THE WAY

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TELLING OUR STORIES

Book Reviews

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 conversion, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

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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. Ganss (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 Iesu, 1898–)

Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va

FOREWORD

POPE FRANCIS HAS INVITED many bishops and others from around the globe to Rome in October 2023 for a synod, an important meeting to look at the future of the Roman Catholic Church. He has made it clear that the best path that local churches can take in preparing for this meeting is to find creative ways of listening to the experience of church members—clergy and laypeople, men and women, old and young, those fiercely attached to the Church and those alienated from it. At present dioceses worldwide are drawing up ambitious plans to enable this to happen. What will be the result? Only the Holy Spirit knows!

What the Pope has recognised in this way of proceeding is the importance of allowing people to tell their story, to explain what the world looks like from their own particular perspective, and to be heard to do so, by each other and by those in power. This, it is hoped, will have a result very different from the kind of meeting where a few explain to the many what has already been decided, even when the intention is to gauge the response to such explanations. The outcome may well be messier, less clear-cut, than might otherwise have been the case. But Christian belief is that God speaks through all people, and so it is important that all people be heard.

A thread running through the articles in this issue of *The Way* is how a diversity of stories can be heard, and what it is like to hear them. Gerald O'Collins speaks of the transformative effect of listening to the stories told in scripture, quietly, slowly, and without prejudgment. Sarah Young offers a personal account of just such a transformation, brought about by listening to the story of Peter walking out across the water to meet Jesus. For Barbara Crostini, complementary ways of viewing a single incident presented in a classic Japanese film from the mid-twentieth century echo with the overlapping portraits of Christ and his ministry offered by the four gospel accounts.

One way of understanding what goes on in spiritual direction is to think of it as a director enabling and helping others to elucidate their own story, so that, in the first instance, they can come to a better understanding of it for themselves. Kirsty Greenaway-Clarke, an Anglican priest, describes that process as practised within her own tradition. In confronting the petition for the grace of poverty in the Spiritual Exercises,

Kevin Leidich shows that this is not a purely passive, receptive process. Rather, within the Exercises, an active pursuit of what I desire serves to shape my story as it moves forward, even when such a pursuit seems at its most challenging. Richard Boileau's appreciation of the work of the Benedictine Dom Aelred Graham illustrates the way in which the story of Christianity itself may be enriched by contact with the practices of other faiths.

Two articles here focus on the need to face up to the darker side of the stories that we tell, not least within the context of the Church. The ability to acknowledge and speak about sexual abuse perpetrated by those with authority within the Church is opening up the possibility of telling stories of other kinds of abuse. Gabriel Roblero Cum offers an account of abuses of conscience and some of the resources which might aid recovery. Such abuse is, unfortunately, nothing new. In the seventeenth century Mary Ward tried to found a congregation of apostolic women, and in the process suffered serious abuse. Christine Burke tells the story of how she responded to this, allowing herself to continue to be led forward by God.

The big story of the last eighteen months has been, of course, the global experience of pandemic. A Kenyan Jesuit, Oscar Momanyi, speaks of how this has given a particular shape to his own community's celebration of the current Ignatian anniversary year. And at a time when, we hope emerging from the worst of the pandemic, people are trying to work out the balance between going back to life as it was before and embracing the 'new normal', the bishop of Warwick, John Stroyan, draws on that experience of storytelling that lies at the heart of theatre to ask whether we are ready to look for change at all, in ourselves, in our society or in our worship.

Taken together, the contributions to this issue of *The Way* insist that stories matter—that, indeed, all stories matter. So you are invited to read these articles in consciousness of your own story, to see what light they cast upon it. You may or may not be contributing to the process leading up to the 2023 synod in Rome. But hearing and telling afresh your own story, and those of others, is an effective way to trace the work of God's Spirit in your life, and in the life of the Church.

Paul Nicholson SJ
Editor

THE END OF RELIGION

New Explorations in Spiritual Practice with Aelred Graham

Richard Boileau

'The devout Christian of the future will either be a "mystic" … or he will cease to be anything at all.' (Karl Rahner)[1]

'To me, Eastern Wisdom gives the key to Christianity.' (Bede Griffiths)[2]

NIETZSCHE PRONOUNCED GOD DEAD in 1882, a proclamation that has been amplified one way or another ever since. The fact that church attendance has declined dramatically in most places is offered as evidence. Though absolute numbers are increasing in some parishes, the fact that attendance is diminishing overall as a percentage of the baptized population in most Western countries is indisputable.[3]

A number of factors can be cited to explain this. According to one observer, 'The Christian religion today … has lost much of the power to stimulate the mind. It appears dull and uninteresting, especially to the young.' This is not a recent observation. It was written exactly fifty years ago and appeared in a book called *The End of Religion* by Dom Aelred Graham, published in 1971, when it won the National Catholic Book Award for popular theology.[4] At the outset Graham quoted Ecclesiastes—'Better is the end of a thing than its beginning'—as well as a familiar passage from T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploration
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[5]

[1] Karl Rahner, 'Christian Living Formerly and Today', in *Theological Investigations*, volume 7, translated by David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.
[2] Bede Griffiths to Martyn Skinner, 1971, quoted in Shirley du Boulay, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 181.
[3] See Ronald F. Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It, and What Comes Next?* (Oxford; OUP, 2021), 97–99.
[4] Dom Aelred Graham, *The End of Religion: Autobiographical Explorations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 14.
[5] T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), 197.

This is the hope that Graham raised in his book and the hope about which I wish to write here.

Among the social effects of the COVID-19 epidemic is a resurgence of predictions about the end of churchgoing, at least as we have known it until now. Speculation about the end of religion itself has been with us for a long time and lingers unabated. Yet, if there is reason to worry about the health of religion today, there is clear evidence that spirituality, however defined, as a driving force within and among individuals, is alive and thriving. The quest for meaning is ever-present and reveals an underlying hunger for authentic spirituality that satisfies the deepest human yearning.

Is Christianity Enough?

The title of Graham's book is a clever double entendre. On the one hand, it raises the prospect of a kind of death. On the other, it points to resurrection in the mode of a radical recentring on religion's ultimate goal. Does it have a singular purpose? If there is a one-size-fits-all answer, Graham skates around it, aside from pointing to the impulse for truth about ourselves. But a purpose is nonetheless assumed by each devotee and it is to that end that each must be faithful. For Christianity, it has something to do with salvation, but what does that mean to each person?

Regardless of the answer, Graham posed a telling question with the title of his fifth chapter: 'Is Christianity enough?' He pointed out, for instance, that 'the primitive Church was the congregation of "the end of days"'. As the ultimate end was then assumed to be imminent, it follows that strategies proposed for the first Christians were shaped by that understanding. Might we wonder if these are still as relevant today as they once were? Graham added:

> C. S. Lewis could be right in his suggestion that after a mere 2,000 years we are still early Christians ….
>
> The truth appears to be that the primitive Church had no consistently thought-out ethical system comparable, for example, to that of Buddhism.[6]

This statement may seem outdated to some half a century after Vatican II, but to others it still has merit. While libraries have been filled by brilliant

[6] Graham, *End of Religion*, 96.

scholars during the intervening years, a question remains about the extent of their influence on the lives of parishioners. Graham continued:

> Comparing for a moment the Judaic tradition with that of Hinduism, in the whole of biblical literature, I can think of nothing to compare—for an ethical ideal expressed with succinctness, clarity, and precision—to Krishna's counsel to Arjuna at the opening of the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita.[7]

Christianity and Buddhism

The wisdom and ethical principles from which all schools of Buddhism operate were summarised at the very beginning by Gautama in addressing his first disciples at Sarnath, on the outskirts of Varanasi (Benares):

> … the Four Noble Truths, concerning the nature, origin, term and cure of all human distress; and the Noble Eightfold Path, the cure, whose stages are Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.[8]

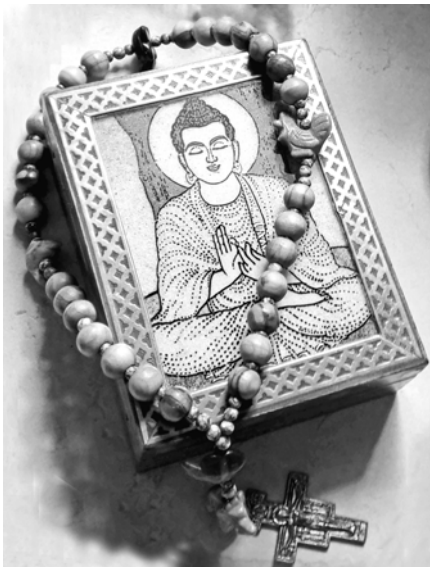
It is upon these admonitions that all Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) rests.

Graham was not striving for conciliation between Christian and Buddhist doctrine, and he was candid about incompatibilities within and between traditions of the West and East. The long chapter entitled 'Promptings from India' begins with the uneasy relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism, and ends with a long description of the tantric tradition and his meeting with the Dalai Lama. Concerned about what he perceived to be Christian unwillingness to apply practices that could prove beneficial, Graham observed,

> Catholicism takes account of the fact that God is immanent as well as transcendent, though Church authority has not always been very happy about the divine immanence. Things are really much simpler to handle if people would only be content to go to Mass instead of wanting to sit quietly in meditation.[9]

Eight years before the publication of *The End of Religion*, Graham's book *Zen Catholicism* appeared in print as a response to the restlessness and genuine curiosity felt by many. In the same year, Thomas Merton published

[7] Graham, *End of Religion*, 97–98.
[8] Graham, *End of Religion*, 153.
[9] Graham, *End of Religion*, 102.



Mystics and Zen Masters.[10] Both are disciplined explorations that the authors hoped would lead to a deeper and more constructive practice of the Roman Catholic faith. Merton is often credited with popularising the wisdom of Asia among Catholic readers seeking new ways of relating to the divine. Like many others who have made the journey and felt a kind of epiphany, Merton seized on Zen in a special way.

'Zen enriches no one', Merton wrote in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*—one of his last books to be published before his death in 1968. 'There is no body to be found. The birds may come and circle for a while … but they soon go elsewhere. When they are gone, the "nothing", the "no-body" that was there, suddenly appears. That is Zen.'[11] As Bonnie Thurston explains:

> Thomas Merton realized that 'you can hardly set Christianity and Zen side by side and compare them. That would almost be like trying to compare mathematics and tennis.' Problems like those of emptiness vs. God, nirvana vs. salvation, and wisdom vs. faith loomed large in his mind. And yet he did, in fact, set the two side by side and, without unduly distorting either, gleaned from them a remarkable approach to human identity. He understood so well because he understood from both positions.[12]

Much of this exploration rests upon the idea that Zen (translated from Sanskrit as *meditation* or *contemplation*) is not the exclusive property of Buddhism. The Zen abbot Shibayama Zemkei wrote:

[10] Dom Aelred Graham, *Zen Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1963); Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Delta, 1963); also worth noting is Chalmers MacCormick, 'The Zen Catholicism of Thomas Merton', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 9 (Fall 1972), 802–818.
[11] Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), ix.
[12] Bonnie Bowman Thurston, 'Zen Influence on Thomas Merton's View of the Self', *Japanese Religions*, 14/3 (December 1986), 17–31, here 17, quoting Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, 33.

> Zen can be accepted in the broad sense as Zen itself … apart from its narrow sectarian interpretation as a school of Buddhism. When Zen is seen in such a broad sense … there can be a Christian Zen, or Taoist Zen.[13]

Many people either eschew the lessons of other religious traditions, randomly adopt religious practices only to suit their preconceptions, or try to resolve any tension at the intellectual level by trivialising them. They may use the word *Zen* interchangeably with relaxation—not unlike those who freely associate Franciscanism with birdbaths and restful gardens—rather than awakening to the true nature of things or awareness of the true self, which may ultimately lead, almost as a bonus, to the resolution of tensions. The internet is riddled with facile escapes from the effort that is required for this awakening.

The idea that propels the genuine rapprochement of Christianity with Zen practice is one of mindfully returning meditation and contemplation to the very heart of Christian understanding and devotion, beyond the cacophony of doctrines and rituals. In an interview Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit priest and Zen teacher, recalled what his own teacher Yamada Roshi had said: '"I do not want to make you a Buddhist. I want to empty you in imitation of your Lord Jesus Christ who emptied himself." Zen helped me with letting myself be emptied.'[14]

On the other hand, detaching Zen from Buddhism is a little like detaching the Eucharist from Christianity. Some of the wrapping sticks to the gift, and Zen comes in a package that should not be discarded. It favours, among other things, a mystical knowing beyond concepts, which some see as threatening to religion but which, for others, is the salvation of their faith and the path to a different kind of consciousness. In 1959, Merton wrote:

> Not to be foolish and multiply words, I'll say simply that it seems to me that Zen is the very atmosphere of the Gospels, and the Gospels are bursting with it. It is the proper climate for any monk, no matter what kind of monk he may be. If I could not breathe Zen I would probably die of spiritual asphyxiation.[15]

[13] Zenkei Shibayama, *A Flower Does Not Talk: Zen Essays*, translated by Sumiko Kudo (Rutland, Vt: Charles E. Tuttle, 1970), 16.
[14] Robert Hirschfield, 'God Is in the Zendo: A Profile of Father Robert Kennedy Roshi, a Catholic Priest and Zen Teacher', *Tricycle Magazine* (Fall 2005), available at https://tricycle.org/magazine/god-zendo/, accessed 4 October 2021.
[15] *Encounter: Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki* (Monterey, Ky: Larkspur, 1988), 5–6.

Most people stay safely back from the boundaries of their own tradition. Some go to the edge and occasionally cross over, gingerly. Few are at home in both. Ruben Habito is a Filipino Zen roshi of the Sanbo Kyodan lineage and a former Jesuit, who teaches theology at Southern Methodist University. He has written many books, including *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible*, *Zen and the Spiritual Exercises* and *Living Zen, Loving God.* He begins by asserting that Zen Buddhism is non-theistic and that its aim is awakening by emptying the ego-conscious mind, returning to the concrete world and, 'what divides Self and Other having been broken, one awakens as in a bottomless ocean of compassion, every single breath finding oneself at-one with all sentient beings in suffering'.[16] Like all Christian contemplatives, Habito values silence: 'If one follows the Breath in trust, and opens one's heart to listen, one may be able to hear a voice, saying, "You are my Beloved. In you I am well pleased."'[17] In *Be Still and Know*, he recalls with deep gratitude the invitation from his own Zen teacher, Yamada Koun, 'to explore the Bible for ways that can point us toward paths that merge with the Zen path'.[18]

Zen and Contemplative Practice

Long the hallmark of the monastic life, contemplative practice, the West's rough equivalent of *zazen* (sitting in meditation), has spread to the active life as well. Much is written and said these days about contemplative consciousness, which Richard Rohr describes as a non-dual openness to reality by which 'you can stand back and compassionately observe the self or any event from an appropriately detached viewing platform'.[19] Rohr may be its most systematic advocate, but James Finley, a novice of Merton's at Gethsemani Abbey, is perhaps contemplative practice's most poetic voice:

> You can sit and renew your awareness that you're sitting in the presence of God all about you and within you. As you inhale, inhale God's silent 'I love you', in which God is being poured out and utterly given away to you as the miracle of your very life …. Then when you exhale, exhale yourself in love and giving yourself in love to the love

[16] Ruben Habito, *Living Zen, Loving God* (Boston, Ma: Wisdom, 2004), 107.
[17] Ruben Habito, 'Zen and Christian: God-Talk out of Silence', in *Translating Religion*, edited by Mary Doak and Anita Houck (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 184–189, here 187.
[18] Ruben Habito, *Be Still and Know: Zen and the Bible* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 171.
[19] Richard Rohr, *A Spring within Us: A Year of Daily Meditations* (London: SPCK, 2018), 275.

> that with the next inhalation will give itself to you. And so, 'I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.' From the reciprocity of love, destiny is fulfilled, and the foundations of suffering are healed.[20]

Finley expresses those fleeting moments of mystical consciousness in meditation as 'infinite union with infinite love'.[21]

Paradoxically, such a union is only possible beyond the concepts we might conjure up about the state of union or the nature of love, especially infinite love. Here too, Zen serves to help us set aside the natural desire for simple cognitive understanding. Graham wrote that 'Zen meditation is instantaneously contemplative; it has been described as seeing without desire'.[22] Unlike traditional *lectio divina*, Zen meditation is totally non-discursive and tied to non-dualism (*advaita*), which eschews distinctions. Though distinctions serve an important purpose in many respects, *advaita* is not all that different from Ignatian *indifferentia* inasmuch as it renounces personal preference as a criterion for relating to reality. In the moment of meditation, we are invited to prefer neither this nor that. In this regard, Graham quoted this Buddhist scripture:

> The perfect way knows no difficulties
> Except that it refuses to make preferences; …
> If you wish to see it before your own eyes
> Have no fixed thoughts either for or against it.[23]

Among other benefits of Zen practice are attentiveness and consideration of religious experience in everyday life, connection with all humanity and nature, and compassion as the means to peace with self and others. These are not antithetical to Christianity, nor are they quaint ideas to be simply grafted on to the trunk of tradition, as they contain vital ways of being Christian, not only open to encounter and dialogue, but eager for a more fraternal world, in accordance with Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. In a 1965 address to the Society of St John the Evangelist, Aelred Graham offered a complex and compelling argument in which he stated,

[20] James Finlay, *Practice That Grounds Us in the Sustaining Love of God* (Center for Action and Contemplation, 2020), available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-A16N4hKou0, accessed 26 September 2021.
[21] James Finley, *Chrstian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 6.
[22] Graham, *Zen Catholicism*, 145.
[23] Graham, *Zen Catholicism*, 42.

> What seems to me of great interest to Christians is the Buddhist insight and manner of meditation. By the Buddhist insight I mean roughly what is indicated in Gautama's Holy Truths, and by meditation I mean the kind of physical and mental discipline practised by Zen Buddhists.[24]

Many people today subscribe to the style of Christian meditation inaugurated by John Main or the similar centring prayer advocated by Thomas Keating.[25] But for others, neither is quite enough. Some feast on the Gospels and Epistles, and the wisdom literature of Hebrew scripture, as well as the sutras of Hinduism and Buddhism. This mixed diet is nourishing to those who find merit in a degree of engagement with what is partly complementary and partly dialectical, leading to a new understanding and practice. Paul Tillich alluded to this search for new foundations by referring to the insufficiency of religion that answers some questions but not others: 'Religion is not a special function of man's spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions', meaning that religion that does not house all reality will not suffice without responsible additions or renovations.[26]

The process of building an adequate spiritual frame can be fraught and frustrating. William Johnston, an Irish Jesuit who lived in Japan and was an active participant in the Christian–Buddhist dialogue, approached the task cautiously. 'I do not think that Christian contemplation and Zen are the same thing', he wrote, but drew a parallel between *satori* (enlightenment) and *metanoia*, citing Paul's sudden reversal on the road to Damascus, Moses taking off his shoes as he realised that the very ground was holy, and Isaiah and the prophets coming to an inexplicable awareness of God's action.[27] In each case, the language is Judaeo-Christian, but points to mystical consciousness beyond our own.

The juxtaposition of Zen and Christianity is not universally appealing and is even an anathema to some. For those who are inclined to investigate its possibilities, high among the merits of Zen is its capacity to declutter the heart and mind, and broaden the ground on which

[24] Aelred Graham, 'On Meditation', *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 1/1 (Winter 1967).
[25] See John Main, *The Way of Unknowing: Expanding Spiritual Horizons through Meditation* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2011); Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 2009).
[26] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford U, 1964), 5–6, quoted in Graham, 'On Meditation'.
[27] William Johnston, *Christian Zen* (New York: Fordham U, 1997), 130. Also worth noting is John James Kendall, 'Through Words and Silence: A Comparative Study of William Johnston and Thomas Merton, Roman Catholics in Dialogue with Zen' (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983).

core values are lived. In an age when classical religious categories and claims are increasingly rejected and when relativism is emerging as a dominant force, a thoughtful bridging of complementary beliefs and simplification of praxis may ultimately serve faith better than tiresome debates and hollowed-out symbols.

Theological Objections

We cannot don the garment that Graham calls Zen Catholicism without adjustments. Though it may be fashionable to bring out our 1960s clothing, it will surely bind and tear here and there. Despite the truths that are shared, if expressed differently, we must take account of fundamental distinctions and incompatibilities. In listing a few challenges, there is no pretence of solving these riddles. For some, they will be prohibitive. But for others, this brief exploration may serve as an invitation to determine what reasonable accommodations suit their particular circumstances.

Eschatology

James Fredericks raises the question, 'In order to practise Zen meditation, do Christians have to forsake their eschatological hope in future fulfilment? By embracing the mystic in Zen, are we casting out the prophet?' He added that Buddhism can be said to have its own unique eschatology. 'Masao Abe (eminent Japanese Buddhist philosopher and religious studies scholar d. 2006) once spoke to me about a fully realised eschatology in Zen.'[28]

[28] Correspondence with the author.

Eric Cunningham is a professor at Gonzaga University in Washington State and a specialist in modern Japanese literature and history, with interests that include Zen Buddhism, religion and postmodernism. He points out that the respected Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro (d.1945) depicted the entire historical process as an unfolding Zen dialectic in an eternal now leading to absolute nothingness.[29] Kitaro believed that human life and history were eschatological in their essence, inasmuch as everyday life was a constant creation and recreation of the world; he also maintained that this eschatological quality of life and the world corresponded to what Zen master Rinzai (d.866) understood as the moment of enlightenment.[30] On the surface, at least, such an eschaton seems incompatible with Christian revelation, which is both rich and necessary to understanding the teachings and actions of Jesus. In so far as Christian life is an imitation of Christ—maybe better stated as a kind of channelling of Christ—its eschatological hope is part of its efficacy.

The fact that both one's present stance and eschatological orientation are important is obvious; it is also self-evident that orientation affects one's stance. But to what degree? Is it not still possible to derive considerable benefit from a common stance even if the orientations are different? Moreover, is it not necessary to guard against fixing one's gaze upon a distant horizon only to overlook the present graced moment, thereby paralyzing our capacity to integrate experience in order to appreciate our orientation with more clarity? Indeed, is it not possible that by sitting in this common stance we might sharpen our awareness of the true nature of hope?

Zen silence is not quietism, and to the extent that it is probably impossible to keep experience unframed, unexamined, and disconnected from the functions of understanding, judgment and decision, a Zen practitioner's assumptions about the path and purpose of life are never set aside for long. While it is true that a purist would argue that hope is an attachment and implies dualism, and so is antithetical to Buddhism, there is a degree of indulgence in sheltering theological hope from the surreptitious encroachment of wishful thinking or the avoidant tendency to construct elaborate ungrounded scenarios.

In an analysis of mysticism as it relates to the Christian encounter with Zen, William Johnston reminded us that Zen meditation is dedicated

[29] Correspondence with the author.
[30] Nishida Kitaro, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated by David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 110.

to enlightenment, recalling Suzuki's expression *kensho*, 'seeing into the essence of things', which may be interpreted as having redemptive qualities about which one might truly sit hopefully.[31] To be sure, the role of grace is key, and Johnston exhaustively exposed the history of Christianity's complex relationship with grace, only to leave this reader wondering how that understanding might evolve in the future. 'The true mystical descent to the core of one's being', Johnston concluded, 'is always accompanied by progress in moral virtue and in psychic maturity, and it effects a reform or a conversion'.

Religions from the East and West fall into two distinct but complementary categories. We may regard the West as soundly representing the prophetic tradition and the East constituting the best of the wisdom tradition. If so, it is not sufficient to ground Christhood in biblical insights only. The wisdom of the East can serve to deepen our understanding. But wisdom traditions are not sufficient either.

Gnosticism

It has been suggested that appeals to religious experience may be at risk of gnosticism, which emphasizes personal spiritual knowledge over traditional religious authority. James Fredericks, professor emeritus at Loyola Marymount University in California, a specialist in dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, says 'without the prophetic dimension, the mystical decays quickly into mere Gnosticism. Christians are always in need of resisting Gnosticism.' This implies that the Church as an institution is the repository of prophetic teaching.[32]

On the other hand, Paul Knitter, author of *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, affirms:

> … if we truly believe that the Holy Mystery we call God is a loving Mystery, then we would expect this mystery to be available/communicate itself to all human beings. If the Mystery is one, then the communication and experience of this Mystery would surely show common qualities and characteristics. Surveying the mystics of the various religious traditions of the world, that is precisely what we find …. As much as some forms of Gnosticism affirm a Mystery that is detached from and dismissive of the material world, I would, as a Christian with firm Jewish roots, have to disagree.[33]

[31] See William Johnston, 'Defining Mysticism: Suggestions from the Christian Encounter with Zen', *Theological Studies*, 28/1 (February 1967), 94–110, here 94, 109.
[32] Correspondence with the author.
[33] Correspondence with the author.

Gnosticism does represent a real danger to coherence in the Roman Catholic faith, as it did long before being discredited by Irenaeus, but, I suggest, the label is often too easily deployed.

As authentic Christianity and Buddhism both invite us into the universe of experience, arbitrary abstractions are of course unhelpful, particularly as they may cause us to gloss over real differences or, in the worst cases, scramble things together into some unscrutinised and undifferentiated porridge that is neither satisfying nor nutritious. It is a fact that the random parroting of sacred texts and the arbitrary adoption of diverse religious practices can easily slip into syncretism. But this calls for caution, not fear. The risk of confusion or dilution can be mitigated by rigorous rules of engagement.

Relationship

A major difference between Christianity and Buddhism is encountered where the former seeks a *relationship* with Christ, as the only Son of God, enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth. As Buddhism draws our attention to the Self, it is tempting to conclude that Zen precludes relationship. Yet, it is important to point out that this is not the egoic self. There is a kind of relationship in *identifying* with the True or Universal Self, the Cosmic Christ to which St Paul alludes enigmatically in his letter to the Galatians (2:20).

Indeed, Aelred Graham pointedly asked: 'Is religion best seen in terms of a relationship or an identity with the pure Existence we call God?' He acknowledged the contrast between the Eastern emphasis on the divinity that abides in the human person and the Western insistence on otherness, a kind of immanence-versus-transcendence dichotomy. He offered provisionally, 'For the moment, let us say that the ideal situation between God and man is best expressed as neither identity nor relationship but as harmony'.[34] On one level, this is a brilliant solution, but practically—theologically, liturgically—it solves nothing.

But it may just be that such theological distinctions are not the most important consideration. Ultimately, the Judaeo-Christian tradition invites us 'to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). If these can best be done by drawing what is most inspiring from what appear on the surface to be different sources,

[34] Graham, *End of Religion*, 23–24.

so be it. And if that is the case, can we continue to maintain that, in God's plan, these sources are truly disparate?

Eric Cunningham acknowledges, 'Zen is a genuine path to transcendence, and its mystics over the centuries have revealed as much about the nature of the spiritual world as have visionaries such as St John of the Cross or St Theresa of Ávila', but also 'It is one thing to seek Unity behind dualism, another thing to realise that without some separation between things, there is no space for love to flow between them'.[35] This issue cannot be overlooked, but as his own journey—as well as those of Graham, Merton and others—has indicated, finding a way to hold these facts in tension offers benefits that outweigh the risks.

Being Religious Spiritually

'Let me end as I began, on a limiting autobiographical note, the better to avoid any pretense of impersonal objectivity.'[36] So wrote Graham in the last chapter of *The End of Religion*. I claim the same protection from prosecution here. The dialogue between East and West has continued unabated in my head and heart for half a century already. I have found the spiritual quest to be a roller-coaster ride, or maybe a modest facsimile of the mythical and archetypal 'hero's journey'—rife with trials, ordeals and transformations. There will be no final resolution in this life, I suspect.

Taken together, Graham's books raise a range of possibilities for engagement with Eastern teaching. It seems improbable that God would have given either the East or the West a monopoly on wisdom, or that Judaeo-Christianity and Hinduism-Buddhism are sufficient unto themselves. More plausible is the proposition that God's plan from the beginning was to seed a desire to be known through one another, then putting us on the path of dialogue.

One hears a great deal these days about a distinction made by disaffected Christians between being spiritual and being religious. Though it often reflects a sincere desire for authenticity, such a statement conveniently avoids hard and important questions. Is it more authentic to be religious or spiritual, or is there not more of a need to be religious spiritually? By itself, religion can be rather deadening. I once said in jest that it 'inoculates a person against spirituality'. Though there is

[35] Correspondence with the author.
[36] Graham, *End of Religion*, 253.

some truth to this, to be spiritual unsystematically exposes us to the tyranny of the false self. Still, you cannot blame some people for being unenthusiastic about going to church. James Finley quotes Thomas Merton as saying, 'There's a lot of people losing their faith, and they're losing it in church', adding, 'The tragedy of it all is that this unitive state of realization we're talking about is the pull of all world religions, including Christianity. The scandal of the church is that it does not teach its own traditions.'[37]

I can only speak about what revitalised my faith, not once, but twice in my own life. The solution was meditation, combined with attention to my personal religious experience, which is the fruit of what is increasingly called contemplative consciousness. From this perspective, understanding the place of religion was enriched and its practice became better integrated with daily life. While this is a personal reflection, I have written this article to serve readers who may feel similarly.

At the same time as being religious spiritually, one must be spiritual religiously, by rigorously attending to God's presence in all moments of life. Though this seems like a highly individualistic activity, in fact it is deeply communitarian because meditation throws open the shutters of our private or tribal consciousness while attentiveness to personal experience acquaints us with the mystery of God in the world. John Main, a pioneer of Christian meditation, wrote: 'Meditation is the way that is entirely open to God because it is open to our own being and the world of creation'.[38]

I have sometimes mused that we need two religions: one for religious belonging, a shared theology and a common home where we rest and find our meaning in God, the other to inspire us in fresh ways and to raise necessary questions about a range of unexamined assumptions. In choosing to live religiously, I am well aware of the obligation to strive in all things for authenticity, which requires inherited tradition and teaching to be subjected to the crucible of experience in a manner that is attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible. We are invited by life itself to live religion mindfully and heartfully, not as some standard-issue uniform or, God forbid, weapon. It takes courage, maybe even audacity, to do this, because risk, hard work and—sometimes—loneliness are unavoidable.

[37] 'James Finley: Breathing God', interview with Tami Simon, at https://www.resources.soundstrue.com/transcript/james-finley-breathing-god/, accessed 4 October 2021.
[38] John Main, *The Way of Unknowing: Expanding Spiritual Horizons through Meditation* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 119.

Near the end of his life, Merton wrote in a letter that rather aptly summarises what I have come to believe:

> I have no hesitation in saying that the 'Buddhist' view of reality and life is one which I find extremely practical and acceptable, and, indeed, I think it is one of the very great contributions to the universal spiritual heritage of man. It is by no means foreign or hostile to the spirit of Christianity, provided that the Christian outlook does not become bogged down in a slough of pseudo-objective formalities, as I am afraid it sometimes tends to do.[39]

One might add a similar admonition concerning certain Roman Catholic formalities.

My purpose here is not to promote Zen or Buddhism per se to a Christian readership, but to encourage the simple and earnest exploration of the wisdom literature and appropriate practices of other faiths. To paraphrase Knitter, without such wisdom I would not have fathomed the depths of my own tradition. Specifically, had it not been for a star that rose in the East, I could not be Catholic with the fire that fills me today. Personal experience of God's presence, often beheld in meditation, particularly in natural surroundings, has been the stronghold of my faith. I confess that I pray from Catholic literature and the breviary as a prelude to meditation, but I readily acknowledge that the Upanishads and the Dhammapada also adorn my prayer space. As well, I may add to my prayer three sun salutations, to which I privately refer as Trinity salutations, or three OM breaths before meditating. Combined, they have helped me to focus more sharply on the end for which I pray.

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[39] Thomas Merton to Mr Lunsford, in *Witness to Freedom: The Letters of Thomas Merton in Times of Crisis*, edited by William H. Shannon (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 167–168.

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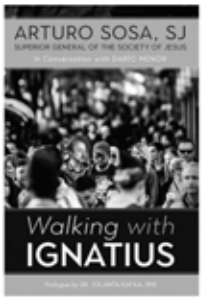

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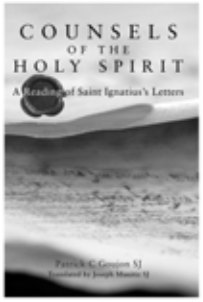

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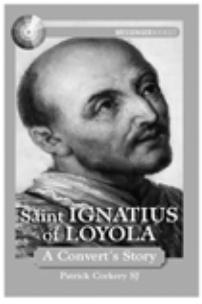

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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND ABUSE OF CONSCIENCE

A Process of Liberation from Submission and Affective Manipulation

Gabriel Roblero Cum

THE SERIES OF DENUNCIATIONS against priests and religious—both men and women—for abuse committed in recent years within the Roman Catholic Church, whether of conscience or sexual, has allowed many individual members of religious orders to acknowledge that they have been victims of those who were their hierarchical superiors. We undoubtedly live in an epoch characterized by awakening to an awareness of the fear and abuse of power. In the social and ecclesiastical context in which we live, we feel great unease about the injustice of any kind of authority wrongly imposed on the lives of persons. This has allowed much more freedom for the denunciation of any abuse of power by those in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[1]

It is becoming ever more frequent that many who are following a process of vocation into the religious life, or who are already priests or members of religious orders, when they come to make the Spiritual Exercises, are able to speak with those giving the retreats about abuse they have suffered from a superior or from someone who had religious authority over them. They tell of the treatment they received, which involved humiliation, affective manipulation and the control of their consciences and wills. In their testimony they reveal words that have weighed on their consciousness and done much damage. These are phrases such as: *You are not what was expected of you*, *You have not lived up to what God wants of a religious sister*, *You can't do it without me*, *You're not worthy of us*, *You disappoint me*, *You're not worthy of this life*.[2]

This article first appeared in Spanish as 'Ejercicios Espirituales y abuso de conciencia. Un proceso de liberación del sometimiento y de la manipulación afectiva', *Manresa*, 92 (2020), 153–162.

[1] See José Andrés Murillo, *Confianza lúcida* (Santiago, Chile: Uqbar, 2012), 33–34.

[2] Alejandro Reinoso, 'Algunos elementos sobre el abuso y la manipulación de conciencia', Conferencia en la jornada de formación para prevención de abusos, Conferre-Conferencia de religiosas y religiosos, Santiago, Chile, 2 August 2017.

Hans Zollner points out that when the abuse suffered has come from someone's own father, a person may still turn for help to at least one other being: God.

> But when the one who commits the abuse is a priest, whose office it is to be a representative of God, *another Christ* as the theologians teach, the image of God becomes opaque and the victim is plunged into the most complete solitude, a dark and deep abyss.[3]

As a result, the possibility of trusting in God and in God's representatives is lost. Sexual abuse has left such a person not only without any feeling of spiritual accompaniment, but above all without any home, without any refuge and without any spiritual experience that has meaning. In general, anybody who has been the victim of abuse has to ask: where was God when I was being abused? What did God do to prevent the abuse?

Psychological Abuse and Abuse of Conscience in the Church and Religious Life

The drama of abuse—the pain, the fear and the silence—can remain embedded for years within someone who has been a victim. This is especially the case when the person is faced with the hard reality that his

[3] Hans Zollner, 'Dios mio, ¿por qué me has abandonado? Esprititualidad y manejo del abuso a menores', *Razón y Fe*, 275/1422 (2017), 324.

or her account of what has happened is either not believed or not heard by the very community of faith which had looked approvingly on the supposed pastoral care that the perpetrator had provided to the victim. As Amedeo Cencini rightly asks, had it not been for the enormous courage shown, and risk taken, by the victims with regard to those who committed the abuse, would the Church ever have been obliged to admit the faults within it, and to recognise not only the scandals but also the debts owing to the victims?[4]

The psychological abuse of conscience is an abuse of power. It consists in exerting control and dominance over the conscience of another person, forcing that person to act in a specific way. It is the kind of conduct which is carried out systematically and repeatedly against the dignity and psychological integrity of the victim (*You can only trust in me to say what is happening to you.* And, *I was unable even to breathe without telling her*).[5]

Marie Keenan points out that the abuse that takes place in religious life happens within an ecclesiastical context and structure, that is, within an institution which has quite specific characteristics and customs, namely the practice of spiritual direction and the sacrament of confession. Such a situation and context allow control of the mind by means of the rule of obedience, along with persuasion and influence. In many cases, the same authority adds weight to the information given and enforces its emotional grounding, leading to conformity, submission and complete acceptance of the institution.[6]

One can distinguish different levels of psychological effect produced by abuse of conscience and affective manipulation. At the first level there is the feeling of being disconcerted, afraid, confused and insecure, and the sensation of a loss of identity. This is the level found among persons being accompanied in the Spiritual Exercises. The next levels of the effects of abuse are more serious and when they show themselves they indicate that an experience of the Exercises is not to be recommended. At the second level symptoms of anxiety, depression, helplessness and despair, sleep and gastrointestinal problems appear, as well as withdrawn

[4] See Amedeo Cencini, *¿Ha cambiado algo en la Iglesia después de los escándalos sexuales? Análisis y propuestas para la formación* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2016), 45.

[5] Álvaro Rodríguez-Carballeira and others, 'Un estudio comparativo de las estrategias de abuso psicológico: en pareja, en el lugar de trabajo y en grupos manipulativos', *Anuario de Psicología*, 36/3 (2005), 299–314.

[6] See Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power and Organizational Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

behaviour. Quite often even those who are close may not be aware of what is happening. But at a third level, serious depression, panic attacks, self-harm symptoms and suicide attempts show themselves.[7]

Strategies in the Abuse of Conscience

The seduction of the victim has been recognised as one of the first strategies adopted in order to carry out abuse. An attempt is made to provide the one to be abused with affective satisfaction. This may be done, for example, by means of praise, or acknowledgement, or the giving of real or symbolic gifts. Also, access may be granted to certain privileges, and a tone of intimacy adopted (*I'm going to tell you something very important, which I'm only telling you*, *I'm putting great trust in you*, *'If you don't do this, I'm going to feel very bad*). Again, permission may be granted to enter certain places from which others are excluded (*You are the only one I allow to come in here*, *Only you can stay here*). Bodily gestures can also serve to initiate the dynamic involved in abuse, for example, a pat or a hug exclusively given.[8]

The abuser makes use of various means to isolate and control the victim, forming a relation of interdependence, and suggesting a connection which implies some sort of proprietorship (*You're my spiritual son/daughter*, *I feel hurt by what you have done*, *You've betrayed me*). Use may be made of special knowledge by which the victim can be controlled and manipulated, and thanks to which that person is separated from others (*I'm very disappointed at what I've heard about you*, *You're not one of ours*, *You're going astray*). We also find ourselves in the area of non-verbal communication: prolonged sighs, shrugging of shoulders, disparaging looks or, in addition, significant silences, insinuations, upsetting or caustic allusions, discourteous remarks. Was that look one of hatred? Are remarks being made that are more than they seem? The victim may well be left in doubt about what is being felt. It is impossible for that person to know whether he or she is mentally exaggerating. Self-doubt creeps in.[9]

The main strategy adopted by the abuser may be to instil fear in the victim: the fear of losing affection, of betraying one's main purpose in life, of not being good enough for the life of the group, or of being

[7] See Kekuni Minton, Pat Ogden and Clare Pain, *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy* (New York: Norton, 2006).
[8] See Reinoso, 'Algunos elementos sobre el abuso'.
[9] See Marie-France Hirigoyen, *Stalking the Soul: Emotional Abuse and the Erosion of Identity*, translated by Helen Marx (New York: Helen Marx, 2004).

rejected by the figure of authority. The dynamic of abuse consists in the fact that the person provoking the fear is *the same person* who consoles and calms. And what is most serious in this process of ecclesiastical abuse is that the one abusing may come to occupy the place of God in the conscience of the victim. The abuse in this way takes over gradually and in a subtle fashion, use being made even of a whole series of spiritual and theological arguments. 'It becomes in this way an act committed in the name of God; it is basically God's name that is being used to commit the abuse'.[10] Given the relationship of submission, the abuser is transformed into the saviour. *I know what God wants for you* becomes the prototypical phrase which removes freedom and causes so great a fear in certain persons that it is impossible for them to escape from the dynamic of dominance and submission. Any intent in the subject to think and choose in a personal way is condemned as mistaken, erroneous or false on the part of the one in authority.[11]

Submission, Confusion, Identity Crisis

The imposition of submission and of confusion are the main ways in which power is abused in order to overcome, control and dominate the conscience of the victim. Marie-France Hirigoyen explains that in an abusive relationship the victim does not realise that he or she is being forced into a relationship of submission. A perverse seduction makes use of the perpetrator's protective instinct for the other. The seduction is narcissistic as it seeks in the other a unique object of fascination, namely the loving image that the seduced has of the seducer. Such a narcissistic seduction confuses and wipes out the limits of what is one's own and what is of the other. The domination appears in the area of relationships and consists in intellectual or moral dominion, which is proof of the ascendancy or influence of one individual over another. The victim fails to realise that he or she is being forced, and gradually finds him- or herself caught in a spider's web, tied up psychologically, anaesthetized and at the mercy of the one who dominates.[12]

In most cases, submission appears to be a way to cope with the need to be recognised, which is preferable to being abandoned. Should the victim accept submission, he or she becomes continually more shut

[10] José Andrés Murillo, 'El abuso: crimen atroz: pecado grave', *Revista Mensaje*, 59/588 (May 2010), 29.
[11] See Hirigoyen, *Stalking the Soul*, 120–122.
[12] Hirigoyen, *Stalking the Soul*, 89–94.

down or depressed, and the aggressor becomes ever more dominating and feels more sure of power. The imposition of dominance plunges the victim into a state of confusion, which makes it impossible to complain or even to know how to do so. This confusion leads to anxiety and stress. Victims become emptied; they lose their personal identity, and with it their value in their own eyes.[13]

With regard to persons who are being accompanied in the Spiritual Exercises this situation brings about an identity crisis, affecting both their vocation and their self-possession. They make plain that something is wrong in their lives, and then question themselves, *Who am I really?* The reason why they show this confusion and self-distrust is that they have handed over control of their lives to another person, who feels and decides on their behalf.[14] In these circumstances, to recognise that they are victims is a most painful process, because their submission has betrayed their own personal identity. It may happen that any decision or election that the person has to make for him- or herself will appear as something extremely difficult or almost impossible, because the voice of the dominant figure of authority will resound as something more powerful than any personal judgment of his or her own. And it may also happen that the person abused assumes that he or she is responsible for the abuse,

[13] Hirigoyen, *Stalking the Soul*, 153.
[14] See Reinoso, 'Algunos elementos sobre el abuso'.

as if having caused it (*I felt that I was culpable, both before myself and before God, I felt that I was evil because I was not able to do what she wanted*).

Annotation 15 as Framework for an Experience of Liberation in the Spiritual Exercises

In the case of someone who, as member of a religious congregation, has lived in submission to an abuser, or has felt the affective manipulation of conscience, the experience of the Spiritual Exercises can provide a space for self-knowledge, liberation, and psychological, emotional and spiritual recovery. The Annotations form a ruling framework which permits the creation of a system of relations providing for a process of liberation in the encounter with God. In accordance with the spirit of the Annotations, the accompaniment that takes place during the Exercises is based on a relationship of trust, on a mutual recognition between guide and guided which excludes any form of coercion or manipulation.

St Ignatius requests that the one giving the Exercises should fulfil the role of witness to the exercitant's experience 'like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium', not impeding or interfering, but leaving 'the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord' (Exx 15). The task of the one who guides in the Exercises is not to get ahead of the action of the Holy Spirit, not to interfere or supplant, but to be a facilitator who does not interpose between the subject and the Other who is sought.[15]

> Rather with great moderation, reserve and prudence, lest carried away with one's own spiritual fervour and wanting to offer all this by oneself, one fails to achieve anything …. Hence it follows that those are mistaken who want to subject those making the Exercises to their own experiences or to what they themselves feel moved and called.[16]

Something fundamental has to be kept clear. The one who guides someone who has undergone either psychological abuse or abuse of conscience has to understand that he or she is occupying the position from which the harm was done before. In fact, it was in the supposed role of one who cared and was interpreting the will of God that the abuser

[15] Compare Carlos Domínguez Morano, *Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos* (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2003), 77–78.
[16] Achille Gagliardi, *Comentario a los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio*, edited by José A. García (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2018), 75.

could establish a dominant position over the conscience of the victim. Consequently, while wanting to provide for the good of the person, care has to be taken lest the new relationship also turn directive, domineering or coercive. As the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin has explained, there may well be a new version of the traumatic harm done previously.[17]

Nevertheless, being neutral is not synonymous with being passive. To listen in an active way, serving as echo and mirror, can bring about an engagement that is healing. An attentive listening will allow the victim to become free from negativity and from the sense of guilt; he or she will once more be able to trust his or her inner resources, throwing off the weight of inner doubt produced by the silencing of words and actions. The 'witnessing' function of anyone who accompanies in the Exercises requires an acknowledgement of the truth of what has taken place, of the harm done and of the depth of suffering experienced. In this way, the meeting of guide and guided becomes a locus in which emotions can be recognised and expressed. On the one hand, the exercitant will be able to give vent to anger, unhappiness, impotence, but, on the other hand, he or she can show that a new human process is taking place that will allow a life free in the love of God. The person can distinguish what was owing to personal fragility and what came because of external aggression.[18] One may presume that this space, where feelings can be freely expressed, is in itself a healing remedy for the experience of abuse that took place in the past.

The 'Moral Third' of Jessica Benjamin and Its Application to the Spiritual Exercises

In order to provide better accompaniment in the Spiritual Exercises for persons who have been victims of the abuse of conscience and the manipulation of affection, study of the concept of the 'Moral Third' proposed by the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin can be of great help.[19]

By 'Moral Third' is meant a principle, a relationship, a function as witness, which is put in place by developing the capacity to listen and recognise, which allows one to have a feeling for the other person as being another mind and another body with specific needs, pains and hopes.

[17] Jessica Benjamin, 'Beyond "Only One Can Live": Witnessing, Acknowledgment and the Moral Third', in *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[18] See Hirigoyen, *Stalking the Soul*, 185, 198.
[19] Jessica Benjamin, 'Beyond Doer and Done To: An Intersubjective View of Thirdness', in *Beyond Doer and Done To*, 21–48.

Psychological synonyms which refer to the experience of the 'Third' are: to affirm, to validate, to know, to accept, to understand, to empathize, to tolerate, to appreciate, to identify with, to meet as a friend, to love.[20]

In the relationship between the one who *gives* and the one who *receives* the Spiritual Exercises—just as in the relationship between analyst and analysand in psychoanalytic therapy—there has to be reference to a third, who in both cases goes beyond the will of the two persons who enter into the relationship. It is this space made up of *thirdness* which makes it possible in the Exercises for God to lead the experience of the retreatant, something different from any sort of taking over, manipulation and coercion. In accord with Annotation 15 (Exx 15), the 'Moral Third' implies that in the meeting with the other there is a liberation from any sort of control. It means that the person who accompanies in the Exercises has the capacity to establish an identification with the other who suffers, recognising his or her suffering. This means, in turn, the ability to recognise the other as a separate, different person, who is at the same time someone similar. Thus a situation is created in which the subjectivity of each can coexist.[21]

An identification with the other who suffers

In the course of accompanying the Exercises, it has been found that many of those who have been abused reflect a vision of God as a 'witness' who kept silence, who facilitated and even became complicit in the abusive situation. Consequently, the indication is that in giving the Exercises the first step has to be to try to modify such a vision and experience. It is not easy to find a place once more for the God of Mercy, the Good Father of Jesus Christ, in that space (the 'Moral Third') when the person has been abused by a representative of God, acting in God's name, and in a context and a structure that supported the abuser.

Despite this difficulty, there are testimonies which give account of the psychic and spiritual recovery that the Exercises produce by helping to recover and deepen the paternal-maternal image of God, the One who is refuge, defence and strength in overcoming abuse. Biblical texts from Isaiah—'I have called you by your name, you are mine' (43:1) and 'I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me' (49:15–16)—are those which have most enabled retreatants to regain the effects of a longed-for freedom:

[20] Emilce Dio Bleichmar, '¿Es posible un principio moral como base de una buena acción terapeútica? El tercero moral de Jessica Benjamin', *Aperturas Psicoanáliticas*, 59 (2018).
[21] See Benjamin, 'Beyond "Only One Can Live"'.

It has been a real healing. I felt like a daughter longing for God to come always, Now I can feel that I am worth a great deal to God, Now I can love freely, Now I feel at peace.

Final Comments

In the process of the Exercises someone who has been a victim of abuse can come to see that his or her rightful religious experience has been hidden beneath a cloak of submission. But he or she also comes to appreciate how abuse was hidden behind a supposed relationship of care and protection. The perversion consisted in the abuser taking that place in the conscience of the victim that belonged to God. Moreover, all this was happening within a structure which facilitated the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and the manipulation of the affections.

The process of the Exercises allows the exercitant to recognise *what belongs to him or herself* and *what belongs to the other* (the abuser or the institution), while also becoming conscious of the value of personal freedom in one's relationship with God, such that no coercion or manipulation is possible. In order to listen as one accompanies, one needs to empathize more than to understand. In many cases it will be important to consider as one finishes the Exercises whether one should recommend, or at least suggest to the exercitant, that psychotherapy may be necessary in order to continue the process of liberation from the abuse of conscience and affective manipulation.

Finally, the following conclusion emerges regarding the formation that is required in those who give and accompany the Exercises. There are two elements that are needed. On the one hand, an experience of the Exercises, properly given and in accord with the order stipulated in the Annotations, will itself function as a tool which can liberate those who have been victims of abuse of conscience and affective manipulation. On the other hand, it will be the attitude of the person accompanying, who remains faithful to Annotation 15, which permits the rebirth of freedom and healing in the exercitant.

Gabriel Roblero Cum SJ is a psychologist and Provincial of the Chilean Province of the Society of Jesus.

translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ

MARY WARD'S LATER YEARS

Christine Burke

ONE IMPACT OF REACHING a higher tally of years myself is gradually facing the prospect of letting go of activity, or at least of over-activity! Religious women in general gain a deep sense of purpose and meaning from our apostolic work, grounded in the twofold commitment of love for God and our neighbour. Over the years, I have listened to other older women share their feelings of loss of purpose and, in some cases, almost a loss of identity when they can no longer reach out to others as part of the active mission of their congregation.

The recent experiences we have all had of lockdown and the limits it imposes present this dilemma to other age groups. This roadblock to what we have taken to be normal has to be 'of God', and I have looked to our specific tradition seeking some insights. While the stories of founders will differ greatly, maybe this time calls us all to reflect on the later years of important forerunners, when activity was denied them by ill health or by some outside force which left them unable to pursue the work that had been so important to them. People such as Pedro Arrupe spring easily to mind, but each congregation can think back to times when activity, for whatever reason, had to cease.

Most often, when we look at the life of Mary Ward (1585–1645), we talk about her vision for women, her missionary outreach, her courage. Her active years in this new endeavour were 1610–1630. The 1620s, especially, saw seemingly unending demands. Her main work in this period, after she and her companions walked to Rome via the Alps (with a detour to Loreto), was trying to meet and work with members of the Roman Curia to convince them that 'if they [men] would not make us believe we can doe nothing, and that we are but weomen, we might doe great maters'.[1]

She was convinced, after much prayer and discernment, that God wanted a congregation of active women, modelled on the Jesuit way of

[1] *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung. Die Quellentexte bis 45*, edited by Ursula Dirmeier (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007), volume 1, 359.

Mary Ward and her companions in 1609, from the **Painted Life of Mary Ward**

life, but self-governing, not under the local bishop or under a male 'Father General'. She envisaged a female leader, directly answering to the Pope, who would be responsible for directing the ministries of the sisters. She could show that the work that she and her sisters had done for ten years had borne great fruit. She drew up documentation to support her claim; and she met with representatives of governments and Church, seeking people who would speak in favour of her project, which envisaged women teaching, doing pastoral work and supporting the spiritual life of others. She saw this call as being clearly 'of God'. She managed to meet with the Pope himself more than once.

In an age where, despite much evidence to the contrary, women were considered second-class and unable to take responsibility, Mary faced down gossip and ridicule, misunderstanding and detraction, from English government spies, Jesuits, non-religious clergy, bishops and cardinals. All the while she kept her finger on the pulse of her growing group of women, calling them as required to new postings in underground pastoral work in England, or in education and formation across Europe. She began small schools for girls in Rome, Naples, Munich and Bratislava, and tried for the same in other cities. Given the communications and transport of the time, this is a formidable workload. Her letters show the pressures she was under, sometimes unable to finish a short note to a special friend, often admitting to one of her inner circle that she was unwell.

Many years earlier, during a retreat, Mary had prayed for the courage to accept whatever difficulties might occur in accomplishing God's will in establishing her Institute. At that time she had been somewhat surprised to realise these might be greater than she had first thought. She had shared her retreat experience with her companion Winifred Wigmore and, in 1624, she wrote to her friend saying that she realised that the 'long loneliness' might be near.[2] She adamantly believed that the work entrusted to her by God would continue: her letter to Pope Urban in November 1629 reasserts this deep belief. Her followers had built their lives around her unwavering trust in the God who called.

And suddenly, in 1631, it all stopped. Forbidden even to say farewell to her community, she was arrested and imprisoned by ecclesiastical decree. She was at death's door. Her whole mission was in ruins. The reply came from Rome—not just simply, 'you cannot call yourselves religious women', but the whole enterprise, 'a poisonous growth in the church of God', is 'suppressed, extinct, rooted out, destroyed and abolished'.[3] She was refused the sacraments and called a heretic. Yet even from her dark and smelly cell she called for calm, for trust that God is over all. She found creative ways to circumvent petty restrictions so she could communicate with her companions via letters written in lemon juice; she and her companions drew on skills honed in the years of persecution of their Catholic families in Protestant England.

A truly long loneliness stretched ahead of her. Fifteen years were to pass before she died in 1645. Having tapped networks which informed the Pope of her imprisonment, she was released. Her recovery in Munich was slow and overshadowed by her summons to Rome to face possible death, either through illness or the Inquisition. She gained an audience with the Pope and was cleared of heresy, but the first few years in Rome resembled a form of 'lockdown', with church spies at the doors reporting her every move and trying to intercept letters. Her health was broken.

Her women almost everywhere had been turned out of their convents in the midst of the Thirty Years' War. All money from dowries invested in their housing was lost with this expulsion. Some made their way to Rome; the few already there had to try to contact others and deal with the pain that so many were unaccounted for. They faced abject and humbling

[2] Mary Ward to Winifred Wigmore, 27 October 1624, in *Till God Willl: Mary Ward through Her Writings*, edited by Gillian Orchard (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 73.
[3] '*Pastoralis Romani Pontificis*: Urban VIII's Bull of 1631', in M. Immolata Wetter, *Mary Ward under the Shadow of the Inquisition* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), appendix, 213–214.

poverty, dependent on others to send food and to avoid the obstruction and interference of those who had plotted to bring Mary Ward down.

Internally, she no doubt had to grapple with the total failure of the enterprise God had entrusted to her and, in this, maintain her trust that God was somehow over it all. In these years she could no longer call herself a religious sister. She had no mission to offer her fragmented remnant of women. She could only seek ways to encourage them and keep in touch. Her letters—those that remain despite having crossed lines of war and church spies, not to mention the subsequent four hundred years of ecclesial suppression and subsequent political upheavals and wars—show a tenderness for the few remaining companions, who were coping with so much ill will and confusion. She maintained her responsibility for them as friends, no longer able to claim any church sanctioned leadership role.

In 1634 she was eventually permitted to visit an Italian spa for health reasons; despite being followed by spies, she supported by her 'spiritual conversations' those secular women and men drawn to share their stories with her. Her ministry became one of welcoming people, listening, showing her care through a quiet presence rather than being able to work actively for change. Finally, in 1637, her small group began their rather protracted return to England, via another spa, not travelling through more familiar German-speaking territory because of the brutal ongoing war, but through France. Her journey was made doubly problematic by extreme ill health. No longer walking twenty miles a day, as in her younger years, she was mostly dependent on public or private carriages, sometimes offered overwhelming hospitality by wealthy contacts, at other times having to beg en route, as from the English Benedictines in Paris. She passed through very dangerous territory, awash with deserting soldiers and brigands lying in wait for poorly guarded travellers. Ill health—kidney stones, fevers and other ailments—kept them for months in Liège.

She arrived in 1639 and dared to respond to calls from parents to help educate their daughters in the heart of Protestant London. The Civil War broke out, and she and her party joined the probably disorganized Royalist retreat. She was an internal refugee in the country she loved so much; however this journey did lead her into her home territory for the first time, perhaps, since she had left in 1605. This Civil War continued to rage around her on the way north, around the house that she and her companions were offered, some distance out of town in the small village of Hewarth, and finally when they moved into York itself, which soon capitulated to Parliament. When they returned to Hewarth in mid-1644 it was to a ravaged house; the air was thick with the evidence

of hundreds of bodies of buried soldiers, all the trees had been cut down and the roof unleaded, with the iron from all windows and doors removed.[4]

The shift was massive—from activity to inactivity, from independence to dependence, from a clear purpose to making do within restrictions. We do not have extensive prayer journals but only a few jottings from this time. One can only imagine that Ignatius' exercise of choosing and accepting being poor and despised as Jesus was would have meant a great deal to her. In 1615, she saw clearly in prayer that freedom to refer all to God, justice as right relations with God and others, and the sincerity to show oneself as one truly is, when grounded in trust in God would enable her company to walk as friends with God.[5] By the 1630s this insight had deepened so that she saw how it embraced the cross. She wrote a note in 1636 which confirms this:

> O how well ordered are thy deeds, my Lord God.
> Then thou saydst that justis was the best disposition,
> Now thou shouest how such justis is to be gotten.[6]

Despite this failure and 'crucifixion', we know that her felicity, which showed itself in her good natured, supportive, caring joy, continued to prevent her group from disintegrating into depression. The *Briefe Relation,* the earliest biography of Mary Ward which was written soon after her death, tells us that 'her confidence and cheerfulnes was so humble, peacefull and communicative to others'. Even near death she told them not to be sad and tried to cheer them by singing herself. She urged them not to give up, but to treasure God's vocation in them that it be 'constant, efficacious and affectionate which last word came with particular accent'.[7]

What can we, facing old age or a more enclosed horizon today, draw from these years of letting go? No doubt there is a call to bring to our prayer pain, loss of dear friends, uprooting from what had been normal and total uncertainty as to the future so these can be welded into an acceptance through a deepening encounter with God. The 'Friend of all friends' trusted by Mary Ward is the one to whom we must entrust our confusion, our struggle, our hope.[8] She offers us a wisdom that showed

[4] See Mary Ward, *A Briefe Relation ... with Autobiographical Fragments and a Selection of Letters*, edited by Christina Kenworthy-Browne (Woodbridge: Catholic Record Society, 2008), 71.
[5] See Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615, in *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 1, 290.
[6] *Mary Ward und ihre Gründung*, volume 4, 486.
[7] Ward, *Briefe Relation*, 68, 73.
[8] Mary Ward to Roger Lee, 1 November 1615.

itself in not allowing the troubles of the day to become her only focus. Her trust that God was in charge lightened her spirit: she did not have to anguish if whatever was happening was beyond her control.

Her readiness to start again after all she had been through, her loving support of others, her positive attitude to life, all encouraged her companions to keep going even after her death. Her belief in the future, despite the condemnations she had lived through and all the evidence that was against *any* future; her refusal to allow bitterness to have any place, praying with generosity for her enemies; her stress on living our vocation affectionately: what warm and hopeful words to inherit from a founder! The value of communication—be it only a short note letting others know that they were in her thoughts; the fact that she received graciously the efforts of Pope Urban to provide for her, despite all he had done and allowed to be done: these point to a generosity of spirit and an outward focus which refused to allow her to be broken by the experiences of her last 'long loneliness'.

All these seem to me to be grounded in Mary's unshakeable conviction that God was her 'Friend of all friends'. As we look at the mounting negatives of our time—climate change, the dismantling of democratic rights, the violence of human trafficking, drugs, war-mongering, combined with the pandemic that has killed so many and changed our perspectives on travel, employment, caring for the aged, freedom—and at a Church which finds it almost impossible to rethink old structures and practices and find new ways, it seems that the call is to do what we can where we are, trusting that, invisible to us, new life is being nourished. We are called to let go into freedom with God, doing the little that in us lies, to put some small amount of yeast into the bread that is in process of being baked in our time. Who knows, it might help feed many in the centuries ahead.

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THE FOUR GOSPELS AND KUROSAWA

Barbara Crostini

THE HAUNTING BEAUTY of a Japanese woman (looking like a geisha to the uninformed eye) riding through the forest in dappled sunlight—the recurring scene in Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece, *Rashomon* (1950)—has remained engraved in my memory for many years. Also strong is the impression of the emotional roller coaster I experienced watching the four versions of the same brutal story of rape and murder narrated in succession by the film. Each variation in the storyline played havoc with my moral assumptions, as sympathy for the woman as innocent victim twisted into a more complex mixture of feelings through the film's stark expectations about honour and pride, and its disenchanted portrayal of love and lust.

More recently, this experience re-emerged from my memory, as I started to wonder whether Kurosawa could have crafted his film around four stories as a parallel to the four Gospels. I should like to explore what mileage there is in this suggestion and the light it can shed on our understanding of Kurosawa's movie itself, but especially on the dynamic narratives of the four Gospels, highlighting a common thread, namely, the fragility of facts.

Parallel Stories

Let me first summarise the parallels between *Rashomon* and the Gospels. The most obvious is the number four. In each case there are four narratives of the same event. Four versions of the same story build up a picture, which, from different angles, grapples with the question of true identity. This choice may be a coincidence, but numbers often assert an importance in the work of exegesis. They attract attention to a similarity that can be developed further.

Both movie and Gospels tell the story of a murder. The murder is the central unjust act, whose degree of injustice, however, can be evaluated differently from different angles. From a certain point of view, both

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murders can be seen as an application of a law, whether it is the code of honour of the samurai, or Roman law about rebels in the case of Christ. But from a different angle, both men killed are victims of deceitful plots and meet their death undeservedly. Although the samurai who is killed is not an obvious Jesus-figure, nevertheless, as a victim, he acquires another life after death—speaking at his murderer's trial through a medium. Thereby he experiences a resurrection of sorts. In both cases, death does not come to sever the link between worlds, but remains as a pivot of ethical evaluation between the worlds of the living and of the dead.

If, as victim, the samurai is parallel to Jesus, the centrality of the trial scene suggests also another parallel, that between Tajomaru, the robber, and Jesus as the accused before the court. In both cases, the fairness of the trial is at stake. Different versions of the accusation can be used for a conviction, but the facts themselves are insufficient to make a determination. Similarly, the known facts about Jesus—his teachings, his miracles—are ultimately not enough to define his identity, and the purpose of his mission remains ambiguous and even threatening for those who cannot read it with the eyes of faith.

While Tajomaru speaks out in his own defence, colouring his deeds with heroic tints and dressing up the dynamics of the action in order to avoid blame, Jesus is silent at the accusations of the prosecutors. The contrast highlights the choice between a human struggle to manipulate

the world to fit into one's rational framework, using rhetorical techniques to persuade others of the truth of this framework, and a divine surrender to what should stand as self-evident truth about one's being. The all-powerful God escapes the temptation of power. At the same time, the robber calls to mind the two robbers crucified with Christ. Only the one who was ready to acknowledge his guilt and, by confessing it, to ask for mercy, was granted instant access to God's kingdom.

The Point with Disharmony

In this respect, all three characters involved in the *Rashomon* story display the same weakness: the compulsion to dress up their responsibility as favourably to themselves as they plausibly can within the framework of the story. Regardless of their actual culpability, this strong psychological compulsion jeopardises the retrieval of truth; a basic self-preservation instinct replaces any objective view of the facts, and, to make things even worse, allied to self-preservation is an equally basic need for self-aggrandisement, self-affirmation and ultimately predominance over the other. The nearly animalistic nature of these impulses is reflected in the raw character of the narrative, where blood, violence and sex wield their power and pursue their perverse logic.

By contrast with this relentless cycle driven by purely selfish ends, the Gospels tell of a striving for the very opposite mode of being, in which the self is subordinated to the other. In fact, Jesus is the perfect example of this ideal, placing his own preservation after that of everybody else—the salvation of humanity. Such an inversion can be perceived as a civilising corrective to the visible distortion of reality found in *Rashomon*, offering the clarity necessary to begin a journey towards truth.

Now the point of juxtaposing discordant narratives is not to create a competition as to the reality of the facts described in each of them. Disharmony opens a view on to a more basic reality: that of the human relationship to facts, which is necessarily complex and multifaceted. Unless each person is free to see beyond personal interests, unconstrained by other pressing needs (mostly coming from within), his or her interaction with events will reveal more about the self than about the events experienced. Interestingly, it does not really matter whether such experience is active or passive, nor is Kurosawa making a point just about memory as an unreliable mediator. It is part of the reality of facts that the inscrutable conscience of every human being not only undermines objectivity, but is a threat to the very possibility of understanding the world.

Kurosawa's own interpretation is a pessimistic one:

> Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings—the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are.[1]

But the point is more than psychological. The upshot of these unsettling stories (*Rashomon*'s as well as the Gospels') is that facts are the weakest link to reality. Actions are much more than facts, because they are rooted in the agent's motives and can only gain completeness when they are led back to those roots. Such complexity places them at the mercy of the individual. The eyes through which facts are viewed cannot be overlooked.

Like the motley cast of the Gospels, the minor characters of *Rashomon*'s frame story are ordinary people sitting at the city gate, including a woodcutter, a priest and an unnamed citizen. These three men are external observers. However, it is they who, in the end, draw the stories' significance together by providing a final commentary. We shall not know which of the four stories—told in turn by Tajomaru the robber, the wife, the dead samurai through a medium, and the woodcutter as external observer—represents an accurate description of the bloody events that occurred that day in the forest. Not even the disenchanted outsider's view given by the woodcutter, sometimes thought to be closest to the truth, is placed by Kurosawa on a higher plane of likelihood. Only the woodcutter tells his story outside the setting of the trial scene, and this distancing removes from him the status of witness. Paradoxically, then, the story that sounds the most objective is in fact the least reliable.

It is only by taking all the stories together, including the woodcutter's more prosaic and inglorious version, that the full range of possible variations is reached. Exposing all the available human motives for the tragic events builds up an overwhelming picture of human failure. The sense that reality gets further away after each tale enhances the feeling of desolation. The insidious snares of self-glorification and self-exculpation, and even the eyes of a casual observer looking on with disenchantment, can only distort any view of reality. Only a warped truth can emerge

[1] Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, translated by Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage, 1982), 183.

from these narratives taken together, but its warped condition is itself a truth.

Such a devastating conclusion about humanity—reminiscent of the disastrous failure of Jesus' disciples to perform their roles—is offset by the final appearance of a foundling baby, whose vulnerable innocence embodies a kind of nemesis for the irresponsible lust that generated it. The woodcutter's acceptance of responsibility for the care of this baby represents the healing power of ordinary, welcoming love, restoring hope in human possibility. While the presence of the baby and of the talismans in its cot are facts, the choice to lift it up out of abandonment is a moral one, shaping an action in which, faced with the facts, an agent (the woodcutter) goes beyond himself and grasps reality in a new and redeeming way. It is at once a simple and a surprising choice, but undertaking it makes all the difference. Of course, the baby also reminds us of the baby Jesus as God's chosen means to come to humanity's rescue. The bodily presence of the child, in its innocence, triggers the selflessness that is a precondition for clarity of vision. Through this act of pure love, the woodcutter breaks the spell of gloom that had accumulated around him.

Finally, the simplicity of Kurosawa's film (whether by aesthetic or economic choice) is matched by the simple literary language and style exhibited in the Gospels. Narrative is powerful in its raw outlines; it does not need embellishment. By his narrative technique, Kurosawa escapes those distortions that he denounces as inevitable when people

strive to appear better than they are. The camera is the eye of God. Through its unpitying representation of four different versions of the same event, truth shines without need for any enhancing rhetorical effect. Kurosawa points out how his film 'shows this sinful need for flattering falsehood going beyond the grave—even the character who dies cannot give up his lies when he speaks to the living through a medium'.[2] This life is our opportunity to turn back from selfishness and the pursuit of our own ends, if we are to have any chance of attaining clarity of vision. Sinfulness (the word Kurosawa himself uses) is not in the deed but in the lack of this clarity.

Relation and the Manifold

None of the parallels between *Rashomon* and the Gospels may at first be obvious, and none, I should make clear, is meant to be in any way blasphemous with respect to the story of Jesus. But, taken together, both weave stories that discuss truth as the ultimate concern, and that are bold enough to problematize this concept, specifically with respect to human failure. Both offer a fourfold approach to the same story, like a net through which something more than the story's facts can be glimpsed for eyes that see.

The power of narrative to open up truth through many-sidedness, rather than confining it in a univocal statement, maintains a space of tension for questioning and dialogue. Truth is never easily nor plainly given. In the concluding remarks to her book *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (2004), Judith Lieu writes:

> Rowan Williams has … suggested that it is hearing a story, and being brought into a relationship with it, namely the story of Jesus, that lies at the heart of 'what is mysterious in Christian beginnings'. In pointing to such a conclusion, the New Testament Gospels, and particularly the differences between them, play a crucial role—for in this way the fact of difference, of cultural variability, becomes part of normativity and not a regrettable obstacle to it. This is a valuable insight, and one frequently echoed by those with sympathies with a postmodern age.[3]

[2] Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*, 183.

[3] Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2004), 313, quoting Rowan Williams, 'Does It Make Sense to Speak of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy?', in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, edited by Rowan Williams (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 1–23, at 16–17.

Lieu's assessment of the origins of the Christian movement as a composite of different amalgamating strands emphasizes the centrality of tolerance. Here the many-sidedness of the Gospels becomes a standard opposing one-sided oppression.

While several writings by the Church Fathers puzzle about how to harmonize the differences found in the scriptures—the so-called *aporiae*—it is striking that attempts to produce a univocal gospel narrative have not been enduringly successful. Whereas a number of apocryphal Gospels have survived, despite their equally non-canonical status, these univocal texts have not. Two prominent examples from the second century, Tatian's *Diatessaron* (a 'harmony' attempting to reconcile the gospel narratives) and Marcion's *The Gospel of the Lord* (a modified version of Luke) can only be reconstructed from fragments quoted in other sources. This is surprising, since the *Diatessaron* remained the standard gospel text in Syria until the fifth century, while Marcion's *Gospel* was propagated through his highly successful movement. Nevertheless, the firm condemnation of both Tatian and Marcion for heresy overturned the appeal of their works as problem-free solutions, while the choice of canonicity coalesced around the four accounts we still now read.

Although the projects of Tatian and Marcion were similar in outcome, they were different in intent. Marcion's aim was the more encompassing. He wanted to do away with the Bible as we understand it, and replace it with his one-text Gospel and a few letters of Paul. The Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms could all be eliminated. After all, if Jesus had replaced the Law, why encumber believers with a set of outmoded practices and redundant readings? Marcion's logic takes to its extreme consequences the premise of supersessionism, which is still widely (though mistakenly) considered a valid Christian understanding of Jewish scriptures. By doing so, he exposes the flaws in such logic. But while Marcion was condemned, a semi-Marcionite belief in the superiority of the Gospels over the Old Testament (by its very name a thing of the past) has not only far outlasted the heresy, but is also rife nowadays, as we struggle to fit into our crowded information spaces anything to do with religion. Why bother with a long and complicated text, when all we need to know is packed densely into the wonderful New Testament narratives? Epistemological pragmatism is Marcion's best ally.

One problem is that it is easy to form a monolithic impression of the Jewish past as a well-structured narrative history, which lends itself admirably to Hollywood movies (a world away from Kurosawa). The Law

is one, set in stone. The prophets shouted their sobering messages over a cacophony of wars, conquests, destructions, deportations and sins, occasionally striking a surprisingly familiar note in words later applied to Jesus. But the fact is that, on closer scrutiny, even the approved biblical canon of the Old Testament self-consciously comprises contradictions.

Take the famous example of Manasseh, king of Judah. In 1 Kings, Manasseh is portrayed as an unredeemed idolater and the very paradigm of a terrible tyrant. In the rewriting of the story in 2 Chronicles, Manasseh becomes the model of the repentant king. Inspired by the latter setting, a prayer of forgiveness was composed in Manasseh's name, to be recited liturgically among the biblical odes.[4] In his masterful commentary on 2 Chronicles, Ralph W. Klein describes the task accomplished by this kind of reworking: 'Chronicles wants to give an alternative account to the Primary History (Genesis–2 Kings) with no attempt to replace that history'.[5]

If juxtaposing rather than replacing may be the aim even of those works which consciously rewrite the past by distancing themselves from their sources, then the coexistence of two (or more) variants in one canon is there for a purpose. It raises the questions: what is a fact of history? Do we rely on facts? Or is history's significance precisely seeing through facts to people's actions, bringing together what *was* under a grander scheme of what might, perhaps more significantly, have been in the past, and be in the future?

Fragility and Truth

The fragility of facts stands in opposition to the assumed assurance of the scientific mentality that offers them as the basis of reality. Unless we can glimpse that what appears most concrete is actually most frail, we cannot open the necessary gap for further thought, for philosophy, for God. That is why our guide to God—scripture—is anything but self-assured. What it aims at doing is to expose the truth as something that can only mistakenly be based on facts. When we think that facts are solid, we can only see one version of any thing: probably our own. The supposed universality of facts is closed to subjective experience; it flattens and stereotypes; it stifles the cry for

What appears most concrete is actually most frail

[4] See George Nickelsburg, 'Prayer of Manasseh', *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, edited by John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 770–773.

[5] Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 5; compare 473–488.

understanding; it numbs intelligence. In the statistical numbers of deaths from the coronavirus, for example, the individual predicament all but disappears. In presumed objectivity, others tell who you are, what you want, what it must be you are experiencing. Talk is closed down and understanding univocal. Rather than truth, this way of approaching the world can only call forth injustice.

By contrast, the experiences of viewing *Rashomon* and of reading the Gospels call forth narratives remote from our experience. But, by choosing a multiform narration, both works advocate a problem-filled truth and identity that are much closer to the experience of each of us. Perhaps because of this they are works that endure beyond the specific culture and time in which they were made. Plural narratives are no modernistic affectation. They are defenders of any claim to truth.

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THE IGNATIAN YEAR AND THE PANDEMIC

Reflections from a Field Hospital

Oscar Momanyi

'There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from.' (Elizabeth Kübler-Ross)[1]

A Virus in a Faraway Land

WHEN THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK started, there was a general sense in my neighbourhood that it was a faraway disease that would never come to us. After all, many other viral diseases, such as Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-1), H1N1 and 'swine flu' have in the past reared their ugly heads in many parts of the world, but they never reached us. So I continued to live in the oblivious conviction that I was safe and that this new virus would pass me by as the others had done. I live and work in the Mwangaza Jesuit Spirituality Centre, a retreat house linked to an infirmary for elderly Jesuits of the Eastern Africa Province in the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya. I work as a retreat-giver and spiritual guide, together with other Jesuits and lay collaborators. I also have responsibility for taking care of the elderly community members as Prefect of Heath in the infirmary.[2] The area has lush gardens with beautiful flowers and trees on the foothills of the Ngong Hills. It is a little Garden of Eden.[3]

How could a virus originating thousands of miles away come to this serene and secluded corner of the world? But when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kenya in March 2020, I realised that my naïveté was over. I started to think seriously about the possibility of myself or people I knew getting infected with the virus. Eventually, to our shock, the virus began spreading among the community. The drama of infection among us unfolded as we were preparing to celebrate the

[1] Quoted in Lennie Kronisch, 'Elizabeth Kübler-Ross: Messenger of Love', *Yoga Journal* (November/December 1976), 20.
[2] See *Constitutions* III. 2. 6 [303] and III. 2. G [304] on the role of a Prefect of Health.
[3] *Mwangaza* is a Swahili word meaning *light*.

Mwangaza Jesuit Spirituality Centre

Ignatian Year (20 May 2021 to 31 July 2022), marking the 500th anniversary of the conversion of St Ignatius of Loyola.

The pandemic did not stop us from making plans to reach out to people in the Ignatian Year; it was not going to undermine us in our mission of bringing Good News to the people of God. We battled the virus together knowing that St Ignatius was with us and interceding for us. He too, in his time, went through this experience. In his *Autobiography* he describes a plague and a lockdown on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1523. After a voyage of five days and nights, the vessel in which he had set out from Barcelona reached Gaeta, and Iñigo disembarked and started for Rome, although there was danger there on account of the plague. He writes:

> … arriving at a town [Fondi] that was nearby, they found it shut up. Not being able to enter, they spent that night, all three of them, in a church just there; it was raining. In the morning they wouldn't open the town to them …. (n. 39)

The situation was an opportunity for us to undergo deeper conversion as we continued with our mission of bringing Christ's message to the people of God, even in challenging times.

What follows is a reflection on the lessons learnt as I, my Jesuit companions and our lay collaborators struggled to live amid the pandemic in our quest to find God. What lessons did we learn that would enable us to be better ministers in the vineyard of the Lord?

Finding God in the Midst of a Pandemic

We had planned to offer a thematic day of prayer at the retreat house on the first weekend of January 2021, to a group of laypeople and some religious, titled Finding God in the Midst of a Pandemic. The coronavirus had by that time been spreading around the world for a year with devastating effects. We thought that it would be good to help people reflect on their experience and try to find meaning in it, despite the challenges. Little did we know that shortly before that day of recollection the virus would have arrived at our home.

Months before the day of prayer we had a meeting to plan how it would unfold. We knew the dangers, but we had a naïve sense that the virus was something *out there*, about which we could talk in a detached way. I had prepared my presentation and I felt content that I would be able to help people pray and give them hope amid the pandemic. My companion with whom I was to facilitate the day of prayer was the first to be diagnosed, a few days before it was due to take place. I decided that I would give the recollection by myself. A few hours later we identified another case, and so we had to cancel the day of prayer altogether, not knowing the extent of the infection among us. We did not want to expose other people to the virus unintentionally.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Just before we had the first case of COVID-19 in our community, I had the privilege of listening to a conversation between an elderly community member and a nurse who was taking care of him. The conversation was about the virus and the possibility of death after contracting it. The community member elegantly explained to the nurse the Principle and Foundation, with a special focus on Ignatian indifference and interior freedom—especially concerning a long life over a short one.[4] I was impressed by the explanation. I had never heard such a lucid account of that foundational statement of Ignatian spirituality.

A few weeks later, this elderly companion contracted the coronavirus. He was visibly shaken, and he realised that he was not ready to let go of his life. That led him to a deeper reflection on indifference, once he was out of danger. His experience helped me, too, to reflect on Ignatian indifference in a new way. I had prayed with the Principle and Foundation

[4] St Ignatius places this profound prayer at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* and invites the exercitant to pray for the grace of interior freedom or indifference.

many times in my life but I continued to realise that I was still learning new things about myself, God and others. We may desire to be indifferent and accept a short rather than a long life, and to be free in front of God, but we may still be on the way to achieving it. Thus, we are invited to remain humble and keep asking for the grace to be truly indifferent even into our sunset years.

A Field Hospital

The experience of coronavirus made Pope Francis's image of the Church as field hospital real for me.[5] It was no longer an abstract idea but a lived reality. We had to turn part of the community house into a quarantine zone for the confrères who had contracted the virus. We also hired two nurses to look after them. Our family doctor was gracious enough to come to check on them from time to time. Seeing our nurses and doctor wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) before entering the rooms of those infected was quite a scary experience. Our house had become a hospital. What we had only seen on television screens for many months was now a reality at home.

As the Prefect of Health, I had to work closely with the nurses and the doctor. In a way, I joined the medics as a kind of 'first responder'. Sometimes I had to wear PPE myself and visit the patients in their rooms for different reasons. The idea of putting the other's welfare first and not my own gained a new meaning for me. One day, a patient wanted some help while the nurses had stepped out for a break. I carefully put on my PPE suit and went into the room. After a couple of minutes, I noticed that my suit was partly torn. I was very scared, but I could not leave the room since I was already exposed. I continued helping my confrère, which I believe was the right thing to do. I was lucky that I did not get the virus that day. Reflecting on the experience, I was happy to receive confirmation in my prayer that Jesus would have done the same thing; he would not have put his own safety first but the life and needs of a desperate brother or sister.

Finding God in Our Rooms

At the beginning of the pandemic in the community, we stopped celebrating Mass in common. Everyone was encouraged to pray in his

[5] Pope Francis first used this image in an interview with Antonio Spadaro of *La Civiltà Catolica* in September 2013. See *A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 30–33.

room. The curtains, the altar linens, the purificators in our chapels were all taken out. The chapels were then closed altogether and the Blessed Sacrament was relocated. It was Good Friday in January! However, Jesus continued to hang on the cross; even the virus could not bring Jesus down. He continued to suffer with us in that crisis as a people loved by God whose faith was being put to a test.

The Ignatian invitation to 'find God in all things' took on a new and radical meaning for us. We had to find God in our rooms. With all the normal liturgies of the community suspended, we had to find God in isolation. The reality of losing community life was hard for some of us who find the support we need in it. Mask-wearing was recommended for everyone who ventured out of his room, just in case someone he met on the corridors was infected. The most vulnerable had their food brought to them in their rooms, while the healthier members had to sit one per table in the dining room. This went on for months, and I could feel the pain of the companions who longed to share community life again. Owing to the alienating situation of physical distancing, meals were often eaten in silence, or else we would have to shout to be heard—bearing in mind most of our senior members have hearing problems. One day, I joked: 'how's the retreat going?' The community experience of our three-week lockdown was similar to that of making a thirty-day retreat. God's grace of interior silence was coming to us in ways that we did not expect. We learnt to be closer to one another even in silent isolation.

Luckily, even though physically distancing was painful, it paid off. One companion got infected weeks after all the previously infected confrères had tested negative. However, since we were physically distanced, we were able to isolate him when we noticed the symptoms, before the virus could spread again. During that second cycle of infection there was less panic in the community because we knew what to do. We had befriended the virus and we knew how to live with it. By that time we had become less afraid of death; we were even experiencing a sense of freedom in the way we lived our lives. We did not prefer a long life to a short one, we had grown to another level of indifference as a community.

At one point, I developed the symptoms of the virus myself: loss of the ability to taste and smell, shortness of breath and body aches. I had to self-isolate for some days; but when I was tested, I was negative. That was when I realised that maybe the crisis had taken such a huge psychological toll on me that I was experiencing COVID-like symptoms. When I described this to a friend, she told me that I must have been seriously

fatigued by all the extra care work brought by the virus, and I had been considerably weakened both physically and psychologically. I realised that I needed to care for myself or else I could experience burnout.

Befriending Our Fears

Even after all the infected companions tested negative—including the oldest member of the community, who was 98 years old—we still had to deal with the aftermath of the infections. One of us, our beloved resident nurse, Sr Teresa Brancalione, died of post-COVID complications: the virus had caused severe lung damage and, after many days in the intensive care unit, she passed away. It was a big blow for us: we were so happy when all the COVID-positive confrères tested negative; we thought we had conquered the virus. A sense of loss and confusion pervaded the house after her death. Companions felt broken-hearted and shocked. God was inviting us to continue to trust in God's providence and kindness, and not in our own strength and medical care. Even in death, God continued to strengthen us and to give us hope in the resurrection.

The words of Mawlānā Rumi, a Farsi poet, were a consolation in bearing that loss:

> Through Love, all that is bitter will be sweet,
> Through Love, all that is copper will be gold,
> Through Love, all dregs will turn to purest wine,
> Through Love, all pain will turn to medicine.[6]

It is only love that can make us understand and feel the pain of the death of a loved one. The love that person showed us in caring for us makes him or her 'the unlosable', who continues to abide with us.[7] Even though Sr Teresa is not with us physically any more, we know she is with us spiritually, guiding and supporting us along the way. The memories of her loving presence carry us on. In *Death the Final Stage of Growth* Elizabeth Kübler-Ross tells us:

> The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion,

[6] *Look! This Is Love: Poems of Rumi*, translated by Annemarie Schimmel (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 31.
[7] For 'the unlosable', see William Ernest Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper, 1956), 49–50.

> gentleness, and deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.[8]

The pain of loss that we experienced at the death of one of us was teaching us to be more appreciative of life and more compassionate to one another, and that all was not lost.

Death was not the only consequence of the coronavirus pandemic in our little bubble. Many people were traumatized by the thought of getting infected or reinfected, to the point that they became alienated, losing the human contact that they needed. One community member stayed in total isolation in his room for several months after he recovered from the infection. This took a mental and physical toll on him, but efforts to convince him to stop his regime of self-isolation yielded no results. Another confrère suffered from Long COVID. The symptoms of infection persisted for many months even after he had tested negative for the virus. They included shortness of breath, general bodily weakness, brain fog and changes in the senses of taste and smell. The psychological and physical effects of the virus on us as a community continued to be felt for a long time after the real crisis had passed.

Being present and ministering to my companions became one of my primary tasks. That is when the idea of community life as a mission made more sense to me. The Thirty-Fifth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus had emphasized that 'community is not just for mission:

The Mwangaza Community

[8] Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 175.

it is itself mission'.[9] Previously, this just sounded like a slogan to me, but it became a reality in a practical way during the pandemic. In the first half of 2021 and the following months, we as a community were learning to find God amid the pandemic. What we had theoretically envisioned for our day of prayer at the beginning of the year, we lived practically, for months, as the reality of the virus came home to us in sometimes surprising ways. Our faith in God was tested, our normal life disrupted, but our hope was made steadfast.

A Common Fate Holds Us Here

The pandemic has taught me that my first naïve feeling that the virus was a faraway reality was dangerous. Another person's problem is my problem too; what affects other people should ultimately affect me and so I should always show concern for their well-being. A common fate binds us together here on earth: we are all interconnected brothers and sisters sharing a common humanity. Pope Francis affirms this in *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato si'*. He invites us to realise the reality that 'everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others'.[10]

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons to be learnt from the pandemic is the invitation to develop a genuine freedom that can help us grow in fraternal friendship as members of a global and interconnected village. Pope Francis beautifully says that 'the process of building fraternity, be it local or universal, can only be undertaken by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters'.[11] Naïvely thinking that what happens in a faraway part of the world cannot affect us is a sad illusion.

Hopeful Imagination

As the pandemic unfolded in our community, I felt that this was a crisis moment that could turn into a *kairos* moment, a time of God's grace for me, the community and the Church, so long as we viewed it with eyes of faith. Everything starts with personal conversion. Fundamentally, the pandemic is a crisis that calls all of us to conversion as a human family.

The pandemic has been a form of exile. We as a people have been exiled, from our work, schools, churches and places of recreation.

[9] GC 35, decree 3, n. 41.
[10] Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 70.
[11] Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 50.

Fundamentally, we have been alienated from one another; a crisis of relationships has unfolded that no vaccine can cure. When the mandate for mask-wearing was in place in various parts of the world, people could not show their smiles to one another; it was hard to know what other people were feeling. Walter Brueggemann writes in *Hopeful Imagination* that exile 'is not simply a geographical fact, but also a theological decision'.[12] Our exile, I believe, provided us with space, as people of faith, to make a theological-spiritual decision: to remain hopeful. To be a people who have been given 'the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word' (Isaiah 50:4). The prophet Isaiah enthusiastically proclaims his mission in the Third Song of the Servant of God: to be a messenger of hope to the weary. Yet he quickly notes that it involves suffering too: 'I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting' (50:6). We are likewise called to that prophetic mission.

I believe the prophetic message for us during the pandemic is to remain hopeful in our exile of isolation: to be a people with open ears (Isaiah 50:5), who listen to the voice of God within us and proclaim hope and words of comfort to God's people amid the despair, pain and weariness brought by the virus. We are called to be discerners of God's will in these difficult times. The pandemic as an exile also invites us to grieve. It is out of our grief that we experience newness. This is a 'season of grief', in which we groan inwardly for newness in our lives in the same way as the exiles who sat and wept by the rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137:1).[13] It is out of the pain of grief that we will learn to do things differently in the future. What are we learning from our tears?

Brueggemann uses the image of homecoming to signal the end of exile. Homecoming for us will come at the end of the pandemic just as it came to the exiles in Babylon. The reality of the pandemic invites us to imagine a future where the lessons learnt from this crisis can lead to the emergence of a better world in which love, compassion, solidarity and reconciliation will triumph. Brueggemann argues that 'the homecoming metaphor makes sense only where the metaphor of exile has been accepted as true'.[14] How we live and learn in the exile of the coronavirus pandemic will enable us to imagine a better post-COVID future. We shall emerge

[12] Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Minneapolis:Fortress, 1986), 93.
[13] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 33.
[14] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 94.

stronger from the pandemic if we let the crisis move us to ask deeper questions about ourselves, God and others. We shall not stay this way forever. However, as we look forward to homecoming, we are invited not to ignore the opportunities for growth during this time of darkness itself.

How does the current crisis move us to be prophetic in our different contexts? Stories of hope abound: around the world nurses and doctors (we witnessed this at first hand in our community) continually put their lives on the line to save others; friends, family and neighbours reach out to one another in different ways. The most striking inspiration for me was 99-year-old Captain Sir Thomas More who raised over £30 million for the National Health Service in Britain through his daily walks in his back yard.[15] There are many more inspirational stories of heroic actions during the pandemic. Where do we fit in with these stories?

We all have something we can share to bring hope in the darkness of the pandemic. It is in small prophetic deeds and words shared that we can help to uplift ourselves and other people who feel isolated, are weary and are in fear. We need to make the theological decision to remain hopeful and to witness. That decision will help us believe that this exile too shall pass: a new post-COVID world will emerge, a world that is more loving, and a world that stops from time to time to reflect on the effects of our human activities on the planet.

A Laudato si' *Moment*

Even though a clear origin for COVID-19 has not been established, it is almost certain that the virus jumped from wild animals to humans.[16] Other zoonotic diseases, such as Ebola, which has been found in various areas of Africa over the years, and localised epidemics in other parts of the world, invite us to reflect on how we care for our common home in the quest to avert future pandemics. It is, I believe, a *Laudato si'* moment. The pandemic is, ultimately, our common home crying out; our environment has been destroyed; our ecosystem has been tampered with.

The pandemic has invited me to ask: what can I do concretely to care for our common home? What have I been doing? Years ago, when Pope Francis published *Laudato si'*, a friend came up with a list of things

[15] See 'Captain Sir Tom Moore: "National Inspiration" Dies with Covid-19', at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-55881753.

[16] See World Health Organization, 'WHO-Convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part. Joint WHO-China Study, 14 January–10 February 2021', available at https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/final-joint-report_origins-studies-6-april-201.pdf.

that community members should avoid doing, in order not to hurt one another and our common home. He called his list: 'Laudato No!' What are the things we will avoid doing in future to protect and preserve our common home? Most importantly, what are our positive choices in response to *Laudato si'*?

We now know better than ever that one thing we needed to do was to slow down. And the virus has slowed us down, stopped us in our tracks and woken us up to thinking carefully about caring more for one another and the environment. What we are called to do in these times is a question for our discernment and prayer. There are no black-and-white answers. Each person in his or her context is invited to discern what to do. How do we reach out to the less fortunate at this time? What I am called to do in the community or the Church during the current pandemic is a question that I will always bring to my prayer, making discerned choices to help make the world a better place.

Months after the virus first arrived in our community, we had the privilege of being vaccinated. We had an opportunity to receive two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The relief that came to the whole community was visible. The chance to access needed medication in an unequal society invited us as a community to be more vigilant and to be in solidarity with people who do not have such opportunities. It is our duty not to be selfish and turn a blind eye to the reality of those

A nurse in Ghana prepares to administer the AstraZeneca vaccine

who cannot afford or cannot access medical care, and may die if they do not. I am invited to ask: what I am called to do in the face of vaccine inequity, when the poorest and most vulnerable are left out?

One thing that comes to my mind is the call to be an ambassador who spreads the message that the vaccines are safe to use. A lot of misinformation is being peddled online and elsewhere, and it was sad to hear that some countries have had to destroy thousands of doses of life-saving vaccines which had expired—for reasons that included people being hesitant to get vaccinated.[17] I feel challenged in this uncertain and confusing time to be a messenger of the right information, Good News, life-giving messages rather than propaganda.

The pandemic has brought new urgency to familiar social justice issues: how the vulnerable are being treated, the accessibility of vaccines for the less fortunate, keeping people safe. When lockdowns are put in place, it is the most vulnerable—those who live from hand to mouth on less than a dollar a day—who suffer most. Such people fear lockdowns more than the coronavirus itself! How do we reach out to ease the misfortunes of such people?

Towards a Post-COVID World

Compassion and the common good should be the driving force for us as we move towards a post-COVID world. In the words of Pope Francis, compassion 'means to suffer with, to suffer together, to not remain indifferent to the pain and suffering of others'.[18] How we suffer with others is a question for discernment for all of us in the particular situation where we find ourselves. What would Jesus do in the varied contexts in which we live? We are invited to go and do likewise (Luke 10:37)!

For Pope Francis there are several crises linked to the pandemic: a health crisis, an environmental crisis, an economic and social crisis, a crisis of politics and 'perhaps the most serious of all: the crisis of human relationships'. The Pope argues that there are 'opportunities' these crises 'offer for the building of a more humane, just, supportive and peaceful world'. The pandemic 'set before us a choice: either to continue on the road we have followed until now or to set out on a new path'.[19]

[17] See Sara Jarvin, 'African Nations Have Destroyed 450,000 Expired Covid-19 Vaccine Doses', at https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/origins-of-the-virus, accessed 19 July 2021.
[18] Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, translated by Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 87; see also Pope Francis, *Life after the Pandemic* (Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 2020).
[19] Pope Francis, address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 21 February 2021.

What can we do in these times, as we prepare for life after the pandemic, to restore our human relationships? I believe we are continually called to be people of hope looking at the world with eyes of faith and continuing to work for the Reign of God here and now.

We decided, as the Mwangaza Jesuit Spirituality Centre community, to continue with our mission of guiding retreats, offering spiritual direction, training spiritual guides and retreat directors, and offering days of prayer to people hungering and thirsting for spiritual relief. The only alternative would have been to close down the retreat house and sit in our comfort zone of vaccinated people, a vaccinated island if you like, and not have contact with the people outside. I also received a personal invitation, springing from my prayer, to resume my Sunday pastoral ministry in a nearby parish in the informal settlement of Gataka, close to Mwangaza. Most people there are poor, living on less than a dollar a day. At the beginning of the vaccine rollout in Kenya, I may have been the only vaccinated person in that area, and the threat of being infected with the virus was real. But I was glad to be in solidarity with the people of Gataka, the *anawim* of God, through the whole drama of the pandemic. In such situations, it is discernment and trust in God that should be our guide rather than selfish focus on self-preservation.

I believe that St Ignatius invites us, in this Ignatian Year and amid the pandemic, to stand in solidarity with the people, as the first Jesuit companions did five hundred years ago with the victims of plagues and other disasters that faced the world at the time. The Jesuits at Mwangaza have learnt about solidarity from first-hand experience of living under the shadow of coronavirus. The experience of the virus has taught us as a community to be what Henri Nouwen calls 'wounded healers', sent out on a mission to bring the Good News of Christ to all people of good will in the field hospital.[20] We are called to embody the vision of Pope Francis who prefers 'a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security'.[21]

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[20] For more on being a wounded healer, see Henri Nouwen, *Wounded Healer: Ministry in the Contemporary World* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1979).
[21] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 49.

Thinking Faith

UNDERSTANDING

Sarah Young

JESUS HAS A VICE-LIKE GRIP on my arm. He did not just reach for my hand as I began to sink but took hold of my wrist and held me firm. He raises me above the surface of the water with ease. He then holds me with his gaze. It is calm and reassuring. The memory of praying imaginatively with the passage from Matthew's Gospel (14:22–33) in which Jesus calls Peter towards him on the water still holds me firm at times of change and transition. It helps me to go forward when opportunities arise to let go of what is safe and familiar and enter into what is unknown.

As a spiritual director, I am always curious to see what happens when others enter into this story in their imagination. I have offered it to retreatants many times, especially when they are faced with a decision to be made. One bounds out of the boat without hesitation. Another sinks below the waves and continues to fall into the deep before Jesus' hand looms out of the dark to save him. Yet another sits and contemplates whether to leave the boat at all, and then sits some more. In a workshop in a high security prison, I delighted in seeing a prisoner playing Peter in a role-play not only step out of the boat on to the water but begin to dance—and he could really dance! Unfailingly, the word of God speaks through this passage to aid the journey of those who contemplates it and consider the choices they make in their own life in the light of it.

I sometimes wonder if Peter felt that once was enough to step out of a boat on to the insecurity of water. Many disciples discover, as Peter did, that they will be asked to step out of several boats in the course of their lives. I have come to understand that to follow Jesus involves stepping out of one boat after another in order to be stretched again and again. It is like Jesus, or any good teacher, saying: *Okay, you've got that bit—now, let's move on*. It is often when I have just got comfortable in my current seat and am beginning to enjoy the view, that the invitation

St Peter Is Walking on the Water, *by Lluis Borrassà, 1411–1413*

comes to step out again into the unknown. It is as though God sees a further opportunity to expand my vision and my capacity to work alongside God in the world. It can rankle. Why would I choose to become the novice again and take another risk when I am quite happy where I am? It seems counter-intuitive and yet, the logic of the gospel tells me otherwise. I am reminded of Jesus' gentle advice to the disciples: 'unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 18:3).

This cycle of getting comfortable, stepping out and learning to trust Jesus is not without pain and loss. Jesus' own relationship with God bears witness to this through his passion, death and resurrection. Peter's relationship with Jesus bears witness to it, too, over the course of his life. Over recent years, I have come to understand that I suffer quite considerably from anxiety when faced with new situations. I thought this was the same for most people but, through my own training as a psychotherapist, I came to see that there is a healthy level of anxiety that keeps us alert to danger, and higher levels that are less healthy and exaggerate the danger. It turns out that stepping out of the boat is quite a big deal, and the emotional and physical cost can be considerable.

The time in lockdown offered me the opportunity to look at this more carefully in the safety of my own home. I looked back to times of transition or challenge and considered just what happened to me physically and psychologically, and I explored what self-help books had to say about tackling the symptoms of anxiety. I notice my 'yes' to a new invitation is often given easily. In the moment, I am excited by the challenge and recognise that I might have the gifts and experience to

rise to it. But as I enter into the reality of it, I often take fright, usually at about 3.00 a.m., and mutter to myself: 'Why did I ever say yes to this?' The self-help guru might offer something along the lines of the following:

> *Step 1: What is it that I fear will happen? Catch the thought and name the fear.*
>
> Peter might, at this point, say: 'I am on water and I know I am going down. I will drown.'
>
> *Step 2: How likely is it that this will happen?*
>
> For Peter, his human understanding of water might prompt him to answer that the likelihood is really quite high.
>
> *Step 3: If my worst fear is realised, what might happen then?*
>
> Well, the other disciples are not far away in the boat and Jesus is watching me calmly from his place standing on the water. Between Jesus and the disciples, they are not going to let me drown.

If he had had more time, Peter might have considered reframing his initial fear and it may have changed how the story played out. However, I suspect this version would not have helped me to relate to Peter quite as easily as I do.

My own question at this point is: *Do I believe that Jesus will save me?* That's the thing! *Do I believe that he and others will not let me drown?* It is a question of trust. My encounter with Jesus in the safety of my imagination leads me to trust that he will not let me drown. This foundation of trust leads me to act when I emerge from my quiet place of prayer. What was imagined becomes a reality. It is only trust in Jesus that enables me to move from my seat in the boat at all.

The first time I experienced the power of this passage in prayer was in a retreat preparing for mission overseas as a Columban Lay Missionary over twenty years ago. I did not know to which country I would be assigned. It was truly a step into the unknown. Jesus' vice-like grip on my arm held me on a journey that expanded my faith, my world and my relationships with God and with other people. That journey tested my resilience, patience and resourcefulness, as there were times when I really was sinking and going down fast. The smallest gestures of human kindness saved me and reminded me of Jesus' desire to hold me fast to that initial, confident 'yes'.

Since then, many new opportunities have arisen to step out of the particular boat I find myself in at any given time. Doing so may not require me to go anywhere at all geographically, but I can feel the same nudge as if it did. Some new waters on to which I have stepped, even though physically close to home, have felt as alien as if I were on the other side of the globe. Returning to this passage creatively can help me to imagine whatever it is I am about to do in terms of stepping out of the boat, and therefore to respond in faith. It may mean having a difficult conversation that I would rather avoid, taking up a new challenge that will stretch me once again, or making a paradigm shift in the way I work with and relate to others. In so many ways, we are called as followers of Jesus to keep stepping out of the boat. We are called to trust him and to act.

As I write this, I am settling into a new house in a new place. As the move became a real possibility, anxiety began to rise. I was, again, making a cup of tea at 3.00 a.m. and grappling with the advice from self-help books to name the fear so that I could work on reframing it. Again, I was wondering why I was not content to stay put in the familiarity of my old home. But I have come to know that change and some risk brings new energy, new life and new relationships. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius assures us that consolation will return even if it is not immediate or easily found. The narrative of the passage from Matthew's Gospel helps me to trust the narrative of my own life, even if my worst fears are realised, and to know that my friends and family are not far away and Jesus will certainly not let me drown.

On retreats, I never tire of witnessing the encounter between Jesus and the person who prays this passage imaginatively. The narrative is different for each person, but in one way or another it informs their way of being a disciple. What begins in the mind of the individual, in the realm of the imagination, can lead to that vital, actual first step into something new—a step that can only be made again and again if we understand the invitation to trust and respond to it.

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HOLY THEATRE AND HOLY WORSHIP

John Stroyan

IN THE EARLIEST DAYS of human expression and communication, religion and art were integrally related, indeed inseparable in the seeking, finding and expressing of meaning. There is nothing surprising about this. After all, every human being, made in the image of the Creator God, is made to be creative. Creativity is the gift and expression of the creating and creative Holy Spirit in us. The arts—I am assuming here a high view of Art—express beauty, truth and goodness. The arts evoke not simply thought but feeling (head and heart).

Before I was ordained, I was involved in the arts—particularly theatre, in directing and writing. When first studying theology in the 1970s, I was also reading about theatre, and was deeply struck by Peter Brook's seminal book *The Empty Space*. I reread it recently and found both his insights and his questions deeply pertinent for the Church today and what we are offering in worship. I confess that some of my reflections here may not simply be *exegesis*, that is, reflecting what he intended to say. There may also be some *eisegesis*, that is, reading into his writing something of my own thinking. But if this is the case, for the purpose of this reflection, it actually doesn't matter. His book, his perceptions and reflections, have spawned in me, and hopefully might also in you, questions for us all which may be of God.

Peter Brook has been described as Britain's greatest living theatre director; many others would add the world's greatest theatre director. I do not know his faith position; but as a seeker of truth, as one who sees the potential of theatre to change lives and even societies, he is looking to communicate, in his phrase, 'the invisible through the visible'.[1] This, surely, is exactly what we, as Christians, are about. If we are serious about participating in the mission of God we need to put ourselves in the shoes of those who do have a sense that there is more to life than the visible,

[1] Peter Brook, *Tip of the Tongue: Reflections on Language and Meaning* (London: Nick Hern, 2018), 1.

who are hungry for a transcendent dimension, but who have not found this, or would not expect to find it, in the worship of the Christian Churches.

So, we need to ask the question: if people are not encountering God among us or in our worship, why? Might it be that we have allowed the Church to be Church-centric, as if the Church existed for the sake of the Church? Have we ourselves become too self-referential? The important thing about the Church is not the Church but God, and God's love for the world.

I am using as a template for these reflections the words of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 'He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth will proceed by loving his own Church better than Christianity and end by loving himself better than all'.[2] These words resonate powerfully for me if—and only if—we take 'Christianity' here to mean what humans have done with the Christian faith, rather than Christ himself, in whom is all truth and who calls us through the Holy Spirit into the truth that sets us free. Have we lost the dynamism of Christ in our understanding and practice of the faith? Have we lost a sense of the transformational dimension of life in Christ through the Holy Spirit? Do we expect, or even want, to be changed by God? Do we want to grow?

In the Ordinal the bishop enjoins those to be ordained in the Church of England to pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit that 'your heart may daily be enlarged and your minds enlightened by the reading of the Scriptures'. This is, surely, in the economy of God, what art does, whether it be music, painting, sculpture, poetry or prose literature. It enlarges our hearts and enlightens our minds. The arts and worship both serve to help us grow in the truth. There is—or certainly should be—something transformative or dynamic at work. We should leave the theatre, we should leave worship, different from how we came in. But is this so? Does this happen?

Brook's first chapter is entitled 'Deadly Theatre'. What are the characteristics of 'Deadly Theatre'? It 'not only fails to elevate or instruct, it hardly even entertains'. We go to the theatre, Brook argues, to take us out of ourselves, for a glimpse of transcendence, of the beyond. We leave not satisfied. Sound familiar? Lord, have mercy. How many people

[2] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms', in *Aids to Reflection*, volume 9 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Routledge, 1993), 107.

go to church to encounter God? How many people go to church, not to encounter God but for other reasons? How many people go to church hungry for God and leave not satisfied? How many people hungry for God are looking elsewhere?

True worship needs not so much endless reinventions of liturgy and practice, but the Holy Spirit. As Jesus tells us, true worship is worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). It needs the beyond to break into our midst. Composers, artists and writers know that for a work of art to be born, something new has to break in, something that was not already formed in the mind or imagination of the artist. Something needs to be *given*: inspiration—a good Holy Spirit word. Artists offers their gifts, their discipline, their imagination, their hard work. They offer the best that they have to give, but still something more is needed that they cannot provide, something that is beyond them.

Orthodox theology is called ascetical and mystical. The ascetical is the work, it is rowing the boat out to where its sails might catch the wind. So *liturgy* is, etymologically and actually, the work of the people—and the clergy, of course, are part of the *laos*, the people.[3] The archbishop's adviser on evangelism told me some years ago of a young man who went to the Youth Church which he was then leading, and afterwards the young man said to him 'I didn't get much out of that'. To which he responded 'No? Well, what did you put in to it?'

[3] See *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'apparently a derivative of λεώς, λαός people + -εργος that works'.

I often find myself, challenging the consumer approach to worship, saying to congregations that each one of them has a responsibility for the quality of worship. It is not just the people up front. Deadly worship, like deadly theatre, allows, even encourages, passive engagement; it is lazy worship. It does not wake us up; it does not challenge or disturb us; it does not help us to see in new ways. It diverts, it reinforces prejudice, it maintains in us a false peace—that Christ comes to break open.

If so much theatre is deadly, to what does Brook aspire? Brook longs for what he calls 'Holy Theatre'. Holy Theatre is the 'the Theatre of the Invisible—made—Visible'.[4] This is for us a sacramental language. Holy Theatre, for Brook, takes us out of ourselves, it gives us *a glimpse of what could be and what we could be*. Is not this actually the most beautiful, true and good description of what worship and preaching should be about? When we come to worship, when we come to Holy Theatre we come into a crucible of change, giving ourselves into the experience, making space for God's recreating work in us. This theatre, this worship, is not so much about comfort or reinforcing prejudices, it is about transformation.

And what of those of us who lead worship? Brook writes of the conductor of an orchestra: 'We are aware that he is not really making the music, it is making him. If he is relaxed, open and attuned then the invisible will take possession of him and through him it will reach us.'[5] We too surely need to be attuned to the movement of the Holy Spirit, sensitive to the Spirit's leading.

For Brook a 'holy theatre' should also be 'a theatre of *joy*'. In parallel with the language of faith, he distinguishes between the happiness or contentment we might get from what is going on around us, and joy, which has something of the beyond or invisible about it. He laments, however, that 'a true theatre of joy is non-existent'. How much of our worship brings or is suffused with joy? And here he says something so poignant and so revealing and, perhaps also for us, so *convicting*. He writes: 'We do not know *how* to celebrate because we do not know *what* to celebrate'.[6] Such words convict me. We, who know exactly what and whom to celebrate, do we truly celebrate Jesus, the Joy-bringer, do we open our lives to the One who is the truth, who will expose and challenge what is not true in us?

[4] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]), 42.
[5] Brook, *Empty Space*, 42.
[6] Brook, *Empty Space*, 10, 47.

For me, a recent experience of worship in Kenya was a wonderful example of knowing both how to celebrate and whom to celebrate. Brook's words, however, certainly ring true about much of contemporary Western culture. Not knowing what to celebrate reduces it to the vacuity of celebrating (if that is the right word) skin-deep glamour and so-called *celebrities*, famous for being famous. I think of words inspired by G. K. Chesterton: 'When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything'.[7]

If Holy Theatre gives us a vision of what could be and what we could be, it needs to be both visionary and prophetic. It needs to disturb our tendency to deadliness, to 'living and only partly living', to quote the Chorus in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.[8] It needs to wake us up. Brook writes of the extraordinary playwright Antonin Artaud: 'What he wanted in his search for holiness was absolute. He wanted a theatre that would be a hallowed place where the audience could be shocked into action and leave behind the trivial.'[9]

I think of the preacher who began his sermon, 'There are three points to my sermon.' Most people yawned, they'd heard that so often. 'My first point is this. There are approximately 2 billion people in the world starving to death right now.' The congregation had heard that too. Then he said 'My second point is this.' Everyone sat up; he'd only been speaking for thirty seconds and he was already on to his second point. 'My second point is that most of you don't give a damn!' Ripples of shock, offence and rumblings across the congregation. 'My third point is that the real tragedy is that most of you are more concerned that I said "damn" than you are that 2 billion people are starving to death.'[10] Then he sat down.

So where, asks Brook, should we look for Holy Theatre? He answers in 'The Rough Theatre': a theatre without chandeliers, without comfortable plush red seats, without programmes and refreshments, and without clever tricks or illusions. This theatre is earthed and earthy; it is characterized by salt, sweat and noise. In our language we might say it is incarnational. God, who is the truth, is with us in the mess, the

[7] Émile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G. K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen, 1937), 211.
[8] T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot, 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 180.
[9] Brook, *Empty Space*, 53,
[10] Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 40.

pain, the struggles of actual life. 'Theology begins where the pain is', as Ken Leech once put it.[11] This is the theatre that is outside the theatre. This is the God who does not live in the Church.

I was at Glasshampton Monastery on a retreat shortly before the lockdown and went, as I always do, for a walk. Outside a local church, I saw a notice saying 'Walking Church'. This is Church that meets as it walks and as it stops in God's creation. People walk together, and stop and listen to a reading, then walk some more and hear the Gospel and a reflection on the Gospel. Under the poster was a quotation often attributed to John Muir, an ecologist and a prayerful seeker after truth: 'I would rather be on a mountain thinking about God than in a church thinking about a mountain'.

I like that. I think of R. S. Thomas's poem, 'The Moor', which begins, 'It was like a church to me'. He describes God's creation—the moor—in sacramental language: ' the air crumbled / and broke on me generously as bread'.[12] In the poem he uses language deeply resonant of contemplative prayer. He writes of 'the mind's cession of its kingdom': we need to get out of our heads. I think of the conductor Thomas Beecham, who describes music as that which 'releases us from the tyranny of conscious thoughts'.[13] Are we in the Church too much in our heads? Does our worship go deeper than our conscious minds? Are not people hungry for depth?

Brook goes on to say, 'we cannot assume that the audience will assemble devoutly and attentively'. Long gone, I hope, are the days when we assumed that congregations would do this, when our missional assumptions were based on a 'you come to us' model. For Brook—and I think this is absolutely pertinent for us—'It is up to us to capture [the audience's] attention and compel its belief'. 'To do so', writes Brook, 'we must open our empty hands and roll up our sleeves. Only then we can begin.'[14] To me there are the echoes in this of the poverty of spirit with which we must approach both God and worship. In the words often attributed to St Augustine, 'God longs to give us the gift of his very self, but so often our hands are too full to receive him'.[15]

[11] Personal communication.
[12] R. S. Thomas, 'The Moor', in *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 160.
[13] *Beecham Stories: Anecdotes, Sayings and Impressions of Sir Thomas Beecham*, edited by Harold Atkins and Archie Newman (London: Robson, 1978), 80.
[14] Brook, *Empty Space*, 97.
[15] Quoted in Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 17.

The final chapter is entitled 'The Immediate Theatre'. It raises the question of the attitude of the audience. This in itself so much determines whether the 'empty space' holds transformative energy. The French language captures something important here. In France you do not watch a play, the phrase they use is *assister à*. The audience assists, has a part to play, in the quality and significance of the encounter. The audience participates in the event, and can catalyse the work of the writer, director and cast to release its life-changing potential. And this is so too, of course, with worship.

So what is the *empty space*? It is the space of encounter. The question is, for Brook and surely for us too, do we *want* to be encountered? Do we want to risk being changed? Brook asks of the one coming to the theatre: 'Does he want any change in his circumstances? Does he want anything different in himself, his life, his society?'[16] Do we dare ask those questions, in the first place of ourselves, and then of those who come to church? If the honest answer is 'No', then that is our challenge. I'll close with the words from a novel by the African American writer Toni Cade Bambara: 'Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well? … Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, 'cause wholeness is no trifling matter.'[17] Jesus calls us into life, life in all its fullness.

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[16] Brook, *Empty Space*, 137.
[17] Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt-Eaters* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 10.

JOURNEYING ON THE WAY

What Do We Understand by the Ministry of Spiritual Direction?

Kirsty Greenaway-Clarke

THE SEARCH FOR 'SPIRITUALITY' or a sense of the 'spiritual' is present both in the Church and in wider society. Indeed, spiritual hunger and grasping after something 'more' are arguably a universal human impulse.[1] One way this search manifests itself is through the practice of spiritual direction. Part of the healing ministry and pastoral care of the Church, spiritual direction has been described by David Benner as 'the jewel in the crown of soul-care relationships'.[2] Fuelled by the wider search for spirituality in both Christian and non-Christian communities, spiritual direction has been experiencing growth and rediscovery within the Christian Churches, including the Church of England, in which I used to work as a minister.[3]

What we now commonly call 'spiritual direction' is an ancient practice with long roots in all branches of Eastern and Western Christianity, stretching back to the Desert Mothers and Fathers of the early Church.[4] As Peter Ball notes, spiritual direction comes out of a multiplicity of traditions.[5] There is consequently a wealth of resources for practitioners and seekers of spiritual direction to draw upon.

Ball has also demonstrated that there have been diverse attitudes towards this ministry in the history of the Church of England, with much of what we might today call 'spiritual direction' or 'accompaniment' not always being perceived as such.[6] But spiritual direction has been a significant, though often hidden and not explicitly defined, ministry

[1] See Anne Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction* (Bramcote: Grove, 1985); and Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2008), 23.
[2] David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 87.
[3] Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 4.
[4] For an overview of spiritual direction within the Christian tradition see Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: A Study of Spirituality* (London: Sheldon, 1977), 34–90.
[5] Peter Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction* (Boston, Ma: Cowley, 1998), 7.
[6] Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 8.

within the Church: among seventeenth-century Anglican divines, in the Anglo-Catholic revival of the Victorian era and, in more modern times, for C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), Reginald Somerset Ward (1881–1962) and Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941). The term 'spiritual director' has only been widely accepted in recent years; the Oxford Movement churchman Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–1882) refused to use it.[7]

Definitions

Spiritual direction is an elusive form of ministry to define, leading to multifarious understandings and interpretations. Despite its long history it is not well understood, even by those within the Church.[8] However, at its most fundamental, it is what happens when a more experienced Christian journeys alongside another in his or her relationship and growth with God.[9] The very term 'direction' implies an orientation—a path on which Christians travel together as they follow 'the Way' of the Christian faith. In their book *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, William Barry and William Connolly helpfully define spiritual direction as,

> … help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with his God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.[10]

To define what spiritual direction *is* one also has to define what it is *not*, so I shall examine examples of both good and bad practice here. Although many terms are used, such as 'soul friendship', 'accompaniment' and 'spiritual guidance', 'spiritual direction' is the most widespread, especially in the Church of England. As Barry and Connolly suggest, this description carries a lot of 'baggage' and associations with authority and hierarchy.[11] I am using it nevertheless, chiefly because of its familiarity, and also because of the appealing notion of a 'direction' of travel in the spiritual life.[12]

[7] Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 11. For a good introductory overview of the history of spiritual direction within the Anglican tradition see Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction;* and Leech, *Soul Friend*, 78–89.
[8] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 1.
[9] William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury, 1983), 5. Spiritual direction can take place in groups, but I am examining it on the basis that it is essentially a one-to-one relationship.
[10] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 8.
[11] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 9.
[12] Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 3.

In large measure owing to the many interpretations of spiritual direction, it is evident that there are different approaches to contemporary outworking and practice. There is more than one way to 'do' spiritual direction, meaning that there is no universal model to be applied to this form of ministry. However, as Peter Tyler suggests, one can discern a 'golden thread' running through the history of Christian spiritual traditions from apostolic times to the present day: thus, spiritual direction always takes place in a context of shared faith between the director and the directee, and within the wider Church as 'Mystical Body of Christ'.[13]

The Director and the Directee

It is important to recognise that a spiritual director does not have to be an ordained member of a Church denomination. This ministry has never been solely the preserve of the ordained, although the role of spiritual direction has often been linked to the clergy.[14] For some it can be helpful to see an ordained spiritual director, but others discover that they have a more fruitful relationship with a layperson. In my experience, my spiritual directors have all been ordained, but this was more through happenstance than deliberate choice.

More important than the ordained status of a spiritual director is his or her suitability to act as a guide for another Christian, as it is imperative that spiritual directors are equipped to help those who seek their advice and counsel. The question of whether they need to be professionally trained has been debated, with scholars arguing strongly against the growth of professionalisation within the field of spiritual direction.[15] As Michael Marshall has stated:

> The last thing in the world a spiritual director claims to be is an expert. He or she merely seeks to come alongside another pilgrim and to accompany that disciple on the Way that leads to fullness of life and to holiness of life.[16]

David Benner states that experience is more important than formal qualifications, and that spiritual directors are more like guides than

[13] Peter Tyler, 'Christian Spiritual Direction', in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality*, edited by Richard Woods and Peter Tyler (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 200–214, here 209.
[14] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 11; and Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Guide* (London: SPCK, 1984), 19.
[15] See Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 164–192; Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 137; and Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 93.
[16] Cited in Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 182.

teachers and leaders as, 'they accompany others on the journey not as experts but as companions'.[17]

However, Margaret Guenther takes a slightly different approach, seeing teaching as a central aspect of the director–directee relationship.[18] Teaching has been an important thread in the history of spiritual direction, stretching back to the Desert Mothers and Fathers who were sought out for their wise counsel and sayings. Likewise, the teaching role was of utmost importance for St Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) and St John of the Cross (1542–1591). They criticized incompetent and inexperienced directors who 'know no way with souls but to hammer and batter them like a blacksmith'.[19]

Whatever one feels towards training and teaching, and the title of 'expert', directors should nevertheless be further along the path than their directees, familiar with the Bible, different forms of prayer and the rich resources of the Christian tradition, so as to offer suggestions and advice, and to speak from their own experience. The best spiritual directors, more often than not, would not initially recognise themselves in this role and would not consider themselves as 'experts' in the field.

Perhaps the most essential qualification is a humble obedience to God and a desire to journey with and guide fellow Christians on the spiritual path. Thus, as Anne Long says, directors should not be self-appointed.[20] Their role should be discerned by others, and they should be sought out by the directee (dioceses have lists of approved spiritual directors). All good directors should be people of faith and experience, who understand what it means to struggle on the journey, and possess a holiness and quality of life, as well as insight, discernment and compassion. One could therefore argue that spiritual directors are born rather than made. For, as William Barry states, spiritual direction is a 'charism of the church' and should be recognised and celebrated as such.[21]

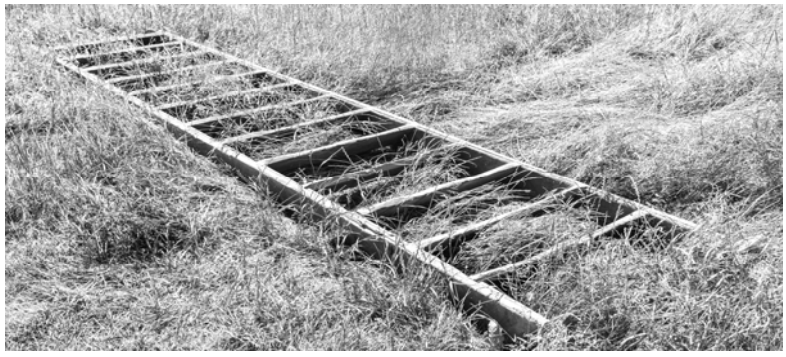
It is essential that clear boundaries and objectives are outlined from the start, so that both director and directee feel secure.[22] Their relationship should never be a hierarchical one which could be open to

[17] Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 93.
[18] See the chapter 'The Spiritual Director as Teacher', in Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 42–84.
[19] Cited in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 66.
[20] Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 16.
[21] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 131; William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2004), 94.
[22] Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 20.

abuse. The director is not 'in charge' of the directee and must not be put on a 'pedestal of piety'—as Sue Pickering puts it in describing the risks and pitfalls of the director–directee power dynamic.[23] The importance of a non-hierarchical relationship was recognised as long ago as the time of the Desert Mothers and Fathers; according to Kenneth Leech, there was 'no notion of blind obedience or domination, for the spiritual fathers were to teach by example first, and only secondarily by word'.[24]

With this understanding in mind, Gray Temple offers the image of a ladder of spiritual maturity, but that ladder is placed horizontally on the ground before God rather than in a vertical and authoritarian position.[25] Likewise, in his chapter entitled 'Demystifying Spiritual Direction', David Benner is clear that the relationship should not be authoritarian. In particular, the term 'direction' should never be used to tell someone what to do, although the word may sometimes imply that this is the case.[26] Instead, the emphasis should be placed on working together rather than being prescriptive. Directors should not be overly 'directive', and this is where the term 'spiritual direction' can be unhelpful for some. Directors should not set their own agenda and vision, but rather listen, guide, encourage and discern the will of God for their directees.

The practice of spiritual direction is part of a wider search for understanding and encounter in the spiritual life.[27] Those who seek



[23] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 2.
[24] Leech, *Soul Friend*, 42.
[25] Gray Temple, 'Spiritual Direction in the Episcopal Tradition', in *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and* Practices, edited by Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner (Trowbridge: Eagle, 2004), 109–132, here 113.
[26] Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 90.
[27] See the chapter 'What Are You Looking For?' in Peter Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction* (London: SPCK, 2003), 13–33.

spiritual direction often do so during a period of change or trauma or uncertainty, perhaps when familiar forms and patterns of spiritual practice no longer seem fulfilling. There is therefore often a sense of needing to 'go deeper' in the spiritual life, and this can potentially be achieved with the help and guidance of a spiritual director: a companion on the sometimes frightening and overwhelming journey of faith. As one directee recalled:

> My experience of spiritual direction has been one of being accompanied in a deepening 'yes' to God, entering more and more into unknowing, letting go of my 'God-in-a-box theology' that was strangling the reality of God in my life. My director's encouragement has helped me increase my availability to God, grow as a person, learn to be gentle with myself, and come to a place of self-acceptance and love, which has enabled a deeper connection with others.[28]

Although it is important that directees feel supported and encouraged, it is likewise important that the relationship is one of hints and suggestions and insights rather than 'oughts' and 'shoulds'.[29] Directees should never be in the position of becoming dependent on a spiritual director. As Barry and Connolly state, the directee should never feel compelled to say 'my director told me to do it', as this is an abuse of the relationship.[30] For Sue Pickering it is not so much about the directee being accountable *to* the director but being accountable *with* the director as this places them side by side rather than in a hierarchical relationship. Both director and directee must always bear in mind that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate director:

> … spiritual direction could be defined as taking place when one person (the director) prayerfully supports and encourages another person (the directee) to attend and respond to God. As a fellow pilgrim, the spiritual director accompanies the directee on this journey of faith. The real 'director' is God the Holy Spirit, who initiates the directee's deepening relationship with the Trinity, with his or her own self, with other people, and with the realities of life in the global village of the twenty-first century.[31]

[28] Cited in Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 17.
[29] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 107.
[30] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 10.
[31] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 3.

The Relationship between Spiritual Direction and Counselling

The majority of scholars writing about spiritual direction consider that despite clear areas of overlap between spiritual direction and counselling, there are also important distinctions.[32] Counselling is problem-centred, whereas spiritual direction is focused on the whole person and the whole of life as a vital part of the journey of faith. Spiritual direction is therefore not as specifically focused as counselling and other services involving care and support. As Thomas Merton (1915–1968) said, somewhat ironically, 'You don't go to a spiritual director to take care of your spirit the way you go to a dentist to have him take care of your teeth. The spiritual director is concerned with the whole person.'[33]

Counselling is therefore often more of a short-term option, while spiritual direction is longer term, and aimed at the ongoing relationship of the directee with God. Indeed, as Ball and Benner have stated, although both are client-centred, spiritual direction is also importantly centred on God.[34] It may very well be that a directee needs counselling at the same time as spiritual direction. Although some directors may also be trained counsellors, familiar with many of the practical methods and approaches of counselling, the majority will not be, and it is therefore essential that the directee is given access to relevant sources of help and support. However, counselling and spiritual direction can take place side by side, and one should not preclude the other.

Holy Listening

One area in which spiritual direction and counselling overlap is in the importance of active listening, or what Margaret Guenther calls 'Holy Listening'. In terms of spiritual direction, holy listening is one of the most essential elements of the director–directee relationship.[35] It is of vital importance that directees feel safe to disclose as much of their faith journey as they feel comfortable with, and that they are reassured that they will be listened to with care and respect and that their director will not take over and interject with his or her own story or experiences. As Peter Ball has stated, a good director, by nature, must

[32] See Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 49–52; Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 135–164; Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 92–93; Leech, *Soul Friend*, 90–137; and Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 17.
[33] Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1960), 14.
[34] Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 135; and Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 92.
[35] For a detailed overview of the practice of listening, see Anne Long, *Listening* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990).

be a good listener; to listen means to give all your attention and to be actively present to the other person.[36] Indeed, for Anne Long, listening is about service; it is a 'footwashing ministry' of gift and hospitality.[37]

However, good listening is far more than merely receiving information. It is important that directors understand the perspective of the directee and indicate that the information has been shared and valued. As one directee states,

> It is important to me to feel heard. It is quite demeaning to be passed over. To have someone really listen to you means that they reckon you are worth listening to. Listening is a sign of respect and value. At a profound level it is a sign that you have worth, even that you are loved. It is acceptance.[38]

Likewise, a friend of Evelyn Underhill testified about her method of spiritual direction:

> One young woman who went to see her says she can never forget the way Evelyn *listened*. It was a winter afternoon; gradually the light faded, and still the two sat on in the light of the fire; the house was absolutely quiet, and Evelyn listened, as this girl had never been listened to before; there was a sense of being utterly understood.[39]

Such a notion of feeling 'utterly understood' demonstrates the value of 'holy' or 'deep' listening. To listen to another person is about much more than the spoken words themselves. One of the tasks of the director is therefore to discern what is unsaid as well as what is said—the apparent gaps and pauses and silences as well as the spoken word. Thus, as Long suggests, directors need to be able to listen to and discern 'the silences, which can mean many things'.[40]

True listening is a tiring and demanding task (anyone in ministry or pastoral care of any kind will confirm this), but it is probably the most essential aspect of spiritual direction (and ministry more generally), from which everything else can then flow. 'Listening to someone then is a multi-dimensional activity, complex, demanding and mutually enriching for it is as we listen like this that we hear not only what

[36] Cited in Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 34.
[37] Long, *Listening*, 35.
[38] Cited in Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 35.
[39] Cited in Ball, *Anglican Spiritual Direction*, 81.
[40] Long, *Listening*, 50.

someone is saying but also who he is.'[41] Significantly, as well as actively listening to directees, spiritual directors also need to encourage them to learn to be able to listen to God for themselves, thus ultimately eliminating the director's role as the 'middleman' between the directee and God. Director and directee alike need to be equipped to answer Jesus' question, 'Who do you say that I am?' (Mark 8:29).[42]

Spiritual Direction and Sacramental Confession

Older forms of spiritual direction—particularly within the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England—were often closely related to the regular practice of sacramental confession. However, although this can potentially still form an aspect of spiritual direction, it is important that it is not assumed or forced on the directee.[43] Although clearly related, spiritual direction and confession are not the same thing and therefore should not be confused. This was recognised with Anglo-Catholicism by J. M. Neale (1818–1866), who made a clear distinction between the two ministries, arguing that spiritual direction should not be 'grafted on to' confession.[44]

As already noted, not all spiritual directors are ordained priests, so the two practices have therefore now tended to diverge.[45] Likewise, people receiving spiritual direction may want to keep this apart from sacramental confession, and this must be respected by the director. Confession can be suggested, if deemed to be of value to the directee, but it should never be imposed. As Margaret Guenther states, a good spiritual director will know that he or she is a sinner too and in need of God's grace and forgiveness.[46]

The Presence of the Holy Spirit

It is essential that the ministry of spiritual direction is always understood as being *more* than a relationship between director and directee. One must always take account of what Peter Ball calls the 'God-dimension' of the meeting.[47] God is constantly present as the third party in spiritual

[41] Long, *Listening*, 50.
[42] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 43.
[43] See Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 27.
[44] Leech, *Soul Friend*, 81; Thornton, *Spiritual Direction*, 128.
[45] Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 28.
[46] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 27, 28.
[47] Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 36. For a discussion of the dialogical nature of the relationship see Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 31–46.

direction, alongside the director and directee, and this aspect should never be overlooked. The relationship is between the director, the directee and the Holy Spirit, with the two latter being the most important. Thus, 'the true spiritual director is the Spirit of God'.[48] Anne Long's image of the director as 'God's usher' leading to the 'real director' is particularly appealing, as it reminds us that directors should not stand in the way of this relationship, but act as a mirror, reflecting the directee to God and vice versa.[49]

God is always seeking to be in relationship with us, whether we are aware of it or not, meaning that the notion of discernment is an important one in the ministry of spiritual direction. In the Western tradition, the process of discernment is most strongly associated with St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and his book, *Spiritual Exercises*.[50] Here, Ignatius shows us that God always wants to be met in conversation with us. His rules for discernment (based on the 'disposition of the soul' [Exx 335] towards that which is life-giving) help us to decide on a particular course of action, and are still useful in the practice of spiritual direction today. Indeed, as Peter Tyler writes in his overview of spiritual direction and the Exercises, the practice of discernment is probably the most important gift that the Christian tradition can bring to the contemporary search for spirituality.[51]

God is always seeking to be in relationship with us

Spiritual direction is therefore valuable for being an important way in which discernment of the will of God can take place. Thus, the main role of the spiritual director should be as the *facilitator* in the development of dialogue and mutual seeking between the directee and God. Therefore, for Barry and Connolly, the spiritual director is to help directees pay attention to God, see where they are on their journey of faith, and offer suggestions for movement towards God.[52] This attentiveness to God—and the associated process of discernment—is essential to spiritual direction, and to spirituality as a whole, and spiritual directors should act as enablers in this relationship of loving attention between the directee and God.[53]

[48] Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 90.
[49] Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 22.
[50] For a helpful introductory discussion on discernment and the Ignatian tradition see Tyler, 'Christian Spiritual Direction', 203–204.
[51] Tyler, 'Christian Spiritual Direction', 204.
[52] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 27, 46; Julie Lunn, 'Paying Attention: The Task of Attending in Spiritual Direction and Practical Theology', *Practical Theology*, 2/2 (2009), 219–229.
[53] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 46.

Discerning Together

The ministry of spiritual direction is different from a professional relationship—but not quite the same as a mutual friendship, as spiritual direction should take place in a more 'formal' setting and have clear times, objectives and boundaries.[54] It should not be authoritarian and prescriptive, but neither should it be reduced to a 'cosy chat', as spiritual direction will sometimes need to challenge as well as comfort.[55] In order to be fully effective, spiritual direction needs to be a relationship built on trust, hospitality, love, support, prayer and the shared responding to the presence of God.

Although the spiritual director will be more experienced in the Christian life, this should not be impressed upon the directee in an unhelpful or abusive way. Rather, spiritual direction is a ministry of love from one member of the Christian family to another. Thus, for Margaret Guenther,

> Spiritual direction, as a work of love, is also a work of freedom. The director is willing to let be, to love with an open hand. Here is a contemplative love, immune from temptation to devour, possess or manipulate. Always seeing the other as a child of God, she is filled with respect, even awe, in the presence of the person sitting across the sacred space.[56]

At its heart, the practice of spiritual direction should always be centred on God and prayer, and on the continual work of healing. Indeed, for Guenther, this ministry is a living out of intercessory prayer.[57]

Spiritual direction has a sacramental character, always allowing the presence of the Holy Spirit in the relationship. For as Barry and Connolly state, the central part of spiritual direction is the fostering of the relationship between the directee and God; the director's task is to help people meet the living God.[58] Like John the Baptist, the spiritual director is to point the way to God, and eventually step back so that God can come more strongly into focus for the directee.

The image of journey or pilgrimage is one which is often used in relation to spiritual direction.[59] This helpfully avoids notions of hierarchy

[54] Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 54; Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 20.
[55] Long, *Approaches to Spiritual Direction*, 18.
[56] Guenther, *Holy Listening,* 145–146.
[57] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 150.
[58] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 43.
[59] Ball, *Introducing Spiritual Direction*, 39.

and power, with their potential for abuse. The spiritual director is someone who walks alongside the directee, as they explore the spiritual terrain together. Director and directee are fellow disciples walking along the same road, feeding on the same resources, with a shared longing to come closer to God. This is the 'direction' inherent in spiritual direction. For Sue Pickering,

> In spiritual direction we help directees notice the signposts on the way, and make choices at a crossroads. We sit with them, tending the campfire, when they are stuck; we celebrate when 'arrivals' of some sort offer a chance of rest and refreshment, and encourage them when God interrupts their complacency and invites them out on the road again.[60]

Another helpful image is Margaret Guenther's concept of a spiritual director as midwife: waiting with the directees, accompanying them through their labour pains and finally helping to bring their new identity in God to birth.[61] However, as Pickering states, it is important that the spiritual director should not take on the role of mother-to-be, but 'encourage and inform, build confidence, monitor movement, and discern potential danger'.[62]

God does not desire us to walk the spiritual path alone, but in a community of faith. Spiritual direction can therefore form an important

[60] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 109.
[61] See the chapter 'The Spiritual Director as Midwife' in Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 84–113.
[62] Pickering, *Spiritual Direction*, 31.

part in fostering Christian community. Thus, both director and directee should be living out the questions of faith and seeking answers *together*. The director should not be sought to provide magic solutions to those questions as, in reality, we are all discerning together. Spiritual direction is ultimately about relationship, not quick fixes to problems.[63]

For William Barry, God's intention for us is to live in unity and community. He argues that spiritual direction is essential in the formation of Christian community and the life of the Church.[64] In a sense, both the spiritual director and directee should be living out the questions of faith and seeking answers together, in the community that God intends for us, bound together in a common love for God. And so I end with a quotation from Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* which encapsulates much about the nature of spiritual direction and Christian faith more generally,

> I want to beg you as much as I can … to be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves …. Do not now seek answers which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is it to live everything. *Live the questions now.* Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.[65]

It is in living the questions that we most often find answers, and in the struggle the joy waits to be discovered.[66]

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[63] Barry and Connolly, *Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 137.
[64] Barry, *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God*, 90–106.
[65] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, translated by M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 27.
[66] 'She comprehended the perversity of life, that in the struggle lies the joy': Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (London: Virago, 1988), 261.

RETRIEVING *LECTIO DIVINA* AT VATICAN II AND AFTER

Gerald O'Collins

A DOCTRINAL AND PASTORAL RETURN to biblical and traditional sources, now regularly called *ressourcement*, helped prepare the way for the Second Vatican Council to renew the life of the Church. In the essay '*Ressourcement* and Vatican II', I illustrated how Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Gérard Philips, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, Pieter Smulders and other theologians contributed to the teaching of the council through their return to the sources.[1] Here I would like to provide a further example, the retrieval in the Constitution on Divine Revelation of the ancient practice of biblical prayer, *lectio divina*, which was then received in the post-conciliar period. This involves quietly reading the sacred scriptures for *transformation* rather than *information*, surrendering ourselves to what we read, and allowing ourselves to be guided or inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Origins of lectio divina

In the third century, Origen pioneered the method and terminology of *lectio divina* as a group and individual practice.[2] He wrote to Gregory of Neo-Caesarea: 'Diligently apply yourself to the reading of the sacred Scriptures … seek aright, and with unwavering trust in God, the meaning of holy Scriptures …. Be not satisfied with knocking and seeking; for prayer is of all things indispensable to the knowledge of the things of God.'[3]

[1] Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2014), 1–24. I could also have included contributions from Alois Grillmeier and Otto Semmelroth.

[2] See Jacques Rousse and others, '*Lectio divina* et lecture spirituelle', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, volume 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), cols. 470–510; Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1996), 38–40, 72–73; for a book-length study of the origins, development and rediscovery of *lectio divina*, see Raymund Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2009).

[3] 'Epistola ad Gregorium', n. 3, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 335*, volume 10, *The Writings of Origen* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), 390; on Origen as the master of *lectio divina*, see Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 28–58.

Origen encouraged Gregory and others to read the Bible devoutly and allow themselves to be brought into the living presence of Christ, the Word to be found and savoured in all the words of the inspired scriptures. Origen understood Christ to be incarnate in the scriptures and so to function as the interpretative key that unlocks their life-giving meaning and message.

Origen died around 254 AD. Some years later Bishop Theonas of Alexandria, in a letter to Lucianus, an officer of the emperor, urged the regular practice of scriptural prayer. He wrote:

> Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, at such convenient hour as offers, and giving some space to meditation. And never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures, for nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind so well as those sacred studies do.[4]

St Benedict, *by Hans Memling, 1487*

Such prayerful reading of the Bible, at times called *lectio sacra*, was promoted by St Ambrose of Milan, St Augustine of Hippo, St Hilary of Poitiers and St Jerome. In the sixth century, *lectio divina* was established as a monastic practice by St Benedict of Nursia. The motto *ora et labora* (pray and work) summarised daily life in Benedictine monasteries, which consisted in liturgical prayer, manual work and *lectio divina*—a slow reading or recital of the scriptures and prayerful pondering of their meaning. Chapter 48 of the *Rule of St Benedict* specified times and circumstances for such *lectio divina*.[5]

[4] Theonas of Alexandria, 'The Epistle of Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, to Lucianus, the Chief Chamberlain', translated by S. D. Salmond, n. 9, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, volume 14, *The Writings of Methodius, Alexander of Lycopolis, Peter of Alexandria, and Several Fragments* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), 438–439.

[5] *The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English*, edited by Timothy Fry (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1981), 249–253; see also 95–96, 446–447, 467–468.

In the twelfth century a Carthusian monk and prior of the Grande Chartreuse, Guigo II (d.1188), described and prescribed four stages in the practice of *lectio divina*: quiet reading (*lectio*), meditating on the text (*meditatio*), responding with prayer (*oratio*) and quiet stillness in God's presence (*contemplatio*). He unpacked the experience as climbing the four steps of a ladder.[6] In the sixteenth century St John of the Cross taught his fellow Carmelites and others this fourfold scheme for practising *lectio divina*.[7]

The monastic practice continued, but from the sixteenth century a certain aversion to *lectio divina* set in. Many Catholics lost their confidence that the inspiring voice of the Spirit would speak to them through the prayerful reading of the scriptures. Some feared that such personal reading could deteriorate into a one-sidedly private and divisive interpretation of biblical texts. The twentieth century, however, brought a retrieval of the *lectio divina*, effected among others by Jean Leclercq and officially endorsed by one constitution and at least two decrees of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).[8] That conciliar teaching decisively encouraged many priests, religious, seminarians and lay persons to seek a relationship to God through a meditative reading of the scriptures.

Dei verbum

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, recommends the practice of *lectio divina* four times, but without explicitly using the term; nor does it appeal to Origen or Benedict. But it does cite Paul, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine in support of prayerful reading of the Bible.

First, all who are 'officially engaged in the ministry of the Word, particularly priests, deacons or catechists, must cling to the Scriptures by unremitting sacred reading [*assidua lectione sacra*] and meticulous study'.[9] Here Vatican II uses the ancient term *lectio sacra* rather than

[6] Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks: A Letter on the Contemplative Life and Twelve Meditations*, translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1981), 17–20, 69–74; see Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 166–172.

[7] See Cunningham and Egan, *Christian Spirituality*, 93–94; Pascale-Dominique Nau, *When God Speaks: Lectio Divina in Saint John of the Cross, the Ladder of Monks and the Rule of Carmel* (San Sebastian: Villa Alaidi, 2012).

[8] For Leclercq's writing on *lectio divina*, see above all *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham U, 1982; French original 1957). Leclercq 'showed how monastic theology grew out of the practice of *lectio divina*' (Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 192).

[9] *Dei verbum*, n.25. Vatican II documents are in my own translation from the Latin originals. This is the only occurrence of the term *lectio sacra* in the sixteen documents of Vatican II.

the equally ancient, largely equivalent *lectio divina*. A quotation from Augustine drives home this duty for the ministers of the Word: it must not happen that anyone 'become an empty preacher of the Word of God to others, not being a hearer of the Word in his own heart'.[10]

Secondly, the Council,

> … vehemently and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful, above all members of religious institutes, to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 3:8) by frequent reading [*frequenti … lectione*] of the divine Scriptures (*Dei verbum*, n. 25).

A quotation from Jerome backs up this injunction: 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'.[11] This maxim puts negatively a conviction found at the heart of the spirituality of Origen and his successors: prayerful knowledge of the scriptures is knowledge of Christ. Thirdly, the same article 25 of *Dei verbum* goes on to encourage all the faithful 'to approach gladly the sacred text itself, whether through the sacred liturgy which is filled with divine utterances, or through devout reading [*per piam lectionem*]'. So the reading of the divinely inspired scriptures should be not only 'unremitting' and 'frequent' but also 'devout'. Fourthly and finally, this same article exhorts the faithful to practise prayerful reading of the (inspired and inspiring) scriptures and cites Ambrose in support of this exhortation:

> Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and human beings. For 'we address God when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles'.[12]

Such reading of scripture accompanied by prayer could serve as a concise definition of *lectio divina* (or *lectio sacra*).

Jared Wicks has carefully traced the development of article 25 of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, where, no fewer than

[10] St Augustine, 'Sermon 179', in *Sermons (148–183)*, translated by Edmund Hill (New Rochelle: New City, 1992), 298.
[11] Jerome, *Commentarium in Isaiam*, prologue, in *Patrologia Latina*, edited by Jean-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1851–1875), volume 24, col.17B. In *Dei Verbum* the footnote to this quotation refers to the use of these words in two papal encyclicals: Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* of 1893 (n. 3) and Benedict XV's *Spiritus paraclitus* of 1920 (n. 63). Benedict's encyclical repeatedly cites what Jerome wrote to those he directed spiritually about the prayerful reading of the scriptures: for instance, 'exercise our mind, feed it daily with Holy Scripture'; 'read [Holy Scripture] assiduously, and learn as much as you can. Let sleep find you holding your Bible, and when your head nods let it be resting on the sacred page' (nn. 40, 42).
[12] Ambrose, *De Officiis ministrorum*, 1. 20. 88, in *Patrologia Latina*, volume 16, col. 50B.

four times, Vatican II retrieved and taught the devout and prayerful reading of the scriptures—*lectio divina*.[13] But Wicks's account remains incomplete; several items need to be added. First, we should move beyond article 25 to include the final article of *Dei verbum.* It expresses the wish that, both through regular study (*studio*) and prayerful reading (*lectione*) 'of the sacred books', the divine revelation may 'more and more fill the hearts of human beings'. Just as 'the life of the Church receives increase from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery', so 'a new impulse of the spiritual life may be expected from an increased veneration of the Word of God' (*Dei verbum*, n. 26). That veneration is to be shown not only through biblical studies but also through *lectio divina.* Thus in its concluding articles, *Dei verbum* five times exhorts Roman Catholics and other Christians to practise *lectio divina.*

Secondly, two other documents of Vatican II, one (the Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae caritatis*) promulgated shortly before *Dei verbum*, and the other (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests) promulgated less than three weeks after, both likewise include exhortations to engage in prayerful reading of the scriptures.[14] Wicks might have noted this but did not do so. *Perfectae caritatis* instructs members of religious institutes 'to draw on the genuine sources of Christian spirituality'. To begin with, this means,

> … having at hand the sacred scripture on a daily basis, so that they might learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3:8) by reading [*lectione*] and meditating on [*meditatione*] the divine scriptures (n.6).

Presbyterorum ordinis takes up this theme twice, once echoing the discussion of reading and meditation that we have just seen in the decree

[13] Jared Wicks, 'Scripture Reading Urged *Vehementer* (DV No. 25): Background and Development', *Theological Studies*, 74 (2013), 555–580. Wicks recalls a sub-commission that, from March 1964, worked on the revelation schema (which became the text of *Dei verbum*). He provides the names of Grillmeier, Ratzinger and Semmelroth (p. 567), but does not mention that Congar, Philips, Rahner and Smulders were also members, making it one of the most gifted theological groups ever appointed at Vatican II. Wicks mentions that two Jesuits (Grillmeier and Semmelroth) were on the sub-commission; in fact, it included two other Jesuits, Rahner and Smulders.

[14] The Decree on the Training of Priests (*Optatam totius*), promulgated on the same day as *Perfectae caritatis* (28 October 1965), briefly and implicitly alluded to *lectio divina* when it mandated that seminarians 'should be taught to seek Christ in faithful meditation on the word of God' (n. 8). The Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), promulgated a year earlier (21 November 1964), gave a Trinitarian account of what other Christians do in what can be rightly called their practice of *lectio divina:* 'while invoking the Holy Spirit, in these very Sacred Scriptures they search out God as speaking to them in Christ' (n. 21). Thus we can name four decrees of Vatican II that retrieve and encourage *lectio divina.*

for religious: 'the sacred knowledge' of a priestly minister is 'primarily drawn from the reading [*lectione*] and meditation [*meditatione*] of Sacred Scripture' (n. 19). The second mention explicitly introduces the term *lectio divina:* 'in the light of a faith that has been nourished by divine reading [*lectione divina*], priests can diligently search for signs of God's will' (n. 18). Thus, in a document promulgated on the last day of its sitting, the Second Vatican Council accepted the term *lectio divina* to name what it expounded in *Dei verbum* about the devout and prayerful reading of the scriptures. And so, for the first time, a term which over many centuries had already named this practice entered the official teaching of a general council of the Church.

Thirdly, Wicks ended his article by praising *Dei verbum* for inculcating 'the practice of devout Bible reading', which can 'rejuvenate church members'. Thus 'Vatican II's dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* has a significant pastoral conclusion concerning what is today known as *lectio divina*'.[15] But it should be added that this ancient practice has been known and named as *lectio divina* (or *lectio sacra*) long before 'today'—in fact right back to the early centuries of the Church.

Fourthly, and finally, Wicks could also have noted how early articles in *Dei verbum*, albeit once more without explicitly naming it, evoke the experience of *lectio divina* to which the concluding two articles point. The prologue opens with what could be a succinct description of *lectio divina*—'hearing the Word of God devoutly' (n. 1)—which will be echoed in the final article, with its hope that 'a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God' (n. 26). The prologue quotes words from 1 John 1: 2–3 which might be used by those who have engaged in communal *lectio divina*: 'we announce to you what we have seen and heard'.

When describing the experience of divine self-revelation as a personal encounter in which God 'speaks to human beings as friends' (n. 2), *Dei verbum* could also have been referring to the encounter with God to be experienced through *lectio divina.* The constitution reflects on the complete Christ-event when it invokes his 'total' presence (n. 4). But that quality also characterizes the presence of the risen Christ in liturgical celebration and *lectio divina.*

[15] Wicks, 'Scripture Reading', 571. He mentions that the bishops of southern France, when asking that the schema on revelation exhort the faithful to read the scriptures frequently, explicitly mentioned *lectio divina* (567, n. 30).

The Holy Spirit is at work, chapter 2 of the constitution emphasizes, when the faithful 'grow in insight' into the realities 'being transmitted', which obviously include the sacred scriptures. *Dei verbum* cites 'the contemplation and study of believers', who, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, 'ponder these things in [their] heart'. This growth in insight effected by the Spirit 'comes from the intimate understanding of spiritual realities' which believers 'experience'. Such language also serves to describe what happens in and through the communal and personal practice of *lectio divina.* The closing words of article 8 likewise apply to what the Holy Spirit can bring about through *lectio divina*: 'the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church … leads believers to all truth, and makes the word of Christ dwell in them abundantly (Colossians 3:16)'.

Whether or not the drafters of *Dei verbum* noticed or intended this, what comes at the beginning (nn. 1–2, 4 and 8) anticipates the substance of what is taught at the end about the *lectio divina* (nn. 25–26). It strengthens the case that Wicks argued if we recognise the presence of an 'inclusion'. What comes at the end of the constitution about *lectio divina* takes up and develops what we have already read at the beginning.

Post-Vatican II Reception

After the Second Vatican Council recommended the practice of *lectio divina* and, at least once, explicitly retrieved the term itself, both the practice and the term began to enter official teaching and related usage, but not without difficulty.[16] When they came to 'a faith nourished by *lectione divina*' (*Presbyterorum ordinis,* n. 18), four translations into English cancelled the only explicit reference in the conciliar documents to *lectio divina* and mistakenly rendered the expression as 'spiritual reading'.[17] While *lectio divina*, both in traditional usage and in the teaching of Vatican II, involves prayerfully meditating on biblical texts, and biblical texts alone, 'spiritual reading' does not as such involve meditation and is engaged with non-scriptural texts such as the *Introduction to a Devout*

[16] For a rich documentation of publications on *lectio divina* from the 1970s to the 1990s and later, see Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 194–200.

[17] *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher (London and New York: Geoffrey Chapman and America Press, 1966), 570; *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, rev. edn (Northport: Costello, 1988), 896; *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Marianne Lorraine Trouvé (Boston: Pauline, 1999), 607; *The Documents of Vatican II with Notes and Index: The Vatican Translation* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2009), 334.

Life by St Francis de Sales or the *History of a Soul* by St Thérèse of Lisieux. Spiritual reading focuses more on the reader 'rather than the scriptural text' and so can lose 'the older meditative approach to [biblical] reading'.[18] In short, both the practice and the texts involved in spiritual reading make it different from *lectio divina*.

In 1970, the method and practice of the *lectio divina*, already encouraged by Vatican II in *Dei verbum*, received notable promotion when two British scholars, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (the founder editor of *The Way*), collaborated to produce a critical edition, with introduction, of Guigo II's *Lettre sur la vie contemplative* (*L'Échelle des moines*). *Douze meditations*. With the text translated into French by an anonymous Carthusian, this book appeared as volume 163 in the prestigious *Sources chrétiennes* series. It contained Guigo II's classical structure for *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *meditatio, oratio* and *contemplatio*.[19] Colledge and Walsh, while undoubtedly aware of Vatican II's teaching on *lectio divina*, made no reference to *Dei verbum* or other conciliar documents.

As recently as 1990 one major translation of Vatican II documents, when it came to *Presbyterorum ordinis* n. 18, avoided 'spiritual reading' but felt constrained to render *lectio divina* as 'the reading of God's word'.[20] The translator failed to register that, long before the Second Vatican Council met, it was already correct to use *lectio divina* as a recognised Latin borrowing into English like *Agnus Dei*, Angelus or *habeas corpus*. Such expressions should be left as they are in English translation and not rendered by supposed English equivalents.

John Paul II

In 1992 John Paul II published *Pastores dabo vobis*, an apostolic exhortation on the ministry of priests (compare Vatican II's *Presbyterorum ordinis*) and their formation (compare *Optatam totius*). The Pope insisted that 'an essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditative reading of the Word of God [*lectio divina*], a humble and loving listening' (n.47). In the notes he did not cite *Presbyterorum ordinis* nn.18 and 19 but called on *Dei verbum* nn.2, 24 and 25 in support of what he explicitly named as *lectio divina*.

[18] Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 176.
[19] (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 86–97. This volume appeared later in English as *The Ladder of Monks*.
[20] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume 2, edited by Norman P. Tanner (London and Washington, DC: Sheed and Ward, and Georgetown U, 1990), 1065.

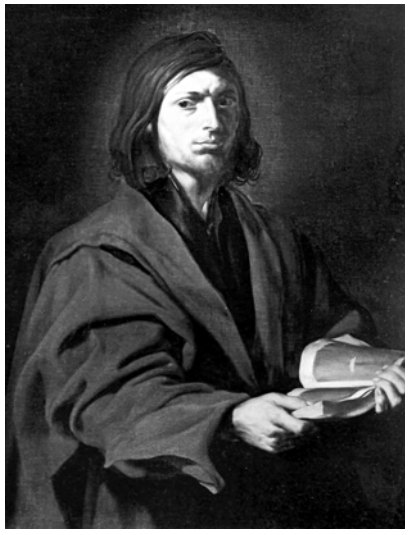
The following year another decisive step was taken, this time by the Pontifical Biblical Commission. It listed four contexts for the 'Use of the Bible': 'the Liturgy, *Lectio Divina*, Pastoral Ministry [and] Ecumenism', before commending *lectio divina* in both its individual and communal forms, understanding *Dei verbum* n.25 as its warrant for doing so. The Commission, unlike the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II, quoted Origen on the practice of *lectio divina*—the only Father of the Church it cited in this context.[21] A year later, the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presented '*lectio divina*, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer … rooted in the celebration of the liturgy of the hours'.[22]

John Paul II's 1996 apostolic exhortation on the life and ministry of religious, *Vita consecrata*, included a rich passage (n.94) on the value of *lectio divina* and, in particular, the fruit of meditating on the Bible in common: 'this meditation leads to a joyful sharing of the riches drawn from the word of God'. Note 382 introduced *Dei verbum* n.2 to illuminate and support the practice of *lectio divina.* His 1999 apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America* recalled that the 'reading of the Bible, accompanied by prayer, is known in the tradition of the Church as *lectio divina*, and it is a practice to be encouraged among all Christians' (n.31). And the 2001 apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* also appealed to *Dei verbum* (note 128). It urged all the faithful, but especially seminarians, priests and religious, whether privately or in groups, 'to engage in *lectio divina,* that quiet and prayerful meditation on the Scripture which allows the word of God to speak to the human heart' (n.38). Finally, a 2003 apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Europa*, while not speaking explicitly of *lectio divina*, quoted the words of Jerome found in *Dei verbum* n.25: 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'. The Pope assured the Christians of Europe that through the Bible they 'will daily find nourishment and strength to carry out our mission' (n.65).

Benedict XVI

Some of these documents, along with the discussions they triggered, probably played a role in persuading Pope Benedict XVI to take up the theme of *lectio divina.* As Cardinal Ratzinger he headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and so presided over the meetings of the

[21] *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 6, 121–122.
[22] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1177; and see n.2708.



Origen, *by Jusepe de Ribera, 1614*

Pontifical Biblical Commission that produced *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. As we have just seen, it concluded by recommending *lectio divina,* and recalled Origen's part in promoting this form of biblical prayer. He was also president of the Catechetical Commission, set up by Pope John Paul II and eventually creating the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which explicitly supported *lectio divina*.

On 16 September 2005, Pope Benedict used a brief address (to an international congress on the fortieth anniversary of *Dei verbum*) to 'recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*'. It had not been named as such in the constitution. Now, forty years later, the Pope retrieved article 25 and expressed his conviction that, 'if it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church … a new spiritual springtime'.[23]

Benedict soon followed up this message in his Angelus address on 6 November 2005. He recalled how *Dei verbum* 'emphasized appreciation for the Word of God, which developed into a profound renewal for the life' of the Church. He added: 'among the many fruits of this biblical springtime I would like to mention the spread of the ancient practice of *lectio divina*'. The Pope explained some conditions for this practice: 'one condition for *lectio divina* is that the mind and heart be illumined by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, and that they be approached with an attitude of "reverential hearing"'. He continued:

> This attitude was typical of Mary Most Holy, as the icon of the Annunciation symbolically portrays: the Virgin receives the heavenly

[23] Commenting on articles 25–26 of *Dei verbum* shortly after Vatican II, the future Pope evaluated its teaching positively but did not explicitly name *lectio divina*: see *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, volume 3 (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 270–272. Nor did Ratzinger cite the pioneering work of Origen in promoting *lectio divina*. But, as Pope Benedict, he spoke of Origen in the 2010 apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* and even earlier explicitly expounded *lectio divina*.

> Messenger while she is intent on meditating upon the Sacred Scriptures, usually shown by a book that Mary holds in her hand, or on her lap or on a lectern.

On 2 February 2008, in an address to male and female religious on the Twelfth World Day of Consecrated Life, Pope Benedict briefly encouraged 'the ancient practice of *lectio divina*'. And in his 2010 apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* he picked out seminarians and members of religious institutes as those whose lives and vocations should be nourished by *lectio divina*, understood as a practice related to but distinct from 'biblical studies' (nn.82–83).

He went on to recommend *lectio divina* more widely, not only explicitly using the term but also quoting teaching about *lectio divina* from Origen, calling him 'one of the great masters of this way of reading the Bible' (nn.86–87). Furthermore, the Pope explained the four steps of reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) (n.87). While he did not say so, this account of *lectio divina* was derived, as we have seen, from Guigo II through John of the Cross and others.[24] Benedict also several times used *lectio divina* as a heading for the biblical reflections he offered to the clergy of the diocese of Rome, even though he never mentioned it as such in the course of his presentations. He was practising it in a communal setting rather than literally speaking about it.

Lectio divina *Now*

Since Vatican II closed in December 1965, many Catholics around the world have responded to the council's call to let the sacred scriptures permeate the life of the Church at every level. In particular, not only those shaped by the Benedictine tradition but also many others have encouraged and practised various forms of *lectio divina*. For example prayerful reflections on the Gospels, coming from Nicaraguan peasants and put together by Ernesto Cardenal, were published as *The Gospel in Solentiname* and reveal the power and relevance of communal *lectio divina* in the world of today.[25] Much of the ministry of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini—not least the Bible services for young people in the Milan

[24] In his address of 6 November 2005, Benedict XVI introduced three elements from this fourfold scheme by recommending 'reading', 'meditation' and 'contemplation' (but not the third step of 'prayer' or '*oratio*').
[25] Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, translated by Donald D. Walsh, 4 vols. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976–1982); on *lectio divina* as a group activity, see Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 218–219.

cathedral—took the form of communal *lectio divina.* Martini's *lectio divina* was deeply shaped by the approach of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, which, besides being deeply biblical, also encourages reading the Gospels during the Exercises and afterwards.

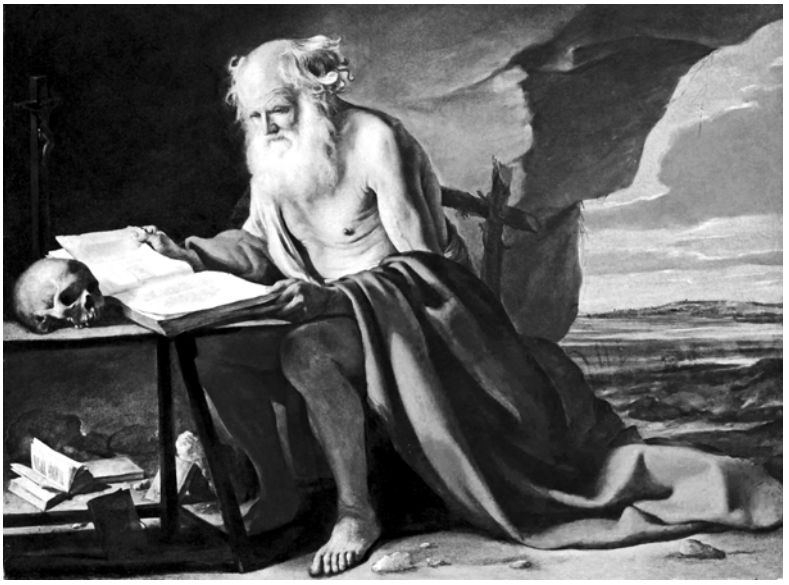
In late 2019, Paulist Press published *The New Testament with Lectio Divina*, an edition of the New Testament (in a translation prepared by the Pastoral Bible Foundation of the Claretians) which invites readers to meditate on individual passages and so be led to prayer. A four-step approach is proposed: a thoughtful reading of some passage, quiet reflection on those verses, a period of prayer, and a decision prompted by the first three steps. This approach matches the first three of the four steps in Guigo II's classical plan for *lectio divina*, endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini*: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. For *contemplatio* it substitutes a decision (*decisio*) or plan of action. But this change does not mean infidelity to the traditional practice of *lectio divina*. Such prayer comes into play, as the final chapter of *Dei verbum* indicates, whenever the scriptures are prayerfully read rather than simply academically studied. The practice of *lectio divina* is not bound to follow the scheme of Guigo II.[26]

On 30 September 2020, Pope Francis comemorated the 1600th anniversary of the death of St Jerome by publishing an apostolic letter, *Scripturae sacrae affectus*.[27] He recalled that Jerome was not only the greatest translator of the sacred scriptures but also a champion of biblical prayer: 'Jerome spent the last years of his life in the prayerful reading of Scripture, both privately and in community'. The Pope quoted from the words Jerome wrote to console a friend on the death of his beloved nephew Nepotianus: 'by assiduous reading and constant meditation [of the scriptures] he made his heart a library of Christ'.[28] Pope Francis commented: what Jerome said of Nepotianus 'could also be said of Jerome' himself; the Bible led him to know Jesus Christ. Without citing the teaching of Vatican II in *Dei verbum* or using the term, the Pope

[26] The Paulist Press had previously published *The Catholic Prayer Bible* (2010), a complete Bible in the NRSV translation edited to encourage reading, meditation and prayer in the tradition of *lectio divina*. Alongside the editions of the scriptures, Paulist had already put out *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*. This 1988 book by Thelma Hall arranges thematically 500 scriptural texts as rich resources for practising *lectio divina*.

[27] While easily available on the Vatican website, this letter lacks numbered divisions. But, as it is short, quotations can be readily traced.

[28] St Jerome, *Epistola* 60.10, in *Epistulae 1–70*, edited by Isidor Hilberg, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 54 (Vienna: Tempsky and Leipzig: Freitag, 1910), 561.



St Jerome, *by the Le Nain brothers, 1642/1643*

encouraged 'the prayerful reading of Scripture'—in other words, *lectio divina*. I should like to conclude by illustrating how this might be practised on the basis of one story in St Mark's Gospel.

Two Examples of lectio divina

The evangelist narrates at considerable length the death of John the Baptist, a sordid story in which Herodias, wife of Herod Antipas, has her revenge on the prophet who had denounced her irregular marriage (Mark 6:14–29). This whole passage, at first glance, does not look suitable for the practice of *lectio divina*. But it can come alive when we notice that, in the whole of Mark's Gospel, it is the first of only two cases of women talking together.

Herodias and her daughter speak to one another as they plot the cruel murder of John the Baptist (Mark 6:24). And at the end of Mark's Gospel, Mary Magdalene and two other women speak together as they hurry to the tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning, intent on anointing his dead body. They have, however, an unresolved problem: 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' (Mark 16:3). They will not need to find some strong person to roll away the stone for them; God has already seen to that.

The *lectio divina* might reflect, first, on Herodias and her daughter, who symbolize hatred and death, and then on Mary Magdalene, together with her two companions, who stand for true love and hear the message of endless life: 'he has been raised' (Mark 16:6). Two women bring about the ugly murder of the Baptist. That martyrdom prepares us for what will happen to Jesus. He too will be killed, albeit in an even more terrible way by being crucified. But three women will be the first witnesses to what happens after the horror of the crucifixion. He has been raised to new and glorious life. Alleluia. We can ask ourselves: what does the resurrection bring us in terms of life and love?

The second example of *lectio divina* is based on a single verse, which could yield rich fruit when read and taken into prayer. It ends the story of the three women's visit to the open and empty tomb of Jesus: 'So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (Mark 16:8). This enigmatic conclusion to Mark's Gospel trails off and becomes a question for readers engaged in *lectio divina*.[29] Will *they* break the silence and carry to others the world-shattering news of Christ's resurrection? They have a decision to make. No longer a mere report of past events, the text has become a challenging invitation to those who meditate on it.

An academic study of this verse properly raises historical questions: did the women, while keeping silent when they met other people, search for Peter and the other disciples until they could deliver to them the uniquely good news of the resurrection? Did the disciples keep the rendezvous in Galilee and meet there the risen Jesus (Mark 16:7)? Taking up the prayerful approach of *lectio divina*, however, we will no longer read the text with our prepared questions. Are we ready to let the text question us and become our story? Will we speak up and become faithful messengers of the crucified and resurrected Jesus?

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[29] Mark 16:9–20 is generally accepted to be the work of a later hand,

'IF YOUR MOST HOLY MAJESTY DESIRES TO CHOOSE AND RECEIVE ME'

The Grace of Poverty

Kevin Leidich

OVER MANY YEARS OF DIRECTING the Spiritual Exercises, I have observed that when a retreatant is invited to spend time with the prayer at the end of the Call of the King, as he or she is encouraged to ask Jesus for the grace 'to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual' (Exx 98), the retreatant is often greatly challenged by the term 'poverty'. Even though it is briefly and tangentially mentioned towards the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the First Principle and Foundation (Exx 23) as part of the consideration of 'indifference', the full reality of the call to poverty strikes the retreatant strongly and perhaps surprisingly at the end of the transitional contemplation between the First Week and praying with the life of Christ through the Gospels in the Second Week.

If unprepared, he or she may also be confused by how Ignatius differentiates 'poverty of spirit' from 'actual poverty', for the precise meaning of these expressions is not clear from the reading of the text. The subsequent petition at the end of the meditation on the Two Standards 'that I be received under his standard; and first, in the most perfect spiritual poverty; and also, if his Divine Majesty should be served and if he should wish to choose me for it, to no less a degree of actual poverty' (Exx 147), deepens this challenge by suggesting that Ignatius regarded 'actual poverty' as the higher state of life for the Christian. The same petition is repeated after the Three Classes of Persons (Exx 156). Despite explanation provided by the director, Ignatius' use of the term 'poverty' in many cases continues to be an obstacle, not only in the sense of a 'challenge', but also as a distraction in making progress in responding freely to the call of Christ the King to 'labor with him'.[1]

[1] For an expansive treatment of this point, see Brendan Byrne, 'The Beatitudes and "Poverty of Spirit" in the Ignatian Exercises', *The Way*, 47/1–2 (January–April 2008), 29–46.

'Actual poverty' can be controversial and confusing as a charism of Jesuit life as well as for those who are making the Exercises. Poverty can be equally perplexing to people who may be attracted to living the vows of religious communities. Even among religious in the same community, different expectations exist concerning the vow of poverty. In its decree on renewal of religious life, Vatican II asked all religious communities to 'cultivate poverty and give it new expression'.[2] The council also recommended poverty to both secular priests and the laity as a means to bring the gospel with greater freedom to the poor.[3] Consequently, a wide range of approaches to poverty appears within literature published after Vatican II during the decades of renewing religious life.

A Common Vocabulary Is Needed

To sort through these multiple approaches to poverty in an Ignatian context, either lived as a religious or as a response to prayer with the *Spiritual Exercises*, a clear approach to the gospel call is needed, one grounded in the vocabulary and dynamics of the Exercises and the experience of Ignatius. Fortunately, today we have greater access to and increasing familiarity with all the Ignatian sources than during the first few decades of renewal after Vatican II. Our growing understanding of Ignatian resources no longer relies predominantly upon the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*, but is broadening to include appreciation of the later Ignatian documents, such as Ignatius' seven thousand letters,[4] his dictated *Autobiography,* his Spiritual Diary and primary sources from the First Companions. All these additional resources provide valuable assistance towards the renewal of the commitment to poverty for Jesuits as well as an authentic understanding of how Ignatius differentiates the graces of poverty for all people who pray the Spiritual Exercises.

I propose that the insights of Ignatius in differentiating these graces, in the *Spiritual Exercises* and in his later writings, give clarity in overcoming any confusion, distractions and obstacles—both for those who are making the Exercises and those who are committed to vowed religious life in

[2] *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 13.
[3] *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 17; *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 4; *Gaudium et spes*, n. 72.
[4] Volumes of Ignatius' letters in English translation include *Letters and Instructions*, edited and translated by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006); *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola U, 1959); St Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters to Women*, translated by Kathleen Pond and S. A. H. Weetman and edited by Hugo Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1960); St Ignatius Loyola, *Counsels for Jesuits: Selected Letters and Instructions*, translated by William J. Young and edited by Joseph Tylenda (Chicago: Loyola U, 1985).

its many forms. Unlike some authors, I do not advocate replacing the term 'poverty' in future contemporary translations of the *Spiritual Exercises* or in the documents of religious communities. However I strongly suggest that directors should provide clear explanations as to what Ignatius meant by the 'graces of poverty'. Michael Ivens advises, 'The text is likely to require clarification and a modicum of commentary if the exercitant today is to discover its real meaning and personal application'.[5]

In explaining what Ignatius meant by 'poverty', the spiritual director must keep in mind the first part of Annotation 15, which instructs the director to communicate less rather than more in order to allow the exercitant to experience the personal and intimate guidance and care of God. However, the term is so open to misinterpretation that the director must intervene and explain what Ignatius meant by 'poverty', lest it become confusing and distracting during a retreat.

I describe 'poverty' as possessing various 'graces' because they are not distinguished in any specific hierarchical order. 'Grace' is also the term that Michael Ivens chose to use in his commentaries: 'The graces represent a conversion of outlook and desire which Ignatius considered integral to all growth in Christ'.[6] For Ignatius the grace to which a person is invited is always the result of God's initiative: 'if his Divine Majesty should be served and if he should wish to choose me for it' (Exx 147). Yet the beloved creature is always invited freely to choose that grace.

The Graces of Poverty

According to Ivens, in his commentary, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, and his posthumously published notes, *Keeping in Touch*, Ignatius differentiates three graces of poverty. Two of these are first introduced, as we have seen, in the *Spiritual Exercises* through the colloquies of the Call of the King, the Two Standards and Three Classes of Persons. A third grace of poverty is explained in Ignatius' letters to the Jesuit community of Padua in 1547 and a letter to European Jesuits in 1552.[7]

Spiritual Poverty

Poverty of spirit, or spiritual poverty, is the grace that is implicit when one gives assent to the relationship of Creator and creature in the First

[5] Michael Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, ediedby Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Gracewing, 2007), 37.
[6] Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, 37.
[7] Ignatius to the members of the society in Padua, 7 August 1547, in *Letters and Instructions*, 203–207; to the members of the Society throughout Europe, 24 December 1552, in *Letters and Instructions*, 405.

Principle and Foundation—that each human person has been created with an explicit purpose, which is to love, and that all created things are means to help humans express that love. 'From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it.' (Exx 23.4) This is in essence the meaning of 'indifference', a term which Ignatius introduces in the First Principle and Foundation.

The virtue of indifference is at the heart of the grace of spiritual poverty. 'The spiritually poor accept all things from God, making use of and enjoying God's creation according to God's will.'[8] As Michael Ivens explains in his commentary on the Two Standards, 'spiritual poverty denotes an attitude that does not look to riches and honour for a security cover against God, but uses and enjoys these as gifts, and only in relation to God's service and praise'.[9] The aim of Ignatius is never to dispossess a person. As he wrote from Venice in August 1537 to Peter Contarini, a future bishop who made the Spiritual Exercises under Ignatius: 'for yourself it is more appropriate to take care that what you possess does not possess you, that no temporal things possess you, and that you render everything back to him from whom you received everything'.[10]

James Walsh, a long-time editor of *The Way*, further expands this concept by observing that spiritual poverty is not so much concerned with what is material, but with recognising our radical interdependence.

> It is very probably that there has been an over-concentration in the Christian tradition on the actual material poverty of the birth of Christ, and a recurring anxiety to share the poverty of destitution, in order to be a more authentic follower of Christ …. The reality of Christ's poverty at Bethlehem has little or nothing to do with the material. What is central is the manifestation of mission ….[11]

Being spiritually poor through indifference opens us to the mission of proclaiming the gospel. Walsh further comments, 'Francis of Assisi believed that he saw the shape of Gospel-poverty clearly revealed in Crib and Cross: and this not so much in terms of symbol, but of relationship—the total interdependence of Jesus and Mary'.[12] All people are called by God to exercise this grace of spiritual poverty—to recognise our dependence

[8] Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, 37.
[9] Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 110.
[10] Ignatius to Peter Contarini, August 1537, *Letters and Instructions*, 32.
[11] James Walsh, 'The Poverty of the Gospel Community', *The Way Supplement*, 34 (1978), 109.
[12] Walsh, 'Poverty of the Gospel Community', 109.

upon God and to be a grateful, generous and loving steward of all that God has given to us. Michael Ivens sums up the grace of spiritual poverty as a 'Christ-centered attitude that transforms a person's experience of all reality and the quality of their entire commerce with it'.[13]

Actual Poverty

Along with spiritual poverty, Ignatius introduces only one other grace of poverty in the *Spiritual Exercises*: 'actual poverty'. The retreatant is encouraged to ask Jesus for the grace 'to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual' (Exx 98). A twofold definition, found in the commentary of George Ganss, represents the traditional approach. On the one hand, Ganss declares, 'actual poverty is the lack of material goods; spiritual poverty is detachment from them whether one has them or not'. On the other hand, 'The term actual poverty can also mean the vowed poverty of a religious institute'. According to Ganss, 'Ignatius left it to the exercitant to take whichever meaning was more useful to him or her at the time'.[14] However, this twofold interpretation has led to ambiguity and confusion among generations of directors and retreatants, as well as those in religious life. The meaning of 'actual poverty' may have been clear to Ignatius' contemporaries, but assuming that he meant 'the lack of material goods' has created misunderstanding concerning its definition and application.

In his later writings, after the approval and publication of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the early 1540s, Ignatius discussed a third grace of poverty, which he called the 'effects of poverty'. Though it is not found in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises,* this additional grace clarifies by elimination what Ignatius originally meant by 'actual poverty'. Michael Ivens explains that the Triple Colloquies of both the Call of the King and the Two Standards differentiate all three graces of poverty (Exx 147), in that the petition to 'reproaches and injuries' implicitly points to the 'effects of poverty'.[15]

In Ignatian writings, the grace of poverty that is practised by religious communities—the poverty of monastic and mendicant forms of religious life—is broadly called 'actual poverty'. Although this is nuanced differently in different communities, it has its basis in the

[13] Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, 37.
[14] *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, translated by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 161, note 60; 168 note 72.
[15] Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, 37 note 30.

Friar Begging, *by Mariano Fortuny, 1862–1867*

communal sharing of goods. Nothing is owned by the individual religious person, but all types of created goods are to be shared communally. Michael J. Buckley has stated: 'In the Formula of the Institute, poverty is not so much opposed to riches as it is to avarice'.[16] The grace of actual poverty is not found essentially in the renunciation of goods, but in the free sharing and use of goods. Analogously, as examples employed by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises* show, the term 'actual poverty' may also fruitfully be applied to the sharing of goods in married life. Spouses are called to hold everything in common. Ownership in marriage is communal and shared.

An important dimension of the 'actual poverty' practised by religious communities is defining 'poverty', not as an end in itself, but as a means to mission. Philip Endean explains,

> When we are faced with a choice, the love of Christ should lead us to prefer the more ascetical and unobtrusive option. At the same time, we are prepared to override this preference for the sake of a more fruitful ministry, a greater divine service.[17]

Ivens offers this additional observation:

> In the Exercises the desire to be poor in order to 'go against' the dynamisms of self-interest and to be personally Christ-like is inextricably bound up with the desire to share the work of Christ in the world …. the desire for poverty fused with the desire for service.[18]

[16] Michael J. Buckley, 'On Becoming Poor', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 8 (1976), 76.
[17] Philip Endean, 'On Poverty with Christ Poor', *The Way*, 47/1–2 (January–April 2008), 59.
[18] Michael Ivens, 'Poverty in the *Constitutions* and other Ignatian Sources', *The Way Supplement*, 61 (1988), 77.

Ignatius himself described this relationship in a letter recounted by Diego Laínez: 'Our intention from the time we set up in Paris was to live in poverty, dedicating ourselves to the service of our Lord by preaching and serving in hospitals'.[19] The close association of actual poverty with edification or good example through ministry to one's neighbour is manifested by Ignatius' concern for gratuity of ministries, 'common life with ordinary people', and the radically mendicant status of the apostolic residences of the new Society of Jesus.[20]

The Effects of Poverty

Though absent from the *Spiritual Exercises*, the grace of the 'effects of poverty' is introduced and defined in later Ignatian writings, particularly the letter to the Jesuit community of Padua of 1547 and a letter to European Jesuits of 1552. Ignatius uses the 'effects of poverty' to describe 'real indigence or lack of goods'. This lack should not be a result of 'involuntary deprivation'—the context for which is inequality or perhaps social sin. 'Real indigence' is freely chosen as a result of God's invitation to the person. The 'effects of poverty' clearly result from God's initiative, not our own. As Michael Ivens writes in *The Way*:

> Ignatius' attitude towards situations of more or less severe physical want is marked by characteristic Ignatian tension. On the one hand, the experience is a privilege, 'no slight grace'; for Christ is present in a unique and profound way to those at one with the really poor of the world. A spirit of genuine poverty will therefore include a desire for such situations—not a romantic nor, necessarily, a heroic desire, but readiness of will and a positive attitude of mind towards real poverty …. On the other hand, Jesuits do not ordinarily make a choice of physical deprivation; it comes—when it comes—as a conditional of apostolic service. What is positively chosen is the external regime defined in the *Constitutions* as ordinary (*communis*).[21]

This distinction between 'actual poverty' and the 'effects of poverty' highlights the service dimension of poverty practised by an apostolic religious community. 'Poverty, the spiritual and religious poverty that the Christian seeks, not the grinding poverty which he hopes to eliminate from the world, gives a freedom to ask questions, to speak out'.[22]

[19] MHSJ, *Scripta* 1, 114, quoted in Ivens, 'Poverty in the *Constitutions*', 77.
[20] Ivens, 'Poverty in the Constitutions', 78.
[21] Ivens, 'Poverty in the Constitutions', 84.
[22] William J. Byron, 'Discernment and Poverty', *The Way Supplement*, 23 (1974), 41.

Ignatius specifically identifies and praises living the 'effects of poverty' in his letter of 7 August 1547 to the newly established college and community of Padua, which suffered owing to a delay in the transfer of a benefice by a benefactor. 'How well you all accept it if you have some experience of poverty …. this grace which his infinite Goodness gives us, both here and there, by granting us to experience holy poverty.'[23] Likewise Ignatius writes on 24 December 1552 to members of the Society throughout Europe suffering the want of necessary goods through the neglect of various promises by benefactors, about,

> … the effects of holy poverty, that is, hardships and the lack of certain temporal things which would be necessary for bodily health and well-being. It is no slight grace that the divine Goodness deigns to confer on us in letting us have a real taste of what we ought to be constantly longing for so as to be conformed to our leader, Jesus Christ, in accord with the vow and holy Institute of our order.[24]

To live the 'effects of poverty' is a privileged and graced gift, if freely chosen, and provides an effective witness of authenticity. However this mode of poverty is rare, and always needs to be discerned as a free choice in response to God's initiative. The contents of these letters and the words of Ignatius indicate that the 'effects of poverty' were not the usual or preferred circumstances for Jesuit communities in the early Society. With the exception of those who were travelling or missioned to foreign lands, so rare was the privilege of the 'effects of poverty' that there are no examples or exhortations towards choosing or living this grace of poverty within the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius' final major project, the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, hints that the 'effects of poverty' are incompatible with the usual style of Jesuit life. In describing that way of life to candidates, Ignatius writes in the General Examen, 'The manner of living is ordinary. It does not contain any regular penances or austerities which are to be practiced through obligation.' (Examen, 1.6[8])

Apostolic Choices

Each person is called to embrace 'poverty of spirit', which is a disposition of radical dependence on God, and the most common context of this choice is within the life of 'actual poverty'. Ignatius gradually discovered the blending of these choices through his own graced experience in

[23] Ignatius to the members of the Society in Padua, in *Letters and Instructions*, 203.
[24] Ignatius to the members of the Society throughout Europe, *Letters and Instructions*, 405.

being led by God 'as a schoolmaster has care for a pupil'.[25] The blending of the disposition of 'poverty of spirit' and the practice of 'actual poverty' forms both person and community to be disposed to discernment. As William Byron writes, 'I regard poverty of spirit as a preparation for, a precondition to, discernment'. Byron also explains the relationship between discernment and the willingness to share as an essential dimension of poverty. 'True discernment will be contingent upon an openness to sharing all that God has given.'[26]

The underlying rationale for choosing any grace of poverty is always apostolic. Even though Ignatius and his companions were ordained in Venice under the 'title of poverty' in 1537, the austere style of life associated with the 'effects of poverty' and lack of necessities was not the vocation to which God was calling them.[27] For this austere form of poverty became an obstacle or stumbling block in his life, compromising his health and diminishing his energy for serving others. The 'effects of poverty' could also be a hindrance. 'Others would flee our friendship if they saw in us people remote from the ordinary ways in dress, food, and so on. For a similarity gives rise to friendship and familiarity, so dissimilarity dissolves these.'[28] Rather than witnessing through austere poverty, Ignatius was called to a life of companionship and service, of sharing his goods, talents and experiences with others. Ignatius was called to the grace of 'actual poverty' that enabled and enhanced

Ignatius giving his fine clothes to a beggar, by Peter Paul Rubens, 1609

[25] *Autobiography*, 27.
[26] Byron, 'Discernment and Poverty', 37–38.
[27] *Autobiography*, n. 93.
[28] MHSJ MN 5, 60, translated in Ivens, 'Poverty in the Constitutions', 85.

his availability and service to others through seeking companions and forming an apostolic community. 'The Companions did not choose to live for the sake of poverty while doing apostolic work. They chose to do apostolic work in poverty.'[29]

Hence, another distinctive form of religious charism was given to the Church and to Christian life, to be practised individually and communally.

> Common life 'in common with ordinary people' (the main sense in which Ignatius uses the term and which he in fact invented) has essentially to do with relationships. More, then, than a matter of material situation, common life is a personal style, and as such its hallmark is 'a certain naturalness, normally to be found among people of good sense'.[30]

The call of Ignatius illustrates that our particular grace of poverty is a gift, depending upon God's generous initiative, and that these three graces should not be arranged as in a hierarchy, since they are all equally meritorious expressions of love.

Poverty in the Spiritual Exercises

Although poverty does not become prominent until the Election material of the Second Week—specifically the Call of the King and the Two Standards—the call to poverty is an implicit underlying dynamic throughout the Spiritual Exercises. Right from the opening statement of the First Principle and Foundation, the text is preparing retreatants to accept the grace of poverty that God is choosing for them. 'Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God, and by means of doing this to save their souls.' (Exx 23) Praise, reverence and service are essential elements in 'spiritual poverty', which is the recognition that God is the giver of all gifts and that we are called to acknowledge our relationship with the Creator. All people are called to this sense of 'spiritual poverty'.

The sensitivity to all created things as gift is at the heart of the daily General Examen (Exx 43), a prayer centred on the blessings we have received each day. These blessings are a reminder of our foundational relationship with the Lord in spiritual poverty. Building upon this foundation, the desire 'not to be deaf to the call of the Lord' (Exx 91),

[29] Joseph Tetlow, 'The Transformation of Jesuit Poverty', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 18 (1986), 3.
[30] Ivens, 'Poverty in the Constitutions', 85.

inviting us to some manifestation of 'actual poverty', becomes more personal and intimate as the Exercises unfold.

The theme of sharing of goods is a strong desire fostered from the beginning of the Second Week. In the Call of the King, the retreatant ponders the invitation of Christ to 'Labor with me' and,

> … be content with the same food I eat, and the drink, and the clothing which I wear, and so forth. So too each one must labor with me during the day…so that each may have a part with me in the victory, just as each has shared in the toil. (Exx 93)

Exx 98, which concludes this contemplation, contains the petition asking for 'any poverty, actual as well as spiritual'. This petition deepens the indifference initially expressed in the First Principle and Foundation and recognises that the call to any specific grace of poverty originates with God's initiative. In the desire 'to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts', and subsequently 'in bearing reproaches and injuries' (Exx 147; the Two Standards), a hint of what Ignatius would later call the 'effects of poverty' can be found.[31]

The Third Prelude of the Two Standards expresses the desire 'for insight into the genuine life which the supreme and truthful commander sets forth, and the grace to imitate him' (Exx 139). The nature of this 'genuine life' is made explicit in 'the address of Christ to his servants and friends whom he is sending on this expedition':

> He recommends that they endeavor to aid all persons, by attracting them, first, to the most perfect spiritual poverty, and also, if the Divine Majesty should be served and should wish to choose them for it, even to no less a degree of actual poverty; and second, by attracting them to a desire of reproaches and contempt, since from these results humility (Exx 146).

The Triple Colloquy at the conclusion of the meditation on the Two Standards reinforces this offering to 'be received under his standard' (Exx 147). In this meditation, the graces of 'spiritual poverty' and 'actual poverty' are intertwined within the retreatant's desire for Ignatian indifference. 'Spiritual poverty does not necessarily imply actual poverty, but it does imply openness to it. Where actual poverty in any form is simply unacceptable, a non-value, there is no spiritual poverty.'[32]

[31] See Ivens, *Keeping in Touch*, 38.
[32] Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 110–111.

Ignatius introduces the Election material by challenging retreatants to investigate 'in which state or way of life does the Divine Majesty wish us to serve him?': either through reformation ('way of life') or permanent commitment ('state of life') (Exx 135). The primary examples that Ignatius uses concern marriage and benefices. At the end of the Election material, Ignatius gives instructions 'Toward Amending and Reforming One's Own Life and State'. What are very interesting about this short section are the examples of reformation that Ignatius uses:

> To make progress toward this end and attain to it, one ought to consider and work out in detail … how large a house and how many persons in it one ought to maintain, how one ought to direct and govern its members, and how to teach them by word and example. So too persons such as these should examine their resources, how much they ought to assign for the house and household, and how much for the poor and other good works. (Exx 189)

These considerations show that those from the same social class into which Ignatius was born were the initial audience that Ignatius had in mind while challenging the retreatant. He does not employ any examples relating to 'effects of poverty', but rather those that pertain to the decisions made within the grace of actual poverty—choices that entail good example, apostolic care, and a discerned stewardship leading to 'your greater glory and praise' (Exx 98) and the salvation of the soul through the gifts of spiritual freedom, shared goods and companionship.

In the 'Ministry of Distributing Alms' found near the conclusion of the *Spiritual Exercises* (Exx 337–344), Ignatius invites retreatants to consider a set of rules that mirrors the same sensitivity to good example, apostolic care and a discerned stewardship. Here again Ignatius addresses an audience that is clearly called by God to specific graces of 'actual poverty' through their commercial and domestic relationships and marital commitments. Their vocations are to develop and make use of their goods in the service of others. Finally, the Contemplation to Attain Love, or *Contemplatio*, as this prayer which follows the Fourth Week is often simply called, presents a clear model for embracing the grace of actual poverty. In the two initial notes to the Contemplation, Ignatius identifies two essential attributes of 'love'. First of all, 'Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words' (Exx 230). And secondly,

> Love consists of a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved

> what he or she has, a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover. (Exx 231)

These two considerations form an ideal description of 'actual poverty', lived in any state of life. They are a clear invitation to embrace and live the grace of 'actual poverty', that total sharing of goods which is a response to the calls of companionship and service.

Following the Call

Establishing a usable and common vocabulary with clearly agreed definitions can address and clarify how Ignatius identified and applied 'poverty' according to its three graces. Sharing these distinctions with those who pray the *Spiritual Exercises* serves to make the consideration of 'poverty' less ambiguous, more realistic and less daunting for them in following the call of Jesus as a co-labourer in his vineyard. For those in vowed religious life, such distinctions will bring clarity to discussing and implementing the personal and communal renewal of committed poverty.

All people are called to the grace of 'spiritual poverty'. Most followers of the gospel are also called to a life of service by sharing common goods as an expression of love and commitment to another person (in marriage) or to a community—as a sign of witness, for good stewardship and as a sign of gratitude. The call to 'real indigence' through the grace of the 'effects of poverty' is rare. Ignatius initially perceived after his conversion that Jesus was calling him to the 'effects of poverty', but this call was not permanently confirmed through his prayer life and ministry.

The topic of the gospel commitment to poverty continues to be complex, troublesome and full of paradoxes, for Jesuits in understanding and living this central charism of our way of life, and also for all Christians who look to Ignatian spirituality as a source of their prayer and commitment to the gospel. I hope that I have been able to assist retreatants and other committed believers to give a realistic YES to their commitment to Jesus—to follow him spiritually, but also in service of love through the generous sharing and stewardship of goods, talents, opportunities and energy.

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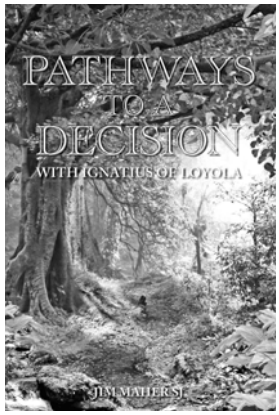
RECENT BOOKS

Jim Maher, *Pathways to a Decision with Ignatius of Loyola* (Dublin: Messenger, 2020). 978 1 7881 2270 2, pp.120, £11.95.



A lifetime of teaching and pastoral care in a Jesuit comprehensive school gives Jim Maher a wealth of insight into how Ignatian spirituality speaks to people of all ages and backgrounds. 'The purpose of this book', he writes, 'is to present some of the key ideas of St Ignatius Loyola's spirituality in an accessible way' (p.7). This aim is well achieved. Real-life scenarios provide relevance. Turns of phrase refresh the familiar. Literary references and poetry, which 'has the knack of invading the spirit by getting under the intellectual radar and nourishing the heart' (p.7), make for a satisfyingly readable book. User-friendly reflection charts make it personal.

This is also a work of translation. The Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises become 'what it's all about, first things first'. Consolation and desolation become good space and bad space. The Examen becomes 'gathering nuggets'. On the Loyola family crest, two wolves stand around a cooking pot. Ignatius, 'practising cognitive behavioural therapy before it was invented' (p.18), becomes a wolf-whisperer, taming competing spirits within our hearts. In a Cherokee story there are two wolves in the heart of every person, one good and one bad, fighting for our spirit. The wolf we feed is the one who wins. The wolf-whisperer shows how to tame 'disordered affections, represented by the bad wolf, otherwise known as the bad spirit' (p.13)—the one who deflects us from our true selves.

We are led through Ignatius' discovery of his own true self, recognising God at work in the back and forth of his desires, feelings and thoughts as he read the lives of Christ or the saints and romances. 'Over time he concluded that God communicates his hopes for us through our desires, feelings and thoughts' (p.16). The Principle and Foundation means that our internal GPS is fixed on God, who wants to share life and love with us, and whom we meet and praise in all human experience, whether well or ill, rich or poor, 'dungfork or slop-pail' in hand, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it.

How do we know if God is leading us, or if a bad spirit is manipulating us? By looking closely at our moods, feelings, thoughts and desires. Fortunately, Ignatius gives us guidelines, 22 in all. 'The bottom line … is where they are leading' (p.31). Fourteen guidelines are presented, concluding with a chart, where we can locate ourselves. Where am I? How do I respond? How do the spirits lead me? What are their 'tactics'? Finding God in all things is a key Ignatian concept: finding God at work within and without. The author describes how we can recognise the action, and therefore the presence of God, in human encounter, in joy and in sorrow, in the natural world, in holy places, in all aspects of life. In discerning our experiences, we gather data on the way to making decisions.

Varied scenarios illustrate how the Examen works in the lives of real people, with families to care for, sacrifices to make, the wear and tear of everyday life to be coped with. We are guided through the moments of being still, praying for light to know what to be grateful for, recognising where God has been present or absent, looking ahead to the next slice of time. The author acknowledges that gratitude is a challenge for many, especially if life has dealt a bad hand

Things that undermine our true selves come in many guises: vulnerabilities, addictions, habits, attitudes, blind spots, behaviours and much more. Traditional Ignatian terminology deals with these under the heading of the Particular Examen, which aims at eliminating sins and faults. Chapter seven, 'Good Riddance', invites the reader to address the associated negativity, going against it (*agere contra*) and exploring the positives that bring us back to our true selves.

A passenger is upset at an airport: '"I'll never fly Bargain Air again!" …. This way of decision-making in the heat of the moment contradicts Ignatius' way of decision-making' (p.74). Certain dispositions are necessary. If our mind is already made up, if we decide while in bad space, if our options are not realistic, if we haven't gathered the necessary information, if we are not aware of our biases, if we don't ask for divine assistance throughout, it's not going to happen. Mind, heart and spirit need to work in harmony.

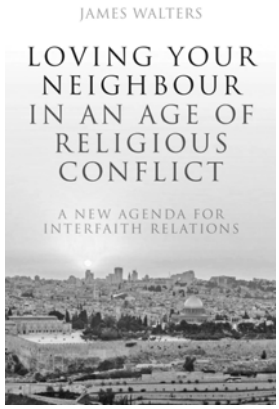
The six Ignatian ways that can help lead to a decision make up chapter nine. First off, Paul, approaching Damascus, is so sure that there is no possibility of doubt. Next is the person with mixed feelings, who is advised to spend time with each option, gathering data, seeking advice, seeking confirmation through discernment. A case study of a teacher and mother who is invited to take on a parish assignment illustrates this. In a similar vein, a Jesuit vocation began to take shape when, 'It dawned on him that he was getting more peace and satisfaction from serving in a care facility than from nights out partying with his fellow students' (p.83). 'If a decision has

still not been arrived at, Ignatius suggests a very practical exercise involving pen and paper …. In this exercise reason rather than emotion is the guiding force' (pp.83–84). Having listed the pros and cons of each option, 'I must come to a decision because of weightier motives and not because of any sensual inclination' (p.84). Three other methods are still available, using the imagination. What would I advise a stranger to do in a similar situation? What decision would I make on my deathbed? At the last judgment, what would I like to have done?

Chapter ten, 'Oasis Moments', offers a variety of ways of staying in good space, from quiet moments and walks in nature, to pilgrimages and retreats. Echoing Robert Frost, the author concludes: 'the Ignatian pathway is the one that "has made all the difference" for so many' (p.101). Like the *Spiritual Exercises* itself, this book is not just to be read but to be worked through. Beginners will learn, the advanced will appreciate it, and instructors will find it a rich resource.

Kevin O'Rourke SJ

James Walters, *Loving Your Neighbour in an Age of Religious Conflict: A New Agenda for Interfaith Relations* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019). 978 1 7859 2563 4, pp.168, £16.99.



This is a very good book with an important 'new agenda'. The title may not set pulses racing, but having reached the end of its tightly packed argument, it turns out to be an exact description of the author's intentions. The introduction gets quickly to the point, challenging two stereotypical Western approaches to the management of religious diversity: one that 'gives no space to genuinely religious voices', the other that would turn them into 'emotional/ethical responses to spiritual sentiment' (p.14). In their place we are promised a Christian contribution to the building of a 'healthy pluralism'. Neither a fully fledged theological thesis nor a summary overview of the often fraught debate about the place of religion in the modern world, this book is a record of experience and a plea for hope. Can we find in our religious narratives not a conflictual politics of identity but a source of virtuous living which sees the other not as problem but as gift?

The author, James Walters, is an Anglican priest and senior lecturer in practice at the London School of Economics, where he founded the Faith Centre in 2014. This is a university chaplaincy with a difference. LSE is a secular university committed to the demands of social science, but Walters makes much of the fact that the student body is extraordinarily diverse, with large numbers of students coming from parts of the world where religious faith is taken for granted as an aspect of normal life. The aim of the centre is not to subvert the academic seminar but to supplement it at the more human level, allowing religious and non-religious voices to be heard in a way that promotes a wise learning about how ancient memories and the complex pressures of the everyday are forever interacting.

In many ways the most telling parts of the book are the little stories that preface each of the five chapters. These poignant records of experience, says Walters, are intended to give 'contextual expression to the more theoretical content of the chapter' (p. 14). They do more than that. They remind us that what we tend to think of as discrete systems of thought or barely suppressed tribalisms are diverse communities made up of flesh-and-blood human beings.

After a few well-aimed (and, for the most part, well-deserved) shots at the more comfortable versions of the theology of religions, Walters turns to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which frames his introductory as well as concluding sections. Ostensibly the parable is all about what it means to be a good neighbour. But Walters argues that this is the easy interpretation. The Samaritan is the despised other of orthodox Judaism, and Jesus is challenging the unspoken assumption that the world is divided into tribes, Jews and Samaritans, righteous and sinners—or, in today's terms, Us and Them. This takes Walters to the heart of his book: two wonderfully dense chapters on the ambivalent phenomenon of the return of the religious in contemporary culture. What factors lead to the growth of religious conflict and what needs to be done to develop an authentic religious literacy which will promote empathetic dialogue between communities and action for social transformation?

His response includes a brief analysis of various ways of understanding the relationship between religion and the political process. Some are familiar, most obviously tribalist identity politics and post-Enlightenment secularism, which either privatises religion or patronises it in order to serve the all-dominating interests of a political consensus. Some are more obscure, such as the modern liberal 'politics of inevitability' (the sense that the future is just more of the same) and its more recent successor, the 'politics of eternity' (the apocalyptic narrative of populists such as Putin and Trump, that only the strong man can save 'the people' from crisis and doom). In all of these 'politics' the religious is in danger of being obscured or colonised,

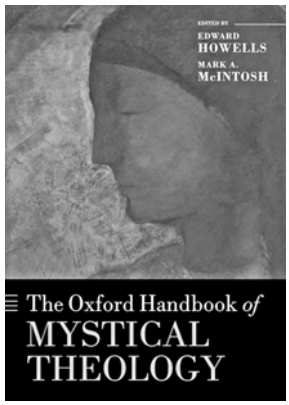
made subservient to 'self-evident' universal forces such as human rights and the market. Under Walters's gentle questioning they turn out to be less global inevitabilities than constructions of the Western liberal consensus. By way of response he calls for a generous and imaginative religious literacy that can appeal to policy makers and diplomats, on the one hand, and teachers and pastoral workers, on the other. Although he does not use the term, it is tempting to call this a 'politics of transcendence', involving a *theological* sensibility that embraces less self-regarding ways of being human and works actively to promote better ways of being citizens.

Walters is at his best when taking stock of the human story. Whether engaging with scripture or with the practical questions about how the best of interpersonal virtues can be nurtured in the service of a healthily plural society, he is a sound guide to sympathetic and intelligent pastoral practice. The final chapter, on becoming good neighbours, is a masterly subversion of the binary logic that dominates so much contemporary thinking. Jesus is not just commending the Samaritan because he does the 'right thing' when the religious professionals are avoiding the issue; rather it is the religious other who 'turns out to be a blessing to us and the source of our healing'. The new agenda Walters commends is not a matter of my making space for the other but, more radically, allowing the other to take me into another space, *his or her* space, where I have to undergo a more profound dispossession and learning.

Walters is correct that the theology of religions is in need of a political theology. The practice of interreligious relations has long understood that the so-called dialogues of 'common life' and 'common action' are best promoted through a generous hospitality to the other which puts the other's interests on a par with my own. Now in a world where the much-trumpeted 'end of history' has suddenly rebounded on itself and democracy is under threat—even in the West—something more robust and nuanced is needed. This book lays down an important marker. Lively yet measured, always thought-provoking and never dull, its lessons will take time to absorb but the effort will be worthwhile. The political and theological issues it raises are discussed with an accessible clarity and intelligent sensitivity that will ensure the non-specialist does not become overwhelmed with the complexity of history and the sheer intractability of the social reality. Its great merit is that it informs without drowning in detail and inspires with a hope-filled vision of what might yet be possible. 'Loving your neighbour' is about people of faith learning how the energy that issues in a selfless, disinterested love for the other is itself revealed in what the all-compassionate God does in making *all* human beings 'in the image and likeness of God' and loving us into life.

Michael Barnes SJ

***The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, edited by Edward Howells and Mark McIntosh (Oxford: OUP, 2020). 978 0 1987 2238 0, pp. 720, £110.**



While acknowledging that mystical theology cannot be separated from human experience, in contrast with much recent and contemporary writing, this book does not locate the mystical in unusual experiences, nor does it pay very much attention to such experiences. It is important for readers to know, therefore, that one particular version of 'mystical theology' underpins this volume as a whole and the editors' choice of topics and contributors. Some of its more important features may be noted.

The version of mystical theology presented here is both contemporary and ancient. It is contemporary in that at its heart is work done on mysticism in the last few decades at the University of Chicago school of theology, seen, for example, in Bernard McGinn's magisterial *The Presence of God*, a multi-volume history of Western Christian mysticism, and in the book *Mystical Theology* by Mark McIntosh, co-editor of this volume with Edward Howells (who gained his PhD on John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila at the same school of theology). This approach to mystical theology is ancient in that it is grounded in patristic and medieval spiritual and theological traditions of both Eastern and Western Christianity and in a concept of 'mystery' and the 'mystical' as that which is 'hidden'. Hence mystical theology has to do with expressing, describing, responding to, exploring, reflecting on, acting upon and fostering individual and communal encounters with the 'hidden' God, who is unfathomable mystery, at once concealed and revealed, known and unknown.

Such encounters take place not only in the scriptures and the Church but wherever this divine mystery is present. Hence, too, for the editors and many of the contributors, mystical theology is not a minor, rather peripheral and somewhat odd branch of Christian theology, but its foundation and lifeblood. That is because good theology springs from good spiritual practice: being receptive to the mystery of God in worship, prayer, contemplation and life is a prerequisite for both good theology and right action.

There are several reasons why readers of *The Way* might want to make a note of this *Handbook* as an up-to-date and informative work of reference. First, many of the chapters are insightful companions for reading and interpreting classic mystical authors and texts, and understanding related theological issues. Secondly, the book as a whole offers a consistent approach to mystical theology in the broader context of Christian theology. This

approach seeks to overcome any perceived dichotomy between spirituality and theology, and sees worship, prayer, contemplation, biblical interpretation, theological reflection, ethical living and social practice as inseparably bound to one another. Thirdly, the interpretations of spiritual texts and authors and the discussions of theological issues in this volume are informed by the best contemporary scholarship and, collectively, by decades of ministry, prayer, reflection and teaching at graduate level in Christian educational settings in North America and Europe. Finally, the parts of the book which offer readings of classic authors and texts are marked, for the most part, by imagination and clarity of thought and expression, and do not presuppose in the reader a wealth of prior technical theological expertise.

The handbook contains an introduction by the editors followed by 33 chapters from different contributors. These are arranged in four parts. Part 1 lays out the understanding of mystical theology that underpins the volume and its relation to human experience, followed by a historical genealogy of Christian mystical traditions and, finally, a contemporary perspective on mystical theology. The chapters in parts 2 and 3 are also likely to be of particular interest to readers of *The Way*.

The focus of part 2 is a survey of past and present sources, contexts and practices of spirituality and mysticism. These include liturgy, asceticism and prayer, a chapter on mystics as teachers, a study of the lives and visions of selected figures and an account of 'mystical poetics'. Each chapter includes 'case studies' to illustrate more general points. Part 3 offers surveys of a range of images and concepts which notable mystics and theologians have used to express encounters with the mystery of God and consciousness of God's presence. These include, for example, ways of understanding the image and likeness of God in humans, metaphors of 'journey', 'depth', 'ground' and 'abyss', the use in some texts of erotic or nuptial images and concepts of Trinitarian indwelling and mystical union. In part 3 as in part 2 general points are illustrated by the analysis of case studies.

It is in part 4 that the volume presents the reader with a detailed exposition of mysticism as the true foundation and heart of Christian theology rightly understood. Here two chapters on relationships between mystical theology and philosophy are followed by a series of presentations and discussions of a 'mystical theology' perspective on most of the main branches of theology in Catholic and Orthodox programmes. These include the theology of the Trinity, incarnation and christology, the theology of the Spirit, Christian anthropology, ecclesiology, a theology of social life and action, and finally essays on interreligious dialogue and eschatology. In part 4, as before, readings of spiritual and mystical texts, ancient and modern, are offered by way of illustration of theological positions. Some of these chapters demand more by way of familiarity with philosophical and theological concepts,

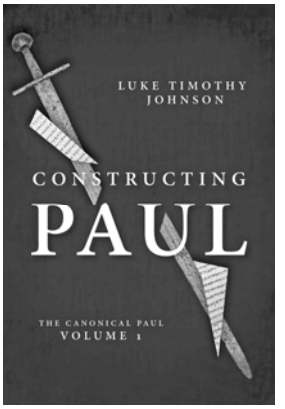
language and patterns of thought. But there are also succinct and accessible accounts of surprising, original and not-often-encountered forms of 'mystical theology' among the texts under consideration.

The volume has other useful features. Each chapter has suggestions for further reading and a bibliography. Separate indices of names and topics allow readers to search for relevant material easily and quickly. An e-book is also available (on Kindle at a reduced price of £77.00 at the time of writing) and an online version by subscription. At £110.00 the hardback is clearly aimed at institutional libraries and is beyond what individuals may be willing or able to afford. It is to be hoped that, in line with other Oxford Handbooks, a paperback version will be available soon at a considerably reduced price for those who wish to have it on their shelves rather than consult it in a library.

In conclusion I would like to point to what I see as a weakness in an otherwise impressive volume. Given that, as the editors acknowledge, this book represents a particular view of mystical theology, it seems to me its value as a handbook would have been enhanced if slightly more had been done to contextualise this view for students and non-specialist readers. This approach to mystical theology has its home in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of theology and practice. So the inclusion of one or two essays locating this particular understanding of mystical theology in relation to other perspectives, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, pointing out similarities and differences with some critical assessment, would enable the mystical theology which underpins this volume to be seen within a broader spectrum.

David Lonsdale

Luke Timothy Johnson, *Constructing Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020). 978 0 8028 0758 8, pp. 375, £40.99.



This is a most refreshing book, for Johnson allows us to understand by 'Paul' all thirteen of the letters ascribed to Paul in the canon. This obviously challenges what has been for several generations of scholarship the accepted understanding of the situation. He invites us, therefore, to read Paul in the light of the riches of the Roman Catholic tradition, notably his sacramental, ecclesial and mystical theology, while avoiding the trap of arguing for an exclusively Catholic reading of the apostle.

Instead of reducing 'Paul' to Galatians, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians,

the author introduces the helpful idea of 'clusters' of Pauline letters. There are, he argues, five of these clusters, namely the Thessalonian letters, Galatians and Romans, the Corinthian letters, Colossians and Ephesians, the 'letters to delegates' (what you would call the 'Pastorals') as well as the extraordinary document that is Philemon. If he is right about this (and he argues very well for it), then we need another model for classifying the elements of the Pauline corpus than the old one: the division into seven 'authentic' letters (those, it sometimes seems, that are deemed sufficiently Protestant) and six 'inauthentic' (those tainted with *Frühkatholizismus*).

This has seemed to me for some years now an increasingly tired classification, and it does not really cover the reality of these very different documents. This means that we need to look again at our models of 'authorship': Paul has the responsibility for all of the letters, rather than necessarily having written every single word himself. This is how Johnson expresses it:

> Paul is the author, but not necessarily the writer, of his entire correspondence, and imagining his delegates and co-workers as participating in the formation of the letters that are sent out in his name (and therefore authorised by him) is a historically and sociologically more plausible model of composition, and one that helps to account for the peculiar combinations of similarity and difference that characterise the collection as a whole (p. 92).

He draws a very illuminating analogy with the collaborative 'authorship' of the annual address to Congress by the President of the United States.

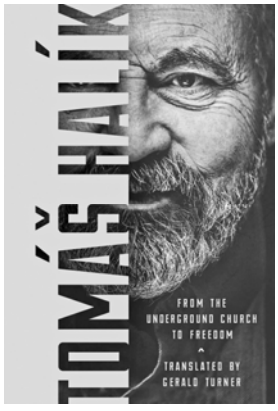
No one before the nineteenth century ever thought of denying Pauline authorship to any of the corpus; and Johnson makes the excellent point that, for Paul, letter-writing was the least favoured mode of contact with his churches. The ideal was face-to-face contact—Paul actually being present to the community. Second best was his presence by way of delegates such as Timothy or Sosthenes; and only when neither of those was possible did he write letters. All his letters were occasional, in the sense that they arose out of trouble or conflict or misunderstanding in a local church, at a particular moment in Paul's life.

All the letters show signs of care and of rhetorical art (as we are more aware these days than we used to be); but Paul is not a systematic theologian. He has, however, an unfailing religious purpose: he is sent with a commission from God and the Risen Lord Jesus Christ for assemblies that have been gathered by the call of God. And Paul did not, Johnson is clear, 'invent' Christianity; he joined an existing cult and followed its practices. He used existing hymns (for example) that he had learnt from the community; he assumed that the basic narrative (about the death of Jesus, for instance) was known to his hearers—even in the Roman Church, which he had not visited.

Paul is a good first-century Jew, familiar with Roman rule and with Greek culture, and cast in the prophetic mould; and he is deeply committed to a world that has been shaped by Torah. His version of the scriptures was certainly the Septuagint, although at times he appears to use the Masoretic Text. It is further the case that Paul's perspective and diction are entirely scriptural, while at the same time he belongs to the extremely complex reality that we tend loosely to characterize as 'Graeco-Roman'. And at every stage, Johnson argues, 'the texture of experience', both ordinary and extraordinary, is decisive for Paul, to a point where he should rather be called an existentialist philosopher than a systematic theologian. That is the context in which he is driven to call Jesus 'Lord', and to speak of the power of the Spirit. Not everyone will agree with every word of this book (I was uncertain about his dismissal of 'God's plantation' in 1 Corinthians as 'only a minor metaphor'); but I commend it warmly, and in particular the brilliant final chapter on Paul as 'oppressor or liberator'.

Nicholas King SJ

Tomáš Halík, *From the Underground Church to Freedom*, translated by Gerald Turner (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame, 2019). 978 0 2681 0677 5, pp. 374, $35.00.



For years, I wanted to write a critical introduction to the life and thought of Tomáš Halík. By the time this autobiographical memoir appeared on the shelves of bookshops, I had abandoned the idea. Critical this book is not; but it is certainly inspiring and revealing. The name Halík has been on the radar for some years: the author of spiritual bestsellers, an eloquent writer and public intellectual, university professor, student pastor, popular preacher, trusted confessor, winner of the Templeton Prize. The list of achievements, publications and activities bears witness to an extraordinary career and invites the reader to learn more about this exceptional man whom, many suppose, we already know very well.

Indeed, those who are familiar with Halík's previous books—translated into about twenty languages at the moment—might be acquainted with some of the stories and ideas included in his autobiography, and thus feel

pleasantly comfortable in the company of a congenial writer. Yet this book is different. It provides us with new lenses for reading Halík, with the full disclosure of his context—that of a country and Church in the turbulent times of a totalitarian regime, later facing the challenges of newly acquired democratic freedom.

From the Underground Church to Freedom is the memoir of a churchman, priest and spiritual leader deeply rooted in and reflecting on the Catholic tradition. It is also the memoir of a Czech citizen who does not hesitate to confess his allegiance to the humanism and democratic orientation of the elites of his country (be it statesmen such as Tomáš Masaryk and Václav Havel, intellectuals such as Karel Čapek and Jan Patočka, or church authorities such as Cardinal Tomášek). Finally, it is an account of the Church in an untypical historical period and of one of its untypical servants. By contrast with his previously published theological essays and interviews, combining the eloquence of an academic scholar with the accessible language of a popularising writer, Halík presents himself here as a priest—a spiritual father. It is as though with increasing age Halík the professor declines whereas Halík the priest grows.

After a short mediation on the purpose of writing an autobiography, the book begins with a complex and very detailed account of the historical circumstances in which Halík was raised and found his way to the Church. The author describes a good number of places in Prague and beyond, writing down lists of names almost in the form of encyclopedia references, which might in a certain sense be too much for one autobiography. Nevertheless, patience pays off. The sections on the underground Church, Halík's clandestine ordination and secret ministry are perhaps the most rewarding for a Western readership. What was it like to be a priest without official state approval, serving the people while maintaining a secular job? What kind of structure and organization did the underground Church have? In what circumstances did the Church live under the communist regime, which was no less totalitarian and oppressive in the 1970s (though in different, cunning ways) than during the brutal terror of Stalinism in the 1950s which devastated the religious life *tout court*?

The most telling pages of Halík's autobiography describe barely imaginable situations and ways of working in the struggle for the good and for truth. It is less forthcoming about the differences, even discrepancies, between various underground groups, not to mention the tensions between official and unofficial church structures which erupted into a conflict concerning the future of the Church in secular Czech society after the collapse of communism.

This conflict has not entirely healed even today, and caused Halík himself trouble and frustration, as when his teaching position at the Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague came to an end rather quickly and not without noise. It must be noted, however, that the author—who has already entered the seventh decade of a very productive and adventurous life—recalls disappointments and disillusions without bitterness or any vengeful sentiment.

Thanks to this book, the reader comes to a better understanding of who Tomáš Halík is: a priest who lived a very exciting life while working for the underground Church and was ready to continue serving that Church under his homeland's newly acquired freedom and democracy. He faced difficulties because of his intellectually orientated and open views on Christianity and pastoral activity, and found consolation in teaching sociology, psychology and philosophy of religion at a secular department. He enjoyed the company of students, yet never developed into a pure-blooded academic scholar of religion, writing very successful spiritual-existential texts and books addressing the troubles and challenges of Western post-Christian society, for which he won a number of well-deserved awards. These enabled him to travel around the world and share his ideas with many Christians, and even with those who find themselves beyond the borders of the Church. Finally he is slowly returning to a deeper engagement with and within the Church, supporting the reform movement of Pope Francis and further developing his views on spiritual life in the contemporary world.

The wine matures and tastes different every year. Halík develops in the same way. The picture he has been painting over the years, namely his essayist spiritual-existential writings, is now framed by the entire context of his life. One can conclude that the legacy of Tomáš Halík will be the courage to look at the spiritual situation of one's own life as well as at that of the entire Church from one perspective and then another. This is the hermeneutical key to the remarkable life of a priest who needs no other books to explain his life and thought. He has managed to do everything in this autobiography, which is at the same time a profound confession about his relationship to the Church and, above all, to God, whom he has been meeting in the people on the way.

Martin Koči

Ann W. Astell, *Saving Fear in Christian Spirituality* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame, 2019). 978 0 2681 0621 8, pp. 432, $60.00.

Many people think of the 'fear of God' as an antiquated Old Testament concern, out of step with modern sensibilities and at odds with the wisdom of Christian spirituality. This position raises a problem for Christians, however, because, according to the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, Jesus commanded human fear of God: 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matthew 10:28; compare Luke 12:4–5). This was a command by Jesus to fear *God*, and not, as some commentators have mistakenly suggested, a command to fear an evil power. (For a related Old Testament command, see Deuteronomy 6:13; compare Jeremiah 32:40.)

The fear of God commanded by Jesus is evidently a state of human uneasiness regarding *moral accountability* from God, given human moral inadequacy and weakness before God and the utter seriousness of God about the moral direction of a human life, either conforming or not conforming to God's character and will. Jesus commanded something good, rather than something bad, regarding human fear of God.

Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus himself as being in a state of intense fear in Gethsemane: 'In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground' (Luke 22:44). Jesus' response to his fear, which did not remove the fear, was his resolve to put God's will first, above his own initial will to avoid his impending death: 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done' (Luke 22:42; compare Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39). This *Gethsemane response* to fear is compatible with fear of God, including fear of God's perfect will. Jesus, according to Luke's Gospel, expressed intense fear in relation to God's redemptive will for his own future, particularly the terrifying death God called him to undergo in Jerusalem. Jesus showed awareness of his impending death at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19–22), but this awareness did not remove his fear expressed in Gethsemane.

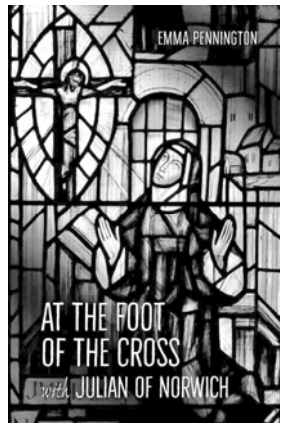
This book approaches what is a complicated topic from the standpoint of the history of Christian theology and spirituality, offering broad coverage along with numerous historical comparisons and assessments. The book's main sections give a sense of its historical breadth: 'Fear at the Foundations:

Biblical and Patristic' (three chapters, on Luke's Gospel, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Augustine); 'Fear in Medieval Meditation' (three chapters, on Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas and the anonymous author of *Contemplations on the Dread and Love of God)*; 'Fear amongst the Reformers' (three chapters, on Luther and Melanchthon, Francis de Sales and Pascal); 'Fear in the Modern Debate' (two chapters, on Julian of Norwich and Schleiermacher, and John Henry Newman and Kierkegaard); 'Fear on the Eve of the New Millennium' (five chapters, on Léon Bloy, Fatima, Rapture theology in American evangelicalism, Liberation theology in Sobrino, and Joseph Kentenich and Emilie Engel). The sweep of the book's coverage is breathtaking, but the chapters maintain scholarly responsibility in their historical presentations and assessments.

An important lesson for Christian spirituality is that we need not fear the morally accountable human fear of God. Such fear of God, commanded by Jesus, can motivate obeying God and even loving God and others. Gethsemane is the model here. This book serves well in pointing to many historical milestones in confronting the important topic of fearing God.

Paul Moser

Emma Pennington, *At the Foot of the Cross with Julian of Norwich* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2020). 978 0 119 857 46519 1, pp.168, £9.99.



One of the greatest and most delightful blessings of *At the Foot of the Cross* is the fact that Emma Pennington—who has been studying Julian of Norwich's writings for almost twenty years and, latterly, lecturing on them—writes with such love of her subject. Those who are coming to Julian for the first time, as well as those of us who have known her for rather longer, cannot fail to be moved by Pennington's text. It is totally approachable and absorbing. Throughout her ten chapters she invites and enables her readers to connect with Julian, and with God. Emma Pennington is the canon missioner at Canterbury Cathedral and holds a doctorate from Oxford University on 'Julian and the Sacrament of Penance'.

In her preface Pennington describes—honestly and vulnerably—her initial encounter with the fourteenth-century mystical theologian and her purpose

in writing: 'I seek to share with you this experience of encountering God through Julian's words, crystallised within a medieval text' (p.10). After this, and a contextualising introduction, we have ten chapters divided into six sections focusing on encounter, and then on Julian's first, second, fourth, eighth and ninth revelations. There is a helpful, brief and up-to-date list of books for 'Further Reading',

Each chapters centres on an aspect or image from the revelations which draws the present-day reader towards five visions of the passion: the crown of thorns, Jesus' face, the blood flowing from Jesus, Jesus' death on the cross, and paradise. It would thus make an excellent Lent study book. The chapters include a section, 'Going Deeper', in which we meditate words of Julian, a handful of 'Questions to Ponder or Discuss' and a biblical quotation 'to carry into daily life'. Whether it is the quantity of the blood, or the colour of Christ's dying face, we are challenged to express our response or reaction.

The writer becomes even more vulnerable in the conclusion, and shares a long-term experience which gave her a deeper understanding of faith, church and prayer as 'the darkness becomes our light' (p.154). This year, as many have had an unprecedented experience of self-isolation, a great number of people have found, through Julian's words, that Jesus can break through the walls of our pain and suffering, offering us love and hope. Pennington ends with the words:

> Julian's writings offer us a revelation of divine love, and she speaks many beautiful and comfortable words that have been loved and valued over the years. But this book has not been about those words; instead it has focused on the heart of her revelation, which is a vision of the cross, and Julian's invitation to sit with her at its foot until we, like her, behold the cross, our own cross, the cross of others, the cross of the world, the cross of Christ as a revelation of divine love. (p.154)

Luke Penkett CJN