be happy to spend time with any resident who would like a visitor. The

receptionist welcomed her and said the residents were attending Mass, and she was welcome to join them. My friend was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and does not have entirely positive memories of it. She turned to an evangelical Protestant faith in her young adulthood and has found joy and growth there. Nevertheless, on that day, in an 800-year-old Spanish town, she felt God was inviting her to join the elderly Catholics at their Mass. Like Mary, she sought to be, above all, a servant of the Lord. Following the receptionist's invitation, she found a small group of residents gathered with a couple of elderly priests. They prayed. They received the elements. They smiled at my friend. And she felt God's healing grace in her heart. She was praying the preparatory week of the Spiritual Exercises at this time. The grace she received was the affirmation that God created her and each of the people with whom she was gathered. God loves them all.

### ***The Arc of the Exercises***

Following the introductory, preparatory weeks of prayer during which the retreatant considers who God is and how we are created and loved by God, the Spiritual Exercises are divided into four Weeks, which may be correlated with the phases of mysticism described by Evelyn Underhill.

1. Purgation–Confession. Notice the tug-of-war in one's self between self-centred life and God-centred life. Confess to our loving God, and rest in gratitude.
2. Awakening/Illumination–Friendship with Jesus. Pray with scriptures related to Jesus' life. Become aware of one's affective life, and Jesus' affective life.
3. Darkness. Accompany Jesus through his passion and death, sharing his humiliation and abandonment, and noticing the darkness of the world.
4. Union. Participate in Jesus' resurrection and life in the world. (This often moves one to action.)

#### *Week 1*

The First Week of the Exercises is a challenge, maybe especially for Protestants. The retreatant is introduced to ways of praying and to some theological understandings that are Roman Catholic—and mediaeval. However, retreatants are encouraged to pray to God in the way that

seems right for them. So, for instance, most of us on the Camino did not pray to Jesus' mother Mary, though we honour her and recognise her to be the first person who understood who Jesus was.

Confession is also a practice less formalised for Protestants than Catholics, and less familiar to them. But, as one of our company wrote:

*I'm loving the Ignatian Exercises. I do not know how I will feel about the 'sin' section, but I suspect I will find it refreshing since the majority of our Evangelical world tends to be biased towards the 'grace' end of the spectrum.*

About a weekly group that includes confession, this person wrote:

*It is amazing and comforting and relieving to hear what we all confess. I think most people do not realise how much freedom and aliveness this leads to.*

To illustrate the experience of praying the Purgation week, the so-called First Week, I shall share one of my own experiences. The text for the day had been the parable of the Prodigal Son. Kevin O'Brien drew our attention to how the son was prodigal in his waste of what he received, and that the father was also prodigal in giving lavishly and joyfully when his son returned. As I walked the trail, my sticks clicking in the gravel and the sun beating down on my hat, I thought about my own parents and their lavish, joyful giving to me. As I walked and prayed, I remembered Steve's and my very beautiful wedding. It took place in the mid-1970s and coincided with a downturn in the economy that affected many people, including my father. It led to my parents-in-law deciding, at the last minute, that they could not contribute to the wedding costs, so my parents bore the weight of the celebration of their young daughter and son-in-law.

As I looked across the plains of Spain, I wept. I wept about my parents' loving-kindness. They gave joyfully. They never, ever mentioned the hardship of paying for the wedding. They rejoiced in Steve's and my happiness. I also wept at my cluelessness. When I was married at 21, I really did not think about the sacrifice my parents made. I did not stop to think about their experience of my wedding, except for the joy I perceived in them. That unawareness is what I confessed. My parents did not want my wedding clouded by thoughts about expense and sacrifice, any more than the father of the prodigal son wished that when he had the fatted calf killed and called neighbours to join the celebration. But I had many years to reflect on my wedding, and in all those years I did not wake up to the broader reality. That I regret.

On the trail, talking with God, I experienced forgiveness. It was painful, like a limb that has been asleep coming awake. In the fullness of feeling, I felt overwhelmed by my parents' love, and that was the greater gift than that of my own confession and forgiveness. Later when our group gathered, we learnt that we each had had an experience of confession that was accompanied by an even greater experience of love. From remembering God's great love in the preparatory week and experiencing it in connection with our own need for forgiveness, we moved into the Second Week.

### Week 2

The Second Week is one of accompanying Jesus through his life. This is always a welcome week of the Exercises, full of imaginative prayer as the gospel stories are read and prayed. Given the presence of Christian statuary and stained-glass windows on the Camino, we felt we were walking through the Gospels on a daily basis. Through these days of the Exercises we prayed for humility. We prayed to notice what turned our hearts towards God and what turned our hearts away. We asked that God would help us in those turned-away times of desolation. We continued to pray to see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly, day by day.

Most of us had blisters and other physical challenges on the Camino. Some had to take days off walking and ride in taxis from town to town. Those Camino experiences could lead to desolation: *Why am I here? What's wrong with my body? I feel lonely and left out, a drag on the experience of the others. I feel envious of their experience and as though I'm a fifth wheel.* When those feelings and thoughts were expressed to God and to our companions, they were prayers. That signalled a return to consolation.

The Exercises themselves could provoke desolation. Praying for poverty is an Ignatian invitation in the midst of reading the stories of Jesus with the rich young ruler and with Zaccheus. We confessed to one another how as we pondered those passages while walking past the sycamores on the trail: we wanted to hide from God and not listen to God's messages. We were afraid of what might be asked of us. Again, the confession was prayer and a turn towards God. Together we prayed for the gift of right indifference, the grace of being free from disordered loves that get in the way of being able to hear and respond to God. The Camino elicits humility, as do the Exercises. We sin and fall short. Our



souls turn from God at times, and our joints fail to sustain us in all the miles we try to walk. Pilgrims discover their dependence on God, strangers, weather, terrain and the blessed souls who planted sycamore trees on the paths through the dry, hot *meseta* between Burgos and León.

The Camino and the Exercises symbolize lifespan and life course. On the trail it is very clear how age is a significant factor. The people in their twenties and thirties click along at a brisk pace, many carrying heavy packs and showing little stress from the weight and walking. At the end of the day they laugh and walk around the town. We older folk arrive at our destinations exhausted, looking for places to sit and examine our feet. We trade tips on bandages and ointments, and then go to sleep early. The Gospels show us people living the spans of their lives. There is remarkably little comment about their physical experience of stress, illness or ageing, but there are some glimpses. We follow Jesus' mother from her youth to her mature experience as a grieving mother. We see Paul through seasons of ordeal and ripening. We see many of the people in scripture face their deaths. In mediaeval times it was not uncommon for people to die on the Camino.

The most popular film about the Camino today is *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen, and that story begins with the tragedy of a death on the Camino.<sup>3</sup> We did not encounter death on the trail, though we heard

<sup>3</sup> *The Way*, directed by Emilio Estevez (Filmax, 2010).

that several occurred during our time there. However, watching hundreds of pilgrims walk towards the horizon, all facing in the same direction, all stripped of the accoutrements of their everyday professional and communal lives, does remind us that we are all headed in the same direction, even though some of us will get there before others.

For us that was brought home by one of our companions, a friend who is 86 years old and a widow. She participated in the Exercises, accompanied by a daughter and son-in-law in their sixties, and three grandchildren in their twenties. The octogenarian has been my good friend for 35 years, so I do not think a lot about how old she is, but noticing how the other pilgrims responded to her made me keenly aware of her age and mortality. During our gatherings about the daily prayers, our friend told us she, too, was being brought face to face with her mortality through her body's age and growing incapacity. She's independent and athletic, yet she's old. She read to us from the French priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote about old age little by little diminishing us and pushing us towards the end—an end that is, however, truly, 'falling into a greater life'.<sup>4</sup> The visible span of life comes to an end. As my friend spoke, we were moved to tears.

As we walked the Camino, each experiencing our own pilgrimage in the context of the human lifespan, we reflected on the course of Jesus' life—through the birth narratives and his life of ministry—during the Second Week. In addition to mortality and age, we pondered the courses of our lives. One person with us had recently retired from a significant career of forty years. Others were near the beginning of their adult lives, wondering if marriage and children were ahead of them and where they would end up working. Others had the time to review our lives and open our hearts to what God might be inviting us into now.

On the trail we met people who were walking because a tragic death of a loved one had shifted the axis of their lives. We met grieving parents and recently bereft spouses. We also met a couple who had always thought they had been called to be missionaries, but the call had not been realised until a year before, when they were asked to take over a ministry in a very small town along the Camino. Learning Spanish and tending to the needs of pilgrims, they were full of joy.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *On Suffering* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 58.

*Week 3*

The Third Week of the Exercises is about being with Jesus in his suffering and savouring the grace of compassion. The Third Week is painful, and it coincided for us with passing the 300-mile point in our walk. We experienced more injuries in our group, and some people once again had to take buses and taxis. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in our Exercises prayers were the two days I had to step off the path and ride because of a heel injury. We stayed the night in a small town called Villafranca del Bierzo, a place where over the centuries pilgrims sometimes had to abandon the hope of travelling all the way to Santiago. Hospitals sprang up to care for them, and it was possible to receive a special certificate of having made it as far as they were able. We felt a kinship with those pilgrims through the ages! The two other people with injuries and I visited a pharmacy and received wise counsel and tender care from a pharmacist well acquainted with *peregrinos*.

When the whole group gathered to pray and reflect on the scriptures we had been contemplating, we spoke about facing unrequited hopes. Hopes for good things, seemingly God-pleasing things, that were not answered. As the rain came down, we thought of Jesus and the disciples together in their suffering. We were hushed and horrified by the brutality of the crucifixion. We remembered the women at the foot of the cross and the amazing way in which Jesus, in agony, cared for the thief beside him and his mother beneath his pierced feet. Among us were two friends who have lost adult children in the past few years. The poignancy of their loss pierced our hearts. We ended our time together just saying out loud the names of suffering people for whom we were praying—those who have left this world ahead of us, and those still with us.

Pilgrimage has *soakage*. I heard from a friend that a tour guide told him the cliffs of Kerry in Ireland have soakage: their fierce beauty has the depth and force to meet the force of grief. That is also true for the Camino, and the Spiritual Exercises. They have the added blessing of being experienced in good and compassionate company. As the Third Week ended with reflections on Holy Saturday, we experienced that liminal state where sorrow and joy mingle. One of the bereft mothers quoted a song that begins, 'All this sorrow, all this joy.' The other grieving mother told us that grief and joy seem like they should be opposites. Yet she has discovered that joy shows up in the midst of the grief. She wore her deceased son's hiking pants on the Camino and felt his closeness as she beheld the beauty of the fields and flowers.

We thought about the strength of community and spiritual practices among Jesus' friends and family on that threshold day of Holy Saturday (in the Exercises). The impulse was for them to enter into the funeral practices of preparing his body, but their custom of Sabbath-keeping, held in community, made them slow down and remember God. We wondered if our communities of practice had that kind of resilience.

#### *Week 4*

Easter ushered in the Fourth Week, and we approached our final hundred miles of the Camino. As we celebrated Easter, we came to the tiny town of O Cebreiro, perched on a hill and the Camino gateway to the region of Galicia, in which lies Santiago de Compostela. With Easter I was back on the trail and delighted to hear birdsong, walk in and out of sunlight on the path, and pass cows in their pastures creating a symphony of bells as they grazed. All nature seemed to speak of resurrection.

O Cebreiro is home to Iglesia de Santa Maria Real, the oldest extant church on the Camino, dating from the ninth century. It is also where Elias Valiña Sampedro was the priest and is buried—the one who spent years placing yellow blazes marking the Camino throughout Spain. The church is made of the same rough-hewn stone as the other buildings and roads of the village. Inside there is a display of Bibles in many languages, including some North American First Peoples' languages.

Candles were flickering with the prayers of pilgrims who had entered the church before me. A side altar contained photographs of people who were deceased and held in prayer. A small table invited pilgrims to write their pilgrimage intentions. After our Exercises gathering and dinner we went to the pilgrims' worship service and blessing. About three dozen pilgrims were there with another twenty or so people from the town. The Franciscan priest welcomed us warmly in several languages, and enlisted pilgrims in reading the scriptures and blessings in different languages. During Communion the hymn 'Ave Maria' was played, a perfect accompaniment to imagining the love of Mary for her son, so like the love of the parents in our group for their children, alive and deceased.

After giving communion, the priest invited all the pilgrims to form a circle around the altar. The townspeople stayed in their pews, praying for us as we encircled the altar. Standing beside my friends and husband, I looked to the other side of the circle where a weathered group of older men stood in their cycling clothes. As the priest greeted each

pilgrim with a hug, I watched tears roll down the men's faces. I thought of the faith that would inspire elderly men to travel on bikes in Spain for hundreds of miles, through rain and sun, over steep passes and across long, dry mesas. Easter, indeed.

### ***Buen Camino!***

As I conclude these reflections on the dual pilgrimage of Camino and Spiritual Exercises, I invite now you to read a prayer we were given in that Franciscan church on a hill, on the day of Easter as we prayed through the Gospels:

If from today I do not continue walking on your path,  
searching and living according to what I have learnt;  
if from today I do not see in every person, friend or foe  
a companion on the Camino;  
if from today I cannot recognise God,  
the God of Jesus of Nazareth  
as the one God of my life,  
I have arrived nowhere.<sup>5</sup>

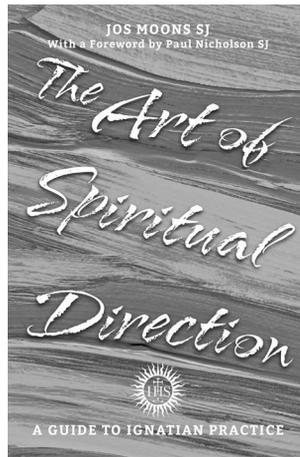
**Susan S. Phillips** is executive director and professor at New College, Berkeley Graduate Theological Union. She is a sociologist, spiritual director and supervisor of spiritual directors, and a writer whose works include *Candlelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction* (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Prayer attributed to a Franciscan monk, Fray Dino, at O Cebreiro.

## RECENT BOOKS

**Jos Moons, *The Art of Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Ignatian Practice* (Dublin: Messenger, 2020). 978 1 7881 2119 4, pp.160, €19.95.**

Is the ability to be a good spiritual director better understood as a charism: a divinely bestowed gift, like the abilities to prophesy or evangelize mentioned in chapter 4 of the letter to the Ephesians? Or is it a skill that can be taught, learnt, honed and improved? This is a question that has been much debated in recent decades, with experienced proponents on both sides. However, as with many such questions posing dichotomies, the best answer probably combines elements of both. Good directors need a range of natural (or even supernatural?) gifts. These gifts themselves, however, can be improved and built upon. Certain inherent characteristics of empathy and patience, for example, can be further developed by training from those who have themselves learnt how to act as effective directors.



In *The Art of Spiritual Direction* (a revised English translation of *De kunst van geestelijke begeleiding*, published in Dutch in 2019), Jos Moons focuses on how such training can develop a director's skills. The author is a Jesuit priest of the Low Countries region, currently working as a university parish chaplain and lecturer at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. His aim, as he explains in the Introduction to the work, is to offer 'concrete, clear and practical tools', adding, 'you could even think of it as a manual' (p.7). In this way it has much in common with the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the fountainhead of the spirituality in which Moons is rooted, where St Ignatius offers exercises to be undertaken rather than a theoretical presentation to be understood.

The core of the present work presents six 'tools' to be appropriately employed by the director. These range from 'listening by following', which describes how to engage in the kind of active listening common to spiritual direction and many therapeutic exchanges; to 'forming for spiritual maturity', which he considers as the ultimate goal of the direction process. A key to

the work is its presentation of *verbatim*s—transcribed anonymised conversations between a director and a directee—that are then commented upon and analysed. These enable the points that Moons wants to put across to be explained in ways that engage the feelings and emotions of the reader, as well as his or her intellect. Since this experience of attending to what Ignatius calls ‘movements of spirit’ is central to any direction in the Ignatian tradition, the use of these *verbatim*s is a particularly apposite choice.

At this point I should confess that I was Jos Moons’ novice director, and have at his invitation contributed a Foreword to the book. It was therefore a relief to see that the patterns of direction that he describes are not dissimilar to my own! There are, nevertheless, potential problems with any work of this kind. First, such a training manual almost inevitably progresses in a linear manner, describing a sequence of skills that build upon each other. In the practice of direction itself, though, a director is likely to be constantly shifting from one mode to another, and an experienced director may well at times be rather more interventionist than the pure model suggests. This illustrates the limitations of the *verbatim* presentations, but these are limitations that the book itself acknowledges.

A second challenge is one that is shared with the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* itself. Just as that was never intended for a retreatant to take up and work through individually, but presumed a guide to interpret and adapt the text, so an aspiring director will be well advised to engage in supervised training and practice rather than assuming that direction can be learnt simply by reading a book. Where a work of this kind might well best come into its own is by being used on such a course, and serving as a reminder of the skills developed there. More experienced directors might also find it useful as offering a framework enabling deeper reflection on their own practice.

There is a further context in which this book might find a place, one that will not have been considered when it was originally written. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many spiritual direction training courses have moved online. Novice directors are having to develop the skills of empathetic listening which, for instance, rely heavily on picking up cues from body language, from the limited interaction possible over a computer screen. It is too early to say whether this way of forming directors will continue to be employed beyond the pandemic. Whether it does or not, it may well be that a very practical instruction manual such as this will prove especially useful in such settings.

**Paul Nicholson SJ**

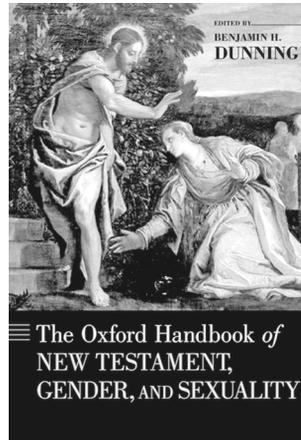
**Benjamin H. Dunning, *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford: OUP, 2019). 978 0 1902 1339 8, pp.728, £110.00.**

Over the last three decades, the modern world has seen tremendous changes in our understandings of gender and sexuality. Not only have many of our social practices changed—for example with the legalisation of same-sex marriage—but our thinking about gender and sexuality has changed as well. Today there is wide agreement among scholars that gender is not fixed or biologically based but socially constructed and changing over time.

New Testament scholars have responded by beginning to rethink how people in the biblical period may have understood gender and sexuality, starting with the assumption that their views are likely to have been different from our own. The emerging scholarship suggests that there were a variety of attitudes found in ancient cultures and represented in biblical and non-canonical texts. In addition, there are (of course) a variety of scholarly viewpoints on how to piece the evidence together.

Amidst this rich discourse, the *Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality* ‘seeks to provide a road-map to this vibrant (if occasionally bewildering) scholarly landscape’ (p.11). The subjects considered are wide-ranging, including methodologies, texts, biblical figures and themes such as sexual slander and prostitution. While the *Handbook* proves to be an accurate ‘road-map’, it also makes clear that the terrain being mapped is still in a state of flux. Although some of the chapters suggest that there is a consensus, many more convey the fissures in scholarly approaches to this subject and the work that remains to be done. This is not a criticism of the volume, but simply represents the state of an emerging set of questions. I shall try to make visible some of the ‘uncharted territory’ that the road-map reveals.

Women are a primary subject of a number of chapters. Many of the authors represent the consensus view of women’s lives as having been highly restricted by patriarchal norms. The perspective of these essays will be familiar to many readers, who are accustomed to thinking that ancient social norms sharply curtailed women’s capacities to act. For example, noting that a single Greek word meant both ‘woman’ and ‘wife’, Jorunn Økland writes, ‘sexual status completely defined female gendered individuals, whereas a man was a man and could have varied roles and sexual statuses’ (pp.316–317). Other



authors argue that some Christian women developed ‘masculine’ virtues through ascetic practices and thereby ‘escaped’ the constraints of femininity (Jennifer Eyl, Ross S. Kraemer).

However, many of the essays acknowledge a much wider array of acceptable actions and roles for ancient women. Carolyn Osiek’s chapter, ‘Leadership Roles and Early Christian Communities’, takes a nuanced approach by first asking what ‘leadership’ meant in the New Testament period and then identifying three roles essential to Paul’s understanding of it: apostle, prophet and teacher (1 Corinthians 12:28). She goes on to show evidence of women in each of these roles, both in the New Testament and the early Church.

In another shift from an earlier consensus, a number of the authors also agree that Jewish women had similar rights and roles to Greek and Roman women of the time. Amy-Jill Levine argues that Jewish women owned property, held civic and religious offices, and participated in synagogue worship (pp.302–303). Robert von Thaden notes that Jewish families shared ideals and structures with Greek and Roman families of the time (p.541). In addition, M. Adryael Tong’s chapter on ‘Gender and Sexuality in Postcolonial Perspective’ provides a concise summary of an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the tendency to portray Judaism as repressive. Taken as a whole, the *Handbook* conveys continuing changes in scholarship regarding women’s capacities in the New Testament period.

When it comes to masculinity, the scholars represented here agree that the Romans associated masculinity with military might, but also with the virtue of self-control (Colleen M. Conway, Davona C. Lopez). Control over desire (for wealth, food and sex, among other things) was highly valued in this period, and displays of self-control were central to the construction of masculinity (David E. Fredrickson). Many scholars evaluate New Testament figures such as Jesus or Paul according to ancient standards of masculinity (see Conway). Yet because the social norms and the texts are multifaceted, a variety of assessments of these characters are possible (Conway, Lopez, Karen L. King).

Queer theory has also opened up a number of new pathways in biblical studies. Queer theory provides an entry point for asking critical questions of our own conceptions of gender, so that we can then notice differences in the ways ancient societies constructed gender. Stephen Moore’s chapter on this topic is an excellent introduction to this subject. Queer theory leads scholars to explore gender and sexuality in ways that assume gender is not binary, stable or biologically based.

However, as Moore notes, ‘all in all, queer biblical criticism, most of all queer New Testament criticism, has made extraordinarily little use of queer theory’ (p.103). Moore’s observation holds true for the chapters in this

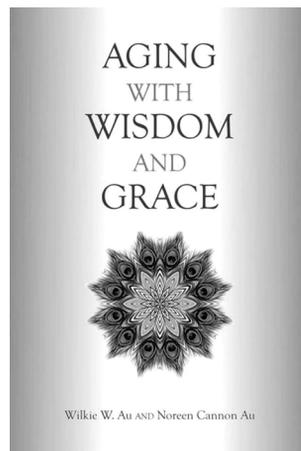
volume, with a few exceptions (Lynn R. Huber, Joseph A. Marchal, Benjamin H. Dunning). Huber draws on Judith Butler's notion that gender is performed rather than fixed and biologically given. She argues that Revelation communicates about gender even when male or female characters are not in view: 'Gender is being done, and perhaps undone, across the text' (p.352). For example, the image of Christ as the lamb in Revelation 5 is unconventionally masculine: 'the one who conquers, is the epitome of weakness and passivity' (p.361).

*The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality* provides an excellent snapshot of this developing field of inquiry. The tensions represented above display some of the exciting new avenues for understanding how early readers of the New Testament may have understood these writings rather differently from how we understand them today.

**Susan Hulen**

**Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au, *Aging with Wisdom and Grace* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2019). 978 0 8091 5462 3, pp.176, \$17.95.**

This book sees the challenges of ageing as an opportunity for development. While it does not hold back from the inevitable losses of old age, it insists on a positive attitude towards our final years. We learn that Karl Pillemer of Cornell University distinguishes between 'happy in spite of' and 'happy if only'. When we are young, we imagine that we will be happy when all the troubles that are causing us vexation go away. In old age, knowing this to be unrealistic, we can make a choice to be happy through the acceptance, rather than the absence, of pain and loss.



Here we have a practical guide, which is offering what the authors, Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au, call a new mindset to navigate the ageing process in an era of constant change. They aim to combat the negative view of ageing which seems to predominate in North America and the West. Wilkie and Noreen both write from professional experience. Both are professors; Wilkie has spent years as a spiritual director, Noreen as a psychoanalyst. Drawing on their extensive knowledge of their different fields, they introduce the reader to a number of scholars, using frequent quotations.

Yet the book itself is highly accessible, written in a straightforward, even homely manner.

Wilkie and Noreen write from the perspective of their own personal faith, and illustrate what they have to say by drawing on examples from their married life together. For example, we learn that Wilkie, who spent thirty-two satisfying years living as a Jesuit, followed by twenty years of happily married life, received a further 'difficult grace' of being diagnosed with cancer at the age of 72. He describes how he learned the value of vulnerability when chemotherapy forced him to depend on Noreen, describing this dependence as a blessing because it opened him up to receiving love that had not hitherto been possible.

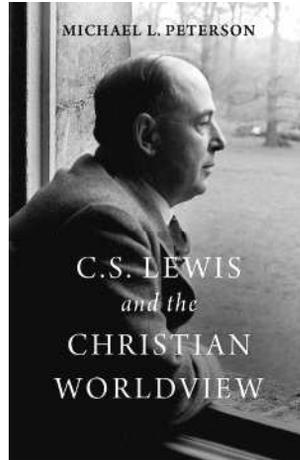
Page after page, this book is packed with stories like this one. It is full of little gems—poems and prayers, brief reflections on spiritual passages. Each will speak to the reader in different ways. My interest lighted on a reflection about Matthew's story of Peter walking with Jesus on the lake. We are told that faith is like floating in a deep ocean: if we thrash about, we will sink; if we relax, we will float. Still unable to float, I was struck by the virtual impossibility of the demands that faith makes upon us; yet, remembering one seemingly impossible achievement of my own, when I abseiled down a cliff, the floating metaphor seemed to ring true. At one point, we are invited to consider our 'expiration date'.

Christians are called to view everything in life from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The divine mystery is revealed as the one who always brings new life from death. The basis for Christian hope lies in the assurance that whenever we experience loss, God will be there to bring forth new life. Dealing sensitively and realistically with the challenges of ageing, Wilkie and Noreen nonetheless draw out the joys and rewards of the final stage of life.

The nine chapters of the book make it ideal material for a group that meets regularly. Each chapter deals with a common aspect of old age, such as 'Aches and Pains: The New Normal', or 'Dealing with Regrets and Resentments'. Each offers multiple strategies drawn from the spiritual life, scripture and social sciences to show how the experiences of old age can be grace-filled and happy. The chapter 'From Loss to Hope' perhaps best sums up the desired outcome for those who practise the recommended steps. Concluding each chapter is a section for personal reflection and a set of spiritual exercises, which could be used by individuals or groups and which could prove a useful resource for spiritual guides.

**Michael L. Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* (Oxford: OUP, 2020). 978 0 1902 0111 1, pp.240, £19.99.**

Michael Peterson's *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* constitutes a major contribution to our better understanding of a writer whose life and thought continue to fascinate us. Peterson words his title carefully. Had he entitled his book *C. S. Lewis's Christian Worldview*, say, we might have inferred that there is a multiplicity of other 'Christian worldviews' equally deserving our consideration. But for Peterson there is really only one Christian worldview, that which he describes as 'classical orthodoxy', the understanding of our faith famously embraced and commended by Lewis as 'mere Christianity'. Of course, Peterson



readily acknowledges, as does Lewis, that there is a diversity of Christian opinion on what we should believe. Nevertheless, there remains, Peterson claims, a 'unity of historic Christian doctrine' (p.8), the bedrock on which we stand together—if, alas, quarrelling with one another much of the time.

Before coming to Christian faith, C. S. Lewis travelled some distance down roads that finally proved dead ends. Peterson does full justice to his engagement with these alternative accounts of how things are, providing masterly analysis of the schools of thought—naturalism, atheistic materialism, cosmic dualism, idealism and pantheism—in which, at one time or another, Lewis rested on his intellectual journey.

Lewis would sometimes claim that his long journey to faith was almost entirely philosophical. That he became intellectually persuaded that Christian theism was the most credible account of the meaning of life is not in doubt. But more was at work in Lewis's formative years than a battle in his mind between competing philosophies. Far more insistent was a craving for something transcending ordinary experience. More pressing and more persistent than intellectual dilemmas was the yearning he felt for 'the Other and the Beyond', accompanied by his dawning awareness that such a desire for 'joy', as he called it, must answer to some transcendent reality.

Anyone telling C. S. Lewis's story must stay true to both sides of that story—to his intellectual quest and to his soul's search for the source of its deepest longing. Peterson allows us to become Lewis's companion on both these journeys, the converging paths of mind and heart that brought him home to God.

But sometimes the two paths seemed to point in different directions. Above all there was the philosophical ‘problem of evil’, ‘the most formidable objection to theistic and Christian belief’, as Peterson describes it (p. 109). This was an issue which Lewis had apparently resolved in his mind. He had published *The Problem of Pain* in 1940, a little book in which he had argued that, thought about rationally, there was not so much of a problem after all. Over several painstaking pages—and there are a number of such dense and demanding passages in this book—Peterson carefully analyses the philosophical arguments Lewis advances.

Late in life, Lewis was again ‘surprised by Joy’. He had married Joy Davidman, who was a US national, to solve her visa problems. Subsequently he fell in love with her. And then she died. Lewis discovered that one cannot rest secure on the mind’s conclusions when the heart is broken. The question is whether, with Joy’s death, Lewis’s ‘answer’ to the problem of pain—and with it his Christian faith—collapsed like a house of cards. Some, reading Lewis’s poignant *A Grief Observed*, have thought so. Peterson’s own conclusion is that ‘at the end of the grieving process, Lewis’s intellectual beliefs were deepened and his personal faith strengthened’ (p. 121). Peterson’s discussion, leading him to this conclusion, is characteristically sensitive and judicious, but we still wonder whether, after Joy’s passing, Lewis ever quite regained his earlier Christian certitude. If Lewis’s rationale for pain and suffering is ultimately inadequate—as surely is everyone’s—it is not only because polished arguments fail to satisfy the aching heart. It is still more because, as Peterson recognises, Lewis ‘does not engage with human wrongful acts like the torture and murder of children’ (p. 117).

Much in Peterson’s wide-ranging study cannot be compassed in this brief appreciation. C. S. Lewis sought to show that traditional Christian beliefs—the incarnation (‘the Grand Miracle’), the Trinity (‘the Great Dance’), the unchanging moral law, *inter alia*—rest on secure foundations. Peterson’s purpose—pursued with daunting philosophical rigour—is to show that Lewis’s defence of ‘classical orthodoxy’ has stood the test of time. Those never persuaded by Lewis may remain unpersuaded by Peterson, but they must concede that the former has found in the latter a powerful advocate.

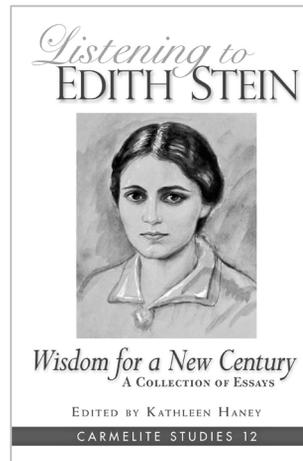
Peterson is well versed in the great philosophical texts but he is also at home in Narnia. Like many others, he is troubled by the question of whether there is salvation other than in Christ and, like many others, he turns to the last of the Narnia stories, *The Last Battle*, for an answer. (Peterson does not take on those—including Rowan Williams, no less—who find elements of racism and sexism in the Narnia adventures.)

Peterson does not hide his admiration for C. S. Lewis. His tribute in the epilogue stops short—just—of adulation. He is all the more to be applauded for the dispassionate and scholarly approach to his subject which he maintains throughout these absorbing pages.

**John Pridmore**

***Listening to Edith Stein: Wisdom for a New Century. A Collection of Essays,* edited by Kathleen Haney (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2018). 978 1 9392 7245 4, pp.456, \$24.95.**

Edith Stein remains one of the hardest of modern saints with whom to come to terms. 75 years after her tragic death in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the German Jewish Carmelite philosopher remains as much as an enigma and puzzle to many today as she did in her own lifetime. Perhaps this is how it should be: *secretum meum mihi* (my secret to myself), she famously said on being asked why she had decided to become a Catholic, and if there is one thing on which all the commentators agree, it is that she was an extremely private woman who was not given to ‘wearing her heart on her sleeve’.



As well as the temperamental difficulties that block access to her, there is the nature and character of her vast collection of writings. One of the most brilliant philosophers of early twentieth-century Germany (and there was a lot of competition for that title), she developed her skills in some of the hardest areas of modern philosophy for a contemporary audience to understand: Husserlian phenomenology and neo-Thomism. Neither subject rewards the casual enquirer.

If that was not enough, the difficulties have been compounded by the inaccessibility of her work. Owing to the sad final years of her life, persecuted by the Nazis and driven from her beloved Germany, after the Second World War her manuscripts were found to be widely scattered and in some state of disrepair. Almost eight decades later her German editors have finally finished publishing the massive, 27-volume *Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe* which, for now at least, contains almost everything she wrote. Although the Institute of Carmelite Studies (who publish the present volume) have already published twelve volumes of her work in English, a lot still remains untranslated, which will take time to reach an English-speaking audience.

Accordingly, as far as Steinian studies go, we have reached the end of phase one—the collection and publication of the critical edition of her works—but we are only at the beginning of phase two—the critical evaluation and appreciation of the impact of those works on the wider world. This is where the present volume comes in. I can think of no better introduction to the present state of Steinian critical scholarship. Almost all the key contemporary writers on her are assembled here and the ICS are to be commended for producing such a timely volume at a reasonable price. As number twelve in their Carmelite Studies series it will rest happily alongside the other excellent volumes already published.

The editor has decided to divide the essays into two parts: a series that looks at Stein in ‘dialogue with the Premoderns’ (Aquinas, Dionysius and others) and one that shows her interacting with the ‘Moderns and Postmoderns’ (Heidegger, Levinas, Henry, John Paul II). As will already be apparent, one of the problems with any book on Stein is corraling the work of a woman of such enormous intellect, who had a variety of interests over so diverse a range of areas: philosophy, psychology, spirituality, politics, theology and gender. Accordingly the result is a varied collection of essays covering the investigation of many of the key Steinian themes.

For those looking for straightforward biography, piety or introductions to her life and thought I do not think the book will satisfy. The closest to this is the opening essay by the US scholar Ann Astell on ‘Edith Stein’s Last Journeys and the Meaning of Place in Exile’. But even this essay ends up in dialogue with the heavyweight French philosopher René Girard (it was originally given at a conference on his work). For those of a philosophical bent, with especial interest in so-called ‘Continental Philosophy’ (a strange Anglo-American imagining), the book will be extremely rewarding, with some thought-provoking and groundbreaking essays by Walter Redmond, Antonio Calcagno and Mette Lebeck among others. These scholars have pioneered the study of Stein in the anglophone world and their work is always challenging and refreshing. Angela Ales Bello, Sarah Borden Sharkey and Johanna Valiquette contribute essays that draw us into the metaphysics of the phenomenological world which will certainly provoke the desire to read more of Stein’s important thought on this area. It is of the nature of Stein that she is a writer who always leaves you wanting more.

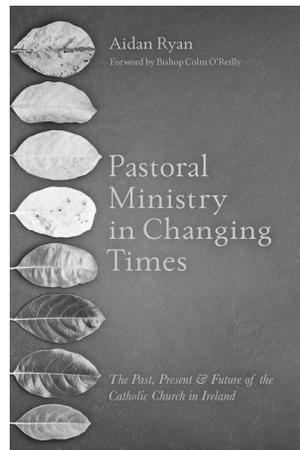
The book is well produced and edited, containing an excellent index (fast disappearing from contemporary books) and a good bibliography of Stein’s work at the end. For readers of *The Way* interested in Ignatian spirituality there may not be so much to explore. Stein’s spiritual concerns, apart from her original Judaism, came largely from the Benedictine, Dominican and

Carmelite traditions. Yet, the one reference to Ignatius states that she made ‘and studied’ the Spiritual Exercises before her conversion. As she prepared to enter Carmel one of her spiritual directors was the renowned German Jesuit Erich Przywara, another figure at present sadly neglected in the anglophone world. So there is, I believe, more to be said on the subject of her relationship with Ignatian spirituality. Perhaps this book, or even this review, might spur a reader into undertaking that work. We stand at a new dawn of Steinian studies, as this book demonstrates—who knows what treasures will emerge in the next 75 years? Stein is surely the ultimate philosopher-saint, a new Thomas Aquinas for our dark times.

**Peter Tyler**

**Aidan Ryan, *Pastoral Ministry in Changing Times* (Dublin: Messenger, 2019). 978 1 7881 2082 1, pp.144, £11.95.**

What pastoral approach do we need to bring hope to a Church in crisis? Aidan Ryan, pastor of a rural parish in the diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois has presented clear and convincing answers to this question with regard to the Irish Church. He brings together articles from *The Furrow*, whose impact is enhanced by being read straight through in a single volume. I think they will speak to all readers, not just those in the Irish situation. He writes from years of experience in ministry, including as a spiritual director in the Irish College, Rome, and six years as a missionary in Zambia.



First of all Ryan looks at the past of the Irish Church through an imaginative conversation with the last monk of the great abbey of Clonmacnois, which was destroyed at the Reformation and its community disbanded. What would this monk say to us now? Accept the testing of your faith. Resist the temptation of discouragement. Accept the need to get back to basics in the following of Christ. Face the present need for newer, smaller and stronger communities. Accept that you are at the end of an era—what Ryan calls the ‘Cullen era’ after the nineteenth-century cardinal who shaped it. This was an era that has lasted long into the present century. It had its weaknesses: ‘an excessive identification of church people and church life with the middle class from which most of the clergy came’ (p.21); excessive concern with finance

(understandable when the Irish Church was emerging from the shadows); and an over-powerful clericalism.

Ryan calls on the Church to face up to the way modern society has developed. Even in rural Ireland, community is no longer strong as it was and many of the young have left. So much of the former practice of religion was social, through a sense of belonging which is now under attack from the shock of abuse and charges of corruption. Faith now must be more thought out and more christocentric in its understanding, especially of the way it approaches liturgy, no longer just observing from the back of the church and looking for a quick Mass to fulfil an obligation.

That sense of social obligation has gone. Too many devotions have led to individualistic devotion. We need 'intentional Catholics' with good adult formation, supported by agreed norms and policies from church leaders who are aware of the nature of change and of features in modern culture which may be open to the gospel. All this calls for careful discernment—which emeritus bishop John O'Reilly enthusiastically supports in his foreword. Allowing for the exceptional historic conditions of Ireland, much of this will be familiar to non-Irish readers. The clarity and directness with which it is expressed is encouraging.

Ryan is strong in affirming the ideals of Vatican II, but also sensitive to the way the present situation needs to be handled, especially with a view to raising the morale of the clergy and their fellow workers. How should they respond to the 'occasional Catholic' and those looking to the Church primarily for traditional rites of passage, which may still be important to many despite the falling away? His chapter on how to respond thoughtfully to requests for baptism, Masses and first communions—with all their social and family panoply—is worth reading for its realism and careful balance. It is sensitive and discerning, but not easy-going.

This sensitivity continues as he looks at the pressures on clerical morale, and in his concluding chapter on what the oft-invoked New Evangelization really means. For Ryan this is not about new methods, but new attitudes. We need to have respect for the dignity and culture of those we seek to evangelize, or re-evangelize, to have respect for what is positive in their lives, just like those missionaries in the past who learnt to understand and respect the culture of the foreign countries to which they travelled. 'All who wish to share the gospel must be deeply steeped in the message themselves'—witnesses, not just teachers—as Pope Paul VI observed. That holds true of those who may be stirred by the insights and honesty of this little book.

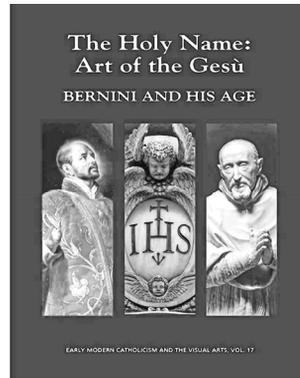
**Anthony Nye SJ**

***The Holy Name: Art of the Gesù. Bernini and His Age*, edited by Linda Wolk-Simon and Christopher M. S. Johns (Philadelphia: St Joseph's U, 2018). 978 0 9161 0100 8, pp.xv + 639, \$50.00.**

This erudite, readable and beautifully produced book is a celebration of the Roman mother church of the Society of Jesus, the Gesù. The book takes a worthy place in the wide-ranging and carefully edited series on the visual arts of early modern Catholicism published by St Joseph's University Press. Its origin is in a most enterprising exhibition held at the University Art Museum of Fairfield, Connecticut, in the 75th anniversary year of that Jesuit university.

As the editor's introduction phrases it, 'against the odds', the loan was secured of Gianlorenzo Bernini's moving and astonishing marble bust of St Robert Bellarmine. This forms the centrepiece of a commendably ingenious exhibition, partly composed of loans from US collections, partly of significant loans from Europe, which contrives, often by adroit use of artists' small-scale working designs, to give a remarkably complete impression of the accreted furnishing and atmosphere of a great early-modern Roman church. Overall this is one of the great successes of the exhibition and its catalogue: on another continent and within the confines of an exhibition, it gives a real sense of the immersive experience which was intended and achieved by the builders and subsequent decorators of the Gesù.

Beyond this, the exhibition has been the occasion to commission a series of expert essays, written by some of the leading authorities on the Roman baroque in general and on the Jesuit arts in particular. These essays alone will give this volume a long life as a work of reference, far beyond the occasion which caused the collection to be written. What we have, in fact, is a comprehensive monographic collection on one glorious church, which is also of global significance as this church is the powerhouse and mother house of the Jesuits, an order committed to the sacred arts and to the sacred utility of the arts, and an order which operated internationally and worldwide in every local dialect of an international baroque. What this collection documents particularly is the way in which the mature, polyglot artistic achievement of the Society was not an inevitable part of its way of proceeding from the beginning, but evolved, almost in lockstep with the maturing decoration and ornamentation of the great Roman church.



Thus, it is paradoxical and fascinating to read in John O'Malley's introductory essay (a masterly compression of great learning into a modest compass) that the original purposes of the Society were almost entirely verbal. They intended to be preachers and missionaries, and initially music was explicitly excluded from their programmes, while the fine and applied arts were simply not mentioned. O'Malley traces the changes that took place as the wide charitable works of the Jesuits came to include education, and multifaceted Jesuit service to communities in Europe and beyond came to include the establishment of substantial churches which were also cultural centres.

From education developed the need to embrace the arts as part of an advanced and flourishing pedagogy, and from the foundation of churches came the need to adorn them and maintain their liturgies. O'Malley observes, with choice examples, the transformation which this wrought in the activities of the Society itself: by the end of the seventeenth century, it would be little exaggeration to say that Jesuits were leading practitioners in music and in all the fine and applied arts, and that they formed a crucial part of the cultural life of Europe and a leading part of the hybrid cultures of those territories beyond Europe in which they were most active. This is, *pars pro toto*, an indication of the way in which this book speaks to more than the single exhibition that brought it into being, and is of wide value for the study of the complex culture of the pre-suppression Society of Jesus.

Christopher M. S. Johns focuses on the seventeenth-century Jesuit General Gian Paolo Oliva (1600–1681) and on the culturally ambitious programmes begun under his leadership, especially the adorning of the Gesù in a way 'which has come to symbolise the *Ecclesia Triumphans* of the Counter Reformation in its most exuberant late-baroque manifestation'. Part of his focus is on the magnificently illusionistic ceiling fresco in the church, by the Genoese painter Giovanni Battista Gaulli, and the way in which it represents the role of the Society in the whole universal scheme of baroque Catholicism. He then traces the gathering suspicion of the Society which led to the 1773 suppression, but which would have been unthinkable in the triumphant years when the mother church was completed. His essay comes to a close on Pompeo Batoni's tender painting of *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* (installed in the Gesù only six years before the suppression), and the way in which the cult of the Sacred Heart became a symbol of resistance to the revolutionary secularism and anti-clericalism of the late eighteenth century, and indeed an emblem of resurgent French royalism.

After these two major historical surveys come a series of expert essays on architecture, art and patronage. Almost all of these deserve discussion in

detail. The editor contributes a definitive chapter on Farnese patronage of the Society and on the whole intricate web of influence by which the Jesuits became possessed of the site of the Gesù. This is fascinating in itself, and the essay goes deeper into the patterns of influence that Roman patronage involved, tracing the ways in which Cardinal Alessandro Farnese imposed his will—even his chosen architect—on the project, as he wished to make the new church something of a Farnese family basilica and mausoleum. This brings forward the suggestion that the first generation of Jesuits might well have preferred an austere preaching church.

There is also a survey of the works of art that Farnese willed on the new church. Some of these are average work of their time, such as the original altarpiece for the high altar; some are applied art of high quality, as in the Farnese chasuble which is described and illustrated. This study is expanded seamlessly by the next essay, John Beldon Scott's closely focused study of how the façade of the church is articulated by the Farnese project, how the inscription is manipulated to place the name Farnese over the door and thus at the highest position of visibility at a point where an ancient ceremonial route turns a corner.

After this Gauvin Bailey's essay emphasizes how the church and interior that we see today took shape over a considerable period of time, with a useful consideration of the intellectual coherence of the first schemes of fresco painting in the Gesù, the cycles of decoration undertaken in the late sixteenth century by Roman artists—many of whom also worked for the Jesuits of the Venerable English College on the martyr cycles and celebrated *Martyrs' Picture* there. Niccolò Circignani and Durante Alberti, for example, worked in both churches. He also unfolds the ways in which these earlier paintings were designed to aid the viewer and worshipper in a progressive series of interactions and meditations which fostered their own individual spiritual development.

Xavier F. Salomon contributes a splendid study of the lost monument to St Robert Bellarmine, which had been erected in 1624 at the expense of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. Discovery of early documentation and visual references (the process of discovery has been painstaking and ingenious) has enabled an authoritative description of the monument as it was. The case for Gianlorenzo Bernini's authorship of the bust of Bellarmine is finely argued. The 1841 dismantling of the monument, in the course of the redecoration of the apse, is also documented, as are the process whereby the sculptures of the personifications of Religion and Wisdom (by Bernini's father) were lost and the eventual reinstatement of the bust, with indifferent nineteenth-century framing sculpture.

Evonne Levy then offers a comprehensive account of how the altar-shrines of the Jesuit saints took form in the Gesù, with an especially interesting comparison to the shrine worked partly by Italian craftsmen for the tomb of St Francis Xavier in Goa. She also discusses in detail the subsequent monuments to Jesuit saints, particularly the exceptional polychrome marble statue of St Stanislaus Kostka by Pierre Legros in Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.

Franco Mormorando contributes a study of a pivotal figure in the development and decoration of the church, the Jesuit General Gian Paolo Oliva. This traces Bernini's cordial relations with the Jesuits and their General, and incidentally offers, in quoted correspondence, a beguiling glimpse of the formalities and courtesies of life in baroque Rome. It is followed by a compelling iconographic analysis of Giovanni Battista Gaulli's contribution to the decoration of the Gesù and the debate about how the semi-dome above the apse of the church should be filled. This contains a fascinating discussion of the importance of the Old Testament figure of Joshua to the Jesuit focus on the Holy Name. (Among the illustrations to this chapter is one of the best photographs of the nave and apse of the Gesù I have ever seen, which brings the light from the lunette windows and the fictive light of the great ceiling into perfect alignment.)

Christopher M. S. Johns offers a thorough and illuminating analysis of the dome, vault and pendentive paintings at the Gesù and considers Bernini's possible role in the shaping of the commission, and his influence on the style of the finished work. Johns's closing emphasis on the sheer number of workers who would have been required to bring this project to fruition is a useful and fascinating reminder, emphasizing the level of planning that a baroque master painter or craftsman would have to have undertaken, especially when embarking on such spectacular illusionistic effects as the 'broken frame' of the nave fresco. (Gaulli's illustrated *Pietà* from the Palazzo Barberini is a work of real quality and very much deepens awareness of this painter's range and skill as a colourist.)

Betsy Rosasco contributes a beautifully organized survey of the preparatory works—oil sketches and drawings—for the nave fresco. The illustrated oil sketch from Princeton University Art Museum (proposing a slightly different scheme) is a work of exceptional virtuosity and beauty. It is fascinating throughout the series of sketches to observe how one of the artists' chief preoccupations seems to be how to manage and position the fictive light-sources in the fresco.

The last two essays in this rich collection, both by Andrew Horn, move out to consider the wider context of the Jesuit arts in Rome, especially those elements that they share with the ephemeral arts of the spectacle and theatrical scenery, particularly the elaborate temporary settings that

were devised in baroque Italy for the exposition of the sacrament during the devotion of the *Quarant'ore*. He focuses particularly on those ephemeral (and permanent) decorations executed to the designs of the Jesuit painter and architect Andrea Pozzo (1642–1709), which were recorded in his influential published works. Altogether, this chapter offers a great enrichment to the volume, by exploring the ways in which such devotions as the *Quarant'ore* interact with baroque theatre and scenography. Fascinatingly, as in the sacred Easter theatres (usually in a robust baroque-survival style) erected in Tyrolean churches to this day, Pozzo made use of illuminations within and in front of his scenery, 'with lights in front and behind to make the perspectives stand out' (p.359). There is particular discussion of Pozzo's magical-sounding installation of 1695 on the subject of water in the Bible—baptism, living waters. This also had internal light effects, of 'a rising sun in the distance'.

Andrew Horn's second essay concerns the altar erected to St Aloysius Gonzaga in the other central Roman Jesuit church, Sant'Ignazio. This, in the author's view, 'most successful of Pozzo's realised works', finished in 1700, incorporates many aspects of contemporary scenography into a moving and compelling sacred theatre. The columns and pediment frame a space in which the marble relief of the apotheosis of the young saint is enacted, as if in a sacred opera of the period with all its resources of stage machinery. The quality of the photographs illustrating this essay is exceptional.

The exhibition catalogue, which concludes the volume, is itself excellent of its kind: the illustration and quality of reproduction throughout is superb; the catalogue entries are models of learning and concision. Perhaps mention should be made of some of the most characteristically baroque objects which have been borrowed from Rome, the gilt and lapis lazuli altar cards or *Cartegloria* from the altar of Saint Ignatius in the Gesù. These have the sumptuous materials, the wind-blown angels, and the advancing and receding shapes of the shrine itself. They are a worthy representation of the thought and discriminating taste which has shaped both the exhibition and this magnificent volume.

What, then, does this distinguished collection of essays tell us overall? It is likely that it will remain for a considerable time the standard documentary and critical work on the mother church of the Jesuits, its history, architecture and decoration. It is a major contribution to the study of the Jesuits as patrons and as practitioners of the arts. It emphasizes that the glorious effects of the baroque finished structure—the use of all the arts to produce an elevating and transformative environment for the visitor to the church—is the result of time, compromise and improvisation.

Perhaps the paradox of the book is the way that it documents the rapid evolution of the Jesuits, from a preaching order indifferent to all but the

word into an international cultural powerhouse at the heart of almost all the arts throughout the baroque world. This idea is an important one: so often, hostile critics in particular represent the Jesuit arts (and indeed Jesuit churches themselves) as standardised, a kind of monolithic and regimented lowest-common-denominator baroque. The truth, as always, is far more complex and much more interesting: even the *Gesù* itself was the result of evolution and improvisation.

The rapid development of the Society was also itself a series of prudent improvisations, responses to a changing and widely varied set of needs and opportunities in Europe and the whole diverse world. It is a beguiling speculation that some of the adroitness, the ability to operate globally in a learned local vernacular, which distinguished the Old Society, has a point of origin in the evolving identity of the Jesuit mother church itself. The influence of the Jesuit arts may have been downplayed, to an extent, by anglophone scholars and critics, but it was and is very real, in Europe and in almost every territory touched by the universal baroque. This volume in itself makes a most significant contribution to the evaluation of that culture.

***Peter Davidson***