GOD NOWADAYS

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January 2005

Alexandra Pleshoyano, a theologian from Canada, writes on Etty Hillesum and her experience of God.

André Myre, a retired professor of biblical studies in Montreal, suggests some new ways of reading the New Testament's stories of Christmas.

Sue Delaney, a psychologist from Sydney, explores women's spiritual awakening across different countries and traditions.

John Pridmore, rector of Hackney in East London and specialist in the spirituality of children, discerns an important spiritual message in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

Kathleen McManus OP, a Canadian theologian working in Portland, Oregon, reports on Edward Schillebeeckx' rich theology of suffering and liberation.

Denise Inge, a writer from Cambridgeshire in England, introduces us to the seventeenth-century Puritan mystic, Thomas Traherne.

Tim Muldoon, a university teacher in Pennsylvania, considers the spirituality of young adults today and the Ignatian Principle and Foundation.

Rogelio García Mateo SJ, from the Gregorian University in Rome, points up the variety of early texts of the *Spiritual Exercises*,

which we illustrate with some extracts from the fullest of these texts: the so-called ***Exercises of Master John***.

Our ***book reviews*** are written by

Jane Livesey CJ, who lives in Cambridge UK, and serves as Provincial for her congregation,
Paul Nicholson SJ, director of Loyola Hall Jesuit Spirituality Centre, near Liverpool,
William Wizeman SJ, who teaches at Fordham University in New York,
Gerard J. Hughes SJ, philosopher and Master of Campion Hall, Oxford,
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Nicholas King SJ, writer and New Testament scholar, from Campion Hall in Oxford.

The Way *is an international journal of contemporary Christian spirituality, published by the British Jesuits. Through writing informed by critical and creative scholarship, it aims to provide a forum in which thoughtful Christians, from different walks of life and different traditions, can reflect on God's continuing action in human experience. Among particular concerns of* ***The Way*** *are:*

- *the role of spirituality in the struggle for justice*
- *the spiritual issues raised by intercultural and interreligious dialogue*
- *the interactions between spirituality, politics and culture*
- *the fostering and development of the Ignatian spiritual tradition*

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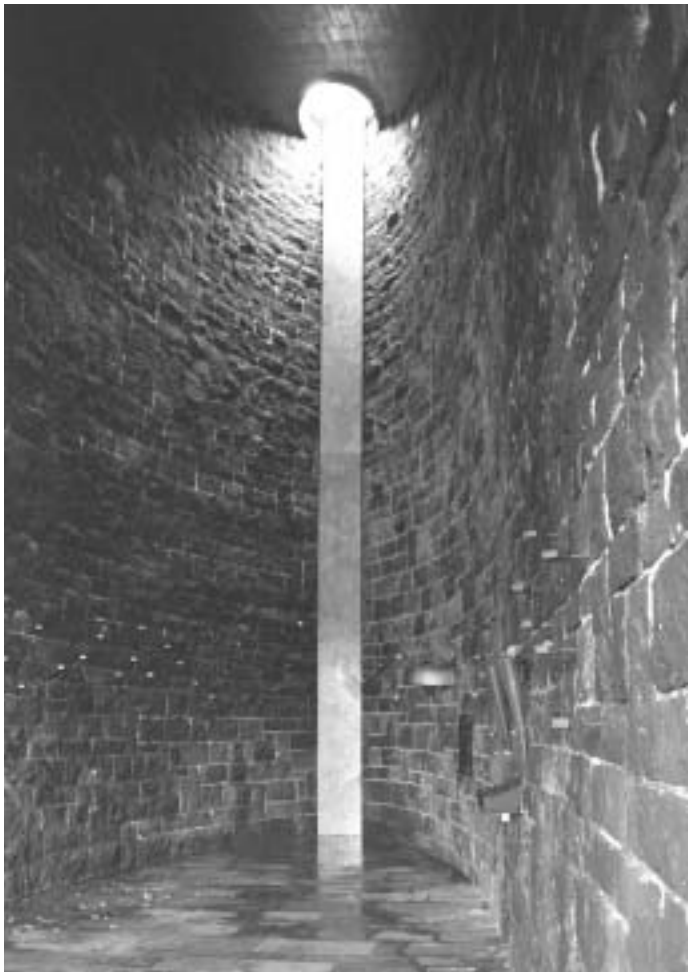

Book Reviews

Jane Livesey on the myth of Cornelia Connelly

Paul Nicholson on theology and spiritual direction

William Wizeman on Diarmaid MacCulloch's magisterial study of the Reformation

Gerard J. Hughes on just wars

Josette Zammit-Mangion on Rowan Williams and desert monasticism

Nicholas King on one Jesuit's engagement with the Trinity

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. Further details can be found on *The Way*'s website, www.theway.org.uk. The Special Number for 2005, marking the centenary of the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1980), will be entitled *Spirituality, Tradition and Beauty*. In 2006, the special number, marking jubilees for Ignatius and for his first two companions, Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier, will be about Ignatian spirituality and growth in relationships. Contributions for these two projects will be especially welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Translations: Ann Carr, Peter Edmonds SJ, Philip Endean SJ.

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FOREWORD

THE STARK INTERIOR of the Jewish memorial in Dachau, depicted on the first page of this issue, refrains from making any theological statement. In this respect, it is quite unlike the adjacent Carmel of the Precious Blood, or the Protestant Church of Reconciliation. Massive but mute, it symbolizes what cannot be named, what must remain with us as a wounding question: the significance of a belief in God, of traditions of faith, when set against the Shoah.

The enormity of the Shoah is unparalleled—one that the psyche can only reduce or cut off. But the kind of radical questioning that it provokes is prompted also by many other changes in our culture since World War II. This first issue of *The Way* for 2005, *God Nowadays*, looks at a range of new ways in which people are currently experiencing and expressing what Christians may, with due tentativeness, identify as the touch of God. Some of these arise from human suffering: the extraordinarily self-possessed, original witness of the Jewish woman Etty Hillesum in wartime Amsterdam and Westerbork; the form of liberation theology developed by the Flemish theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx. But liberation can also be cultural and imaginative. Thus we have Sue Delaney writing on the spiritual awakening that women can experience in mid-life as they assert themselves against the models of womanhood sanctioned by their society. Tim Muldoon suggests that the spiritual needs of today's young adults are somewhat different from those of their parents, the baby-boomers, whose voice is nevertheless the prevalent one in journals such as this. And John Pridmore finds an impressive vision of imaginative liberation in the ostensibly anti-religious trilogy by Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials*.

Other pieces in this issue foster our contemporary quest for God by giving us new perspectives on our past. To mark the Christmas season, André Myre offers a provocative new reading of the biblical infancy narratives; and Denise Inge retrieves the remarkable work of the seventeenth-century nature mystic Thomas Traherne in the light of modern physics. We also look again at the origins of the Ignatian Exercises, in particular at some of the early texts that, while not

definitive, nevertheless give us some important insights into how the first generation of Ignatian retreat-givers understood what they were doing. In best postmodern fashion, we are finding the past's lost voices.

It is often thought that our questioning about God is somehow a purely contemporary phenomenon: up to some comparatively recent date, 'we always thought' that things were just so; now the Shoah, or feminism, or postmodernism, or some form of deconstructive human science, has thrown everything into confusion. Such thinking oversimplifies the truth. Long ago Job, or rather the author of the book that bears his name, was thoroughly baffled by God, and the prophets and psalmists were often perplexed at God's ways. Great Christian theologians, such as Schleiermacher in Enlightenment modernity, or Aquinas in the middle ages, or Denys in antiquity, have regularly taught that God's reality is beyond definition, beyond our capacity to know.

When we describe God as almighty or omniscient, we are not describing God; rather, we are naming some of the respects in which God's power and knowledge are different from ours, limited as we inevitably are. The protest that an almighty God could never have permitted Auschwitz only has force if we construe 'almightiness' as the observable property of a very powerful being. But matters are different if we see that term as a pointer towards divine mystery. To follow Christ is to be taken on a journey that educates us out of our preconceptions and projections, and opens us to a God who has always been greater than what eye has seen or what ear has heard. Our age is certainly one that raises awkward questions about God, and scrutinises critically the orthodoxies, whether traditionalist or trendy, that it has inherited. But perhaps matters have ever been thus when the quest for God has been alive and honest.

Philip Endean SJ

ETTY HILLESUM: FOR GOD AND WITH GOD

Alexandra Pleshoyano

ETTY HILLESUM, A YOUNG JEWISH WOMAN who had been living in Amsterdam, died in Auschwitz on 30 November 1943 at the age of 29. She left behind a diary and 73 letters, and more letters are still being found.[1] Hillesum's writings articulate a remarkable experience of God during times when many just abandoned a faith that seemed so useless. Who could still talk about an almighty God in Auschwitz? Why would we need a God apparently so indifferent, or perhaps helpless?

Many theologians, especially Jewish theologians, have tried to find a new way of understanding God in response to the Shoah. But rather than trying to define God, Etty Hillesum sought to defend and even to help God. How did this happen? What was God to her, and could her God be of any use to us today? Could her writings help us too to live *for God and with God* in a world distorted by the excesses of hatred and violence? Can she help us come to terms with the sheer variety of spiritualities now presented to us?

Etty found God while keeping her distance from the tenets of any religion. Following a discussion about Christ and the Jews, she wrote:

> Two philosophies, sharply defined, brilliantly presented, rounded off; defended with passion and vigour. But I can't help feeling that every hotly championed philosophy hides a little lie. That it must fall short of 'the truth'. And yet I myself will have to find a philosophy to live by, a fenced-in space of my own, violently seized and passionately defended. But then wouldn't that be giving life

[1] The diary is composed of eleven notebooks, the seventh of which is lost. Two additional letters were recently published by Denise de Costa in *Met pen en penseel. Levenskunst van Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum en Charlotte Salomon* (Thieme Deventer: Deventer, 2003).

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> short change? The alternative may well be floundering in uncertainty and chaos. (30 November 1941)[2]

Etty's understanding of God was based on an original combination of influences from psychology, literature, philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and other sources. But above all it drew on her distinctive way of understanding and interpreting: 'You must learn to trust your own experiences, observations and intuitions', she wrote, 'rather than believe that you have to get everything out of books' (5 October 1941).

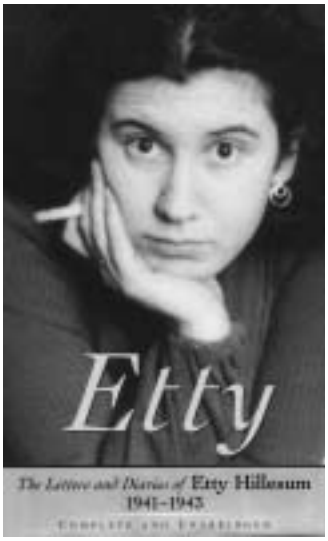
Etty felt that she had a task to accomplish, and that she was the heiress of a large spiritual legacy—a legacy that she was to share as best she could (18 September 1942). That intuition had something prophetic in it. For her writings are becoming the voice of a theology after Auschwitz, speaking to Jews, to Christians and indeed to anyone, whatever their level of religious commitment:

> … all the divisions between people and nations are being removed for me. There are moments when I can see right through life and the human heart, when I understand more and more and become calmer and calmer, and am filled with a faith in God that has grown so quickly inside me that it frightened me at first but has now become inseparable from me. (7 July 1942)

Etty and God

Etty was born in 1914 in Zeeland. She was the daughter of Rebecca Bernstein and Louis Hillesum, and she had two brothers, Jaap and Mischa. Although they remained part of the Jewish community, the Hillesums did not practise their religion. Since 1937, Etty had been living in Amsterdam with a retired accountant and widower, Han Wegerif, who became her lover. In May 1940, Holland was invaded by the Nazis, who started to strip the Jewish population of their rights and properties. In July 1941, Etty's brother Jaap persuaded her to accept a position at the Jewish Council in Amsterdam, hoping to protect his sister. But Etty only

[2] All references to Hillesum's diary and letters are taken from *Etty: The Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*, edited by Klaas A. D. Smelik, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans (Ottawa: Novalis, 2002). Since a number of other, less complete editions exist, references to the diary are by date of entry, not by page number.



worked there for two weeks before transferring to the Westerbork transit camp as a social worker. In September 1943 she was herself transported to Auschwitz, and according to the Red Cross she was gassed on 30 November.

In February 1941 Etty had met the German chirologist[3] Julius Spier, with whom she started therapy while also working as his secretary. A former colleague of Jung, Spier had a major influence on Etty's psychological and spiritual development. Although their relationship was not without its ambiguities, Spier helped her deal with her depressions and exploit her inner forces. He also introduced her to the Bible. On 8 March 1941, Etty started a diary. Tormented by existential questions, she was looking for a meaning in life. She probed the depths of her self, and discovered what she came to call God.

Though Etty learnt much from her reading and from Spier, she remained independently minded. She did not 'give life short change' in order to feel secure and protected behind a 'fenced-in philosophy'. She had moments when she doubted even Spier and his friends, whom she loved dearly:

> … my rejection of S. [Spier] and his circle was back. They seem far too ponderous and emphatic with their 'love' and their God, etc., etc. No doubt that my feelings are what is called ambivalent. But for Heaven's sake, why shouldn't there be room for everything inside me? In fact, everything is inside me …. The heavy and the light must be accepted as two different aspects of my being. Why deny the one aspect as soon as the other asserts itself more strongly? That is nothing but lacking the courage to be oneself. (30 November 1941)

But Etty's doubts decreased as her assertiveness increased. After Spier's death in September 1942, she said that he brought her soul to birth, and that she would commit herself to do the same for others.

[3] Someone who studies people's personalities by examining their hands.

Etty longed to be there for everyone instead of concentrating her life on one single human being. But before she could help anyone else, Etty needed to help herself. Spier taught her to love and to accept herself while improving herself at the same time. On 10 August 1941, she wrote to him in her diary: 'I regained contact with myself, with the deepest and best in me, which I call God, and so also with you'.

From May 1942 onwards, Jews in Holland were required to wear the yellow star, and restrictions continued to increase. Nevertheless, Etty wrote at this period about her deep joy. She gathered all her inner strength in order to live for God and with God, and to have God dwelling within her. Although she found the word 'God' somewhat primitive, saying that she did not even need it (22 June 1942), the word comes back in her diary 37 times in June 1942, 82 times in July, and 92 times between 15 September and 13 October 1942 (her last diary entry). Was she being influenced by Jung when she said that the word 'God' was a makeshift construction? She copied a quotation from Jung on 12 January 1942:

> I know people for whom the encounter with the strange power within themselves was such an overwhelming experience that they called it 'God'. So experienced, 'God' too is a theory in the most literal sense, a way of looking at the world,[4] an image which the limited human mind creates in order to express an unfathomable and ineffable experience. The experience alone is real, not to be disputed; but the image can be soiled or broken to pieces.

The Shoah may well have shattered many conventional images of God. Yet somehow Etty discovered a real experience.

Impressed by Spier and Jung, Etty wanted to specialise in psychology herself, so as to help others (17 September 1942). But only a particularly fine psychologist would be able to listen to the deepest and best part within themselves and within the other: to let God listen to God. In June 1941, on Spier's advice, Etty therefore decided to meditate for half an hour each morning in order to listen to her inner voice. When she retired within herself, she found that she escaped from her egocentric perspective and became intimate with God; but when she moved away from her inner being, which she identified with

[4] 'Theory' derives from a Greek verb meaning 'to look'.

God, she found herself back contemplating her navel and getting deeply depressed as a result.

Did Etty think of God primarily in terms of Jung's concept of the unconscious? Perhaps, but who can probe such depths and proclaim that the mystery of God is not present within them? There is an obvious question about how far Etty was truly encountering the otherness of God, and how far her God was merely a projection of herself. But there are several passages where Etty seems to make a distinction between her will and God's will: 'Not my will, but Thy will be done' (3 October 1942). On 16 July 1942, she wrote: 'Have You any other plans for me, God? … what are Your plans for me?'

In Etty's writings, we find two distinctive kinds of experiences of God: a relationship with the God within her own self, and a relationship with God through creation and creatures. Etty's sensitivity to creation and its beauty brought her intense aesthetic experiences. On 30 May 1942 she copied down a passage from Saint Augustine: 'My soul shall praise Thee in all things, God, Creator of the Universe …'. Etty found life so beautiful and rich that it made her want to believe in God (27 March 1942). She thanked God for wanting to dwell within her (23 January 1942) and for having created her. She believed that every human being is created in God's likeness.

Etty thanked God for wanting to dwell within her

Indeed, this phrase from the Book of Genesis, 'created in God's likeness', became her *Leitmotiv*. She had room for everyone and everything within herself, no matter how soiled the likeness of God might appear. She expanded her heart to accommodate the whole range of reality without eliminating anything, because everything is part of God's Creation: good and bad, life and death.

This idea of wholeness became increasingly important for Etty. How did she come up with it? On 15 March 1941, Etty copied a quotation from the philosopher Will Durant:

> Nowadays no one … dares to look at life as a whole …. Everyone knows his part, but not its meaning in the play as a whole. Life is losing its purpose and is becoming empty just when it seemed so full of promise. … We shall define philosophy as a view of the whole, as the spirit, spread out over life and forging unity out of chaos.

This way of accepting life as a whole was also central to Spier's teaching. Etty writes: 'Paradoxical though it may sound: S. [Spier] heals people by teaching them how to suffer and accept' (14 December 1941). Etty accepted death as a part of life, even the most horrible of deaths (2 July 1942). She kept on proclaiming her faith in God and in the beauty of God's creation, despite everything. What really mattered was,

> … to be truly, inwardly happy, to accept God's world and to enjoy it without turning away from all the suffering there is. … even if you live in an attic and have nothing but dry bread to eat, life is still worth living. … There is so much to relish, life is rich, even though it has to be conquered from minute to minute .... (24 March 1941)

Although the noose was tightening around the Jewish population, Etty was still capable of appreciating the beauty of a flower, or a star, or the whole creation. She asked Spier:

> Isn't it almost godless to keep having such faith in God in times like these? And isn't it frivolous to go on finding life so beautiful? (2 July 1942)

Nothing, nobody could deprive her of her belief in God, or of the experience of inner freedom that came from finding life so beautiful despite everything. This may sound paradoxical when we remember the first entry in her diary: '… deep down something like a tightly wound ball of twine binds me relentlessly' (9 March 1941). But with Spier's help, Etty learned to detach herself from whatever made her feel tied up in a bundle, and to give birth to a new self, filled with a peaceful inner freedom.

Another influence on Etty was the writer Walter Rathenau. On three different occasions she copied down the same letter that he had written to a woman in love, including the following passage:

> Be gentle with your suffering and it will be gentle with you. It grows with desire and with indignation; it is lulled to sleep by gentleness, like a little child. You have so much love in you; devote all of it to your fellow men, to children, to things, even to yourself and to your pain. (20 October 1941)

Here we see Etty learning to accept the inevitable, even when this separates her from her loved ones. Even in her loneliness, Etty could feel at home everywhere and at one with all.

> I know two sorts of loneliness. One makes me feel dreadfully unhappy, lost and forlorn, the other makes me feel strong and happy. The first always appears when I feel out of touch with my fellow human beings, with everything, when I am completely cut off from others and from myself and can see no purpose in life or any connection between things, nor have the slightest idea where I fit in. With the other kind of loneliness, by contrast, I feel very strong and certain and connected with everyone and everything and with God, and realise that I can manage on my own and that I am not dependent upon others. Then I know that I am part of a meaningful whole and that I can impart a great deal of strength to others. (9 August 1941)

Etty's way of accepting life as a whole brought her an immense feeling of security and trust, and a surrender that had nothing to do with desperation. Spier helped her a great deal by teaching her just to let things come and go, without her mind needing to seize and control her experiences:

> I had never before felt as I did this afternoon …. And the quite simple fact is that now I just let it happen to me …. As I sat there like that in the sun, I bowed my head unconsciously as if to take in even more of that new feeling for life. Suddenly I knew deep down how someone can sink impetuously to their knees and find peace there, with their face hidden in their folded hands. (16 March 1941)

Thus it was that Etty learned about kneeling, which is not a familiar gesture in the Jewish tradition. This kind of surrender became essential for Etty. A surrender born of trust, and investing her with tremendous courage: '… if God does not help me to go on, then I shall have to help God' (11 July 1942), she wrote. Thus, too, Etty committed herself to protect and to care for that deepest and best part within herself which she called God.

Helping God

On 19 March 1941, Etty quoted Spier in her diary: 'God helps those who help themselves. Whosoever help themselves, trust themselves

and their inner being, also trust in God.' She also copied the following quotation: 'Humanity is given dominion over its soul (see 2 Corinthians 5:5) and ought to husband it well; live on its spiritual strength, be inspired' (13 March 1941). Etty took dominion over her soul, over her most honoured lodger whom she called God. She would husband and help God. We might rather have expected Etty to be begging for God's help. But, convinced of God's helplessness, she decided that God needed her help:

> I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last. (12 July 1942)

To help means to save, rescue, succour, assist, take care of, and collaborate. Etty decided to do all of these for God. Is this so new and so *avant-garde*? Does not Paul, with whom Etty was familiar, write that we are God's servants (1 Corinthians 3:9)? We can also find in 1 Corinthians 4:1 that we are stewards of God's mysteries. A steward is someone responsible, who manages another person's property. Is not Etty the steward of God? According to Paul, stewards are expected to remain faithful. Etty wished to remain faithful to her promises to God.

How did she arrive at this faithfulness, this decision to work for God? At the beginning of her diary, as Etty was struggling against her sexual desire for Spier, she wrote:

> Is it worthwhile putting up a fight? Shouldn't one just be taking what life has to offer and leave it at that? There is probably an even more banal question behind that one: who will thank you for putting up a fight, or, quite bluntly, who will give two pins? God will, no doubt, and these words suddenly pouring from my small fountain pen fill me directly with humble strength. Perhaps these

> words—God will thank you for it—will turn into my salvation. (19 March 1941)

Thus Etty started to work for God and with God.

Another aspect of St Paul's image of servants and stewards in 1 Corinthians is the obedience that is required of a servant. Etty did recognise a form of authority in God:

> I thank You, God, peace and quiet now reign in my great inner Domain, thanks to the strong central authority You exert. The furthest flung boundaries sense Your authority and Your love and allow themselves to be guided by You. (9 January 1942).

On the same day, she told God how much good work they were doing together. She had assigned a larger dwelling-space to God within herself, and faithfulness had become less of a struggle. She feels less and less ashamed of her deeper moments with God:

> Something I have been wanting to write down for days, perhaps for weeks, but which a sort of shyness—or perhaps false shame?—has prevented me from putting into words. A desire to kneel down sometimes pulses through my body, or rather it is as if my body had been meant and made for the act of kneeling. Sometimes, in moments of deep gratitude, kneeling down becomes an overwhelming urge, head deeply bowed, hands before my face. It has become a gesture embedded in my body, needing to be expressed from time to time. And I remember: 'The girl who could not kneel', and the rough coconut matting in the bathroom.[6] When I write these things down, I still feel a little ashamed, as if I were writing about the most intimate of intimate matters. Much more bashful than if I had to write about my love life. But is there indeed anything as intimate as humanity's relationship to God? (3 April 1942)

Etty defended God, denying divine accountability for the senseless harm we cause one another, and insisting rather that we are accountable to God (29 June 1942). She felt ready for anything, ready to go anywhere on earth, wherever God might send her. Above all, she felt ready to bear witness unto death that life is beautiful and

[6] Etty here refers to where she often prayed; *The Girl Who Could Not Kneel* was the title of a novel that Etty wished to write, probably based on her own experience.

meaningful in any situation, and that it is not God's fault that things are the way they are, but our own. She said that humanity had been granted every opportunity to enter every paradise, but that we had never learnt how to take those opportunities. Etty expected nothing from God. Instead she sought, not only to collaborate with God, but also to be responsible for God.

This brings us to another of Spier's teachings transcribed by Etty: 'The less one expects, the more one receives' (13 March 1941). Whatever Etty did receive was now welcomed as a gratuitous bonus. She was not even pretentious enough to expect too much from herself:

> I don't fool myself about the real state of affairs, and I've even dropped the pretension that I'm out to help others. I shall merely try to help God as best I can, and if I succeed in doing that, then I shall be of use to others as well. But I mustn't have heroic illusions about that either. (11 July 1942)

Etty struggled not to expect anything from anyone; her emphasis was on giving to others. In September 1941, she copied this passage, in which Spier quotes from the prayer attributed to St Francis of Assisi:

> Oh, Master, let me not yearn so much
>
> > To be consoled … but long to console,
> > To be understood … but long to understand
> > To be loved … but long to love. (20 September 1941)[7]

Referring once more to this prayer, she wrote on 9 October 1942: 'Lord, make me less eager to be understood by others but make me understand them'. Etty wanted to console, to understand and to love God by consoling, understanding and loving others. Were they not all created in God's likeness?

It is difficult to know where her idea of helping God came from. In an undated letter, probably written in July 1942 from Amsterdam, Etty addresses herself to Spier in these words:

> You must look after your health; if you want to help God, then that is your first, your sacred duty. A man like you, one of the few to

[7] The ellipses and the eccentric formatting are in Etty's original.

> provide decent shelter for a portion of life and suffering and God (most people have capitulated long ago, and 'life' and 'suffering' and 'God' have become so many empty sounds for them), has the sacred duty to maintain his body, 'his earthly mansion', as well as he can, to offer God hospitality in it for as long as possible …. This slice of the epoch in which we live is something I can bear, that I can shoulder without collapsing under its heavy weight, and I can already forgive God for allowing things to be as they probably must be. To have enough love in oneself to be able to forgive God!!

On reading this remarkable passage, we can only ask what Etty meant by this. Who is the God who allowed all this horror to happen, and whom she forgave? Is this a God whom we can all carry within us? A God for whom we are all responsible? A God who created all of us in the divine likeness, giving us the freedom to mirror that likeness—a likeness of unconditional love? Quoting Spier, Etty wrote: 'He says, "these are times to apply the saying: love your enemies". And if we do say that, surely we must also believe that it can be done?' (25 July 1942)

On 15 September 1942, as Spier was dying (of natural causes), Etty gave thanks for all he had done for her: he had dug God up in her, bringing God to life; and she would now go on digging and seeking God in all the human hearts she met, no matter where they might be. It was in these terms that Etty committed herself to God. She promised to find a dwelling and a refuge for God in as many houses as possible, which meant in as many people as possible, for we are the houses of God. She would follow the path of King David, who refused to rest until he had found a dwelling for the Holy of Holies. Etty refused to abandon God. She would remain faithful to that best part of herself which she called God, and to that best part of others which she also called God, so that God might remain faithful to God. Etty wanted to survive,

and to bear witness to the fact that God was living, even in those terrible times (27 July 1942).

Etty would struggle when she was in Westerbork not to let herself be consumed by concern for her family. In one of her last letters from Westerbork, undated but written after 18 August 1943, she wrote:

> I know that we must not lose ourselves so completely in grief and concern for our families that we have little thought or love left for our neighbours. More and more I tend toward the idea that love for everyone who may cross your path, love for everyone made in God's image, must rise above love for blood relatives. Please don't misunderstand me. It may seem unnatural—And I see that it is still far too difficult for me to write about, though so simple to live.

In June 1943, Etty gave her eleven notebooks to a friend, Maria Tuinzing, just as Etty's special status as a social worker in Westerbork was about to be revoked. She asked Maria to hold on to them until she returned home; were she never to return, she asked that Maria pass them on to another friend, the writer Klaas Smelik. Etty had the intuition that she had a task to accomplish with her writing: 'I feel that I am one of many heirs to a great spiritual heritage. I shall be its faithful guardian. I shall share it as best I can.' (18 September 1942)

Etty wanted to love every human being fervently, because she believed that a part of God is buried in us all. After Spier's death, Etty wrote of him:

> … great discerner, God-seeker, and God-finder that you were. You sought God in every human heart that opened up before you—and how many there were!—and found a little bit of Him in each one. (15 September 1942)

Her words echo Jeremiah 29:10-14:

> For thus says the LORD … when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD ….

Etty certainly invoked God, prayed to God, and sought for God. Eventually, she found God, and her life became an uninterrupted dialogue with God.

At Westerbork, a friend sent her a treatise by Dr Korff entitled: 'And yet God is Love'. This appeared truer to her than ever before (29 June 1943). If God is love, as we can read in 1 John 4—with which Etty was familiar—then it is only through love that God is recognisable.

Etty decided to love, choosing love above all. This was not a matter of feeling. The feeling of love failed her at times, and was certainly rare in the world surrounding her. Moreover, the absence of hatred in no way implies the absence of moral indignation. But only love can make better times possible. Etty experienced a love beyond feelings, like 'an elemental glow that sustains you'. The person loved, she discovered, 'has hardly anything to do with it' (8 August 1943).[8] In a letter dated to the end of December 1942, she wrote:

> And I also believe, childishly perhaps but stubbornly, that the earth will become more habitable again only through the love that the Jew Paul described to the citizens of Corinth in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter.

Why God Nowadays?

After Auschwitz, most people's images of God were shattered. But Etty drew on her own experiences, observations and intuitions rather than believing that she had to get everything out of books. What she learnt from Spier enabled her to find her own voice before God and to radiate God's love further. Addressing herself to Spier, shortly after his death, she wrote:

> You taught me to speak the name of God without embarrassment. You were the mediator between God and me, and now you, the mediator, have gone, and my path leads straight to God. It is right that it should be so. And I shall be the mediator for any other I can reach. (15 September 1942)

In Judaism, the idea of walking with God is richly significant. She committed herself to walk for God and with God no matter what happened:

[8] Letter to Maria Tuinzing.

> For once you have begun to walk with God, you need only keep on walking with Him and all of life becomes on long stroll—such a marvellous feeling .... (14 July 1942)

Etty's sense of God, as eclectic as that of many people today, enabled her to face the unbearable without committing suicide:

> Had all of this happened to me only a year ago, I should certainly have collapsed within three days, committed suicide, or pretended to a false kind of cheerfulness. But now I am filled with such equanimity, endurance, and calmness that I can see things very clearly and have an inkling of how they fit together. I don't know what it is, but despite everything I am very well, dear God. (23 July 1942)

Why talk of God nowadays? Etty suggests that God helps us transcend fear by faith, listening to the inner life within ourselves and within others. God gives us a reason for living, and encourages us to preserve harmony in our inner households, filled as they are with so many conflicting, disparate elements. God helps us to keep believing in humanity, to find the strength to live in the present moment and the courage to trust in it, to live in a spirit of praise and gratitude for the life which is beautiful despite everything. But perhaps the most important reason for speaking of God is a fundamental desire: in the end, we wish to walk for God and with God, simply out of God's love.

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CHRISTMAS AND THE CONFRONTATION OF EMPIRE

André Myre

ANY LIVING SPIRITUALITY will be nourished by what is stirring in the depths of the self's encounter with the new, the unforeseeable, the uncontrollable. The interior quest is like a devastating whirlwind; new insights and the freedom of love leave nothing untouched. A living spirituality will also be expressed in terms of its surrounding culture—a culture which never stays still. It should surprise no-one that the God of the Bible is always announcing the destruction of what has been created or laid down.

The healthy interpretation of the Bible is integral to this ferment of new life and permanent flux. If it makes any sense to talk of the Word of God, this Word exists only in the now. No sooner has it been understood than it is saying something else; no sooner has it been written than it needs to be read anew in the light of what has just happened. You cannot know what it has to say before it has spoken.

Interpretation is thus a delicate art. Interpreters need to be in touch with what is happening in their own depths, and they need to know that the Word is constantly changing—a point which remains true even when many claim that it has long been silent, that it has said all that needed to be said, that its expressions are immutable.

The generations that came before ours read the biblical texts about Jesus' birth in good faith, through the filters that their culture gave them. Like us, they varied in their awareness of these filters. And they drew great things from their readings that nourished their spirituality over centuries. We today have new questions that require new answers. The interpretations of the past are not there simply to be repeated; rather they invite us to undertake the same adventure of interpretation. We will never quite know whether what we discover is in fact reliable and trustworthy. But we have no choice but to take the risk.

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What, then, might we today find in the New Testament about how Jesus was conceived, and about the world into which he was born?[1]

Overcoming Humiliation

At the start of the first chapter of his Gospel, Matthew looks at Jesus' ancestors. And the way he does it is disconcerting, to say the least. He begins by setting out the genealogy of the man from Nazareth, and has the temerity to mention five women (Matthew 1:3,5,6,16). You might have expected to hear the names of some outstanding Israelite women who had had an impact on their people's history. The reality is quite different. The first of these women is Tamar, who was probably a Canaanite. Her father-in-law, Judah, had refused to acknowledge her position as his son's widow, and denied her the hand of his third son, Shelah. Eventually, she had conceived twins by Judah himself, having disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced him (Genesis 38). Rahab, the second woman, was also a Canaanite, from Jericho. She saved the lives of the two spies that Joshua had sent on a reconnaissance trip (Joshua 2). The next one is Ruth, a Moabite woman, who, in spite of the loss of her husband, was led by loyalty to accompany her mother-in-law to the land of Israel. Then, to ensure her livelihood, she provided herself with a husband by approaching Boaz secretly, at night (Ruth 3). Matthew does not directly name the fourth woman, who must also have been a foreigner: Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, who fell prey to King David's lust and was violated by him. In this genealogy of Jesus, the evangelist has thus introduced the names of four foreigners, four women who for different reasons had exercised their sexuality in ways that diverged from accepted social norms.

So what did the first four women have in common with the fifth, the one of whom Jesus was born (1:16)? Matthew explains this in the story that follows the genealogy (1:18-25). We need to understand a few facts about Matthew's culture if we are to understand his intent.

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[1] For further reading, see the classic work of Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993 [1977]); the sociological work of Richard A. Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

At that time, it was the parents who were responsible for arranging the marriage of their children. At the conclusion of negotiations, the marriage contract would be signed, and the two young people, usually between eleven and thirteen years old, would officially be declared husband and wife. But immediately following this, they would have to live apart from each other for several months—a time for putting together the dowry, for mating the farm animals, for fitting out or constructing a suitable dwelling, for preparing for the wedding celebration, and so on. At the end of six months or a year, the young wife was solemnly led to the house of her husband, so they could start their new life together. During the period of separation, the young couple did not see each other unless they were closely chaperoned, because it was important that the wife be a virgin at the moment when they first came together. It is notable that Mary is only described as a *parthenos* (young maiden or virgin) three times in the New Testament—and all three references are linked to this period that preceded her marital life.[2]

Matthew is explicit about the time when Jesus was conceived: 'before they lived together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:18). With this statement, the evangelist is doing two things: he is situating the event in its context of scandal, and then diminishing the scandal by declaring that the Spirit of God was at work in the origin of this human life.

First, a word about the scandal. In the following verse, Matthew says that Joseph was 'a righteous man'; not wanting to 'expose her to public disgrace', he planned 'to dismiss her quietly', without making a fuss (1:19). This statement says something wonderful about Joseph's character, no doubt, but it also raises a troubling question. If Joseph had nothing to do with Jesus' conception, what was really going on here? We have to say at the outset that we will never know the answer for sure, and perhaps Mary never revealed the truth to anyone. All that was known at the time of the evangelists is perhaps contained in what was said about the adult Jesus of Nazareth: this is *the son of Mary* (Mark 6:3). 'Father unknown', as the traditional formula puts it. The texts do not permit us to go any further. We have a young man who decided to

Jesus was conceived in scandal

[2] Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:27 twice.

keep a young girl as his wife, even when he had the right to send her away. We have the young girl, one of life's victims. And we have a conviction: a conviction that the scandal of the situation did not prevent the Lord God from putting God's Spirit into Mary in order to bring life into being, and then from acknowledging the most radical divine presence in this man. Perhaps, indeed, this divine event was in some way actually dependent on the scandal. The five women of Matthew's genealogy form a tradition which already reveals a God who operates beyond conventions.

How might we develop a spirituality of Christmas for our times from the New Testament? The man from Nazareth must have faced the hardships of life from the very moment of his conception. He could not but have been scarred by them. The gospels, which are normally very discreet on his family relationships, do hint that his relationship with his mother was occasionally strained. He did not like her telling him what to do at Cana (John 2:4), and he reacted harshly on one occasion when she set out with his brothers and sisters to try to bring him back home, claiming he was out of his mind. You had to do the will of God to lay claim to being his mother (Mark 3:21,31-35). By contrast, Joseph must have been a very good father for Jesus, because 'father' was the name with which Jesus affectionately addressed God.

Jesus faced life's hardships from conception onwards

Certainly Jesus was forever marked by his origins, deeply humiliated, diminished and marginalised. But he had seen how suffering had changed and matured his parents. He decided to take the same path. One day, he took the daring step of leaving everything to go and listen to the Baptist. And he let himself be challenged by the people's misery that was revealed to him there. His own suffering enabled him to understand that of others, and to hope with them for the Kingdom of God. Perhaps we cannot be sensitive to the pain of others before we let ourselves be touched by the suffering and emptiness in our own life. We can only be interiorly rich if we work through the human condition with all its limitations arising from external circumstance.

It is up to the reader to decide whether or not this interpretation is offensive to God. We might say that it denies God's intervention in history, scandalously besmirches Mary's memory, tarnishes Jesus' dignity and contradicts the traditional teaching about his origins. But we could just as well say that it takes account of God's preference for

the oppressed, of God's respect for human beings, of the dignity of a violated woman; it speaks of the majesty of a man who learnt self-respect in spite of the depth of his humiliation. It also acknowledges that the expressions of faith change as cultures change. The Johannine Christ saw very well the role of the Spirit of truth in speaking 'whatever he hears' and declaring 'the things that are to come' (John 16:13). Nothing has ever been said once and for all.

Conquering Oppression

The infancy narratives are usually read just piously, whereas they should be empowering their readers to live with hope in a world of extreme hardship. Let us start with Matthew. At 1:21, the meaning of Jesus' life is expressed in a few words: 'he will liberate his lost people' (generally translated as 'he will save his people from their sins'). For the evangelist, the people are trapped; the future is blocked. In the New Testament, 'sin' is above all a collective reality, and it is not to be limited simply to a 'religious' sphere. The people collectively needs liberation because the people collectively is oppressed. And sin is both the cause and the reality of this oppression. The next chapter in Matthew illustrates this situation.

Herod the Great was the king in office. He had been installed on the throne by the Romans; half-pagan in origin, he was a total stranger to the line of David. He was a complete megalomaniac, bleeding the people dry in order to pay the costs of the enormous constructions with which he hoped to impress his Roman masters. His paranoia was such that he would, on the slightest suspicion, get rid of those he believed were trying to dislodge him from power, even of his own children. Historically, Matthew's account is substantially true, even if it is influenced by subsequent faith in Jesus' lordship. If such a sinister figure heard tell of a baby that would one day be raised to kingship, he would certainly take all possible measures to eliminate that child.

In Matthew's narrative (2:4), we see besides Herod the chief priests and scribes. These are the leading Jewish functionaries, who are completely dependent on Herod's power. For Matthew, the Roman Empire was squeezing a small people like a vice, as it crushed them with taxes; it installed a bloodthirsty kinglet in power, one who made the population pay dearly for his dreams of grandeur (and his son Archelaus, mentioned in 2:22, was to be no better). And these two

holders of power used the political, religious and intellectual leaders for their own ends, manipulating them at whim.

These were the sins from which the people needed to be liberated. It was the whole system that needed changing, so that people could breathe a little. In the gospels, this change has a name: the Kingdom of God. Jesus hoped for it throughout his life:

> Father …. Your kingdom come. … Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts …. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

The Lord's prayer is the prayer of Christmas

This is *the* prayer of Christmas. The prayer of little ones, the prayer of the humiliated and oppressed. May the system be destroyed; may we have something to eat; may our debts be abolished; may there be an end to this continual misery, this evil which is so great that we cannot bear it. Sadly, this is a prayer relevant for all times. This prayer sets teeth so much on edge that it has to be blunted to make it acceptable to the systems in power: the Kingdom has to be transposed into the other-worldly; bread is interpreted as the Eucharist; debts are changed to personal sins; trial is transformed into temptation; evil is detached from its social, political and economic base. The traditional way of thinking about Christmas is along the same lines: a sugary and nostalgic festival pandering to our demand for cosy feelings, rather than stimulating engagement in the construction of a new society. And the need for radical change should touch us personally as well. To the extent that I benefit from the present structuring of society and am thereby a 'winner', I will not be able to accept the radically subversive aspect of Christmas.

On this matter, Luke is just as clear as Matthew. He also situates Jesus' origins in the time of Herod, king of Judea (1:5). He does not even hesitate to name the emperor of the time: 'In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered' (2:1). A census is not an innocuous event. It is all about taxes: rulers who have an accurate record of the number of their subjects know how much they can get out of them. David had learnt to his cost in earlier times that *YHWH* hated censuses.[3]

[3] 1 Corinthians 21.

Every empire claims to be the last word in civilisation and culture. An empire has no difficulty in convincing itself that when it invades another country, it is performing a great service to the people there, and bringing the gifts of peace, freedom, communication and culture. Rome obviously was not free of this ideology and saw its empire as 'good news' for the peoples who had finally been brought salvation.

It is against this background that we must understand Luke, whose heavenly messenger presents a quite different sort of saviour from Caesar:

> But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Liberator, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' (Luke 2:10-12)

This child is the anti-Caesar. The language of the 'angel' is political, retorting to the official propaganda: *announce, joy, city of David, liberator, Christ, Lord* are political terms. What is being proclaimed is not a new religion, but the birth of a child who will later radically oppose the designs of the Empire and of its puppets installed in power in Jerusalem. The people will be liberated from Rome and from Herod under the guidance of a descendant of David, and this is a cause of great joy. As a modern US American interpreter, a citizen of our contemporary Empire, has put the matter:

> Whereas the emperor cult celebrated the birth of the god Augustus as 'good news for the whole world' (i.e. the gospel of *world order* maintained by Roman military might), in Luke's story God's messenger announces the birth of Jesus as 'good news for the whole people' (i.e. the gospel of *liberation* for a people subjected to that world order).[4]

It is worth noting who is chosen to receive God's message: shepherds, a marginal group if ever there was one. Matthew made it clear that the ruling classes did not want to know anything about a new king (2:4). They did know his predicted birthplace, but there was

[4] Horsley, *The Liberation of Christmas*, 33—emphases original.

Refugee children in contemporary Afghanistan

no question of making an effort to go and see him. Luke, on the other hand, speaks of those who are interested in the news: despised shepherds (2:1-20); Simeon, a just man who rejoiced in the liberation of Israel, even as he foresaw the opposition it would arouse (2:22-35); Anna, a widow, a typical representative of the impoverished masses, who spoke of the child to those who had this liberation at heart (2:36-38).

Such people are often referred to as 'the poor of *YHWH*'. We often think of them in terms of their thirst for spiritual consolations, with no mention of their connection to their world and their hope for a new society. But read, for example, Psalms 9 and 10. It may be surprising to encounter their anger and thirst for justice, their pleas for a radical change in their situation. And it is not only in the supposedly violent Old Testament that these cries can be heard. Try reading Luke 1 and 2 again. There we see the joy of the 'gentle' Mary, who rejoices in her God: finally, this God has paid attention to the *humiliation of his servant*

(1:48). The focus is no longer on Mary's humiliation, but it is nevertheless significant that Luke speaks of it, because it is the starting-point of what Mary then says:

> He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53)

If words have any meaning at all, there is nothing mealy-mouthed in this text. It is not limited to spiritual or religious connotations. Caesar and Herod are attacked head-on, along with all of the rich. (Perhaps I may mention here two questions that always puzzle me. How can the Church allow such texts to be officially read in its liturgy? And who reads them and understands them?) Zechariah is equally clear as he blesses the Lord God for having 'raised up for us a horn of deliverance … deliverance from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us' (1:69,71). Finally, Simeon declares he is ready to die, now that he has seen this long-awaited 'deliverance'(2:30).

These 'infancy narratives' are far from speaking only of 'religion'. They express the thirst for liberation of people who are oppressed and suffocated by a system put in place by the Empire of the day, with the help of the political, social, economic, intellectual and religious authorities of the country. And they present as liberator a man of lowly origin, whose mother had become pregnant in dubious circumstances, and whose father had taken her into his home in defiance of the conventions of the time. On the one hand, a vast Empire with a gigantic military force, pillaging the known world's resources to enhance its size. On the other, a man alone, but free, working for the liberation of his people. The contrast is striking.

The 'infancy narratives' are not just about 'religion'

Becoming Marginalised

Two thousand years later, these texts still have much to say to us. Obviously they cannot speak in quite the way they once did. When they were written, people were exploring a totally new faith in the lordship or kingship of the risen Jesus, while the reign of Caesar was already coming to an end. Salvation or liberation was within reach; the joy of the final age was at hand. Later on in the life of the Church, this

faith had to be expressed in a culture which had a more negative view of sexuality and a more positive understanding of political power. Jesus had been miraculously conceived; God had become incarnate in a child; and Christian regimes, even though imperfect, could be inspired by the values of the Gospel. The invitation was to spiritual poverty, to the adoration of the child-God, to the glorification of sexual asceticism, and to generosity towards the poor.

Our culture is more sensitised to violence towards women, to social humiliation, to structural injustices, and to the mechanisms for implementing and legitimating oppression. It is not only inevitable but desirable that the old texts should be read again in the light of these new awarenesses. There is certainly a huge tension between the person glorified for being chosen as the mother of God and this humiliated woman who finds her dignity again thanks to a decent man, and who has to teach her son how to love and respect himself. But the tension is quite intrinsic to God's dealings with humanity. For this humanity has a history with different periods, different cultures. No longer do we need to suppose that God's acknowledgment of the divine reality itself in another depends on some kind of change in the manner of human reproduction. These days, we speak of a God who is constantly living out a dialogue with humans at ground level, among the oppressed, always on their side. In God's fidelity and consistency, it was therefore 'necessary', as the Bible would say, that God's own self be spoken and recognised in the kind of drama that Mary lived through.

New sensitivities lead to new readings of the Scriptures

Every age wrestles with God and expresses only some aspects of God. It is at the end of the cumulative story of God's struggles with human beings that we will be able to judge the likeness of the portrait to the original. Our belief is not a matter of defining God, or of statements that encapsulate God. Rather, we recognise God's action obliquely, and in a range of different, not straightforwardly compatible ways, corresponding to the meanderings of history and the diversity of cultures, all as limited as each other.

It is important to encounter the one who 'speaks' deep within the self, because—despite what has just been said—nothing fundamental has changed between the time of the New Testament and any subsequent age, including our own. Empires follow one another, and they are all the same. The one prevailing in our own time resembles

Imperial Rome only too closely. The same concern to dominate, the same arrogance, the same certainty of representing the highest culture and civilisation, the same claim to be bringing peace, justice and liberty to the world, the same contempt for the Other, the same brutality. If there is any difference from previous empires, it lies in the effects. Never have we witnessed so much death, so much cultural destruction, so many assaults on the environment and the planet. The current face of the Beast of the Apocalypse will be cursed by generations to come, if indeed there is to be any future for humanity. And it is precisely because nothing has changed, that nothing will ever change (except at the end, but what will *that* be like?), that the encounter with God is important. For it allows us to battle on with patience, knowing that each generation inserts itself into a story and gives its own flavour to that story's hope.

It is in this context that celebrating Christmas becomes so significant. In spite of the Empire's apparent victory, in spite of its seemingly unbreakable power, Christmas lets us foresee its defeat. It is thus the most subversive of feasts. It speaks of the importance of the losers, the dignity of the oppressed, the innocence of 'sinners', the choice of God to be found with the humiliated ones, God's habit of living at the bottom of the ladder, with God's own. On the one hand, Christmas gives value to all that the Empire abhors. On the other, it radically devalues all that the Empire is proud of: power, control, sophisticated armaments, contempt, the claim to have God on its side and to be able to bring liberation, salvation and happiness to humanity. Christmas says that all that is so much hot air.

Christmas is the most subversive of feasts

But we need a good dose of the interior life to be able to sustain Christmas, because everything around us is opposed to it. The Empire has its bards and psalmists everywhere: journalists, chroniclers, academics, experts of all kinds, political and religious leaders. Few are those who dare to stand up against the Empire, for fear of losing their jobs, their influence, their friends, their reputations.

All this points to the importance of prayer, the fundamental function of which is to help us keep our eyes on the truth. Mary and Jesus, whether we talk of them in divine terms or in human ones, were more important than Caesar; the power of the Empire has already been cut off at its root because the power of Christ is at work against it, and it will collapse one day (soon?); the earth will last, beautiful and

abundant, and so on. If I believe in Christmas, and live out my hope by struggling to discover who I truly am, by struggling to fight against the Empire of death which throws out its tentacles all round me, I shall become a fulfilled human being, despite all the weaknesses of my nature and all the humiliations of my life:

> Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours! (Luke 2:14)

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WOMEN BEGINNING A SPIRITUAL QUEST

Sue Delaney

IN THE SECULAR WESTERN WORLD, spiritual seekers are often dismissed as people unable to deal with the challenges of everyday life in a highly competitive and consumerist society. If someone has suffered some personal tragedy or illness and now seeks solace in religion, their search is regarded more benignly; but in general, spiritual seekers are seen as little more than dilettantes in the spiritual supermarkets of the New Age: self-indulgent, narcissistic and gullible. While this is a change from being judged to be neurotic and introverted—epithets favoured by the twentieth century—it is not an improvement in the understanding of how someone becomes a spiritual seeker.

The reality of the present day is that the spiritual seekers of the Western world are often those who have become disillusioned by our consumer society, discovering that its goods and services, its careers and life goals, provide no lasting contentment. Unfortunately, many people have also become disillusioned with their inherited religious traditions. Too often their questions have met with pity, suspicion and even hostility. The result is that they have turned their gaze beyond the boundaries of formal religion in their search for meaning.

Over the last century this has led to a slowly accumulating mass of autobiographical writing and reporting about the spiritual quest from all over the world. Such writing has varied from a few brief paragraphs in popular magazines to lengthy autobiographies in book form. Most of this writing, at least in the West, has come from women rather than from men, and particularly from those who have journeyed beyond their inherited faith traditions. A careful perusal of these stories of

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spiritual journeys throws new light on how modern, mostly well-educated women have begun a spiritual quest.[1]

Not every woman becomes a spiritual seeker. Many are fortunate to find in themselves a simple but authentic faith that needs no further assurance of its grounding in reality. Others, for whatever reason, have no interest in religion or spirituality.

So why, and how, have some women set off on a spiritual quest? Childhood doubts and existential anxiety, a casual comment by friend or stranger, a certain book, personal crises, unexpected spiritual experiences, and existential discontent are some of the ways in which women have begun a spiritual quest over the last century. Despite the diversity of religious background and culture, certain common themes emerge. A question or series of questions begins to occupy the mind, while a yearning for 'something' takes up residence in the heart.

Children's Difficulties with Belief

Who is to say when a spiritual quest begins? There are many triggers. Some of these undoubtedly go back to childhood. Others may be traced to a specific event in adult life. Others may not be so obvious—feelings or questions which seem to mature deep underground for many years before reaching conscious awareness.

Looking at women's stories, it seems that many who have set out on a spiritual journey as mature women have had difficulty accepting religious beliefs in childhood. As one woman said, it was not as if she did not want to believe. She envied the other children who seemed to have no difficulty in accepting what they were taught at her Catholic school. She went to church, said many prayers, even wanted to be a nun, but in the end drifted away from Catholicism because, in her heart, she was not really sure whether God existed or not.

She was not alone in questioning traditional religious beliefs. And this does not only happen to women in the Christian tradition. A number of women from a Jewish background have experienced similar

[1] The ideas presented in this article draw on a multitude of sources, both published and unpublished. Where possible, references to better-known or more readily available spiritual autobiographies, such as those of Dorothy Day and Rosemary Hamilton, have been used to illustrate particular points. Other sources, less readily available, included the writings of Australian women, Shoshana Keller and Amatullah Armstrong; an Indian woman, Indiri Devi; a Chilean woman, Istimah Week; a French woman, Isabelle Eberhardt; an English woman, Marion Milner; and a New Zealander, Mary Garden.

struggles. Edith Stein, a Jewish philosopher who became a Catholic and then a Carmelite nun, mentioned having lost her faith and deliberately ceasing to pray by the time she was sixteen years old.[2]

The enquiring minds of children are not easily satisfied. They have an innate capacity to ask searching questions. Small children do not hesitate to question the religious beliefs and practices of others, not so much in order to challenge, but out of genuine curiosity. Unfortunately, during much of the last century, many religious traditions more or less subtly discouraged such questions with the implicit threat of divine displeasure and community rejection. Great courage was needed to challenge prevailing religious beliefs. Some girls resolved the problem by suspending difficult questions, only to have them return later in life. Others continued to wrestle with their difficulties, sometimes becoming alienated from their families and their traditions in the process.

[2] Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family: Her Unfinished Autobiographical Account, The Collected Works of Edith Stein,* volume 1, edited by Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, translated by Josephine Koeppel (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1986), 139, 148.

Children born into circumstances where both questioning and the idea of a personal spiritual quest were encouraged did not seem to face the same difficulties. Vimala Thakur, now a revered spiritual teacher in India, was born into a Brahmin family. As a small child she used to see her mother engaged in the worship of God and wondered how God could be in such a tiny statue. She asked her grandmother, who told her that God lived in the forest. So she ran away from home to the forest, searching for God. She did not find him, but her interest in God continued. As she grew older, her father encouraged her to go to ashrams and visit spiritual teachers, but asked her not to accept any of these as the final authority, rather to seek the light of truth in her own heart.[3]

Challenges to Religious Belief

Perhaps the first serious challenge to belief that arises for young children is the discovery that God rarely answers prayers or provides miracles. For a child hoping to avert some serious personal or family crisis, this can undermine faith. More than one woman has mentioned losing her belief in God in this way. Others speak of the difficulty of believing in a God who could allow terrible things to happen. And then there are those children who, as they begin to understand that one day they too will die (from about the age of seven onwards), develop a growing anxiety about death.

Dorothy Day alludes briefly to this in her autobiography. Day's parents, nominally Episcopalian, were not at all religious. Their children were taught to believe in God and to say bedtime prayers; other than that, God was never mentioned. When she was eight, however, contact with a Methodist family aroused her interest in religion. She began to go to Sunday school and to church with them. In her own family, she was the only one who went to church. As a result,

> I was alternately lonely and smug. At the same time I began to be afraid of God, of death, of eternity. As soon as I closed my eyes at night the blackness of death surrounded me. I believed and yet was

[3] Chris Parish, '"Set Them on Fire!" A Portrait of a Modern Sage', *What is Enlightenment?,* 5/2 (1996), 36-39.

> afraid of nothingness. What would it be like to sink into that immensity?[4]

In that same year, Dorothy's family moved to another city. One day she and her mother watched the retrieval of the bodies of two small children who had drowned in a nearby lake. Dorothy commented:

> Here was death in the concrete and yet it did not touch me so nearly as those forebodings of death which came to me at night after I had closed my eyes in the dark room and the universe began to spin around me in space.[5]

Sometime in her high school years, betraying her struggles with religious belief, she wrote,

> Life would be utterly unbearable if we thought we were going nowhere, that we had nothing to look forward to. The greatest gift life can offer would be a faith in God and a hereafter. Why don't we have it? Perhaps like all gifts it must be struggled for. 'God, I believe' (or rather, 'I must believe or despair'). 'Help Thou my unbelief.' 'Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.'[6]

To believe or to despair. This is not so much a fear of death, as a fear of non-being. We come out of non-being into the brightness of life. We live, and then we die, disappearing into non-being. Other women have mentioned struggling with existential anxiety, not only when they were children, but as a hidden undercurrent in their lives even as adults.

Incompatibility with Other World-Views

After completing high school, Dorothy Day plunged into life at university. There she learnt from Marx that religion was 'the opium of the people'. It was something that brought comfort to people, something which the strong did not need. So she hardened her heart against her religious inclinations and turned instead to communism

[4] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 20.
[5] Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 23.
[6] Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings: Little by Little,* edited by Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992 [1983]), 21.

and the fight against social injustice. Only when she was a new mother in her early thirties did she turn again to religion, to Catholicism this time, desiring the order and tranquillity it promised.

For many women, going to university has marked the end of any adolescent religiousness. They have put aside religious beliefs under influences such as science, Marxist ideology and Freudian psychology, all of which seem incompatible with a religious view of the world.

This is not something to be regretted. For those women inclined towards religion as children, this setting aside of 'childish things' is part of a deeper allegiance to truth. Such an allegiance requires a fearlessness and openness of mind that can allow the suspension, or even rejection, of all religious beliefs. Despite the longed-for security of belief and the community of believers, the attraction to truth is stronger. Thus the ground is prepared for the later appearance of existential and spiritual questions.

Awakening to the Quest

There are many things that can trigger a spiritual quest in maturity. Looking at the stories of modern, independent women, one is struck by the diversity of situations in which the quest began. One woman, in despair following the death of her husband, began trying to find out if life continued beyond death. Another, a successful academic and family woman, experienced several bouts of ill health, which brought her to realise that she had less control over her life than she had imagined. She needed a deeper understanding of her Jewish tradition than its practices were giving her, and so she turned to a study of its scriptures. Even reading a novel can be enough to trigger a spiritual quest. Several mid-twentieth-century women, including Dorothy Day, mentioned books by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy or Kazantzakis as giving impetus to a turning inward. The quest is also stimulated, for some, by the spoken word.

The casual remark of an acquaintance was enough for Frenchwoman Lizelle Reymond as she was working on translating a Sanskrit text in a library in India. A student asked her how long she was going to go on arranging books on library shelves. His words struck her like the reverberations of a great bell.

> Under the effect of this shock, I asked myself the question: Do I have the inner stability to face the demands of my life? Do I know my place in life? What is it I know?[7]

At the time, she was living with a Brahmin family in a village near Almora, a town in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. When her work on that particular text was completed, she began looking for further texts suitable for translation and publication in France. A wandering holy man told her of a learned monk who lived in a distant village, translating Sanskrit texts into Bengali. This monk received no one. She decided to write to him.

> I doubted whether he would answer. However, a month later a reply came: a refusal. But one sentence in the letter attracted my

[7] Lizelle Reymond, *To Live Within: A Woman's Spiritual Pilgrimage in a Himalayan Hermitage,* foreword by Jacob Needleman, translated by Nancy Pearson and Stanley Spiegelberg (Portland, Or: Rudra Press, 1995), xvii.

> attention. I decided to write again. This time, without mentioning texts for translation, I spoke from myself asking a question about spiritual discipline.[8]

From that tentative beginning, her quest gathered momentum. Within months she was accepted as a student of the monk and began the first of many years of spiritual practice and study under his guidance. Perhaps her spiritual quest really began, albeit unconsciously, when she was drawn to the work of translating sacred Sanskrit texts. Yet some small thing—the student's question, the sentence in the monk's letter—was needed to bring those existential questions to consciousness and set the quest in motion. It was as if something hidden deep within was ready to come to the surface.

An Unexpected Spiritual Experience

An unexpected spiritual experience, whether in a dream or in waking consciousness, can trigger doubts and questions. Flora Courtois, a girl of sixteen living in the USA, needed a minor operation. While under the anaesthetic, she observed a whirling spiral of light approaching from a great distance and at great speed. At the same time a voice told her that she would understand all things when the centre of the spiral reached her. Unfortunately, she awoke before this could happen. Yet she was left convinced that what she had seen and heard was inexplicably related to the deepest truth. In the following year she began to doubt all that she had been taught within the Catholic tradition, and began a quest for a primary reality that permeated everything.[9]

Other women have reported less dramatic experiences, but experiences that were nevertheless unexpected and powerful enough to awaken an interest in existential and spiritual questions. Often this meant trying to understand what they had experienced by integrating it into an inherited religious belief system. Failing that, it might mean suspending all religious beliefs to go in search of the deeper truth that they had briefly encountered.

[8] Raymond, *To Live Within*, 6-7.
[9] Flora Courtois, *An Experience of Enlightenment* (Wheaton, Il: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986).

The Search Arising in Mid Life

Most commonly the spiritual quest begins, if it is to begin at all, between twenty-seven and forty-seven years of age. There are exceptions, of course, when the quest continues without a break from childhood or when a life crisis precipitates the quest in an older woman. However, while personal crises do awaken questions about the meaning of life, such questions are actually more likely to arise just when life is going well. During the middle years of life, women have established a certain way of life, and many of their goals may be within reach. Either they have married and had children, or they have remained single. Some have well-established careers, some do not. Whatever their individual circumstances, those who have become spiritual seekers were reasonably happy and content with life until, unexpectedly, a vague unease began to make itself felt, gradually solidifying into a more substantial discontent that nevertheless still lacked any real focus.

Existential Discontent

This discontent was not the developmental discontent of adolescents on the cusp of adulthood, eager to establish an adult identity and railing at parental restraints. Nor was it a discontent with an intimate relationship or a particular life situation. Those discontents are focused; they can be named and dealt with. But this discontent was different. It had no focus, it pervaded the whole of life, and it was persistent. It did not seem to be a symptom of an underlying depression. Depression is commonly accompanied by other symptoms, such as changes in weight, sleep patterns and mood. The women did not talk about feeling depressed, but rather about being discontented, and being puzzled as to why.

Rosemary Hamilton, a woman of Christian background, grew up in the wild, mountainous country of Canada's west coast. Her childhood, though materially impoverished, was happy, marred only by the death of her beloved father when she was fourteen. She became a social worker, married and had children. While her children were young she was briefly discontented with the constraints of family life. This discontent disappeared as she realised that she had chosen to marry and have children, and that she was content with that choice even if it meant sacrificing some freedom.

Twenty years later, after a reluctant divorce, she did find the freedom to advance her career and to experiment with new relationships. After several years of this, suddenly everything started to feel empty.

> I was 48, at the top of my career, when the role of pampered poobah grew stale. So did my role as a social activist. A vast discontent seized me. … I'd spent a lifetime achieving the goals society sets: satisfying sex, ecstatic love, marriage and children, an honoured occupation. All had left me feeling hollow, hungry; wanting, needing something more.[10]

Unlike the earlier discontent, this discontent persisted and intensified. It also brought with it a yearning for 'something more', but a something more that could not now be easily labelled as freedom. She had had, after all, years of freedom to work towards life goals that seemed to offer satisfaction.

The other difference between this new discontent and the earlier one was that the first represented a desire to escape *from* a sense of entrapment, whereas this discontent was a yearning *towards* something. It emerged in the fullness of a successful life and persisted with an urgency that required a response.

So it is with many women. The first sign of an awakening to a spiritual quest is a vague, unfocused but persistent discontent in lives that are otherwise happy and busy. Just when they should be enjoying the fruits of wise life choices, hard work and good fortune, discontent surfaces. To begin with, it can be mistaken for something else—perhaps the longing for a child, or a new project, or a different lifestyle or career. But after some years of pursuing those alternatives, it becomes clear that the hidden yearning remains unsatisfied. Discontent rears its head again, even stronger and more persistent than before.

The Questions

Usually this discontent begins to crystallize into a question or a series of questions. Some women want to know how to bring order to a life

[10] Rosemary Hamilton, *Hellbent for Enlightenment: Unmasking Sex, Power, and Death with a Notorious Master* (Ashland, Or: White Cloud Press, 1998), 4.

that seems disorganized and without direction. What principles and rules should be adopted in order for life to be more satisfying? Others want to know if there is a deeper meaning and purpose to life. What is the goal of life? How is life to be lived as fully as possible? For others, religious questions come to the fore. Is there a spiritual dimension to life? Is there a God? How can I know? Does the answer to this question make a difference to the way life should be lived? Then there are questions about life after death, and about the possibility of communication with dead family members. Sometimes, too, there are questions about a 'psychic' realm. Other questions focus on the reality to which the word 'God' refers, on the ultimate goal at the core of a religious tradition, however that goal be conceived.

The questions take many forms. There is no 'right' question. The initial question is simply a starting point; tentative answers awaken more profound questions. In this way the spiritual quest takes hold. One woman tells how her search for meaning sometimes became so intense that she would have to tell herself to stop thinking about it or she would go crazy. She would go to the movies, have coffee with friends, and try to forget. She would forget for a time, but it always returned. So the spiritual quest began and gathered momentum. In the process it became a quest of the heart as well as of the intellect, for at its core was that unnamed but powerful yearning.

Yearning

Women all over the world, in every religious tradition or in none, have spoken of this yearning in various ways. A woman from the USA has described it as a terrible restlessness, and as a longing to find meaning and purpose in her life. One Australian woman called it an ache, a hunger, a yearning that persisted and seemed incurable, while another described it as wanting everything, yet not knowing what that 'everything' was. An Indian woman spoke of how her whole being was crying out for something she could not name. A Chilean woman wanted a deeper religious experience than she found in attending her Catholic church.

In some instances there were strong overtones of an almost erotic attraction—but to what? An English woman wanted to be swept up, swept away by something all-consuming. A woman from New Zealand echoed her words, wanting to be absorbed and annihilated by love—

not a transient, human passion, but 'once and for all and forever'. The French philosopher Simone Weil, who came from a Jewish family background but who regarded herself as closer to Christianity than to Judaism, described this yearning as arising in a period of preparation for a closer relationship with God.

> In this period of preparation the soul loves in emptiness. It does not know whether anything real answers its love. It may believe that it knows, but to believe is not to know. Such a belief does not help. The soul only knows for certain that it is hungry. The important thing is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same.
>
> The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty.[11]

This yearning that could not be satisfied was a puzzling reality. It demanded satisfaction, and satisfaction in this life rather than in some dubious paradise beyond death. In women who were ready, only some small thing was needed to awaken that yearning, and to call them to begin a spiritual quest. The call was not the result of an intellectual decision. Nor was it the attraction of an interesting project. It seemed to be something that could not be put aside, despite the profound discomfort and life changes it might bring in its wake. In the end, it was a yearning for truth, for love, for enlightenment, for union with that which ultimately IS.

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[11] Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, translated by Emma Crauford, (London: HarperCollins, 1951), 132.

'JUST TELL THEM STORIES'

The Liberation Spirituality of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

John Pridmore

PHILIP PULLMAN INSISTS that his intention in writing *His Dark Materials* was simply to tell a story.[1] The critical consensus is that he has done so brilliantly. A vast body of readers—adults as well as the young people for whom the trilogy was written—agrees. So too did the full houses for the acclaimed stage production at London's National Theatre. Here is a thrilling work of immense imaginative sweep and power. *His Dark Materials* is a story. This may be a special kind of story, but it is not something else masquerading as a story. Pullman's trilogy is not a disguised tract.

This essay is about what might be called the 'spiritual development' of the trilogy's main characters, the children—and the no-longer-children—Lyra and Will. I shall ask too how the story functions. I shall suggest that Pullman's book is itself spiritually formative; like all good literature, it does us good to read it. But the obvious must be stressed. *His Dark Materials* was not created as a quarry for insights into children's spirituality and how it may be shaped. Subscribers to this journal have their reasons for discussing the book in such terms, but these are not the reasons why young people read it. They do so because they are enthralled by it.

His Dark Materials is a story, a war story and a love story. Crucial to the outcome of the war are the courage and tenacity of Lyra and Will, two children who come from different worlds. According to

[1] The trilogy consists of *Northern Lights* (London: Scholastic, 1995), cited as *NL*; *The Subtle Knife* (London: Scholastic, 1997), cited as *SK*; and *The Amber Spyglass* (London: Scholastic, 2001), cited as *AS*.

Pullman's cosmology there exists a multiplicity of parallel universes between which it is possible to move. Pullman presupposes that such a cosmology is, in principle, possible and—a premise that has a great bearing on what we make of the trilogy—that it accounts for all there is. His plurality of universes coexists within a single 'envelope' beyond which there is nothing and no one. Lyra's home is a college in the Oxford of another world, a world both like and unlike our own. Lyra is a resourceful and mendacious hoyden, running wild across the roofs and through the cellars of her college, driving the dons who are her guardians to distraction. Will is from our world, from somewhere suburban and faceless in the south of England. The children meet in a third universe to which they gain access, Lyra through a cosmic cataclysm which rips the fabric of the worlds apart, Will through a small window in the air beside the Oxford ring-road.

The war in which the children are caught up is the renewal of an ancient conflict. Before the worlds were formed there was rebellion in heaven, a revolt by the braver angels against one of their own who had conferred on himself the title of Almighty God. That rebellion was put down and 'the Authority', as he is called in Lyra's world, continues his malign and despotic reign. The instruments of his rule in that world are the Church, the Magisterium and the priesthood. These bodies are dedicated to the suppression of every natural impulse, watchful for the least deviation from the truth as they define it, fiercely opposed to all curiosity and free enquiry (*AS* 342-343). Battle is now once more joined as beings from all the worlds, including humans and angels, make common cause (*AS* 222) finally to overthrow this tyranny that has lasted since time immemorial.

Much of the narrative concerns a mysterious material which those in Lyra's world who are privy to the arcane speak of as 'Dust'. 'Dust' appears to gather about individuals as they become adults. This substance is feared by the Church, which sees it as sinful and seeks to destroy it. But the children come to recognise that what the Church wishes to master and abolish is in truth 'matter beginning to understand itself'. Far from being sinful, 'Dust' is what confers on us

our autonomy and our capacity for joy. And as the story unfolds we learn that what is known as 'Dust' in Lyra's world has been discovered in our world too. 'Dust' is the same as the 'shadow particles' of our universe. In time it becomes consciousness, capable of making free choices. Those in Lyra's world who dread 'Dust' are of the same spirit as those in our world—or in any world—who know that their hold on power will always be challenged by the unfettered mind.

Eventually the children prevail. The old enemy is overthrown. The remaking of all things—the building of the 'republic of heaven'—can begin.

'Spiritual Development' in His Dark Materials

What understanding of the spirit of the child do we find in *His Dark Materials*? To gain a firmer purchase on this elusive question I shall comment on what I see as three of the trilogy's leading themes 'the self', 'innocence and experience', and 'spirituality and religion'.

The Self

Each character in *His Dark Materials* is a threefold being. Mrs Coulter, Lyra's mother, all shelter and deceit stripped away, stands naked 'body and ghost and daemon together' before the ferocious gaze of Metatron, prince of the angels (*AS* 418). Each of us is 'body and ghost and daemon' (*AS* 176). Here, as so often in the trilogy, Pullman draws on the concepts and the imagery of the Christian Bible, even as he rejects the traditional Christian account of our nature and destiny.

Mary Malone, who was once a nun in our world but who has now renounced both the religious life and the Christian faith, reminds Will and Lyra that St Paul spoke about 'spirit and soul and body' (*AS* 462-463). There are three parts to human nature. Each of us has a *body*—'the best part', comments Will, as his friendship with Lyra takes on a new and strangely disturbing quality. And each of us has a *ghost*, a pale, hapless shadow of the self, which at death descends to the realm of the dead. Here Pullman draws on both the Hebrew Bible's idea of Sheol and the classical notion of Hades, the underworld. The ghost of the individual is the forlorn shade of the one who once was. In the story's most audacious sequence, the children descend to the realm of the dead to set free the departed ghosts. The ghosts of the dead are released, but not to some celestial paradise. Their destiny in death is

oblivion. Yet the sting of death is drawn, and the ghosts cry before they are gone:

> We'll be alive again in a thousand blades of grass, and a million leaves, we'll be falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze, we'll be glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world which is our true home and always was. (*AS* 336)

Hell has been harrowed.

Lastly, and most significantly, each of us has a *daemon*. A child's daemon, which is with him or her all the time, now as one creature, now as another, can be seen as representing the developing 'spirit' of the child, as we would call it in our world. To be parted from one's daemon is to die—a separation which, if she is to fulfil her high destiny, Lyra must herself suffer (*AS* chapter 18 onwards). Lyra cries out in agony when she realises that she must enter the realm of the dead, and that to do so she must part from her daemon, Pantalaimon. 'But he *is* me!' she cries (*AS* 295). Deliberately to abandon one's daemon is the final betrayal (*AS* 299).

The image of the daemon, in some ways recalling the 'totem animal' of the North American 'first nation' peoples, can be seen as outwardly manifesting who a person essentially is, and who they are becoming. In two ways at least, this bold, delightful and ingenious image illuminates the spiritual development of the growing child.

First, there is a significant difference between a child's daemon and that of an adult. Exploring the vaults beneath Jordan College, where generations of masters are buried, Lyra and her friend Roger notice that each tomb bears not only the name of the one who rests there but also a brass plaque with a picture of an animal or some other being on it. These, Lyra realises, are images of the dead men's daemons. 'As people became adult their daemons lost their power to change and assumed one shape, keeping it permanently.' (*NL* 49) Lyra hates to think that her beloved daemon will one day 'settle'. But she has to learn that this is an inevitable part of growing up for, as she is told, it is only 'when your daemon settles [that] you'll know what sort of person you are' (*NL* 167).

The mutating forms of Lyra's daemon—now a moth, now a lion, now a goldfinch—say something essential about the spirit of the child: that he or she is *always becoming*. The spirit of a child is a river,

and we cannot tell it to be still. The literature about children's spirituality and the successive official guidelines about 'the promotion of spiritual development' (mandatory requirement in English and Welsh schools) abound with clumsy attempts to arrest the child's evolving spirit for long enough to take its description. With the image of the child's ever-changing daemon, Pullman has succeeded where definitions fail in conveying the fluid and dynamic character of spiritual growth. The spirit of the child cannot be pinned to a board.

As grown-ups, we may well resent the suggestion that our daemon no longer changes, and that we're saddled with the one we've got. (It is a salutary spiritual exercise for the adult reader of Pullman to reflect on what creature might be his or her daemon.) Yet we are bound to concede, however reluctantly, that children possess 'a freedom to become', a suppleness of the spirit, as of the body, which can no longer be ours as adults. We say to an adult whom we have not seen for years, 'You haven't changed at all!' But to a child we say, 'My! How you've grown!' Behind these commonplace expressions, as behind the image of the daemon that must eventually settle as one creature and not another, is the acknowledgement that there is a lissomness of the spirit in the young which is lost in later life, however strongly we insist that the spiritual journey is never done. (Can what is lost in some measure be recovered? If indeed we must become like children, if indeed we must aspire to the condition of childhood, we must at least hope that it may be so.)

Secondly, this extraordinarily clever image is effective in that it enables Pullman to make the dynamic process of a child's spiritual growth transparent. In our world we can neither see nor hear the restless river of the child's flowing spirit. But in picturing his children accompanied by their ever-present daemons Pullman can bring this process to light. As we hear the dialogue between child and daemon—they are always chatting to each other—it is as if we are listening to that inner river, the hidden stream of the child's spirit, with all its eddies and unpredictable currents. In the relationship of child and daemon we witness what is unfolding as the child becomes who he or she is to be.

Lyra steals into the dark and empty hall of Jordan College. Hardly visible in the gloom, Pantalaimon, in the form of a moth, hovers at her shoulder. With her finger-nail the mischievous child flicks one of the crystal glasses on the high table and the sound rings round the hall. 'You're not taking this seriously', whispers her daemon. 'Behave yourself.' (*NL* 3) The reprimand opens the first conversation we overhear between child and daemon. Eventually Lyra, like every child, will discover that growing up is indeed a serious business and later exchanges will be weightier.

In our own world that dialogue of the spirit in the growing child may be less audible to us, but that does not mean that it is altogether silent. For our children too talk to their 'daemons'. Sometimes we overhear these conversations, the child talking to an imaginary friend, as we suppose. But these spiritual exchanges go on all the time.

Innocence and Experience

It becomes clear, as the story unfolds, that Lyra has a unique role and destiny. The witches have long known of a child who is to come, and who will have 'the power to make a fateful choice on which the future of all the worlds (will) depend' (*AS* 69). Lyra's mother, the seductive and sinister Mrs Coulter, for whom nothing can be too cruel that serves the purpose of the Magisterium, extracts from one of the witches Lyra's true name. Lyra, according to the great bear Iorek

Byrnison, is 'Lyra Silvertongue', but she is also Eve, and 'the fateful choice' that she must make is the same as that made by the other Eve.

'Lyra is Eve.' (*SK* 329) The Church of Lyra's world teaches that the consequence of the choice made by the first Eve is that sin and shame and death entered the world. Now the Church is seeking to contain, and even to reverse, the consequence of that first fall from grace by a kind of 'final solution'. By means of 'intercision' children are to be separated from their daemons, and thereby kept in perpetual subjection, safe from the possibility of developing the power to choose, and the ability to defy the Church's authority. So there must be no further Fall. 'This Eve', the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline announces, 'this Eve, who is going to be tempted … if precedent is any guide, will fall and (her) fall will involve us all in ruin'. 'If this temptation does take place and the child gives in, then Dust and sin will triumph.' So the Magisterium determines that such a possibility must be averted, and that Lyra must be killed before she can be tempted (*AS* 71-75).

But Lyra survives, and there follows what the Church fears. 'Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits.' No temptation is involved, for what the children experience is natural and good, beautiful and joyful. 'With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, "Will … ". And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth.' (*AS* 491-492) Lyra's 'Fall' is accompanied by a surge of sexual awareness, and soon Lyra and Will are clinging together in each other's arms. Mary Malone, who 'plays the serpent' (*SK* 261) and feeds the children with these fruits, does not need her amber spyglass:

> She knew what she would see; they would seem to be made of living gold. They would seem the true image of what human beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance. (*AS* 497)

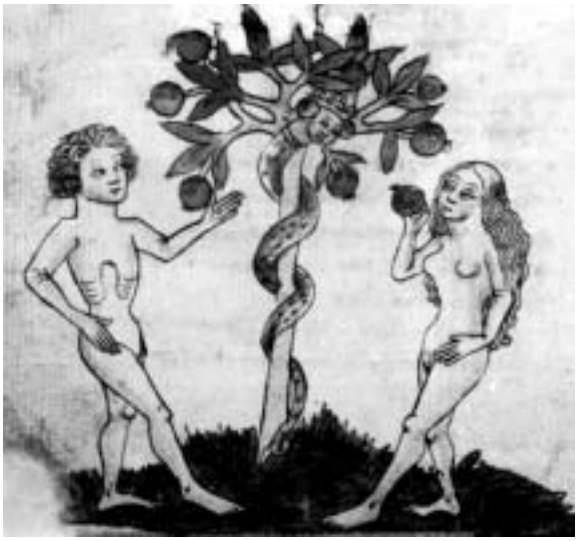
So, as Pullman retells the story, 'the Fall' is not a fall *from* grace. Were we were still to speak of what has happened as a 'Fall', we could only speak of it, paradoxically, as 'a fall *into* grace'.

> The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all. (*AS* 497)

His Dark Materials is a radical reinterpretation of the myth of the Fall. It challenges the understanding of the story dominant both in Western theology and in the popular imagination. On that traditional view Adam and Eve disobey, and they and all humankind are punished with toil and pain. From generation to generation the guilty state of our first parents is perpetuated. According to Augustine, to whom we owe the melancholy notion of 'original sin', our corrupted condition is a kind of sexually transmitted disease, for it is the 'concupiscence' that goes with the begetting of children that perpetuates our fallen state.

Pullman will have none of this. He rejects the understanding of the Fall which won the day in the West. For Pullman, the story of the Fall is not about a primal sin and its calamitous consequences. It is, rather, all about growing up. (In this respect his reading of the story is much closer to how it is understood in the Jewish tradition or by Irenaeus and the Greek fathers.) The children come into their inheritance. Knowledge, the 'knowledge of good and evil', is not forbidden; on the contrary it is necessary and indeed a blessing, for only with that knowledge comes our capacity to choose. To be sure, that choice may be for good or ill. But good is only truly good when it is chosen. Innocence may have its charm, but something more than innocence is needed for our flourishing.

Mary Malone was once a nun, and has become a research scientist. She sees the significance of the 'Shadow-particles' on her computer screen. In the relatively recent evolutionary past—a mere thirty-three thousand years ago—these particles (the 'Dust' of Lyra's world) became con-centrated in the human brain and consciousness was born. That moment, Mary realises, marked 'the great change in human history symbolized in the story of Adam and Eve; with the Temptation, the Fall, Original Sin' (*AS* 235).



Here then is Pullman's rereading of the ancient myth. The story of the Garden of Eden is a mythological account of the decisive stage in the evolution of human consciousness, the emergence of our capacity to reason and freedom to choose. So far from being a primal catastrophe, this moment is a coming-of-age to be celebrated.

The Lyra of *His Dark Materials* is Eve and, like that other Eve, she has her unique and inalienable role in the scheme of things. But—again as in that earlier story—Lyra and Will are also each of us and all of us. Every Lyra and every Will, every child, must grow up. Spiritual nurture must welcome this process. The spiritual life of the child is not a secret garden from which all that is adult must be excluded, nor some delicate plant which will wither outside its hothouse. Spiritual nurture is not barrier nursing, conducted in a hermetically sealed environment from which all potentially infectious influences must at all costs be kept out.

There is much talk today of 'the death of childhood', and many are concerned to keep at bay those influences which are perceived as destructive of childhood innocence. Philip Pullman himself has deplored much of what happens to children in contemporary culture, but *His Dark Materials* is not a celebration of childhood as a golden age. His trilogy gives little encouragement to those who would idealize the spirituality of childhood, and who see the onset of adulthood as a threat to it. There is little in *His Dark Materials*—for all the bewildering capacity of the child's daemon/spirit to change its form—to suggest that the spiritual nature of the child is a capacity for discerning the transcendent, for perceiving things which are closed to the clouded spiritual vision of the grown-up. One suspects that Pullman would distance himself from those who celebrate the spiritual insight of children and contrast it with a lack of such insight in adults. Such a view of children's spirituality does not empower the child. Rather, it can easily serve regimes—including parental regimes—which prefer to prolong the dependence of childhood as much as possible. Spiritual nurture, according to *His Dark Materials*, is a matter of enabling children to grow up.

Two principles control Pullman's account of the flourishing and fulfilment of the child's spiritual nature: the principles of liberation and of love. Where Lyra recognises and accepts her destiny to release the ghosts from the land of the dead, the epigraph to the chapter is the New Testament text: 'You shall know the truth and the truth shall set

you free' (John 8:32). In the later twentieth century those who read the words of Jesus through their awareness or experience of poverty and oppression developed what came to be known as 'liberation theology'. For all its teeming Biblical and religious imagery, *His Dark Materials* cannot be forced into a Christian theological framework, or indeed into any other. But what we do have in the trilogy is an essay in what could be called 'liberation spirituality'. Spiritual fulfilment becomes possible when 'the Authority', and all the despotisms and tyrannies it symbolizes, are overthrown. Here is a spirituality which is essentially social and emancipatory.

This liberation comes about through love. In the end, love prevails even within the cold and scheming Mrs Coulter; her reawakened love for Lyra proves stronger than her loyalty to the Church. 'I love Lyra. Where did this love come from?' she asks. 'I don't know; it came to me like a thief in the night, and now I love her so much that my heart is bursting with it.' (*AS* 426-427) Our last picture of Lyra and Will is of children-no-longer-children who are 'saturated with love'. What order of love is this? There are echoes of the conclusion of another epic here, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and of 'the love that moves the sun and the other stars'. Lyra and Will are steeped in a love which is more than the attraction between them; their love draws on the love which has settled on them as Dust (Lyra's 'shining hair [is] all set about with golden Dust' [*AS* 427]). Here I make the connection which Pullman stops short of making, though I think he implies it, that 'Dust', matter become conscious of itself, is matter that has become love. Not 'God is love'—but 'Dust is love'. Their love draws on that love, but it does not stop with them. It not exhausted in their delight in each other, but energizes their commitment to building 'the republic of heaven'.

Liberation comes through love

Spirituality and Religion

The fiercest discussion prompted by *His Dark Materials* has centred on Pullman's apparently hostile stance towards the Church, towards religion generally, and towards Christianity in particular.[2] Mary Malone

[2] See, for example, Anthony Woolard, 'Philip Pullman and the Republic of Heaven', *Modern Believing*, 45/2 (2004), 47-56.

says, 'The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all' (*AS* 464).

Pullman cleverly locates the Magisterium of the Church of Lyra's world in Geneva. This enables him to depict his Church as exhibiting at once all that is most deplorable both in popery and in puritanism. Pullman draws on the familiar stereotypes of the Church as oppressive, cruel, obsessed by sin—especially by the sins of the flesh—and ever the enemy of free enquiry. The word of a witch, Ruta Skadi, suffices to express the estimate of the Church which goes unchallenged and unqualified throughout the trilogy:

> For all its history … the church has tried to suppress and control every natural impulse …. That is what the church does and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling …. (*SK* 52)

None of this is very subtle, a fact which should give us pause. The description of the Church in Lyra's world is not a balanced representation of an institution in our world which, notwithstanding its often shameful history, has nevertheless here and there done a little good, and which has included, along with the rest of us, some quite nice people. But this description was not intended as such. Those who see this book as an attack on the Christian Church have not read it attentively. Pullman is looking for a little more sophistication from his readers.

Detail from **The Simoniac Pope** *by William Blake*

Pullman's aim is not to pillory the Church—though he himself has little taste or time for institutional religion. Rather, he is encouraging us to think about whatever it is that impedes human growth, human flourishing. In Pullman's story, these forces have found a willing agent in the Church; and the Church of Lyra's

world serves in Pullman's mythology as a symbol for all that is destructive and infantilising. It symbolizes whatever opposes 'the republic of heaven', which Lyra and Will and all of us are summoned to build. But 'church' here is a symbol, and what the symbol conveys is not any single institution, not the Church of our world—though where caps fit, they must be worn. The enemy of human flourishing is whoever or whatever seeks to suppress the free spirit, and to stop children and those no longer children from falling and staying in love. It is noteworthy that Philip Pullman himself has had much more to say about the damage done to children by an oppressive and prescriptive educational system than about the harm done to them by religion.

How His Dark Materials *Functions Formatively*

How are we to classify *His Dark Materials*—if classify it we must? What is its literary genre? If we describe the trilogy as a work of 'fantasy' we must do so with some caution, for this is fantasy of a different order from some more familiar examples of the genre. And if it is fantasy, what manner of fantasy is it? Fantasy will of course always escape any attempt to define or categorize it. Having said that, I find the broad classification proposed by Sheila Egoff helpful.[3]

Egoff draws attention to the deep roots of fantasy in myth, legend and folklore, in material retold for generations by word of mouth before ever being put in writing. Egoff reserves the term 'fantasy' for written fantasy. 'Fantasists shape their stories through artifice.' The matter of written fantasy may have elements in common with what is handed down by oral tradition, but it is the narrator's private vision that we are now invited to share, not 'the public dream'. Egoff distinguishes a series of sub-genres of fantasy, including the

[3] *Worlds Within: Children's Fantasy from the Middle Ages to Today* (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1988), see especially 4.

literary fairy tale and epic fantasy. The literary fairy tale imitates the traditional form, but it is imbued with the author's individuality. The epic fantasy, conceived on a grander scale, is closely related to legend, and its great theme is the unending conflict between good and evil. Pullman would not, I hope, quarrel with our describing his work as an example of 'epic fantasy'.

I have suggested that *His Dark Materials* is potentially a spiritually formative work. If so, how does it function? Fantasy can work in different ways. Some fantasy, for example, is essentially didactic. Other fantasy can be seen as 'therapeutic'. My contention is that *His Dark Materials* is neither of these. Rather, it exemplifies what has been described as 'utopian fantasy'.

Didactic Fantasy

What is taught by 'didactic fantasy' is an improving message that the author intends. The function of didactic fantasy is to teach a lesson. We think of the sententious and moralising approach of much Victorian children's literature. Is *His Dark Materials* didactic fantasy? Certainly critics of Pullman have accused him of preaching, of propagating a secular gospel. We have noted one point at which the authorial voice is too loud—Mary Malone's remark that Christianity is simply a mistake. There are such occasional didactic moments in the trilogy, false notes in the narrative. But the work as a whole cannot be classified as didactic fantasy. It is a tale of tremendous moral and spiritual power but its morality and spirituality are generally inherent in the story, not imposed on it.

Therapeutic Fantasy

'Therapeutic fantasy' is fantasy understood as promoting psychological well-being. Bruno Bettelheim argued in his famous study of fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment*,[4] that such tales must be interpreted in Freudian terms. Fairy tales, he claimed, acknowledge the shadow side of existence, the dark within. They enable children to address the turmoil of menacing and potentially destructive subconscious pressures by inviting them to identify imaginatively with the protagonists of a narrative in their struggle to overcome evil. Fantasy, interpreted in this

[4] (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

way, allows the reader to enter another, imaginary world where they can work through and resolve their inner conflicts, and then return to the 'real world' properly adjusted to take on its challenges.

However, Pullman does not, quite clearly, accept the distinction between the real world and 'somewhere else'. As John Parry, Will's father, says, 'There is nowhere else' (*AS* 382). The function of Pullman's fantasy is not to transport us readers to an unreal never-never-land, such as Narnia or Middle-earth, from which we can return better equipped to cope with our own real world. Fantasy, as Pullman recasts it, is not an alternative to realism but a dimension of it. The imagined worlds of his trilogy are fictional worlds, to be sure, but they are all possible worlds, made of the same stuff as the world in which these words are being written and read. The worlds we enter in reading Pullman are not fictional sanatoria where we get our heads straight before re-entering everyday life in sound mental health. *His Dark Materials* cannot be forced into the interpretative framework that Bettelheim has constructed.

Utopian Fantasy

I wish to suggest that the formative potential of *His Dark Materials* is best understood if it is seen as an example of what Jack Zipes has described as 'utopian fantasy'.[5] Fantasy and fairy tales are often characterized as timeless and ahistorical, and as exercising a universal appeal. The circumstances of their composition, in this view, do not matter. But Zipes challenges this, insisting that such writing is part of a social process which reflects continuing conflicts in society over power and social relations. Such tales, Zipes claims, are shaped by existing social patterns but also by the longing that those patterns might be changed. They contain 'the wish-fulfilment and utopian projection of the people', the aspiration to a better life.[6] Thus they demand a political understanding.

Fantasy writing can be a liberative social process

[5] *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy-Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1979); *Fairy-Tales and the Art of Subversion* (London: Heinemann, 1983); *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988); *Creative Storytelling: Building Community, Changing Lives* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy-Tales and Their Tradition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999); (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

[6] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 6.

Zipes' understanding of the fairy tale as essentially a utopian tract owes much to his reading of Bloch's seminal work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*).[7] Bloch's Marxist faith was that human beings could shape their destiny to conform to their deepest longings and needs. Zipes quotes a passage from *The Principle of Hope* in which the vision of the coming good is invoked: '… something comes into being in the world that shines into everyone's childhood and where no one has yet been—home'.[8]

Fairy tales or fantasies, in Zipes's view, are not other worlds into which one escapes, even with a view to returning to one's everyday world better equipped to deal with it. Still less are they didactic tracts. They are to be understood rather as essentially subversive. They challenge familiar power-structures; they are manifestos for social change. *His Dark Materials* is such a story.

John Parry, Will's father, tells his son about,

> … the two great powers [that have] been fighting since time began. Every advance in human life, every scrap of knowledge and wisdom and decency we have has been torn from the teeth of the other. Every little increase in human freedom has been fought over ferociously between those who want us to know more and be wiser and stronger and those who want us to obey and be humble and submit. (*SK* 335)

The subject of *His Dark Materials* is this immemorial conflict between the two principles—spiritual servitude and spiritual liberation—not the death of God and the defeat of the Church. The 'spiritual' in this context, in these pages, is to be understood not primarily as a matter of inward sensibility but rather as a dimension of the social and the relational.

There is, in Pullman's view, 'nowhere else', but there is 'something else', the possibility of a new order. Lyra says at the end to her daemon:

> We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard all of us and then we'll build … the republic of heaven. (*AS* 548)

[7] Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1995).
[8] Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, 129.

At the heart of fantasy, Zipes teaches us, there is a deep sense of unrest. The conditions that we experience are intolerable, and must be changed. The story is told in the longing that it will come true and—for this is how such utopian fantasy works—the same longing is awakened in the hearer or reader of the story. As we read the story—as we read *His Dark Materials*—we too catch the vision of what can be, of what *shall* be if we join together in trying to make it all come true.

'As we read the story ….' The spirit is above all nurtured by narrative. As the ghosts of the dead pass into light with joy, this is their last word:

> 'Tell them stories …. You must tell them true stories, and everything will be well, everything. Just tell them stories. (*AS* 455)

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EMBRACING LIFE, EMBRACING THE CROSS

Edward Schillebeeckx and Suffering

Kathleen McManus

'WHY DO YOU EMBRACE YOUR CROSS, YOU FOOL?' In his construal of Christ's passion, Mel Gibson presents a bloody, lacerated Jesus as taunted with this question. Gibson's intent was to dramatize the suffering that saves us. A fuller reading of the Gospel, however—and of reality—reveals that it is love that saves us, a love that embraces the whole of human life and therefore its sufferings, but a love that is fundamentally positive. As Jesus puts it in John's Gospel, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).

Some time after I saw Gibson's film, I was walking on a wild, empty beach, and I experienced one of the Spirit's jarring juxtapositions. The film's disturbing interpretation of Christ's sufferings broke across another, more vibrant picture which the iridescence of the sea had recalled to my mind: that of a young woman reclining on a boat and looking out on a similarly sun-drenched sea. The camera was at her back, and a panorama of sea and sky lay at her feet—the world as it were awaiting her embrace. It was, above all, her delight in the prospect that the photo was conveying.

The woman was nineteen year-old Kelly Jamison,[1] and the picture had first captivated me when it was hung on the wall of her hospital room. She had been hospitalised for months after being struck down by a hurtling boulder during a college mountain-climbing expedition. Other students had escaped, but the boulder struck Kelly in the back,

[1] Names have been changed for the purposes of this article.

The Way, 44/1 (January 2005), 61-73

crushing her pelvis and smashing her head into the snow-covered ground.

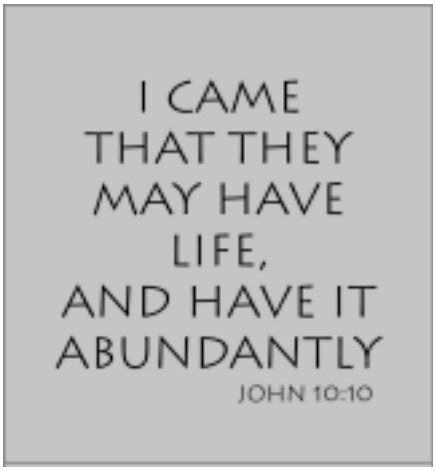
When Kelly was airlifted off the mountain, she was more than unconscious. Her heart had stopped beating; she also had extensive internal injuries. When she arrived at the hospital, doctors opened her chest and massaged her heart until it beat again, enabling the flow of blood back to her brain.

There was, naturally, a sense of relief amid the shock for Kelly's family and friends; it was as if she had been brought back from the dead. But there were more difficult feelings too. Gratitude for her life was mingled with fear of what her injuries might imply. She was in a coma, and machines were sustaining all of her vital functions. Doctors began what would become an incessant round of surgery. Infection was a constant worry, and on one occasion threatened to kill her. Around her a network of prayer, solidarity and support began to form, a network which began from Kelly's family and closest college friends, but which seemed to have no bounds.

Now and then someone would voice concern about the Jamison family's tenacity. 'What are they fighting for? If she emerges from this, what kind of a life will she have? What if she has sustained serious brain damage? How will she feel if she wakes up with countless injuries and learns that she will not have the free and active lifestyle she cherished? What about psychological trauma?' And there was also the most radical question of all: 'Why did the doctors open her chest and restart her heart in the first place?'

These were not questions that the Jamison family were asking. The one whom they loved had embraced life in its fullness, and without reservation. Now, as she lay powerless before them, they embraced her life for her. Now, embracing life meant embracing the cross, together. Kelly's family and closest companions did not analyze their tragedy. Instead, they threw themselves into the battle for Kelly's life, warding off naysayers and sceptics, and choosing courageously to hope beyond hope.

Henry Jamison, Kelly's father, kept abreast of every clinical detail, monitoring his daughter's machines like a watchdog. Even before her eyes opened, he was urging her on like a coach goading his team to victory. Peggy Jamison, her mother, was a constant healing presence, playing music in her daughter's intensive care room and reading aloud the countless cards and letters that flowed in, whether from the



university Kelly attended, or from friends far and wide, or from the growing network of strangers who had heard of Kelly's story and were sending assurances of prayer. Kelly's sister gave her manicures, while at weekends her aunts and family friends would arrive, speaking words of love, recalling joyful memories, keeping her in life.

Kelly's young college friends, frightened and sad, spoke often of her unique personality. They told stories of her unquenchable spirit, of the mischievous ways in which she would draw them along with her into active pursuits—indeed, into life. Would she live that free, engaged life again, they wondered? Could she bear the diminishment they feared? But those were questions about the future. The Jamisons were fighting in the present for Kelly's survival. And they knew, even before she could understand or speak the words herself, that Kelly also was waging a mighty battle from within. They accompanied her, one day at a time. That accompaniment meant not only an utter restructuring of life in the practical order, but also a deep restructuring of priorities—a new valuation of life's final meaning. In the process, the Jamisons at once engaged the best and most rigorous of medical science, and surrendered themselves to the power of prayer emanating from the invisibly expanding community all around them.

The struggle of Kelly and her family point us to what the theologian Edward Schillebeeckx OP calls 'the authority of suffering humanity'. For Schillebeeckx, there is a creative and transforming knowledge that comes only from suffering; to use his phrase, suffering has a 'critical and productive epistemic power'. Society at large ignores this power, even denies it; when faced with suffering, it lets itself depend on technology, especially in situations like Kelly's when there is a question as to whether life is sustainable. But Schillebeeckx maintains that 'the authority of suffering humanity' must be allowed to challenge the authority of conventional reason. Then, even when suffering seems meaningless, it can nevertheless enrich our lives.

Negative Contrast Experience

For Schillebeeckx, the experience of suffering is of special theological significance, notwithstanding God's commitment to the flourishing of what Schillebeeckx calls the *humanum*, in all its diversity and complexity.[2] Suffering enables us to imagine what we are hoping for. The fullness of life for which we long—salvation—comes to awareness in counterpoint with the concrete reality of suffering. In this context, Schillebeeckx coins the expression 'negative contrast experience': an experience of injustice, oppression or suffering that gives rise to protest and spurs us towards active transformation. Schillebeeckx speaks of how contrast experiences convey an intuitive sense of obligation. We just *know* that we must work for something different. For Schillebeeckx, this kind of intuitive response is also a charismatic moment: it is here above all that we are in contact with the Spirit.[3]

Whereas some in our world see only meaninglessness and chance, the Christian response is 'No!', says Schillebeeckx—or at least 'Nevertheless!' The basis of this response is faith in God, a conviction that God is present even in suffering, even in failure, even in death. People experience powerlessness and extreme vulnerability when scientific and rational measures fail to conquer suffering of the body, mind and spirit. Yet meaning can be found within these, through an inner impulse which Schillebeeckx describes as the 'charismatic element', moving us towards a kind of change (conversion, *metanoia*). Schillebeeckx, drawing on Thomas Aquinas, speaks of an experiential aspect of faith, corresponding to a tendency of the human spirit that derives from the living God.[4] In situations of powerlessness or acute suffering, human beings are thrown back upon a God whom they find within themselves, in a core of mysticism.

Meaning can be found in vulnerability

[2] Schillebeeckx uses the Latin neuter adjective *humanum* as a technical term to signal that what it is to be human cannot be defined in that way that a substantive noun would suggest. It conveys the sense of a project, involving body and soul, individuality and community; the *humanum* is a process of constant transformation under the dynamic call of God.

[3] See 'Church, Magisterium, and Politics', in *God the Future of Man*, translated by Theodore Westow (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 143-166, especially 155-156.

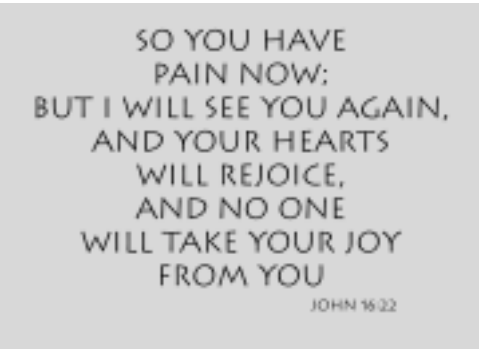
[4] 'The Non-Conceptual Intellectual Element in the Act of Faith: A Reaction', in *Revelation and Theology*, translated by N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), volume 2, 30-75, here 45.

This mystical impulse within the self connects us with the eschatological reality of the divine promise. The experience is inevitably one of contrast: the ultimate divine grounding of our lives with its promise may be not at all clear to us, but we know it through an experience of contrast. Our model for such mysticism is Jesus, whose relationship of trusting communion with the one he called Abba remained unbroken, even as he suffered and died on the cross. What defines the relationship is God's faithfulness to Jesus, even through Jesus' own dark night of pain and felt abandonment. Jesus' unbroken trust is thus vindicated, even if the vindication becomes known only in the resurrection. As Schillebeeckx repeatedly expresses it, 'on the cross, God remains holding Jesus' hand'.

In contemporary society, we can learn from this image. Scientific reason, with its prevailing view of what counts as 'quality of life', tends to see suffering as a technical problem to be solved. It writes off as meaningless any suffering which human ingenuity cannot relieve. But as people created in the image of God, we may properly explore what it means to embody the image of a God who never abandons the sufferer. When we are at the limits of reason, this Divine Image beckons us into a praxis of solidarity and a discipleship of presence.[5]

This discipleship of presence may seem merely passive; in fact, however, it represents a deeply prophetic activity. The refusal to abandon the sufferer is, in fact, a counter-cultural position of active resistance and protest against the restrictions on what is conventionally deemed 'meaningful human life'. As technologies develop, as society is gradually coming to accept physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, as the human genome project enables us to manipulate life in unprecedented ways, we need to fight a social and political war even for the right to remain holding the sufferer's hand. For society at large, and many in the medical profession in particular, see suffering as inherently meaningless.

[5] 'Praxis of solidarity' and 'discipleship of presence' are phrases borrowed from Kenneth Surin and Scott Gustafson respectively. See 'Theodicy?' in Kenneth Surin, *Turnings of Darkness and Light: Essays in Philosophical and Systematic Theology* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), 73-90; and Scott W. Gustafson, 'From Theodicy to Discipleship: Dostoyevsky's Contribution to the Pastoral Task in *The Brothers Karamazov*', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 45 (1992), 209-222. See my discussion of these in relation to Schillebeeckx in Kathleen A. McManus, *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 162-170.



Our point, Schillebeeckx' point, is that there *is* meaning in the experience of suffering, both for the sufferer and for the human community at large, even when the primary sufferer is unable to register meaning. The experience of Kelly Jamison's family in the weeks before she came to consciousness profoundly illustrates this point. And no one in touch with Kelly's story, however far removed in the extensive relational network emanating from it, can doubt its truth. Kelly's family was fortunate that the doctor in charge of her case never flagged in his battle for her recovery. By contrast, another doctor with whom they dealt saw all efforts as futile, and failed to comprehend their hopeful determination. Wisely, they chose to ignore him. But, unfortunately, his attitude is becoming more typical in such cases.

Schillebeeckx' theology helps us to name and understand this trend, and also to resist it. As scientific knowledge extends, we seem to be losing touch with what we might call contemplative knowing. We are so convinced that we both can and must control the contours of life, using all the means at our disposal to increase efficiency and optimise performance, that 'quality of life' comes to be equated with autonomy. And the prizing of autonomy has infected our means of valuing and knowing. Increasingly, we are a society incapable of the 'knowing' that functions beneath the surface of empirical reality. In such a situation, theology has before it the urgent task of articulating for the world, particularly the scientific world, the meaning in suffering. We have the task of teaching people why it is a diminishment of our humanity, an erosion of any sense of being created in God's image, for us simply to seek to release the sufferer from this world. Schillebeeckx helps us name what we know in suffering and how we know it.

What We Learn From Suffering

What is involved in the refusal to abandon the sufferer? What do we mean by a 'praxis of solidarity' manifest in a 'discipleship of presence'?

For Schillebeeckx, the experience of suffering enables us to see much more sharply what is wrong with the world, and what, therefore, must be done to promote human flourishing. We cannot know what true and full humanity is, because its reality lies in the future. But we *can* know when it is *not* developing.

The knowledge gained through suffering is neither the practical, 'purposive' knowledge of science and technology, nor the 'purposeless' knowledge of contemplation. In a world much damaged by the severance of science and contemplation, suffering enables the two to come together. 'Just like contemplative or aesthetic experiences, experiences of suffering *overcome* a person.' And yet suffering, as a contrastive experience,

> … opens perspectives for a praxis that aims at removing both the suffering itself and its causes … anticipating a better future and actively committed to realising it.[6]

Schillebeeckx is therefore far from simply rejecting scientific knowledge or rational authority. His concern is rather the proper relationship between scientific and contemplative knowing. Both should be informed by the contrastive experience of suffering; both should be subject to it. But what does this look like in reality? How do we discern the 'new praxis anticipating a better future and actively committed to realising it'? What does it mean for situations like that of Kelly Jamison, where we are at the point of 'silently holding the sufferer's hand'?

Christian prayer, Schillebeeckx asserts, can inspire us to act in quite distinctive, transformative ways. The meaninglessness of history embodied in human suffering can only be transformed piece by piece, through specific actions in particular circumstances. But as this happens, fragments of salvation emerge. Suffering is rendered meaningful, as indeed is whatever is negative in the whole of human history. Real healing and wholeness are integral to what 'salvation-coming-from-God-in-Jesus' means. In particular experiences of suffering where science fails to bring about the healing we desire, we

[6] 'Questions on Christian Salvation of and for Man' (1978), in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology and the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 101-126, here 125.

need to look again at what the Christian experience tells us about 'healing'.

'Healing' and the Miracles of Jesus

In his reflections upon Gospel images, Schillebeeckx points to how those in distress experienced Jesus' human presence as 'saving' (and here we might substitute 'healing'). Indeed, suffering and distress were the conditions for experiencing the gospel as 'glad tidings'. Wherever miracles of physical healing occur in the Gospels, something is said about faith: 'Go; your faith has made you well' (Mark 10:52). Faith, healing and conversion are inseparable. And what is decisive is the personal act of resorting to Jesus, whose *humanity* provides assurance of God's help. At the same time, however, Schillebeeckx is very clear that it is *God's* presence and saving power that people are experiencing in Jesus' humanity. What this means for healing and salvation is illumined in Schillebeeckx' treatment of 'the problem in Nazareth', where Jesus was unable to effect any cures. The problem in Jesus' home town was not that people did not believe that Jesus had the power to work miracles, but that they did not attribute this power to God. Further, and more importantly,

In the Gospels miracles are always connected with faith

> They were asking for miracles which would make no demand for *metanoia* or imply a call to fellowship with God.[7]

Physical healing in the gospels is an external sign of the deeper reality of salvation—a salvation that comes about only though conversion or *metanoia*, that inner, dynamic 'turning' at the heart of the experience of negative contrast. This 'turning' is at once profoundly personal and utterly other-centred, and requires existential trust in the divine underpinnings of reality. Perhaps we may see the 'problem in Nazareth' reflected in our own society, subject as it is to the 'authority of reason', and to a vision of humanity defined by physical perfection and the concrete realisation of our plans. The kind of healing that Jesus offers depends upon a change of heart within the

[7] *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, translated by Hubert Hoskyns (New York: Seabury, 1979 [1974]), 196.

experience of human suffering. This change of heart permits truth to approach in the flesh; it fosters human solidarity and a living discipleship of presence, and in its turn it is fostered by them. This discipleship follows God in vulnerability, and thereby makes God's presence in the world stronger.

Healing, salvation, the wholeness and flourishing of humanity, do not therefore occur apart from the mystery of what is known in suffering; nor do they occur apart from the complex web of human relationships. And it is the living God who approaches us. The God who is faithful to our human cause finds a way of being present even amidst negativity and suffering:

> Truth comes near to us by the alienation and disorientation of what we have already achieved and planned …. The hermeneutical principle for the disclosure of reality is not the self-evident, but the scandal, the stumbling block of the refractoriness of reality …. In such experiences of what proves completely refractory to all our inventions we shall also finally discover the basis for what we rightly call revelation.[8]

In ordinary life, such liberation emerges only in fragmentary ways, counterpointed with negative experiences of contrast. It is in the fissures and the gaps, in the seeming breaks in logic, that truth emerges. There, for the believer, God shows Godself. There, in those dynamic fissures, experience discloses mercy at the heart of resistant reality. Thus experiences of suffering can be threatening or revelatory, depending upon our ability to experience reality as a gift by which God opens up a future for humanity. But this capacity is a matter of faith, and our faith convictions require us to surrender to a gift. It is an urgent task for theology today to enable society, and especially the scientific community, to see humanity in terms of faith-cognition.

The Jamisons' Suffering

Kelly Jamison's tragic accident devastated her family and friends. It was an unwanted reality that broke into their lives abruptly, turning them inside out. Kelly had plans and designs for her life, entwined in a

[8] *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, translated by John Bowden (New York: Seabury, 1980 [1977]), 35.

network of dreams and plans cherished by her family and friends. A hurtling boulder altered that reality for ever, effecting the 'alienation and disorientation' of all that she had, in Schillebeeckx' phrase, 'achieved and planned'. This 'scandal', this 'stumbling block' did not come from God; it was no part of God's design. The God whom Schillebeeckx calls 'pure positivity' resisted this 'scandal' in and through the very impulse of resistance moving the hearts of all who loved Kelly. Their 'no' to this suffering reality was God's 'no'. That 'no' was the other side of a far more fundamental 'yes' to life.

The Jamisons lived their lives within a dynamic of contrast, lasting a long time. Moreover, the experience enabled them to unearth a fundamental reality of inchoate longing that only the suffering could have brought to awareness. That longing, that desire was the root of a new knowing, of an intuitive faith-cognition that led to a practical quest for a new future where freedom and happiness would be understood differently because of the experience of suffering. For Schillebeeckx, the 'contrast experience of suffering' makes us aware of 'a future meaning, a future freedom and happiness that will be real'. It also opens us to the integrating and reconciling force of contemplation, undertaken purely for itself without any further end—a contemplation that anticipates the goal of all reality, and at the same time nourishes a 'future-creating praxis which is to conquer evil and its sufferings'.[9] Suffering and threat reveal this new future. Those very conditions become the mode of a new knowing, and as such they shape both the nature and the content of what is known. What is known inheres precisely in an enfleshed praxis of solidarity with the sufferer. It inheres in the faithful human presence that is God's chosen means of being in this world.

If we ask what Kelly and her family learnt from their experience of suffering and threat, the answer can only come from them. But, as one who was a caring observer and can draw on Schillebeeckx' theology, I might venture some suggestions. Perhaps the situation of threat that the Jamisons faced evoked in them an active embrace of life that resulted in a new valuation of life's deepest meaning.

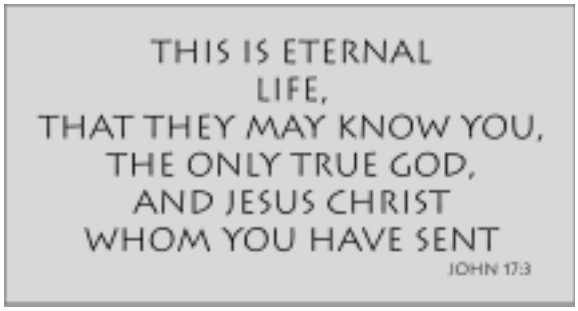
Was Kelly's life 'worth' saving as she lay comatose with massive internal injuries? Some people in society at large and in the scientific

[9] 'Questions on Christian Salvation', 126.

community would answer that question in terms of how likely it was that Kelly would come through the experience with an acceptable quality of life. And given the initial evidence, the answer to the question would have been (and in some cases, was) 'no'. All the evidence indicated that, if Kelly lived, her quality of life would be severely compromised at every level—physically, mentally and emotionally.

But the Jamisons' instinctive 'no' to the prospect of Kelly's demise was rooted in something deeper than the empirically pragmatic. Their response was an existential act of faith. At the same time, they were not simply ignoring scientific reason. Overwhelmed by suffering, they were allowing both their scientific and their contemplative knowing to be informed by suffering's authority. The experience of suffering itself—Kelly's and their own—guided their choice of the narrowest, most daring medical path. That same experience of suffering informed their contemplative knowing of the deep Mystery which grounded them. Suffering threw them back upon God, upon the promise and substance of life. Existentially they trusted the promise, not knowing whether or how it would be fulfilled. And their trust was rewarded with genuinely new life.

For Kelly Jamison awoke from her coma a month after her accident. Her initial responses were slow and non-verbal, but she gave clear evidence of recognising her visitors. Within a few weeks, she was sitting upright and talking. Initial confusion gradually gave way to clarity. Memory of life before the accident returned, although it would be some time before she would be ready to retrieve the details of that event. Major reconstructive surgeries continued. After Christmas, Kelly returned to her home town of Seattle, first to a local hospital, and then to her family's home. Before leaving the hospital in Portland for Seattle, Kelly told her parents clearly, with characteristic stubbornness, that she wanted to do all that it would take to get well. She has been engaged in a rigorous programme involving both physical and occupational therapy, and currently moves



around easily on crutches. Her college friends visited her for her birthday, and reported that they found Kelly high-spirited, energetic and full of new plans for the future. Those plans are real, concrete and courageous. Just prior to her birthday, Kelly had phoned the university with a request that her file be reopened so she could register for the Fall semester.

Kelly Jamison's amazing recovery and steady progress are surely a result of her family's passionate and tenacious refusal to abandon her to a fatalistic scenario. Their embrace of life both encompassed and sustained their embrace of the cross. And the resurrection that awaited them was the quite particular, concrete emergence in time of the Divine Promise that had, silently and mysteriously, always been their ground.

But the story could have had a different ending. It could have turned out that Kelly remained in a coma. Or she might have been struggling to recognise and communicate with her loved ones, struggling even to function minimally. Any number of painful scenarios might have been possible. Would the 'refusal to abandon the sufferer' have been the right course given these potential outcomes? I believe the answer is 'yes'. The Jamisons could not know the outcome. They acted on the basis of faithful love. Of course they wanted the best possible future for Kelly, but they did not measure the value of her life according to empirical standards. They valued her life absolutely and unconditionally; suffering only made that value plainer.

If Kelly had not recovered in the marvellous way she did, the Jamisons' trust would still have borne fruit. Their lives were radically transformed by Kelly's suffering. Their existential witness of faith drew forth an array of profound responses from the human community, near and far. Their restructuring of priorities, their utter dependence on prayer and on the bonds of relationship, became a palpable vehicle of grace for others, just as the growing network of communal support mediated grace to them. In vulnerability and in trust, and precisely because of the threat they faced, a deeper humanity was cultivated, and God's image in the world took on more flesh.

The Refusal to Abandon the Sufferer

The Jamison family's story profoundly illustrates the links between the refusal to abandon the sufferer, a willingness to move away from

prevailing models of rationality, and a readiness to allow our communal lives to be reshaped by the authority of suffering humanity. The courageous choice to remain, holding the sufferer's hand, implies a new sense of what counts as meaningful human life.

Human beings who are at life's beginning or end, or who for any reason function only marginally, usually do not have any voice. In our day, critical ethical decisions are being made by secular scientific, social and governmental authorities which do not take sufficient account of these suffering people. And large numbers of people, including 'Christian believers', find it difficult to maintain the point of view of the sufferer. It is the task of the theologian not only to take this point of view to heart, but to give a voice to these voiceless ones in the world of ethical decision-making. Theology has the task of listening to the experience of those who suffer and of those who accompany them, and of uncovering and articulating what they learn through such experience. Proclaiming this knowledge in a world fascinated with the merely empirical will be a matter of courageous invitations to conversion, and of the patient cultivation of wisdom. Such wisdom and conversion come only if we submit to suffering's 'critical, epistemic, and productive power'. In a Christmas sermon, Schillebeeckx puts it this way:

The theologian's task is to give a voice to the voiceless

> Really only those who have suffered, in *person* and in *others*, know what concern for fellow human beings and their society, what concern for more humanity, require of us.[10]

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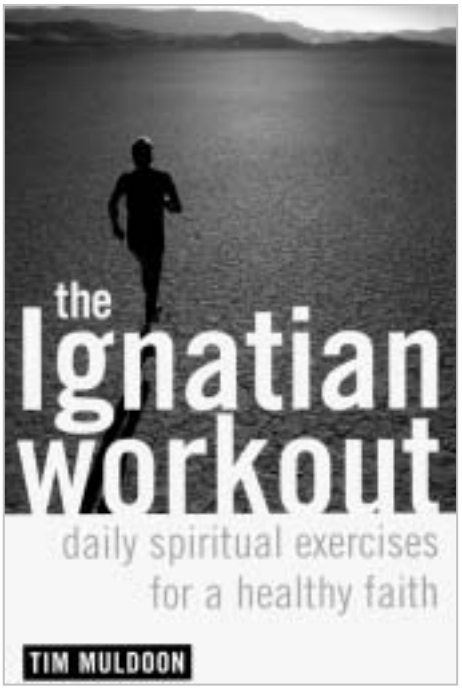
[10] 'Christmas Meditation: "Being Made Man" (Matthew 2:13-21)', in *For the Sake of the Gospel*, translated by John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 45-49, here 48-49.



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'A SIGHT OF HAPPINESS'

Thomas Traherne's Felicity in a Fleeting World

Denise Inge

WE WESTERN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CITIZENS of the world speak much of survival, and we fight for it as never before. Medical advances increase our life expectancy year by year, and we hope for the eradication of disease. We campaign for the preservation of the rainforests, for a ban on hunting endangered species, for a reduction in pollution; we strive against global terrorism; we worry about the ozone layer as we smear our children with sunscreen and our bread with cholesterol-lowering spreads. Yet our own eventual demise is sure, delay it as we may; and for the endurance of the earth we can only hope. We live in a world destined, it seems, to run down; we live a life certainly poised for death. And still we seek 'fulfilment', individual happiness, as if the individual mattered. What can one person's happiness mean in the face of these larger concerns? Conversely, is there any meaning beyond immediate satisfaction?

Happiness seems a woolly kind of romantic notion, the province of poets and dreamers. So it may not be surprising to find that Thomas Traherne, the seventeenth-century priest and poet, makes happiness his major theme. Only, his happiness is not, as one might expect, something to be deferred to the afterlife. For Traherne, heaven is here as well as hereafter, and happiness is something we can begin to taste now. In our own century, the world-renowned scientist and priest John Polkinghorne has presented a theory that makes the physical resurrection a coherent hope and also gives the present moment concrete significance. When Traherne and Polkinghorne are read together they suggest a world in which individual human happiness may have real and lasting importance.

At various points in history the belief in human happiness has been challenged. In 1926 Adolf Hitler wrote boldly: 'The day of individual

The Way, 44/1 (January 2005), 75-87

happiness has passed'.[1] But his bleak words contrast sharply with the hopeful ones written some years later by a young girl, one of the many Jewish people to have suffered so terribly under Hitler's regime, Anne Frank. In her diary entry for 7 March 1944, she wrote,

> I lie in bed at night, after ending my prayers with the words, 'Thank you God for all that is good and dear and beautiful' and I'm filled with joy. At such moments I don't think about all the misery but about the beauty that still remains. This is where Mother and I differ greatly. Her advice in the face of melancholy is: 'Think about all the suffering in the world and be thankful you're not part of it'. My advice is: 'Go outside, to the country, enjoy the sun and all nature has to offer. Go outside and try to recapture the happiness within yourself; think of all the beauty in yourself and in everything around you and be happy.'

Anne Frank's voice echoes that of Traherne, who also lived in a time of competing ideologies which was beset by war. Frank admonishes us to 'go outside to the country', to 'enjoy all that nature has to offer' and to 'be happy'; likewise Traherne writes, 'A happiness there is, and it is my desire to enjoy it' (C IV 17).[2] He 'came into the country' deciding to spend his time 'whatever it cost in search of happiness', to devote himself 'wholly to the study of Felicity' (C III 46, III 52). Frank writes, 'recapture the happiness within yourself'; Traherne, 'the excellency is within'. For both of them happiness is a thing earnestly to be sought; for both happiness is linked to the enjoyment of nature; and both see a world of beauty within and without.

What else can we know about this man Traherne, with whom Anne Frank seems to share such an affinity? Like Herbert and Donne, Traherne stands in the tradition of the Anglican priest-poet.[3] Having published two works in his lifetime, neither of which won him an enduring following, he would have been lost to literature and theology if two of his manuscripts had not been discovered at the turn of the twentieth century. These were his poems, and his best-loved *Centuries*

[1] Quoted in W. H. Auden, *A Certain World* (London: Faber, 1971), 182.

[2] Traherne's works will be cited as follows: C, *Centuries of Meditations*; KOG, *The Kingdom of God*; SM, *Select Meditations*. All spellings and capitalisations have been modernised.

[3] The tradition continues into our own day in figures such as R. S. Thomas, David Scott and Rowan Williams.

of Meditations. The rest of his works trickled into the public domain throughout the twentieth century, the latest discoveries being made as recently as 1997.[4] He has been a favourite of noted twentieth-century Christian writers and thinkers such as C. S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Dorothy L. Sayers and Elizabeth Jennings.

Traherne was a Herefordshire man and a man of letters. Though educated at Brasenose College, Oxford, in its Puritan heyday, he was a devotee of the national Church with its rituals, liturgy and bishops. Though he loved Plato and Aristotle, he was also enthusiastic about the arts and the new sciences. He was engaged in the important theological debates of his day, and known as a verbose, affable and pious man. He had imbibed much of what was best in the Puritan tradition, though he does not at all fit the caricature of the dour, pleasure-spoiling, world-denigrating and self-abasing Puritan we often imagine. He did not share the Puritan contempt for establishment, ceremonies and honours. Most significantly, he did not view the world as a wilderness to be avoided or subdued—as Bunyan, for example, did. His conviction that the world is good is perhaps Traherne's most eloquent gift to us.

Almost from the day of his birth, as soon as he could perceive, Traherne found the world beautiful:

> The world's fair beauty set my soul on fire.
> My senses were informers to my heart,
> The conduits of his glory, power and art.
> … and every sense
> Was in me like to some intelligence.[5]

[4] For details of these and other discoveries see Denise Inge and Cal Macfarlane, 'Seeds of Eternity: A New Traherne Manuscript', *Times Literary Supplement* (2 June 2000), 14; Julia Smith and Laetitia Yeandle, '"Felicity disguisd in fiery Words": Genesis and Exodus in a Newly Discovered Poem by Thomas Traherne', *Times Literary Supplement* (7 November 1997), 17; Peter Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, volume 2 (1625-1700), part 2 (London: Mansell, 1993).

[5] 'Nature', lines 6-12, in Traherne, *Poems, Centuries and Three Thanksgivings*, edited by Anne Ridler (London: Oxford UP, 1966).

The more Traherne saw the usefulness of the works of nature—'the serviceableness of its parts'—the more beautiful the world appeared to him. In the newly-discovered manuscript *The Kingdom of God*, he writes: 'The most excellent things are the most common. Were there but one cup of water in all the world, a bushel of diamonds would be trash in comparison.' (KOG 266*v*) Generations before ecology and conservation issues made us consider again the value of our earth, Traherne wrote these prescient words:

> They rejoice in a piece of gold more than in the sun; and get a few little glittering stones and call them jewels. And admire them because they be resplendent like the stars, and transparent like the air, and pellucid like the sea. But the stars themselves which are ten thousand times more useful, great, and glorious they disregard. Nor shall the air itself be counted anything, though it be worth all the pearls and diamonds in the thousand worlds. A work of God so Divine by reason of its precious and pure transparency, that all worlds would be worth nothing without such a treasure. (C I 34)

In such a world of ordinary miracle, 'we need nothing but open eyes, to be ravished like the Cherubims' (C I 37). Not only is the natural world beautiful, but it is a source of revelation to him, a conduit of the divine. As the handiwork of God, Traherne's world shows to him the ways of the creator. It is alive to life, continually created and recreated. In the beauty of the natural world we may perceive God speaking to us. God is here, he says, God is with us. Traherne goes so far as to suggest that the natural world is,

> God's body, which the Deity hath assumed to manifest His beauty and by which He maketh Himself as visible, as it is possible He should. (C II 20)

The world's roundness and the universe's vastness betoken God's infinity:

> An infinite wall is a poor thing to express His infinity; a narrow endless length … were unprofitable; but the world is round, and endlessly unsearchable every way. … The distance of the sun, the altitude of the stars, the wideness of the heavens on every side passeth the reach of sight and search of the understanding. And whether it be infinite or no, we cannot tell. The eternity of God is so apparent in it, that the wisest of philosophers thought it eternal.

> We come into it and leave it as if it had neither beginning nor ending. (C II 21)

But God's attributes may be represented in the smallest thing as well as in the infinity of the cosmos:

> Suppose a river, or a drop of water, an apple or a [grain of] sand, and ear of corn or an herb: God knoweth infinite excellencies in it more than we: He seeth how it relateth to angels and men; how it proceedeth from the most perfect Lover to the most perfectly Beloved; how it representeth all His attributes. (C II 67)

Since every little thing speaks to us of the divine, we can never love the world or anything in it too much. 'O what a treasure is every sand when truly understood! Who can love anything that God made too much?' (C II 67) Loving the world too much is not the problem, says Traherne, but loving it too little, or in the wrong way, or for the wrong ends: 'What a world would this be, were everything beloved as it ought to be!' (C II 67)

All of this love of creation, its smallest grain of sand and its widest realms, is rooted in Traherne's larger quest for happiness. His great

theme is *Felicity*—a mutually beneficial happiness that both pleases us and is a glory to God—and it would be foolish to try to understand his reverence for creation apart from his quest for happiness. Traherne takes present happiness so seriously that he is suspicious of those Christians who would defer happiness until heaven, since we are commanded to have our conversation in heaven now. If happiness is something we should desire at the last, it is also something we should desire now. *Now* we are to be 'full of joy and full of glory' (C IV 9).

We are created to be happy, claims Traherne; it is 'the Glory of God' to make us so.[6] We come into this life happy and free. Happiness is our natural condition. Yet Traherne's own happiness was also something he earnestly sought, studied hard to discover and pursued 'no matter what it cost him'. It seems, then, that there was an experience of loss in Traherne's happy life. In his third Century, which contains many elements of autobiography, Traherne recounts moments both of great plenitude and of deep longing, the presence and the absence of God; it seems that at times he did hear the silence of the God who may not answer but is still there. But these apophatic moments were temporary; not for him Vaughan's 'dazzling darkness'. We are left with a question: did his writings about happiness resonate most deeply with his experience of life, or with his driving hope? Is the Affirmative Way for him an expression of his bounty, or of his need? It is both, I believe. For Traherne's happiness is fullness replenished. It is about wanting and having and wanting again, need satisfied and desire renewed. His happy person is never satiated, dulled and stilled by gorgeous plenty; nor are they ever, in the long term, left bereft.

Traherne's happiness is fullness replenished

In all of this, Traherne's greatest inspiration towards happiness was the natural world. Why should nature be such a source of happiness for Traherne? It is so not only because of its beauty or its usefulness, nor only because of its capacity to show the hand of God writ large and writ in miniature, but also because nature participates so precisely in this cycle of fullness replenished. In its cycles and seasons, the natural world is at once complete and still becoming, ever the same and ever new. 'The eyes of Heaven', says Traherne, are upon us all 'from one

[6] 'The best of all possible ends is the Glory of God, but happiness was that I thirsted after. And yet I did not err, for the Glory of God is to make us happy.' (C III 39)

end of the year unto the other', as creatures 'sacrifice their essences, and perish to support' human life'. 'The sun and all the stars dance attendance … the flowers are ambitious to please.' And human beings, who are 'conceived with pleasure, & come forth of the womb to innumerable blessings', are 'always blessed they go out, and when they come in'.[7]

Traherne would have us see our place and the place of all things in the universe. 'All things were made to be yours, and you were made to prize them according to their value' (C I 12), he asserts. 'Everything is ours that serves us in its place.' (C I 14) Not only do things have a place, they also have a meaning. Every living thing speaks in some way of eternity. 'Eternity was manifest in the light of the day, and something infinite behind everything appeared', Traherne writes. He seems to see 'the patterns which all things living are forever weaving'.[8]

There are woven patterns of time and season, of habit or ritual, of meaning and symbol. Integral to these woven patterns is the act of memory. The pattern must be known and remembered if it is to be repeated. The tree may 'remember' in its genetic code; the rabbit in his instinct; the person, most particularly, in their mind; and all of us are remembered in the mind of God as we weave again the patterns of our created and creative lives. It may well be in the end that the patterns we have woven are what are most entirely us.

Even our bodies may be most essentially their patterns. The material of our bodies is constantly changing—the atoms in our bodies now are not the same atoms that were there a few years ago—and yet we are recognisably ourselves. John Polkinghorne writes of the science of our changing bodies, 'the real me is an immensely complicated "pattern" in which these ever-changing atoms are organized'. And then he connects this with the resurrection: 'It seems to me to be an intelligible and coherent hope that God will remember the pattern that is me and recreate it in a new environment of his choosing, by his great act of resurrection'.[9]

[7] KOG, taken from *Thomas Traherne: Poetry and Prose*, edited by Denise Inge (London: SPCK, 2002), 113-114.

[8] Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 103.

[9] John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* (London: SPCK, 1994), 92, quoted in John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 142.

Polkinghorne's theory or 'coherent hope' seems to me to carry Traherne's thoughts on nature and memory into a new sphere. Polkinghorne enables us to see memory not just as a storehouse of the past but also as a warehouse in the present containing the building blocks of the future. Individual memories and collective memories, the memories of tribe and nation, of cultures and creeds, of a neighbourhood, a family, a school, a parish, memories, whether private or shared—all of these are the stuff of human and divine creativity.

Time and time again nature is the field of memory for Traherne. Why should this be? In *The South Country*, Edward Thomas reflects on Traherne's childhood memories and experience of nature. Nature is Traherne's field of memory, he suggests, because 'her solitudes are the most rich'.[10] Thomas notes that in childhood one is most often in the company of other children or of adults, and that company or community involve the spirit in some sacrifice. In the solitude of nature, however, the spirit is more open to what may be regarded as spiritual intercourse than it is in company. More importantly, he suggests, our childhood memories of nature are immediate, uncluttered by adult interlocution:

> But above all, our memories of Nature, are seldom or never flawed by the seeming triviality, the dislikes, the disgusts, the misunderstandings which give to memories of human society something of dullness and the commonplace …. Thinking of ourselves in a great wood or field of flowers ever so long ago, it is hard not to exaggerate whatever give-and-take there was between the spirit of the child and the vast pure forces of the sun and the wind. In those days we did not see a tree as a column of dark stony substance supporting a number of green wagers that live scarcely half a year, and grown for the manufacture of furniture, gates, and many other thing; but we saw something quite unlike ourselves,

[10] Thomas, *The South Country*, 106.

> large, gentle, of foreign tongue, without locomotion, yet full of life and movement and sound of the leaves themselves, and also of the light, of the birds, and of the insects; and they were givers of clear, deep joy that cannot be expressed. The brooding mind easily exalts this joy with the help of the disillusions and the knowledge and the folly and the thought of later years.[11]

What Thomas is proposing is that the memory of experience is as significant as the experience itself. So it is not just the direct experience of nature that gives Traherne such a source of happiness, but the memory, the taste of it lingering in his mouth. It is the reflection on nature's individual merits and overall worth, and on the connectedness of all things interior and exterior, that makes it such a rich spring. It is in the memory that one may see the meaning of the thing. Writing of Psalm 78, and its command that God's glorious deeds and wonders should be passed on from generation to generation, Traherne comments that these divine actions—or 'ancient ways',

> … are not to be seen in the visible world, but only in the memory and minds of men. The memory and mind are a strange region of celestial light, and a wonderful place, as well as a large and sublime one, in which they may be seen. (C III 89)

The memory of happiness is a part of that happiness. 'I recall many scenes', Thomas writes:

> … a church and churchyard and black pigs running down from them towards me in a rocky lane—ladslove and tall, crimson, bitter dahlias in a garden—the sweetness of large, moist yellow apples eaten out of doors—children: I do not recall happiness in them, yet the moment that I return to them in fancy I am happy.[12]

It may have been memories of this sort that Anne Frank was trying to reach through her journal. When access to the natural world was denied to her she retained the memory of its invigorating beauty.

Traherne writes:

[11] Thomas, *The South Country*, 99.
[12] Thomas, *The South Country*, 99.

> A sight of happiness is happiness. It transforms the soul and makes it heavenly, it powerfully calls us to communion with God.' (C III 60)

A sight of happiness. Something both seen and savoured, immediate and remembered. But there is more to Traherne's happiness than happy experiences of nature remembered. There is something active—an application of the imagination. This is likewise what Anne Frank alludes to when she admonishes her readers to 'enjoy' and 'recapture' happiness within themselves. Where Frank's mother advises her to 'think', Frank herself advises her reader to 'go'—go outside, go to nature. And yet she could not go herself. She could not go beyond the cramped rooms in which her family hid. At times she could not even see the light of day, though in her imagination she could do so much.

Traherne is similarly restless. 'The soul is made for action', he writes, 'and cannot rest till it be employed. If therefore you would be happy, your life must be as full of operation as God of treasure.' (C IV 95) What is this operation of the soul? There are many actions or deeds that Traherne commends to his reader: enjoying the world, loving the world and all created things, loving another's soul, seeing everything with the eyes of heaven, living a life of virtue. What we do now matters:

> … it ought to be a firm principle rooted in us, that this life is the most precious season in all eternity, because all eternity dependeth on it. Now we may do those actions which hereafter we shall never have occasion to do.

Now we may risk, with faith and hope, with difficulty and danger, a life of virtuous action, before faith and hope are swallowed up in perfect sight. We may live life now, with its own unique opportunities, as a particular stage of that larger eternal life,

> So piecing this life with the life of Heaven and seeing it as one with all eternity, a part of it, a life within it: strangely and stupendously blessed in its place and season. (C IV 93)

One particular thing we can do now that we cannot do later is to enjoy this world and to return to God from it the works of our imagination. 'The world within you is an offering returned' writes Traherne, 'very delightful in flowing from Him, but much more in

returning to Him'. This is because 'God hath made you able to create worlds in your own mind which are more precious unto Him than those which He created' (C II 90). 'That power to create worlds in the mind is the imagination, and is the proof that the creature liveth and is divine.'

What our minds do in the acts of memory and imagination—remembering and creating—is a participation in the creative act of God. And this creative act is not just a past event. Creation is continuous; matter is formed and reformed over and over again. In our bodies, in the life cycles of plants and animals, in the whole earth, fullness is replenished. Our minds create whole worlds, both in imagination and in memory, and offer them back to God. But where memory and imagination deal with the mind and to some extent the spirit, resurrection deals with the whole person, body included. Polkinghorne writes:

Matter is formed and reformed over and over again

> The old creation was a creation *ex nihilo*. The new creation will be something different; it is a creation *ex vetere*, for it is the transmutation of the old consequent upon its free return to its Creator.[13]

Here, where we do not have the divine power to act, we must have the human power to hope. For the powers of memory and imagination that we have been given are tokens of the greater power that God will exercise in the resurrection of the body, for you and for me and for all creation.

The immediate end of Anne Frank, despite her hopeful words about happiness, was early and tragic—a death camp. The immediate end for Traherne, whose vision of felicity fired his prolific work, was also an early death. We know our own mortality and see the signs of disease on our earth. It is not hard to imagine the eventual end of life on our planet. How then can we talk of hope? We hope not for the preservation of life, our own or the world's; we hope in the resurrection. That is the Christian hope. Polkinghorne writes of a hope for all creation, for a new heaven and a new earth and for human

[13] John Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1995), 108.

beings within them—all created from the stuff of which we are now made:

> Where will this new 'matter' of this new world come from? I suppose that it will come from the transformed matter of this present world, for God cares for all of His creation and He must have a destiny for the universe beyond its death, just as He has a destiny for us beyond ours.[14]

> Jesus' risen body is the transmuted and glorified form of his dead body. This tells us that in Christ there is a destiny for matter as well as for humanity. In fact, our destinies belong together, precisely because humans are embodied beings.[15]

Embodied beings. Our own embodiment reminds us of the unavoidable importance of the physical. The world matters. This is not just because it is our home, and as such meets the material requirements of our embodied selves as well as the spiritual and emotional need that we have to belong to a particular place. The world also matters because it is a beautiful and complex organism in its own right, because it is a manifestation of God's creative bounty—for Traherne it is 'God's body'. The rich goodness of creation extends beyond the beauties and bounties of harvest that we enjoy, again and again; the regular replenishments of creation's fullness speak to us prophetically of death and of resurrection—the earth's, each other's, and our own.

But what of individual human happiness—its fleeting moments and its ordinary hours? How can it hope to survive if our destiny can never be survival? And yet our happiness does matter, yours and mine; moreover, this happiness can indeed come about. It matters because it is one small thread in the

[14] Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity*, 93.
[15] Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, 108.

whole pattern that God's world is weaving, a thread without which the pattern is forever marred. It can come about because of grace—immeasurable divine generosity around us, under us, above us continually. The world has been created good, and we have been given a time in which to enjoy that goodness—to revel in it, savour it, relish it and return it back to God, by our senses, by our actions, by our thoughts. Occasionally we may be given the chance to right a wrong; daily we are given more mundane choices. In all of these we have been given the power to alter, in some small way, the pattern of things.

Let us not pretend, then, that our happiness, our brokenness and our choices do not matter. 'This life is the most precious season in all eternity, because all eternity dependeth on it', wrote Traherne (C IV 93). If every grain of sand may show the glory of God, then every moment of human happiness may herald heaven. 'The ultimate destiny of the whole universe is sacramental', writes Polkinghorne. 'What is known locally and occasionally will then be known globally and forever.'[16] We have been given the power to know the beauty that is in us and in the world around us, and to create whole worlds in our imaginations and in our memories that we may offer back to God. We have been given the power, by God's grace, to change and to be changed forever. And so we may become not just recipients but active participants in the larger pattern of resurrection. That, in the end, is what we were made for; it is our destiny.

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[16] Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, 108.

POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY AND THE IGNATIAN *FUNDAMENTUM*

Tim Muldoon

SHORTLY AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that the Church was entering a third major phase in its history. It had begun as a sect within Judaism, but Paul's mission to the Gentiles had inaugurated a process that led to Christianity becoming a shaping force for European culture, and later for its colonial offshoots. But now, with Vatican II, it was becoming for the first time a truly global reality.[1]

We can set this idea against Samuel P. Huntington's account of how democracy has grown in the world in three waves. The first wave followed the American and French Revolutions; the second followed World War II; and the third involves mainly Catholic countries in Central and South America, East Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe.[2] In short, both ecclesial Christianity and political democracy are becoming global realities.

What do these movements have to do with Christian spirituality? A great deal. For if spirituality is the lived practice of faith in the concrete, everyday experiences of our lives, then culture has an important impact on spirituality. For example, we who live according to a belief in a Church that is 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic' must exercise a certain measure of imagination in cultures which are immersed in postmodernity. Unlike those whose world-views were limited to the towns or villages near their places of birth, we today look

[1] Karl Rahner, 'Basic Theological Interpretation of Vatican II' (1979), in *Theological Investigations*, volume 20, translated by Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981), 77-89, especially 83. Rahner's focus was on the Catholic Church gathered at the Council; for the purposes of this article, however, I will refer to the term 'Church' in the more abstract sense of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ.

[2] Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

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out at a world that is amazingly diverse. Our awareness of 'otherness' has multiplied because of our immediate access to knowledge of people and places very different from home. In such a world, the Church can scarcely be described as 'one', and the claim to catholicity is, at best, ambiguous.

In the postmodern, global context, the practice of Christian faith is a deliberative choice of a kind quite different from anything faced by earlier generations. The phenomenon of globalisation confronts us with the realities that Christian faith is certainly not the only religious option available to us, and that Christians constitute only a minority of the world's population. These realities, moreover, raise deep questions about Christology, soteriology, worship, morality, ecclesiology, and a host of other issues. The ways in which we answer these questions will certainly have an impact on our spirituality.

Christian faith is not the only religious option available to us

Another decisive influence on how Christian faith is practised in the postmodern era comes from the global spread of democracy. At the root of the democratic ideal is a kind of faith that all human beings, being created equal, ought to have a share in the structures of power that govern the community.[3] As early as the 1820s, the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville observed that what was unique in the sensibility of the United States was the manner in which democracy persuaded the people of their individual worth. Unlike their forebears in different parts of Europe, these US Americans rejected hierarchical social systems, preferring to see themselves as equals and thus equally capable of judging what constituted a good society.[4] The spread of democracy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represented a kind of gospel in itself, a way of rendering claims about the means to salvation. Democracy persuades people that they are capable of judging for themselves what is ultimately true or false. Democracy exalts individuals by persuading them that they can discern the nature

[3] Compare the language of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women …'. While the document does not explicitly endorse democracy *per se*, it is clearly influenced by Western models of government. (Online at http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html)

[4] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1831), online at the University of Virginia's website, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html.

of reality through the intelligent application of the faculty of conscience.

The dual movements of globalisation and democratization have had profound effects on our perception of truth. Awareness of global diversity leads many to question the very possibility of universal truth. Cultural relativism is the belief that the very existence of a plurality of world-views means that there are no criteria by which to judge one against another. Minimally, awareness of pluralism should make us conscious of the fragility of human understanding. According to a Nigerian proverb, where one thing stands, another thing stands beside it. My way of thinking cannot be considered the only way of thinking, and so responsible intelligence demands that we discern together which way of thinking is most authentic.

Democratization also exalts the individual conscience. There are both positive and negative dimensions to this privileging of the individual. Positively, it demands that individuals appropriate for themselves the means by which to make reasoned judgments. In the area of religion, this means that the individual can no longer rely on the community or the cleric for faith: the individual must come to the act of faith through personal initiative, personal response to the invitation of God. Postmodernity, in this perspective, presents Christians with an opportunity for growth, an opportunity to look into the meanings of accepted doctrines in order to discover anew the ways in which God invites people to intimacy. The negative dimension, however, is that democratization can persuade the individual that faith is a private enterprise. And where faith becomes privatised, it becomes a consumer commodity, governed by economics. A democratized faith can, in the extreme case, become an attempt to answer the question, 'what's in it for me?'

The Church is witnessing the effects of globalisation and democratization on its youngest members. Young adults in the West have grown up in a world where these two forces have been formative. To cite one example, studies in the United States demonstrate that young adults are more influenced by popular culture—ruled by a consumerism which is in many ways the result of democratization—than by Christian tradition. They are more likely than older people to regard different world religions as equally valid; they are unlikely to consider the influence of religious leaders as the most meaningful in their lives; they are less likely than older generations to attend formal

worship regularly; they are likely to see religious affiliation as an option rather than as a duty.[5]

Those formed at the end of the Cold War understand democracy as salvation from communism, economics as the primary hermeneutical lens with which to understand the world, pluralism as the postmodern equivalent of religious tolerance, and religion as a personal choice to help people get in touch with themselves. Choosing to be a Christian is not unlike choosing a political party. It arises out of the democratic ideal of self-development; it has something to say about the good community; and it is fine as long as one does not violate the only moral absolute in a pluralist world: do not judge others. Young people in the Western world have been raised in a culture which sees religion as another product to consume.[6] Further, they have been led to believe that the customer is always right.

[5] Two recent studies include Dean R. Hoge and others, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), and James D. Davidson and others, *The Search for Common Ground: What Unites and Divides Catholic Americans* (Huntington, In: Our Sunday Visitor Books, 1997).

[6] Vincent J. Miller explores the impact of consumer culture on religion in *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

The market for spirituality over the last decade has boomed, driven by the generation born after the Second World War who are now reaching late-middle age. A cursory glance at those authors, both Christian and non-Christian, who have written on spirituality in recent years reveals that the majority grew up during the turbulent decades following the war. The culture which formed their world-views was rapidly changing; structures of authority were collapsing in ways that made many question whether anything in society was constant. For Roman Catholics, especially, the Second Vatican Council represented the changing of the unchangeable. The Church, which had remained the same for as long as anyone could remember (for some 400 years since the Council of Trent, for those who knew their church history), was undergoing massive, visible changes: masses were said in the vernacular; scores of clergy and religious were moving into lay life; and an emphasis on the Church as the people of God was replacing the notion of a privileged, clerical elite. This generation began to see Christian faith as a personal commitment more than as a cultural inevitability; and they were perhaps the first to speak their minds on a grand scale about what constituted the authentic practice of faith. The theological and moral debates that followed the Council, especially those in response to the watershed encyclical *Humanae vitae*, were the result of a community coming into critical awareness of its own responsibility for appropriating the meaning of Christianity on a personal level. In this respect, Catholics were beginning to catch up with their Protestant brothers and sisters in understanding faith as a personal commitment to following Jesus. Matters religious were profoundly political; having been given the responsibility of discerning what the demands of faith were, Christians across the ideological spectrum accepted the corresponding responsibility of contributing to public debate about authentic Christian spirituality.

Over the last decades, many lay people have developed greater ownership of their faith and their Church. They have developed the kind of understanding of spiritual growth once reserved for clerics—an understanding that God calls all Christians to spiritual maturity through the process of lived reflection on the implications and demands of faith. This development contrasts with the facile image of the lay person as someone who is to be passively obedient to Church

authorities, an understanding which prevailed in Catholic magisterial documents in the period between Vatican I and Vatican II.[7]

There is, however, a more negative side to this growth. An important element in the maturation of many adults in the Church today has involved critical reflection on the expressions of faith—liturgy, morality, spirituality—such that many see the practice of critical reflection as itself constitutive of faith. What is overlooked, however, is that authentic criticism can take place only when there is something to criticize: one can come to critical awareness of one's faith only if one has a faith in the first place. The younger generations of the Church have grown up in an ecclesial context where criticism is the rule. Their parents (in many cases) are adults who have come to think critically about their own faith, and who wanted their children also to develop critical thinking in matters religious. Very often, their teaching took the form of a negative understanding of religious faith: 'I don't force my children to go to church, because I want them to decide for themselves'. Criticism—an intellectual exercise undertaken by free people in a democratic society as they expressed their ability to think for themselves—often preceded or even replaced faith formation. Young people were taught to be critical consumers of information and thoughtful purveyors of religious truth, not merely passive *tabulae rasae* upon which religious authorities could impress sectarian doctrine. What they were not taught, however, was the joy in (I do not use the expression 'reason for') making the act of faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Authentic criticism takes place only when there is something to criticize

The effect of this formative period on many young people has been to give them the ability to think critically about religious truth-claims in a postmodern world. My students are comfortable judging certain doctrines acceptable and others not so—regardless of whether the doctrines arise out of Christian or other traditions. They are consumers of religious truth—fascinated by it, in many cases, and content to determine the pragmatic value of various truth-claims. They can navigate ambiguity. Though they are sometimes naïve, they know that religious commitment should be balanced against the more

[7] Paul Lakeland explores the development of the understanding of the lay person in this period in his book *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (New York and London: Continuum, 2003).

fundamental ethic of respect for all religions. To many, spiritual growth is the unfolding of the self; it is a kind of discipline by which one grows into an ethical person. Their soteriology is thoroughly pluralistic: my faith saves me; your faith saves you. It all depends on which God you believe in.

Yet what these students often lack is a true understanding of why faith matters. They may be persuaded of its worth in civil society as a code of ethics—which they value, since they are schooled in the historical examples of those, such as Nazi doctors or Stalinist government workers, who were rational but not ethical. They may recognise its importance in the ordering of society. They may be drawn to its language of mystery, particularly around liminal issues such as love, death and suffering. They may appreciate how human history testifies to the archetypal drive for religious meaning, and how Christianity highlights the fundamental cycles of life, death and rebirth. They can see religious faith as a kind of commitment to live deeply the search for meaning in a fractured world. All these perspectives are valuable, and may be what Justin Martyr referred to as the 'seeds of faith', inasmuch as they suggest to young people that faith is important. But what is so utterly foreign to many is the experience of falling in love with God. Religion, for them, is an intellectual exercise rooted in the individual conscience, rather than a response to a God who holds out a hand to say, 'let's have an adventure!'

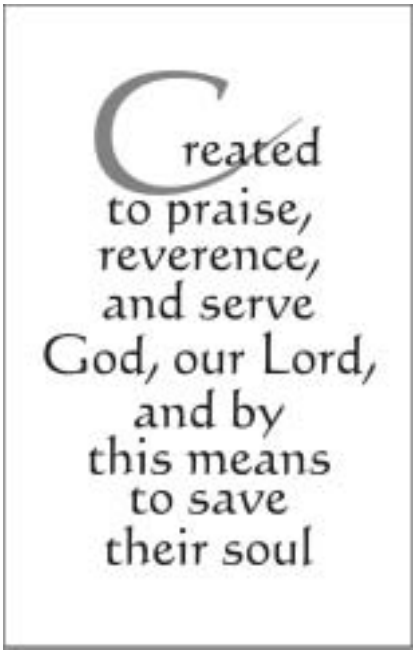
At the same time, though, young adults immersed in the postmodern, post-rational, post-hegemonic, post-colonial world have begun to recognise an element in their personal lives which challenges socially defined conceptual categories. They feel a hunger for spirituality, a hunger which leaks out of their art, their casual conversations, their experiences of love and suffering. They have recognised that something in their experience leads them to seek transcendence, even as they frequently criticize the Church for being an organization which seems actively to hide it. Their turn to find spiritual meaning in places other than the Church ought not to dissuade us from asking what resources in our tradition address their fundamental hunger. In my experience, one of the most provocative comes from the tradition of Ignatian spirituality.

The Ignatian Fundamentum

Saint Ignatius of Loyola's sixteenth-century *Spiritual Exercises* begins with what he calls the 'First Principle and Foundation'. This is a deceptively simple statement of what one must embrace in order to progress spiritually, and it offers us a provocative point of departure for considering what authentic Christian spirituality might look like in the postmodern era. Ignatius suggests that we are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by these means to achieve our eternal well-being. This observation rests upon an understanding of what constitutes the spiritual life, namely, the pervasive practice of responding to an ever-present God. In referring to this understanding, I follow the usage of Joseph A. Tetlow of the Latin term *fundamentum* rather than the English 'foundation'.[8] This Latin term, which is found in all the Latin sixteenth-century directories of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, connotes God's intimate involvement in the whole of a person's life. Too often, the 'Principle and Foundation' is thought of as just one element in Ignatius' programme, as step one in Ignatian prayer. The truth is that the *fundamentum* more properly refers to the very objective of the entire spiritual life.

Ignatius' text then develops his basic thesis: everything on earth is to help people in working toward the end for which they were created; we should use things only in so far as they help us to achieve that end; we must be indifferent to everything as long as we are fixed on that end; we ought to desire only that end. What emerges from a cursory reading of the Principle and Foundation is a blueprint for moral and spiritual growth—an almost instrumental understanding of a human being as a creature 'for' some greater purpose which God determines. I am reminded of Thérèse of Lisieux, who likened herself to a plaything in the hands of the child Jesus, or of Teresa of Calcutta, who spoke of herself as 'God's pencil'. Ignatius proposes that we exercise our faculty of imagination in order to envision what it might be like to be an instrument of God, designed for something beautiful.

[8] Joseph A. Tetlow, 'The *Fundamentum*: Creation in the Principle and Foundation', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 21/4 (September 1989), 1-53. Compare Gilles Cusson, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Mary Angela Roduit and George E. Ganss, edited by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1987 [1968]).



My interest here is in how Ignatius gets us thinking about ourselves in an entirely fresh way. While the language he uses is certainly familiar to traditional Catholics, its disarming simplicity also invites today's postmoderns to explore issues about humanity and God within a Christian frame of reference. My thesis is this: Ignatian spirituality speaks to postmoderns because it is based on a personal, imaginative exploration of the gospel, and it invites people to choose freely to deepen their intimacy with God through a deepened understanding of who they themselves are. The invitation to come to know God in this way is radically different from the approach which has become familiar to so many: that of learning the doctrines and moral teachings of the Church in religious education, and developing the critical thinking that sometimes leads us to question whether any doctrine can be judged true. Ignatian spirituality is not primarily doctrinal, because it is not primarily an exercise of reason. It is instead a practice of imagination, with all the affective dimensions that unfold in imagination, often without the explicit consent of the intellect. I wish to focus on three themes which comprise the Ignatian *fundamentum*—three themes which, when appropriated by the seeking person, lead one to spiritual growth through intimate encounter with God. These themes are imaginative play, fundamental receptivity, and self-transcending love.

Imaginative Play

For those immersed in a thoroughly pluralist world, any spiritual practice that is predicated on obedience to doctrinal claims is unlikely to be persuasive. To put it a different way, traditional devotions such as the rosary, Eucharistic adoration, mass attendance on first Fridays, and even Bible study may be perceived as exclusive. The conventional

wisdom for many religious educators over the years has been that a community must share its practices and beliefs with the young, in order that they might come to assume adult roles in the community. But in a thoroughly pluralist world, young adults achieve a measure of critical consciousness that very often leads them to question the relevance of the beliefs and practices of their faith community. Many wonder why they should spend the time and energy going to church when they are not certain that what it offers is right.

Ignatian spirituality offers a 'user-friendly' way into the life of prayer which appeals to the uncertain. The basic counsel is simple: imagine what it would be like if God were creating you every moment of your life. Ignatius' First Principle and Foundation has been read (mistakenly) as a doctrinal claim which one must accept in order to undertake the Spiritual Exercises. What I propose, instead, is that the Principle and Foundation is an invitation to imaginative play. What, it asks, might it be like if God took the time and care to create my entire life, moment by moment, in order that my acceptance of this creation—and my participation in it—might reflect beauty, as a work of art reflects the creativity of an artist? What might it be like if God were a person who invests in my very being, and places me in a world where I can use everything to achieve perfection?

The postmodern person who is wary of arrogant claims to authority and truth can, in good conscience, accept an invitation to exercise imagination. Whereas the more traditional models of mission often assumed the superiority of Christian doctrine, the invitation to imaginative play makes no such claims. Instead, it proposes that the language and conceptual apparatus of Christian tradition can provide a story through which to explore the relationship between God and a person on an individual level. It might be objected that such a dynamic falls prey to the individualism that ignores the corporate dimensions of Christian spirituality. But this imaginative play is merely a method, not the goal of the Spiritual Exercises. The method is merely the medium through which one eventually comes to consider the meaning of the relationship between God and humanity.

Fundamental Receptivity

Moral theologians in the latter half of the twentieth century began speaking of a 'fundamental option', of a person's basic decision to

choose God's will. They contrasted the fundamental option with specific moral choices—some of which were sinful—in order to argue that individual sins need not represent a decision to end one's relationship with God.[9]

I prefer to speak of 'fundamental receptivity' as a goal of Ignatian spirituality. Whereas the term 'option' suggests a kind of primordial act of conscience, the term 'receptivity' more adequately renders what a person constantly practises in the process of living the spiritual life. The Ignatian *fundamentum* is not a once-and-for-all decision, but rather a formative process that knits God and the human person in an ever-deepening relationship. A person who practises imaginative play around the theme of God's creation of the self has already assented, on some level, to the invitation to know God. As that person continues to imagine related themes, using biblical stories and religious symbols, the person continues to explore the ways in which the imagination proposes matters for thought or feeling.

A formative process that knits God and the person in ever-deepening relationship

Imagining the stories of saints led Ignatius himself to discern more and more clearly how attracted he was to the idea of doing something great for God. Imagination allowed him to explore the meaning of saints' lives, and thus to become aware of feelings and thoughts which he had not previously considered. Further, he came to enjoy those feelings and thoughts, so that eventually he was able to name what he was experiencing: a desire to serve God in the context of the Church. Ignatian spirituality gently proposes that a person explore the feelings and thoughts which arise spontaneously while imagining God's relationship to the self. What is especially attractive about this proposal is the fact that it is the individual who generates the feelings and thoughts. Over time, the practice can lead a person to greater and greater receptivity to knowing and serving God.

[9] See, for example, Karl Rahner's theory of fundamental option in 'Some Thoughts on a Good Intention' (1955), *Theological Investigations*, volume 3, translated by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966). Compare Pope John Paul II's more critical account in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, nn. 65 and 66.

Self-Transcending Love

The goal of Ignatian spirituality is a self-transcending love of God and of the other. If a person is given the freedom to explore God's relationship to the self—in the Examen especially—the response is gratitude. Authentic receptivity to God involves receiving love that enables one in turn to love others. For many the attraction to the practice of spirituality will originate in a desire for self-development. But over time they will discover a truth that Jesus taught: one must lose one's life in order to find it. There is something intuitive about love, justice, service to others—something which cannot be denied by people of good will, whether religious or not. Ignatian spirituality leads a person to deeper appreciation of God's love, and by extension to the expression of love in acts of solidarity, justice and mercy. Its necessarily social orientation represents a conscientious response to the evils of the world which avoids any temptation to use power. Ignatian spirituality is not a 'revolution' in the sense of a social movement; such movements have often eventually used power unjustly in seeking to overturn unjust uses of power. Rather, it is an invitation to change society by becoming a changed person within society. For the postmodern person, wary of the frequently murky ways in which power has been exercised, authentic spirituality involves a critical social awareness.

If the practice of Ignatian spirituality leads a person to a deeper knowledge of God, then it is about enabling a person to develop a firm *fundamentum*—the rock upon which Jesus proposes that the wise person build a house. In an era when the very notion of certain knowledge is suspect, this tradition offers a challenge: do not think of *knowing about God* as an exercise of reason, with all the difficulties that that entails. Think instead of coming to *know God* through greater knowledge of oneself. In doing so, one comes to recognise that at the very *fundamentum* of one's lived existence is a loving creator, working with each person to co-create their daily life.

Postmodernity and the Fundamentum

In the postmodern age, the objective of those who undertake the Spiritual Exercises—and indeed, of those who wish to practise authentic Christian spirituality—is an ownership of the *fundamentum*. Far from being an introductory exercise or a passing comment, the

fundamentum represents what St Paul calls 'the mind of Christ', and is thus what every Christian ought to strive for.[10] It is interesting to note that Paul's instruction to the Corinthians—who were themselves in the midst of debates over authority in the first century—addressed how those who were 'infants in Christ' might progress to spiritual maturity. Their situation, and Paul's counsel, have a message for us in the twenty-first century.

If postmodernity involves questions about the possibility of religious authority, it is no surprise that there has arisen in recent decades an interest in religious 'experience'. For, in the absence of trust, people must rely on their own faculties. In response to the Corinthians' squabbles over whom to believe, Paul underscores that it is ultimately God alone who is the author of spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:7). The *fundamentum* can be seen as an attentiveness to the God who is constantly working with us to co-create our lives—a kind of *lectio divina* in which the text is our own experience, but which we read through the lens of sacred scripture. For young people who trust only their own experience, it is important that we suggest to them that Ignatian spirituality offers a new way to discover the God who has been present with them throughout their lives.

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[10] In 1 Corinthians 2-3, Paul is instructing Christians about what distinguishes the spiritual person from the unspiritual person, indicating that the former has 'the mind of Christ'.

THE 'ACCOMMODATED TEXTS' AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*

Rogelio García Mateo

THE CRITICAL EDITION OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES* in the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu*[1] offers not just one text but several. This diversity is not well known—even scholars rarely take it into account. The great majority of studies and interpretations limit themselves to the Spanish text known as the 'Autograph'—so called because Ignatius corrected it in his own hand, although the copying was basically done by an amanuensis. This version was first published in 1615, and it is clearly our primary text. But if we confine our attention to it, we lose some rich material that is authentically Ignatian, and that can serve to clarify, to nuance and to amplify some points that remain uncertain in the Spanish text. Sometimes the cause of the problem is that the Spanish is five centuries old; at other times, Ignatius is using a concise, pregnant phrase that expresses a complex set of ideas. Brevity, loose clauses and economy of expression are fundamental hallmarks of Ignatius' style in the *Spiritual Exercises*.[2] Back in the 1920s, José Calveras saw this difficulty when it came to words

This essay was first published in the Spanish Jesuit journal *Estudios eclesiásticos* in 1994, and it has subsequently been reprinted in the author's collected essays, *Ignacio de Loyola: su espiritualidad y su mundo cultural* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 2000). We are grateful to the author and to the copyright owners for their gracious permission to produce this abridged translation. Two long footnotes have been added, containing extracts from the John Helyar text of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

[1] MHSJ Exx (1969), edited by José Calveras and Cándido de Dalmases.

[2] This way of writing has sometimes provoked the claim that Ignatius did not know Spanish properly. Such a claim betrays a misunderstanding of basic aspects of Ignatius' work. Its brevity and concision are appropriate for a text the concern of which is neither to recreate experiences with detailed descriptions, nor to convince with long theological arguments, but to move people to action. Every expression needs to be charged with meaning, with incentive, with any element that is not indispensable being eliminated. The criterion of good style is effectiveness in leading to action. Thus Ignatius makes suggestions and indicates the subject-matter briefly, leaving the work to the exercitant. Elaborate explanations would weaken a text which is aiming to lead a person actually to meditate.

such as 'affection' or 'indifference', and he wrote several important articles that drew out of the Ignatian writings the various associations that such expressions generally carried with them.[3] But Calveras' approach, which is still worth pursuing in its own terms, needs to be supplemented by another. We need to explore the points of interest and value in the so-called *textus accommodati*—the accommodated texts.

The Different Texts and the Origin of the Exercises

The title 'accommodated texts' has perhaps prevented these texts from being given the attention that they deserve. It was Calveras himself who coined the expression to designate manuscripts of the Exercises that were incomplete, or that included a commentary. He contrasted these with what he called *textus archetypi*:

> … complete and unglossed texts, those which constitute the 'book' of the Exercises as it actually was edited or as it might have been edited.[4]

The 'official texts' are: the Autograph already mentioned; the Latin Vulgate of 1548; and the two editions (1541 and 1547) of the Latin *Versio prima*. Calveras' distinction, which was not made in the earlier critical edition of 1919, rightly served to highlight the primacy of the full text, or better full texts, of the *Spiritual Exercises*. But the distinction also discriminated against a range of texts which are of indubitable value.

The oldest manuscripts of the *Spiritual Exercises* to have reached us are the 'Text of John Helyar' (H), dating from 1535-1536, and the 'Cologne Text' (C), dating from 1538-1539. The earliest printed edition appeared only in 1548: this was the so-called Vulgate, composed by the Jesuit Latinist André des Freux in an elegant style with a view to its being presented to Pope Paul III for approval. Alongside this there also appeared the *Versio prima*, which had existed since 1541 (P1), but which had now been corrected for the press by

[3] See, for example, José Calveras, 'Tecnicismos explanados. I: "Quitar de sí todas las affecciones desordenadas"', *Manresa*, 1 (1925), 25-42.
[4] MHSJ Exx (1969), p. 83.

Ignatius' secretary, Juan de Polanco (P2),[5] and which acquired this title of 'first version' after the approval was given. The Autograph is probably to be dated 1544.[6]

However, the MHSJ editors, Calveras and Cándido de Dalmases, thought that the *Versio prima* was a translation of an older Spanish text that has not come down to us, 'because it is obvious that St Ignatius wrote the *Exercises* in his native language, prior to translating them into Latin'.[7] For all the logic behind that statement, it lacks historical foundation; the claim cannot be made in these stark terms. It is of course the case that Ignatius, 'very good scribe' (Aut 11) that he was, had the habit of noting down his experiences, and of extracting texts and thoughts that seemed important to him. And we have to suppose both that such notes were in Spanish, and that they were sketches for what later became the definitive texts.[8] But this does not necessarily mean that before the Latin versions, and above all before the Helyar and Cologne texts, Ignatius had written a full text of the Exercises in Spanish, designed to be used in the same way as we now use the *textus archetypi*.

The testimony from Ignatius that leads us to suppose the existence of a Spanish text of the *Exercises* in the Alcalá period (1525-1526) comes in the so-called *Autobiography*:

> While in Alcalá he was also occupied in giving spiritual exercises and in explaining Christian doctrine … (Aut 57)

There is then reference to a process some months later in Salamanca:

> Frías the bachelor came to question each of them individually, and the pilgrim gave him all his papers—these were the Exercises—so that he could examine them. (Aut 67)

But if we remember that this autobiographical narration began in 1553, in other words five years after the first printing of the *Spiritual*

[5] MHSJ Exx (1969), pp. 106-121.
[6] MHSJ Exx (1969), pp. 95-96.
[7] Cándido de Dalmases, 'Los estudios del P. Calveras sobre el texto de los Ejercicios', *Manresa*, 37 (1965), 385-406, here 396.
[8] See Manuel Ruiz Jurado, 'El texto de los Ejercicios de san Ignacio', *Manresa*, 69 (1997), 171-186, at 173-174.

Exercises, the historical credibility of these statements diminishes significantly. Either the author, who was by now an old man, or the editor, Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, could easily be projecting on to the past what was by now a familiar reality to them. Alternatively, the text might be giving a familiar name, for the reader in 1553 and later, to those 'papers' in 1527, which were in fact no more than some notes, headings and reflections that later were replaced by the text we now call the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Such evidence as we have, from letters and from the trial records in Alcalá, suggests that Ignatius was using significant elements of what we now know as the Exercises by the mid-1520s. But there is no mention of anything like a complete text, nor are the words 'spiritual exercises' used in any Ignatian writing to have come down to us from before 1536.[9] Typical of Ignatius' language in the early 1530s is what we find in a letter he wrote to his brother, Martín García de Oñaz, in June 1532. Here Ignatius is making contact with his family for the first time since his departure in 1521. He is explaining the changes he has made in his life, and gives an account of what he has been up to. He never talks about an 'exercise', and when he speaks of his apostolic activities he writes of 'many social contacts (not for personal ends)'.[10] Such an indirect expression is paralleled in the expressions found in the process reports from Alcalá referring to Ignatius' apostolic activity: 'conversations' and 'talks'. The Helyar text, which can be dated precisely to 1535 or 1536, uses the word 'exercise', but it does not bear the title *Spiritual Exercises*, as one might have expected; instead it speaks of entering a 'stadium of spiritual meditations', with the word 'stadium' taking up the sporting metaphor in Ignatius' explanation of what spiritual exercises are (Exx 1).

The composition of the *Spiritual Exercises* was a process that lasted twenty years. The experiences Ignatius had at Loyola and Manresa were generative and foundational, and he clearly reflected intensely upon them in writing. But we have no basis for knowing what the

[9] The first use comes in a letter from Ignatius to Manuel Miona, 16 November 1536: '… the only way I knew of repaying you some slight percentage was by arranging for you to make a month's Spiritual Exercises' (Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, edited and translated by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean [London: Penguin, 1996], 138-139, here 138.)

[10] Ignatius to Martín García de Oñaz, late June 1532, in *Personal Writings*, 118-123, here 120: '*muchas conversaciones, mas no temporales*'.

The River Cardoner in Manresa

content of his notes was, and nor can we say with any certainty that he was using the expression 'spiritual exercises' until the mid 1530s. The various attempts by scholars to trace elements in the text back to Manresa all yield conflicting results, and remain conjectural; they are simply reading too much into sources which were not intended to yield this kind of information.[11]

When Ignatius left Manresa, he intended to go to Jerusalem and remain there permanently (Aut 45). Where would he have found any possible exercitants? What language did he intend to use? The Holy Land was under the control of the Turks. His realistic apostolic possibilities would have been very limited: perhaps only witness, prayer, help to the poor and needy, and the possibility of a martyr's death.

[11] Henri Watrigant, *La genèse des Exercices de saint Ignace de Loyola* (Amiens: Yvert et Tellier, 1897); Arturo Codina, *Los orígenes de los Ejercicios Espirituales* (Barcelona: Balmes, 1926); Pedro de Leturia, 'Génesis de los Ejercicios de S. Ignacio y su influjo en la fundación de la Compañía de Jesús', in *Estudios ignacianos*, edited by Ignacio Iparraguirre, 2 volumes (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1957), 2.3-46; Henri Pinard de la Boullaye, *Les étapes de redaction des Exercices de S. Ignace* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950).

At Manresa, Ignatius *made* 'his' Exercises, and had the most important spiritual experience of his life. He made notes of this experience, but we do not know what they contained. What we do know is that out of this experience there would eventually come the text that we know as the *Spiritual Exercises*. We can find some elements of this in the Alcalá trial processes, and in the ten letters we have that date from before 1535. But it is only after that date that we have good historical sources for speaking of a text of the *Spiritual Exercises*. And these sources include two of the so-called *textus accommodati*, to which we now turn.

The Helyar Text

The Helyar text was discovered by Pietro Tacchi Venturi, and first published in Arturo Codina's 1919 MHSJ edition of the Exercises.[12] The name derives from that of John Helyar (1503-1541), an English priest and a humanist, who was secretary to Cardinal Reginald Pole. In 1535, or perhaps in early 1536, he was in Paris, before passing on to Leuven, where he spent an entire year. It was in Paris that he made the Exercises, with either Ignatius himself or Favre as his director.

The copy of the *Spiritual Exercises* was found in a book containing Helyar's personal notes. It gives us the basic structure and elements of the Exercises, but with in most cases a far briefer content. The order is also somewhat different: introductory material; the general Examen; the First Week Exercises, and then those of the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks; methods of prayer; discernment of spirits; particular Examen and daily Examen; the additional directions. Between the methods of prayer and the discernment material there comes something which is not found anywhere else in the manuscripts. It is entitled, 'What is to be done after the Exercises in order to preserve oneself', and gives some appropriate meditations, including one on Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit that is not envisaged in the definitive text.[13]

[12] See now MHSJ Exx (1969), pp. 418-454.

[13] MHSJ Exx (1969), p. 450. 'For a month, the Examen should be made twice a day. Also every eighth day a lay person should go to confession and receive the eucharist. A priest should celebrate at least twice a week. Contemplations should be done daily for an hour, that is half an hour praying and half an hour contemplating. And we can contemplate in the two ways.' Quite what those last two sentences mean is not clear. There then follows a programme of points for contemplation over a week,

Already in the Principle and Foundation we find some important differences from the official texts. The Principle and Foundation appears as the third of three 'useful precepts' regarded as appropriate for entering the 'stadium of spiritual meditations'. There is no substantial difference in form or content from the text now familiar to us, although there is no mention of freedom or of free will. The 'Presupposition' that comes before the Principle and Foundation in the final text appears here as the third of the 'useful precepts'.[14]

The particular examen is separated from the general one, and appears at the end. The content of both is much reduced in comparison with the definitive text. The similarities, however, become much closer once we look at the four Weeks. The First Week in the Helyar text corresponds almost exactly with the *Versio prima*, apart from some very slight changes. The same applies to the Second Week, although the Three Modes of Humility come after the three 'times' of Election, and this material has not yet been fully elaborated. We can say, then, that the First Week and a part of the Second had attained their final form around 1535, and the same applies to the Third and Fourth Weeks. The discernment rules, however, are still inchoate.

specified as beginning on Friday and finishing on Thursday. 'It is suitable for the conservation and increase of the spiritual things acquired to admit dealings that are similar to its purpose and drift, choosing the better and more spiritual ones, and withdrawing from what runs counter.'

[14] The full text of the three 'Annotations' runs as follows:

'Firstly, we must enter into the Lord's praise, or into the Spiritual Exercises, with a great and generous spirit, in such a way that we hand over everything that is ours, what is interior as much as what is exterior, our memory, understanding, will and affections—then our whole soul and body and its members and other goods; so that He may dispose both of me and of everything that is mine for His will and good pleasure, without my own desire or aversion.

'Secondly, the human person is created for the praise of God and for the salvation of their soul. Thus all things created on the face of the earth are created for the human person, that they may praise God, and save themselves. From this it follows that the human person must take from created things of this kind only as much as will help towards the praise of God and their salvation; and they must repel those things in so far as they harm the person as regards this kind of end. From which it is clear that we must be indifferent about these created things: in other words, I must not will, unconditionally and without reference to duty, prosperity more than adversity, rest and quiet more than business and toils, poverty more than riches or vice versa, honours more than insults, a long life rather than a short one, health rather than sickness, life rather than death; and conversely, not will them at all apart from the extent to which I shall have judged this or that to be more for the service of God and the salvation of my soul, without any carnal or sensual affection.

'Thirdly, given that any statement put forward will have different meanings, I must always have my mind more ready to salvage it than to condemn it; and when I will not be able to salvage it, I shall ask from the person how they understand it. Finally, if that person has a bad sense of things, and advocates the worse interpretation, I shall, after some questioning, correct them; and if they refuse to be corrected, I shall seek all seemly and possible means for saving this kind of soul, and for casting this kind of error away from it.' (MHSJ Exx [1969], p. 429)

There is no trace of the Contemplation to Attain Love, of the Rules for Thinking with the Church, or of the Mysteries of the Life of Christ. It is worth noting, too, that there are biblical references that the official texts do not contain—a point which brings out quite clearly, despite the official texts' lack of quotations, the biblical character of these meditations.[15]

Though the Helyar text may not fully correspond to what Ignatius gave the Inquisitor, Fray Valentin Liévin, in 1535 before leaving for Azpeitia (Aut 86), it is the nearest thing we have to a source for that text. To refuse to take it seriously on the ground that there may have been a more accurate text in Spanish is to undervalue a historical source of enormous value. Moreover, anything Ignatius would have given an Inquisitor in Paris would probably have been in Latin; it is unlikely that the Inquisitor would have known Spanish; and Latin was the normal language for study, for international communication, and for dealing with Inquisitors. Be all that as it may, the Helyar text, despite its conciseness and the way it is put together, would nevertheless provided material for the full thirty days.

The Helyar text is a source of enormous value

The Cologne Text

In the Cologne text,[16] dating from 1538, we have now the complete exercises apart from the Mysteries of the Life of Christ, although there are allusions even to these. In the place where the Mysteries would come, we find the annotations that the definitive texts place first. The text thus begins with its version of Exx 21 'There follow some spiritual exercises', and then follows the standard order, although with a much shorter examen. There probably existed only the first thirteen of the Rules for Thinking with the Church; the original scribe breaks off after rule 11, and the subsequent scribe, who must have worked much later, took the final five rules from the Vulgate, not from the *Versio prima*. The text's name is due to its having been found in the Cologne

[15] In the Examen, Jeremiah 4:2; in the Call of the King, Psalms 142, 8:2, 24:4-5; in the meditation on the birth of Christ, Isaiah 1:3; in the Two Standards, Isaiah 54:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Romans 6:23, Proverbs 5:22, 1 Timothy 6:10; in the Three Methods of Prayer, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Romans 8:32.

[16] MHSJ Exx (1969), pp. 454-506.

A Canal in Venice

Charterhouse, where Favre left it after he passed through in 1543. It is kept in the city's municipal archive.

Only two years separate the Helyar and Cologne texts, a period which Ignatius spent largely in Venice in the expectation of embarking for Jerusalem. Ignatius spent the first year of this time completing his theological studies privately, until his companions arrived from Paris in January 1537. We can suppose that he enjoyed in 1536 a time of study, peace and recollection, and that this was an ideal opportunity for the revision and expansion of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He would subsequently complete them definitively in Rome, with the *Versio prima* being completed in 1541, under the heading 'all the Exercises briefly, in Latin', as an indication that the work had now received its final form.

The Exercises of Master John

The Annotations

Of the so-called 'accommodated texts', the most striking and original is that known as the Exercises of Master John.[17] The manuscript consists of four notebooks, with comments by Ignatius himself. It goes only as far as the Three Classes but, importantly, it contains a text that has been considerably elaborated. Originally it was attributed to Polanco, but this judgment of Calveras was set aside by Dalmases on the ground that the manuscript dates from 1539-1541, when Juan Polanco had not even begun his study of theology. Yet, says Dalmases, the text contains numerous scriptural quotations and appeals to authorities, and presupposes theological study. If Polanco is excluded, the author can only be Jean Codure, who died in 1541, and it would have been put together at the same time as the *Versio prima*.

What, however, lends this text its authority and importance is the fact that it was put together under Ignatius' direction, as witnessed by the various notes in his own hand that we find in the text. We have already see how, at the beginning of the *Versio prima*, Ignatius has designated the text as 'all the Exercises, briefly, in Latin'; he was surely distinguishing that text from this of Master John, or from other amplified texts of the Exercises that were being mooted. Herein lies the major significance of this text: in it we have, in modern terms, an initial commentary on a major part of the *Spiritual Exercises*, checked over by their author. This makes it a text of foundational importance in the study and interpretation of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

As regards method, the Exercises of Master John do not offer any great new insight; they correspond in almost every respect to the definitive texts. But matters are different with regard to the content, which contains extensive glossing and explanation.

Generally, the glosses are accompanied by scriptural quotations. Thus, as early as the first annotation, by way of explanation as to what is meant by 'spiritual exercises', we find quotations of Psalm 77:6 ('I meditated at night with my heart; I was exercising and searching my spirit'), of Psalm 119:23 ('your servant was exercising within your

[17] MHSJ Exx (1969), pp. 507-590.

statutes'), and 1 Timothy 4:7 ('exercise yourself in godliness').[18] These quotations considerably enrich what we understand by 'spiritual exercises', setting the asceticism of the original within a biblical context missing from the official texts.

There is a second annotation, not found at all in the official texts. It gives three different ways of understanding the relationship between meditation and contemplation.[19] In the rest of the annotations, what is striking is the large number of biblical passages, nearly all from the New Testament or from the Psalms.

The Principle and Foundation here carries the title, 'The Purpose of the Christian Human Being', and there is a more theological argument for how the 'principle and basis of the whole spiritual edifice' for the Christian consists in knowing what his or her purpose is. Regarding indifference, further specifications are given:

> … not health rather than sickness, a long life rather a short one … to be a prince rather than a subject, to live in marriage rather than celibate, in the world rather than in the religious life.

At the end, we find an additional phrase:

> … and to set ourselves at the arrival port of our pilgrimage, that is in the supreme love of God and the exact observance of the commandments.

This phrase brings out the eschatological dimension to the practical wisdom in the Principle and Foundation, and leads into two extra paragraphs bringing out the importance of watching and prayer, supported by Gospel quotations (Mark 14:38; Matthew 24:42; Luke 12:37), and especially the importance of the Examen:

> But for purging the spirit from its sins, nothing can be more useful than your assessing the drifts of your thoughts, words and deeds, and making an account of them, twice daily, at midday and in the evening.

[18] The biblical quotations in the Exercises of Master John are given according to the Latin Vulgate. The translations given here are based on NRSV, modified where the Latin suggests it is necessary. Psalm numbering follows the Hebrew Bible.

[19] The full text of this annotation is given at the end of the selection of extracts which follow this article, along with representative selections of the First and Second Week material.

The River Tiber in Rome

Thus we are enabled to understand better the organic role of the Examen within the Exercises.

The First Week

The preparatory prayer to the first exercise of the First Week brings out the need for grace:

> For both Scripture in various places, and the teaching of the Fathers, tells us of how grace is necessary for this, and how we need God's help. For of ourselves, we can do nothing other than fall into sin.

There is nothing new in the preludes, apart from a few biblical quotations by way of reinforcement. Thus the petition for true shame is supported by the examples of Magdalen (equated with the woman who was a sinner in Luke 7:38), and King David (2 Samuel 12:16).

By contrast, the three points contain much new material. The first, on the sin of the angels, distributes the task of meditation among the three powers of the soul. The memory has to recall the perfections with which the angels were created, and how a group of them, under the leadership of Lucifer, rebelled against God in pride. Not only does

the text speak explicitly of Lucifer, but it also cites one of the classic texts to characterize his sin: Isaiah 14:13—'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will be like the Most High'.

The understanding, which naturally reasons—'drawing some things by reasoning on others'—is meant not only to compare our personal sins with those of the angels, but also to meditate on how the fallen angels remain forever in their sin of pride without repenting, while humanity is given the chance to do penance. 'What extreme goodness has been shown me, so often sinning and refusing the remedy offered me that is penitence.' To emphasize further the state of mind that this part of the meditation seeks to evoke, the text adds a passage from the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:18-19), and also the prayer of the publican in Luke 18:13: 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

The third power, the will, is presented as the queen in the realm of the soul, because it directs the other powers, setting the memory and the understanding in motion.

So there is a comparison between God's dealings with the fallen angels and with ourselves. God has been patiently sustaining us even as we have been sinning for such a long time,

> … always inviting you to repentance, and encouraging you to return with him into a state of grace, saying, 'Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you'.

Even the first point of the first Exercise, then, is shaped by the objective of the First Week as a whole: the experience of the extraordinary mercy which God shows to humanity.

The meditation on Hell, which forms the end of the First Week, is salted with no fewer than 26 biblical quotations not found in the official texts, and the Christ-centred meaning of the whole comes out fully in the final colloquy.

The Second Week

The contemplation on the Incarnation in the Master John text is filled out with Pauline ideas, and in particular with the christological hymn found in Philippians 2:5-11:

> The Son of God, sent into the world, and made human of a woman, accepting the form of a slave and being found in human

> form, was to break down the dividing wall and put an end to the hostilities in his flesh, humbling himself and being made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The density of christological expression here, and the Pauline references, anticipate the reference to the paschal mystery that we find in the definitive text later in the contemplation (Exx 116). The incarnation and the passion are held together by an idea of the pre-existent Christ, whose destiny is not something blindly imposed on him, but rather accepted in the full freedom proper to the Son as he 'humbles himself'.[20]

The petition in the third prelude is extensively elaborated, in a way that stresses how the Incarnation brings about salvation. Once again the text shows the strong influence of a 'descending Christology' in the *Spiritual Exercises*, of the kind that was, by and large, predominant in the first Christian millennium. One may contrast what happened from the tenth century onwards, particularly with Anselm in the Western tradition, where the emphasis was more on an ascending movement, on how Christ acted in our stead before God. The standard answer to the question, 'why did Jesus Christ die?', in the first millennium was, 'to free us from sin and death, from the power of darkness'; by contrast, later Latin theology, influenced by Anselm, would generally answer, 'to offer himself in sacrifice to the Father and to satisfy divine justice'. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, satisfaction had become substitution, in that Christ made satisfaction 'in our stead'.[21]

The descending Christology continues in the third prelude, along with the themes of human divinisation as a consequence of the Incarnation, and of the exchange that God's descending movement brings about between divinity and humanity. In such a context the

[20] For more on Paul and Ignatius, see Rogelio García Mateo, 'San Ignacio de Loyola y San Pablo', in *Ignacio de Loyola*, 65-85.

[21] See Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, translated by A.G. Herbert (London: SPCK, 1970 [1930]). It is this later kind of Christology to which the Third Week alludes, in its prayer of Exx 203: 'grief with Christ in grief, shatteredness with Christ shattered, tears, interior pain at such great pain that Christ suffered for me'. The passion and death of Christ appear here as a form of representative expiatory suffering, overcoming our condition of sin and death, with Christ taking these on himself as if he were the guilty one—the kind of interchange also drawing on Paul: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21).

well-known Ignatian *de arriba* ('from above'—Exx 237) takes on a new christological resonance.

The Two Standards is not greatly expanded, and follows the official texts quite closely. But its theological language is more technical. When it describes the call of Christ, it speaks of Christ calling all human beings to his standard, wanting them 'to do military service for God under it'. *Militare deo* is the classical expression, with roots in the New Testament ('share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus'—2 Timothy 2:3), expressing the radicality of Christian commitment. The call of Lucifer cites Romans 6:23 ('the wages of sin is death'). The second point is far more developed than Exx 141 in the standard texts, and makes explicit references to the temptations of Jesus in the desert:

> … as is established by the shared consensus of all the holy Fathers and doctors, who hand on the tradition that it was none other than Lucifer himself who tempted Christ after his forty days fast.

Christ's speech is also far more elaborated, and the beatitudes are explicitly cited. The manuscript finishes with the Three Classes, in standard form, although the first prelude is considerably expanded and there are references to John 11:40 and 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

We can see, thus, that it is not just small variants that we have in this text, not just secondary details or insignificant additions. Rather, we find ample explanations of central themes in the *Spiritual Exercises*, yielding an enriched understanding of their theological content, and also a thoroughly biblical framework for interpreting Ignatius' text, centring on the New Testament—a framework dating from the very early history of the Jesuits. Because Ignatius himself revised this text, it provides us with something more than a contemporary commentary; we have what amounts to an authorised expansion, giving us a much more solid and objective basis for articulating the theology of the Exercises.

That enterprise is difficult: the text is extremely concise; there are relatively few biblical references outside the Mysteries of the Life of Christ; some expressions are very obscure and the context is too sparse to yield any insight into their meaning. A theological commentary—and still more a pastoral one—can easily degenerate into a merely personal interpretation. This early manuscript gives us a textual basis

for a different kind of commentary, at once more objective and more rooted in biblical and theological tradition.[22]

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[22] There are three other significant early manuscripts, the so-called 'Madrid', 'Valladolid' and 'Italian' texts, and also the account of the Elections made by Pedro and Francisco Ortíz. Because they are quite fragmentary, they are not as important as the texts discussed here, but they do deserve a separate treatment. To these we need to add another manuscript found in the National Library of Mexico, commented on by Miquel Batllori in 'Los ejercicios que Nadal llevó a España y las meditaciones de muerte y del juicio', in *Cultura e finanze: Studi sulla storia dei Gesuiti da S. Ignazio al Vaticano II* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1983), 65-98.

THE EXERCISES OF MASTER JOHN

Rogelio García Mateo's article introduces us to the so-called Exercises of Master John, a text of the Exercises with some annotations in Ignatius' hand. This version presents the material in a much fuller, more rhetorical style than we might expect and than the official texts might suggest. To present this version of the ***Spiritual Exercises*** *within article length is to falsify it, in that its effect comes from its sheer expansiveness. There is some Ignatian warrant, after all, for the rhetoric of the retreat-master in James Joyce's* ***Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man****. 'Master John'—presumably Jean Codure—preserved Ignatius' exhortation to brevity, but his observance of it seems, by our standards, rather lacking. Nevertheless, there is much to ponder in this text, for all that it appears alien. We can begin with the points for the First Exercise of the First Week.*

AFTER THESE PREPARATIONS,[1] one is straight away to move into the meditation itself in earnest. Its first heading is for you to consider most attentively the sin and also the punishment of Lucifer and of his companions, the apostate angels. And to make your consideration more meaningful, you must summon to your deliberations the three powers of the soul, namely the memory, the understanding and the will. These will give you extraordinary support in opening up and enlarging the character of all this material.

Indeed the memory, whose task it is to recall what is old and past, will have much to suggest to you and put before your mind's eyes. In the first place you will remember how those beautiful, grace-filled angels, outstanding for their rare gifts of spiritual powers and perfection, were created by God, who brought everything into being;

[1] The preparatory prayer and the preludes.

how they were then left to enjoy the power of their free choice[2] and permitted to use the judgment of their own will, so that they might listen to God their Creator and obey Him, and gain eternal beatitude; how if they refused to obey God in His supremacy and excellence they would deservedly be condemned to the eternal tortures of Hell; how finally, as a result of their importunate and intolerable pride, they made it their ambition to be seen to be equal to the Almighty God whom they should have recognised and worshipped as their Creator; how they were at once deprived of their position and their dignity, and were dragged by the ropes of Hell to be dropped into the infernal regions to be tortured, and to be kept for judgment.[3] This was in accord with that text of Isaiah, *Why did you say in your heart, 'I will ascend to Heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God, I will be like the Most High'?*[4] How have you fallen from Heaven, Lucifer, who rose in the morning? Your pride has been dragged to the depths, you will be dragged to Hell, to the bottom of the lake.

Now we move to the understanding. Its role is to apply thought to different topics, and, through reflection, to make connections between different things. You are to exercise this faculty in this meditation, so as to go through the whole material with great diligence, and as far as the nature of the matter allows, to open it up along such lines as these. If God has not spared those most excellent creatures of His, but has deprived them of eternal glory because of one sin, and has afflicted them with the torments of Hell which will never cease, how much more must I, a petty human being, fear the severity of the Divine Majesty—I who, as His goodness has been inviting me to penitence, have so far been refusing to respond. If angels, granted and adorned with so many gifts and virtues, freely raised to such a rank of excellence, were thrust for one sin out of Heaven into Hell to be tortured for ever, how much more justly will my offences, which are so many and so grave, hurl me into Hell. How often has my wretched self deserved eternal damnation. If the angels who sinned once were thrown into Hell by the just sentence of God, how great was God's severity

[2] Sirach 15:14. The original biblical quotations are in the Latin Vulgate, and are here translated directly. The exact references given in footnotes are editorial, and link to the Hebrew Bible now standardly used.
[3] 2 Peter 2:4.
[4] Isaiah 14:13,14.

towards them, to whom He gave no opportunity for penitence after a single sin. What extreme goodness has been shown me, so often sinning and refusing the remedy offered me that is penitence. How blind has my mind shown itself to be, and how obstinate, how impenitent and shameful have I been, who have preferred darkness to light, who have despised the most powerful God, the Creator, when He called me. I have preferred my pleasures to the divine will and the commandments. Up till now, I have imitated Lucifer in his pride, and I have had no fear that I should be punished with him in eternity. And you can add: *because of my sin before Heaven and before you, and for the multitude of my sins, I am now not worthy to be called your son, not even your slave, and I cannot raise my eyes to Heaven.*[5] *God therefore, be merciful to me a sinner.*[6] And you can continue in this manner, as the power of the understanding will suggest to you.

Finally we are to call on the powers of the will that they may play their part in this meditation. In the kingdom of the soul the will is called the queen, because when it gives orders, the other powers obey without delay. Because of it, a person is said to be, and is, free to want and not to want, to desire and to reject, to love and to shun and to hold in hatred, whatever the intellect and reason judge to be good or bad. Therefore it is at the core of the will first to direct the memory, so that it may recall, remember and, as it were, place before the eyes of the mind the whole record of what has gone before, namely the creation and its excellence, sin, the condemnation of Lucifer and the other apostate angels who together with him rebelled against God through pride and disobedience. Then it will assign to the understanding the task of running through particular things, assessing them as diligently as possible, and soon also that of comparing one's

[5] Luke 15:18-19.
[6] Luke 18:13.

own sins, so varied and so grave, with that one sin of the angels. You will also compare the punishment which was inflicted on the angels for their most stubborn pride with the one awaiting you—unless you recover your senses. Finally you should contrast your ingratitude with their ingratitude, in so far as you have despised not only the best and kindest Creator, but also treated with contempt the most tender Lord, who, while you were constantly sinning, has borne it most patiently, always inviting you to repentance and encouraging you to return with Him into a state of grace, saying, *Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you*.[7] In this way, you will stir into action the desires of the will and you will be covered in shame, after a consideration of your many heinous crimes; this exercise is very effective for achieving this shame.

The Second Week: Contemplation of the Incarnation of the Lord

The Second Week material continues in the same rhetorical style, marked by biblical allusions. Particularly noteworthy are the rich theologies of petitionary prayer in the colloquies, and the way in which the final exercise of the day, later known as the Application of the Senses, is presented as continuing the reflective activity more normally associated with the contemplations earlier in the Ignatian day.

The Preludes

On the first day of the Second Week, a contemplation of the incarnation of the Lord is to be made. This contemplation consists of a preparatory prayer, three preludes, three points and a colloquy.

The preparatory prayer is not changed.

In the first prelude the history of the material to be contemplated is to be considered. Here you are to consider those three Divine Persons looking from Heaven at the whole globe, or at some surface crammed with human beings; they are speaking among themselves about the toils and miseries of the human condition, how all people are generally spending their days forgetful of their duty and their God, spending their life in pleasures, in greed and lust as if they were beasts,

[7] Matthew 11: 28.

and suddenly sinking down to Hell. To this that sentence of David applies: *The Lord looked down from Heaven over the children of humanity, to see whether there is one who understands and seeks God; all have fallen away, and have become useless; there is not one who does good, not even one*.[8] These same Persons are moved by mercy towards the human race, because it is on its way to destruction.

Christ Agreeing to Save Humanity
by William Blake

And since it could only happen that humanity should continue to perish until the crime committed against God be cancelled, They discussed the matter among Themselves and decided out of Their great kindness that the Second Person, in order to preserve the human race, should assume human nature and as an immortal should put on mortal flesh. This is what seemed to the Divine Wisdom most appropriate, that a debt which humanity had accumulated should be paid through a human being who was also God, that a sin which had been committed through the disobedience of a human being should also be cancelled by the obedience of a human being. For after the crime of the first parents the powers of the soul were damaged, with the result that complete deception took over the understanding, and the most corrupt affections took over the will, and perfect obedience could not be found in the entire human race. There could be no hope that sometime, out of the corrupt mass of the human race now totally at enmity with a God gravely offended, a human being

[8] Psalm 14: 3; Romans 3: 12.

could be found who was so dear to and so much in friendship with the Trinity that he might appease the injured majesty of the Deity, or might render satisfaction and compensation equal to or greater than the offence. Therefore no means for setting humanity free was judged more suitable and fitting by the most high Lord, now that the fullness of time had come in which everything was to be renewed, than this. The Son of God, sent into the world,[9] and made human of a woman, accepting the form of a slave and being found in human form,[10] was to break down the dividing wall and put an end to the hostilities in His flesh, humbling Himself and being made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Then it was decreed that the Word of God should become flesh, and that the archangel Gabriel should be sent from there to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph, who would announce the incarnation of Christ, a most joyful and fortunate event for the human race.

The second prelude contains the composition of place. Here you will consider the very vast and broad surface of the world which the different races of human beings inhabit. In this way you will survey and mentally review the whole extent of the earth, in such a way that, starting from the east and heading for the west, you will finally come back to the east. Soon after you will set off again from the north, and when you arrive in your imaginary journey at the south, after travelling through such an abundance of places, you will find yourself back again in the north.[11] You can travel even further: by exercising your intellect and keenness of mind, you will pass through different regions, meet people of varied appearance, customs and cultures, laws and government. However you will pay most attention, describing and drawing it in your imagination, to the whole of Galilee and especially to the city of Nazareth, the home of the divine Virgin Mary, mother of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Before all else, you will contemplate at length, with great diligence, the house in which the divine Virgin lived and where she conceived and brought up the Lord Jesus, pondering its size, its height, its length and width, how it was neither grandiose nor magnificent, neither skilfully constructed nor splendidly adorned, and

[9] Galatians 4: 4.
[10] Philippians 2: 7.
[11] It is perhaps noteworthy that a religious text of the 1540s should speak so confidently of a round earth.

other things of this kind that will suggest themselves to you spontaneously for contemplation.

In the third prelude, you will beg the Lord again and again to illumine your mind and understanding by His grace and to enlighten you so that you may know, may be constantly amazed and astounded at, the most boundless benefit He bestowed on the human race, namely the mystery of the Incarnation. The only-begotten Son of God, who has no need either of ourselves or of what we have (*My goods*, says David, *you do not need*[12]), descended to earth from the side of the Father in order to assume human nature, and in this same nature was ready to pay for your crimes and for those of all humanity, and to suffer a most bitter death. *For truly he has carried our iniquities and has Himself born our sorrows*.[13] With such zeal and effect was Augustine wont to contemplate the hidden plan of this mystery, the incarnation of the Lord, that he was overcome by astonishment and admiration for it, and in his conversation he never ceased to keep before his eyes so great a benefit and to be astounded. Christ Himself in His preaching about this same benefit taught His hearers. He said, *Thus did God love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son*.[14] All these things you will contemplate with great vigilance, so that you may be inflamed with a more ardent love for your Lord, and may follow Him with greater zeal. For there is nothing which will draw a person more effectively to the love of God than careful consideration and wonder at the fact that God has been made

[12] Psalm 15: 2.
[13] Isaiah 53: 4; 1 Peter 2: 24; 1 John 3: 5.
[14] John 3: 16.

human for human beings, so that He might make human beings participants in His divine nature. …

The Third Point

In the third point, you will consider first what human beings living on earth are doing, how they are indulging in mutual deception, robbing, striking, killing one another, and finally being cast down to Hell. Next you will notice what the Divine Persons are doing, how they are bringing about that most holy and totally wonderful work, namely the Incarnation of the divine Word, for the redemption of the human race. Soon you will observe how carefully the angel Gabriel is performing his office of ambassador to the divine Virgin. Finally you will ponder how modestly that most holy Virgin is conducting herself, once she has welcomed the divine messenger, and how, now that the commission of God her ruler has been revealed, she is giving thanks with great modesty and humility of soul to the Divine Majesty for His immense and inexplicable kindness. This she herself had begged for in her most ardent and humble prayers, that it might be granted to the human race the more speedily.

Test for yourself and be astonished how sublime, eminent and distinguished she will have been to whom the angelic legation was sent by the eternal and almighty king. The angel said that she had found favour with God, that she was so pleasing to the ruler who was most high, that the Word of God chose her for Himself as the one mother from whose most pure blood He wished to put on flesh. This is she of whom Solomon says, *One is my dove, one is my perfect one, one is to be his mother, chosen as his parent*.[15] In other words, she is the one who is to override Eve, to repair the ruin of herself and of the whole human race. What honour can be compared with this dignity? But the more she is lifted up, the more humbly she conducts herself, and everything she has received, she attributes to the divine goodness, claiming nothing for herself. Hence that utterance, a token and testimony of a soul most modest and a heart most honest and mature. She says, *Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word*.[16] This saying so pleased the most high Lord, that the one who

[15] Song of Solomon 6: 9.
[16] Luke 1: 38.

acknowledged herself as the humble servant of the Lord immediately became the mother of God, as the Holy Spirit granted fruitfulness and the power of giving birth to the most pure virgin, ignorant of marital intercourse. All these things are to be entrusted to the memory and diligently examined, that from each item you may ask to draw some fruit.

The Colloquy

In the colloquy, you will first address with great reverence the three Divine Persons with this or a similar prayer:

> O most blessed Trinity, out of your exceeding goodness you have created humanity in your image and likeness, so that it might attain eternal happiness. When humanity was fallen and lost by the free exercise of its will, and liable to death and to perpetual damnation, you have in turn raised it up, restored it, given it life, as your Word, the only begotten Son of God, was sent into the world, assuming from our corrupt nature immaculate flesh, *made in the likeness of human beings and in appearance found in human form*.[17] I suppliantly beg your majesty, do not despise me, for whose salvation you willed your Word to take flesh, but through your unheard of charity towards the human race, be willing to concede to me this or that spiritual gift if it is fitting for my soul to obtain it.

And here describe what you want, not so as to teach God, who knows what you desire before you turn to prayer, but that you may set your own mind alight with a greater desire of the same good as you are naming it and explaining it in words. In like manner, you will address the incarnate Word and the divine virgin Mother of God, Our Lady, with prayer that is apposite and fitting, seeking help from both, and asking grace and assistance so that I might sincerely and truly follow Christ and manfully[18] imitate the one who in Christ so wonderfully and mercifully deigned to assume flesh for my redemption and that of all. Finally you make an addition to the colloquy, namely the Our Father.

[17] Philippians 2: 7.
[18] The original here is *pro virili*—a genuine masculine.

The Second Week: The Prayer of the Senses

After the customary preparatory prayer and three preludes, you will find it useful to exercise the five senses on the material of the two contemplations already completed, and this is best done through four points.

In the first point which belongs to the first contemplation,[19] with the eye of the imagination you will gaze at the three Divine Persons, radiant in their eternity and glorious majesty, in need of nothing. Likewise you will look at the Word descending from Heaven to assume human nature on our behalf, and then at the angel Gabriel, in most splendid dress, flying through the airy space to announce to the most blessed Virgin that God would receive a body through her and be born. Finally you will see the divine Virgin herself, and the angel coming to her, as she finds time for prayer in the greatest diligence and humility. And for the second contemplation, you will make efforts through the powers of your imagination to see the blessed Virgin, Joseph, and the maidservant. You will consider and contemplate to yourself what they are doing, whether they are standing or sitting, how they look and how they are dressed and what colours they are wearing, how carefully Joseph is looking after the needs of the divine Virgin, how humbly and quickly the maidservant is serving her Lord of all who is ours too. You can then

The Adoration of the Shepherds
by Albrecht Dürer

[19] The prayer of the senses seems in Ignatius' own text to cover both the Gospel passages contemplated in the course of the day.

think out for yourself other scenes of this type that will repay contemplation. Thus, ensuring that due decorum is maintained, you may match individual points to individual persons in an appropriate and suitable way, and in all these methods you will be eager to derive some fruit for yourself from all this.

The second point is to use the ears of the imagination. With these you will drink in and ponder all those things which the above mentioned persons, both divine and human, are saying, or could plausibly be saying. Clever people can easily imagine what these things might be, in accord with the persons and the nature of the business. In due course you will apply to yourself the same considerations which you have attributed to the persons mentioned, so that by this means you may come to some fruit. For example, you will suppose and imagine God the Almighty Father addressing His only begotten Son with this or a similar prayer:

> My Son, the mass of the human race which we have created in so great perfection, has been handed over as a result of sin to the power and tyranny of the devil, and consequently is destined for total destruction, unless it is quickly given succour. We shall have done a deed worthy of our goodness if, since we have made humanity out of our most wise and providential kindness, we remake it, now that it is lost as a result of its wickedness, and we set it free from its dreadful captivity to the wicked demons. Further, there is no means more apt for freeing humanity than that you take up human nature, and in this nature, endure death for the sake of humanity on behalf of the guilty and convicted as one who is innocent.

The Father's prayer greatly pleased the Son, who was obedient to the Father even to death.[20] And this you will adapt to yourself in this way:

> If the almighty Father showed such liberality towards me, that he handed over His only begotten Son to death for the sake of my salvation, how much do I owe to a Lord so good and loving? How diligently and energetically ought I to strive to serve Him in everything, and to please Him in my words as much as in my deeds.

[20] Philippians 2: 8.

You can reflect on such or similar ways in which you are indebted to the Father and to other persons likewise whom you saw mentioned in your contemplations. Then you will apply this to yourself, so that you may derive some fruit from it.

The third point commends the power of the imagination that enables you to smell and taste the infinite sweetness of the three Divine Persons and their most fragrant goodness and most pungent mercy. Then you are to bless the fragrance of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the balsam of His charity and of all His virtues and perfections. So too you must praise the sweet smelling ways of the divine Virgin and St Joseph and their chastity and humility which is more sweet smelling than any incense or ointment, while preserving, as I warned before, the dignity of the persons who come into the contemplation.[21] Finally, engrave everything on your mind and memory, so that this way of contemplating may bring to you no modest fruit.

The fourth point consists in this: it is as if you touch, embrace, kiss those places where the persons you call to mind, are treading, or where they are sitting. This will be Heaven when you contemplate the Divine Persons, or, when you consider the humanity of the Lord Jesus, the womb of the blessed Virgin from which Christ has processed like a bridegroom from his chamber. And when you review in your mind the actions of the blessed Virgin and of Joseph, set before the eyes of your soul the little house where they lived in Nazareth and the room in which the angel announced the incarnation of the divine Word to the most holy Virgin Mary. Do the same with the stable and the hostelry in which they were received in Bethlehem. Always you must make an effort to gain some fruit from everything.

Set before your soul the little house where they lived

To this exercise, a colloquy is added as a conclusion, of such a kind as is described in the first contemplation and likewise the second. At the end you will say an Our Father.

[21] Even here, there is anxiety that imaginative contemplation could get out of hand—a factor that will lead to far more restrictive interpretations of imaginative contemplation later in the sixteenth century.

The Annotations

As Rogelio García Mateo's article informs us, the version of the Annotations in the Master John text is chiefly interesting for how it uses biblical ideas to amplify the far sparer indications in the official texts. We begin with two particularly important paragraphs, the fifth and the fifteenth in the final text, the sixth and sixteenth here.

The Sixth Annotation

The one who undertakes the Exercises ought to approach them with a spirit that is generous, open and liberal, in such a way that they hand over to their Creator and Lord their whole self, with their will and their freedom. They will keep nothing for themselves except a spirit which is obedient, and ready to follow wherever the Divine Majesty will call. They will say with David, *Lord, teach me to do your will, for you are my God*.[22] Let them not think that they have claim to any right for themselves, but let them depend totally on God. They will make no difficulty in opening themselves to the very nod and will of God and to whatever that eternal and infinite wisdom has decreed for them and for all which concerns them. Hence it was that Paul, speaking on behalf of those who generously undertake to follow the way of God, said, *Lord, what do you want me to do?*.[23] Christ said, *Not my will but thine be done*.[24] And so also he taught us to pray, *May your will be done*,[25] a will that is good, pleasing and perfect.

The Sixteenth Annotation

The one who instructs a beginner in the course of the Exercises should make no attempt to attract or pressure the latter into this or that state of life. Although at other times, outside the period of the Exercises, it is quite allowable and even praiseworthy for us to encourage and even urge some, provided that they appear suitable for it, to choose and pursue continence, virginity, chastity, poverty and religion, and other means which are conducive to a life of evangelical perfection, nonetheless it is much better during spiritual exercises that the Lord

[22] Psalm 143:10.
[23] Acts 9:6.
[24] Matthew 22:42.
[25] Matthew 6:10.

and Creator of all should Himself impart and present Himself to the devout soul who is seeking the divine will. He Himself testifies, *No one can come to me, unless drawn by the Father*,[26] because no one can come to Him in this life or the other unless also inspired and led by the Father. That is why Paul said, *Each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind*.[27] For it should come about that a person who is aflame with the love of God should be brought to the path that is best and most appropriate for them, and thus to a pattern of living in which they will be able to praise and worship God in the most holy way. Meanwhile, the teacher who is giving the Exercises ought not to act so that they incline themselves this way or that, but, as if standing on a balance, they should allow the Creator to act with His creature according to His own judgment, and allow the creature to be led by the guidance of the Creator wherever it seems good to the wisdom of the Almighty.

Finally, we have the annotation which was not incorporated into the official texts. On the basis of the latter, it has been said that Ignatius took up a traditional sense that meditation was somehow more advanced than contemplation, while interpreting it 'not in the sense of spiritual ascent but along the trajectory of the Incarnation'.[28] *Contemplation is normally gospel-centred prayer. If that is true, this second annotation in the Master John text reflects a different understanding—or rather three different, and not entirely compatible, understandings. What we are to make of the discrepancy is a matter for discussion and speculation. The complexity of the argument may mask some uncertainty on the part of the early Jesuits themselves.*

The Second Annotation

We can treat Meditation and Contemplation in three ways. Firstly we take them to mean the same; we mix them up and we fail to distinguish between meditation and contemplation; we allow both the understanding and the will to be active. Secondly, we take them to

[26] John 6:44.
[27] 1 Corinthians 7:7.
[28] Ignace de Loyola, *Exercices spirituels*, translated by Edouard Gueydan and others (Paris: Desclée, 1985), 224.

differ and allow each of them to have a distinct meaning, and so we can define meditation along these lines: 'Meditation is a vigorous and wholesome application of the mind to search something out or to get to know it through experience'. In this way, meditation is solely the result of the activity of the understanding, not of any bad or inquisitive activity but of a healthy one, and not just any healthy activity but one performed with rigour. This is on account of the difficulty experienced by those who are beginning to meditate. Hence David says in Psalm 118, *How I have loved your law, O Lord; it is my meditation the whole day*.[29] In this regard it is very different from contemplation, which, when it is properly performed, is made with ease. For this reason it is said that we move from meditation to contemplation when in our struggle to meditate, we find all difficulty removed. Now that the disposition has come to birth, the way is open to contemplation, and this includes movements of both understanding and will. David was undoubtedly speaking about this in Psalm 38, *In my meditation, the fire burns*.[30] Further, in so far as it looks to the movements of the understanding, it is defined as a free and easy application of the mind for looking into matters, and it is spread out in every direction. As far as the operations of the will are concerned, it is usually defined as follows: contemplation means certain death for carnal desires through the joyful raising of the mind.

A third way of explaining these terms can be added to the two already discussed. Here they serve as a way of distinguishing more clearly between acts of the understanding and acts of the will. Clearly we understand meditation, whether it is performed with ease or with difficulty, as an act of the understanding on its own, whereas contemplation chiefly means an act of the will, which the act of the will serves, directed towards it as a sort of target.

[29] Psalm 119:97.
[30] Psalm 39:3.

Admittedly, when the words are understood in this kind of way, it is almost true that whenever a person is meditating, they are also moving into contemplation, both because the will is rousing us to meditation and also because, as a fruit of what has been meditated, the will is being stirred to exercise its own activities. It is also true that whenever a person opens themselves to contemplation, this does not just happen by chance or by routine, because acts of the will are necessarily preceded by the act and operation of the understanding. Nevertheless, these words 'meditation' and 'contemplation', when understood in this kind of way, are most often taken to differ, and there are various reasons for this.

In the first place, the proper role of the understanding is to meditate, and the role of the will is to contemplate. Further, it is more fitting in meditation to be discursive and to be looking around, and to be reviewing different materials with our mind and intellect. On the other hand, in contemplation we are enjoying ourselves and refreshing ourselves in quiet and tranquillity with the sweetest taste and fruit of materials on which we have already meditated. Finally, just as meditation, which has contemplation as its end, is concerned with the starting-point of the effect and goal desired, so contemplation joins and adds the will's force to the end-point of such an effect. I call 'effect' that which we desire to gain by both meditating and contemplating; this could be, for example, an immense and powerful sorrow for the crimes that we have committed, a groaning, the shedding of tears, a most fervent desire and burning love of eternal goods, in sum, any taste and sense of spiritual sweetness. Hence the name of 'meditation' will be better applied to the exercises of the First Week, and the word 'contemplation' to those of the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks.

RECENT BOOKS

Judith Lancaster SHCJ, *Cornelia Connelly and Her Interpreters* (Oxford: Way Books, 2004). 0 904717 24 0, pp. 316, £18.00.

It was the great nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke who used the phrase '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*' (roughly translated, 'telling it like it was') to describe the writing of history. In our postmodern age such a stricture is likely only to raise a wry smile at the thought that anyone could even contemplate such a possibility, let alone actually try to achieve it.

And so, *mutatis mutandis*, it is with the efforts of the biographer, as is illustrated by Judith Lancaster's fascinating book *Cornelia Connelly and Her Interpreters*. Lancaster is blessed not only in her extraordinarily interesting principal, but also in the fact that there are seven extant biographies (some of them unpublished) of Connelly, six of which were written by members of her own religious order, and one by a fascinated outsider.

Cornelia Connelly was one of the most extraordinary women in English Roman Catholic history—and indeed also in that of the USA, for she was born in Philadelphia. After the breakdown of her very unorthodox marriage, she founded a religious order, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. From the outset Lancaster makes it plain that it is not her intention to add to the canon of Connelly biographies, but rather to examine the lenses through which biographers, like all historians, perceive their material. However, in fulfilling that intention, she inevitably also expresses her own insight into this remarkable woman. Connelly's integrity, and her unflinching commitment to what she saw as her divine vocation, to the point of losing her children as a result, are admirable attitudes, even if we cannot easily understand or empathize with them today. Hers was a complex life and personality, and Lancaster admirably refuses to avoid the questions they raise.

Lancaster's insights fall into three groups. Firstly, and most simply, a study of the biographies and the biographers tells us a great deal about Connelly herself—for example just why her society was named after the Holy Child Jesus. Secondly, the biographies also reveal much about the biographers: their times, their attitudes, and the culture of the religious order to which six of the seven belonged. The third set of insights is richer and more complex, and is concerned with the developments in how

women, especially those in consecrated life, have understood God and themselves over the past 120 or so years.

It is beyond the scope of a review to expand fully on how Lancaster sets about her task, but we can focus, as she does, on what might be termed the '*Urbiographie*', by Sister Maria Joseph Buckle, one of the earliest members of the Congregation, and one who was known to have been close to Cornelia. As Lancaster puts it, it was Buckle who 'established the dominant myth' of Connelly by filling eight manuscript volumes—and this to such a degree that 'even where later biographers disagreed with Buckle, that is always what they were doing: disagreeing with Buckle rather than putting forward their own different and independent arguments' (p. 132). Here Lancaster homes in on the fundamental problem faced by any biographer or historian. Even supposedly primary sources have been in some way filtered by the time the biographer gets to them. The intent is not necessarily nefarious; it may simply be that one side of a correspondence has been preserved and the other not. Yet already our view of the correspondence is skewed. And so the process continues.

In her study of Buckle, and in subsequent chapters on a selection of Connelly's other biographers, Lancaster attempts to identify at least some of the filters through which each read Cornelia and her life: the nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century apologias; the mid-twentieth-century emphasis on Connelly within a long dominant, if already tacitly threatened, model of religious life shaped by a spirituality of inward suffering borne with outward composure; the post-Vatican II biographies that began to explore, albeit still rather tentatively, a more developmental model of Connelly's spirituality and virtue, and thus to paint a more rounded picture of the woman as not only religious founder but also wife and mother.

Lancaster's final question—to herself and to the reader—is the obvious one: what would someone embarking on a biography of Connelly today, in the first days of the twenty-first century, think it important to add to the picture? She has her own ideas, with which not everyone will concur. But her principal conclusion is undoubtedly true, and applies to the whole genre of biography: a contemporary biography will improve on its predecessors not because it is somehow more definitive or magisterial, but rather because of its 'being written by an author more conscious of contextual influence' (p. 239). Lancaster is right to stress that, *pace* Ranke, 'there is no such thing as an agenda-free, objective, neutral, definitive presentation of a life' (p. 300). But as long as both writer and reader remain

aware of that point, it enriches, rather than impoverishes, discussion about biography. There will always be something new to say.

Jane Livesey CJ

William Reiser, *Seeking God in All Things: Theology and Spiritual Direction* (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical Press, 2004). 0 8146 5166 6, pp. xii + 172, £19.95.

The spirituality centre where I work has, in recent years, offered a brief annual course entitled 'Theology for Spiritual Guides'. The course currently takes the form of a seminar discussing areas of theology that the participants consider, from their own experience as directors, particularly relevant for spiritual accompaniment. Several themes tend to recur. How, for instance, should the diverse images of God presented by directees be reconciled? How does prayer 'work'? Are imaginative contemplation of scripture and contemporary exegesis compatible? How can the experiences of sin, and of God's forgiveness, best be understood?

I approached Reiser's book expecting it to offer something similar. It would identify areas of theology that were highlighted by the experience of spiritual direction, and explore them in a way that made the process of direction clearer. And this indeed was what Reiser's introduction promised. Here Reiser identifies four areas of theology on which any practice of spiritual direction will be drawing, at least implicitly. First, directors must have a theology of revelation, some understanding of God's self-gift in human lives. Second, an ecclesiology is needed, since in Reiser's view any encounter with God is necessarily related to a broader community of believers or Church. In the third place directors need to be well versed in the biblical narratives, especially the Gospels. Finally, they need what is called a theological anthropology, a sense of what it means to be human before God.

The first two chapters do indeed take up the first of these topics. God's spirit leads people in a diversity of ways, expected and unexpected. It is the privilege of spiritual directors to bear witness to these leadings, which constitute a kind of divine revelation for the individual. But at the end of the second chapter another element emerges, which rapidly becomes the principal concern of the entire book.

Reiser is highly exercised by the fact that there are people who either find God in ways that are outside orthodox Christian faith, or else lead seemingly perfectly adequate lives with no reference to God at all. In fact

he has already noted this concern in the 'Personal Preface' with which the book begins. But, from the third chapter onwards, a desire to demonstrate the distinctiveness of Christian faith becomes increasingly central to what he writes. Over a third of the book is devoted solely to this topic, and most of the rest is coloured by it. Discussion of the remaining three topics of the Introduction becomes almost wholly subsumed in this wider presentation.

Positively, the answers he puts forward are stimulating. Obviously the first thing that makes Christian faith different from other approaches to God is the discovery of God in Christ. Yet it is above all in its attitude towards suffering that Christianity, for Reiser, is distinctive. Centrally, Christian faith encounters God in the suffering of the crucified Jesus. Jesus was crucified because he identified prophetically with the rejected of society, and spoke out on their behalf. There can be no genuine Christian faith, therefore, without such solidarity, which alone has the power to draw authentic compassion out of us. Christian spiritual directors must recognise themselves as immersed in this reality.

This picture, compelling though it may seem, leaves a number of problems when it comes to understanding spiritual direction (as Reiser acknowledges). For example, the religious experiences of Christians and of people of other faiths often have many elements in common. They may, for example, come to a deepened sense of being 'at home' in the universe, or to a greater freedom to act against what they know to be untruth. Reiser's concentration on what is distinctively Christian leads him to underplay the significance of these common elements, as regards both their intrinsic importance and their relevance for spiritual direction. Again, his desire to promote a particular view of Christian distinctiveness leads Reiser to regard spiritual direction as 'part of the ministry of catechesis' (p. ix). Directors should not try to step outside their own understanding of the faith, not least because such an attempt cannot hope to succeed. Reiser recognises that people persist in walking other paths, but he can do little more than lament the tension this produces within the director. Another view would perhaps be more sanguine about the attempt to enter into the directee's faith outlook, and to offer accompaniment precisely out of that empathetic identification.

On pages 60 and 61 Reiser gives a detailed and moving picture of the traditional cultural Catholicism which nurtured his own faith from infancy. He concludes: 'where such an atmosphere is lacking, the search for God is going to resemble a philosopher's search for truth and enlightenment—Magi without a star'. But, in large areas of the post-Christian world, few in the Church, let alone outside it, enjoy such an atmosphere today. *Seeking God in All Things* offers an interesting and challenging outline of what

theology might have to offer directors working with mainstream Christians. There is more to be said, however, about those who follow less orthodox paths.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Diarmaid McCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin, 2003). 0 7139 9370 7, pp. xxvii + 832, £25.00.

'I'm not okay, you're not okay, but that's okay.' That is how a distinguished US American historian of the sixteenth century summarised Martin Luther's theology to a class of undergraduates. Luther would no doubt have relished the phrase's memorability. However, Diarmaid MacCulloch rightly insists that we cannot reduce the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to simple mnemonic devices. Still less, however, should they be consigned to historical oblivion. Our contemporary scene is marked by divisions within the Roman Catholic Church, by a strong fundamentalist Protestantism in the United States which many Europeans find bewildering, and by a dread of violent forms of Islam. All three of these have parallels in the early modern period. As the European Union draws more nations into its fold, mutual comprehension among its member countries is essential, and Europe's divisions cannot be understood without coming to grips with the Reformation (p. xx). MacCulloch is a professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University, and he presents a detailed, nuanced and engagingly written analysis of the religious turmoil that struck Europe 500 years ago—a turmoil with reverberations that are still being felt throughout the world today.

MacCulloch's case begins with a convincing refutation of the long-standing myth that the late-medieval Catholic Church was corrupt and ready to collapse (p. 110). It was, on the contrary, a vibrant institution; it was capable of reforming itself; and in many ways it was already doing so. Luther was a product of the reform of his own Augustinian order. Guilds or confraternities of the laity were already taking responsibility for the liturgy (pp. 16, 22-23). The spirituality of this period was not dominated by 'saint worship', as it has been pejoratively described, but by worship of the person of Jesus Christ (pp. 20-22). Nor was there a shortage of preaching (p. 326). The vitality of the Church makes its rupture in the early sixteenth century all the more fascinating. What destroyed the ancient unity of Christianity in Western Europe?

According to MacCulloch, it was divisions over ideas of human nature and over 'how to exercise the power of God in the world' within the Church that led to this destruction (p. xxi). The debate was about Augustine's account of the interplay—or lack of it—between God's grace and human freedom. MacCulloch holds that Luther rediscovered Augustine's views on the biblical writings of St Paul: human nature was utterly corrupt; human beings could in no way merit the salvation gained for them by Christ's death and resurrection; and they had no freedom of will to cooperate with God's grace at work in their lives (pp. 106-112). These insights (whether or not they were in fact truly Augustinian) gave rise to Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, and John Calvin's doctrine of the double predestination of the saved to Heaven and of the damned to Hell—ideas that were quite novel, and that Protestant leaders advocated with conviction and relish.

People, especially in the towns and cities, followed Luther, Calvin and the other Protestant reformers with enthusiasm, largely because they were living in an 'atmosphere of tense excitement mixed with extreme fear for the future …. At all social levels, people were expecting something dramatic and decisive to happen.' (p. 152) The Muslim Turks were the terror of the Mediterranean, and they were about to destroy the Catholic Kingdom of Hungary. Muslim victories were seen as signs of God's wrath, and as the beginning of the end of the world (pp. 56-57, 551). Europeans were expecting church reform, and prophets of reform to proclaim it. Luther, Calvin and the other reformers seemed to fit such preconceived notions, though their revolutionary ideas did not sink in until after confessional boundaries were already being set (p. 345).

While printing was essential to the swift spread of reforming ideas, most people could not read. MacCulloch surmises that music was the key: Lutheran hymnody and Calvinist metrical psalms, not theological tracts, were the means through which the Reformation message was communicated (pp. 36, 307). Despite their musical harmony, Protestants could agree on little else, except that the pope was Antichrist. Consequently 'the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and the huge reservoir of traditional religious practice in the countryside proved too formidable to overcome' in most of Europe (p. 365).

The Counter-Reformation could in one sense be described, using terms of contemporary US American television, as a movement from 'drab to fab'. It moved away from the starkness of much Protestant theology, music, literature—and from its extinction of the visual arts—towards veritable riots of activity (in pilgrimages and processions), colour (in religious art, architecture and vestments) and music (in sacred polyphony

and popular carols). The missions—whether in Europe, the Americas or Asia—of Jesuits and other new or reformed religious orders were permutations of a Catholic renewal rooted in the militancy of medieval Spanish Catholicism (pp.416-419). Before the advent of Protestantism, Church reform meant institutional reform; after the Council of Trent, Church reform meant the personal, individual reform of priests and people—often against their wills (p.405). Nevertheless, the Counter-Reformation established itself with remarkable success, and after some hints of a more dialogical approach to secular culture in the decrees of Vatican II, its attitudes have been confidently reaffirmed under John Paul II (p.702).

One of Professor MacCulloch's main concerns in writing *Reformation* is to explain the cultural divisions within Europe, divisions that become less self-explanatory as religious practice wanes across most of the Continent. In this endeavour he demonstrates a great breadth of learning, and is unafraid to explain complex theological issues. He also stresses that the Reformations were very much dependent on social, political, cultural, literary and technological circumstances. Life changed dramatically again and again from Ireland to Lithuania, and the outcomes were uncertain. England, for example, was in 1500 a devoutly Catholic nation, but by 1600 it had become devoutly Calvinist, and by 1700 it was something different again: 'Anglican'. England executed more Roman Catholics than any other Protestant nation in Europe, and thousands of Huguenots died in France's St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, but it does not appear that the blood of martyrs was the seed of either Church (pp.392, 436). The old certainties of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations no longer hold. All the more reason, then, for rejoicing at Professor MacCulloch's illuminating and highly readable revision of 'I'm not okay, you're not okay, but that's okay'.

William Wizeman SJ

Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). 9 780521 53899 8, pp. x + 149, £13.99.

To anyone who thinks that there simply cannot be anything new to say about just wars, Professor O'Donovan's book will come as a most refreshing surprise. O'Donovan works from a theological principle that he states clearly and briefly: for the Christian, the purpose of war can never be victory, but only the furtherance of God's justice and peace. 'When self-

defence, of state, community or individual has the last word, paganism is restored.' (p. 9)

O'Donovan points out that Aquinas' teaching on war, including the just war principle, comes within his more general discussion of Christian love, or charity. To engage in war is to perform an act of loving judgment, under the guidance of God's grace in the ways it is habitually given. The ultimate goal is one of mediation. Warfare, on this account, must be governed by the same kind of safeguards that we would use to protect the integrity of judgment-giving in the practice of law. It must be authoritative, discriminating, proportionate, and aimed at reconciliation. On occasion, in situations of extreme violence, pacifism may indeed be demanded—after all, any Christian might at some point have to face martyrdom. But pacifism is the response of last resort.

The fact that the remaining essays in the book are entitled 'Counter-Insurgency' (dealing with authority), 'Immoral Weapons' (dealing with discrimination), and 'War by Other Means'(dealing with questions about what is proportionate), might suggest that what we are being offered is nevertheless just the old theory rehashed. This would be to underestimate completely the delicacy and responsiveness of O'Donovan's treatment. His style of moral judgment is in the best sense Aristotelian. He avoids any attempt to derive conclusions about particular cases by some deduction from first principles. Just war theory can indeed alert us to the many pitfalls which attend the attempt to form a judgment about a situation now,

> … yet when these warnings are all heeded, the help that practical doctrine offers is not help for historians, but for those who wish to learn *how to engage* in the praxis of judgment—to engage in it in *these* days and in *these* circumstances, where we actually find ourselves, here and now. (p. 13)

As Aristotle would have put it, moral judgments are particular.

In the later, more specific chapters O'Donovan gives many examples of how he would judge cases from recent times. His treatment is nuanced and perceptive. He illuminates a wide range of topics: terrorism, rebellion, the role of the United Nations, insurgency, weapons agreements, anti-personnel mines, sanctions, the status of captives, and the utility of war trials, to mention just a few. In Aristotelian style, his views are not argued for; they are explained. It is not that we arrive at moral decisions by deducing what must be done from general principles. Principles are indeed helpful, but in the end one simply has to *see* what is to be done. The particular insight is then expressed by explaining which principles are to be taken as relevant here, and how they will be understood, and there is nothing either mysterious or dogmatic about this. It is in this spirit that

O'Donovan invites the reader to share in his way of seeing the issues. I found myself persuaded by his vision, time and again. The book demands careful reading, but it is non-technical. I recommend it most highly.

Gerard J. Hughes SJ

Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003). 9 780745 951386, pp. 125, £9.99.

Silence and Honeycakes is a wise and rich book which you will want to keep dipping into long after you have first read it. Williams briefly and accessibly brings together ancient teaching and present reality, and allows the wisdom of the early desert monks and nuns to shed light upon some of the most vital and urgent questions of our contemporary world. Williams' wide learning, and his close familiarity with early Christian literature, enable him to get beyond the facile reading of early monastic asceticism. Instead, he shows how these texts express the deep humanity of the desert writers, fostered as it was by the practice of love of God and neighbour. Given that the spirituality of these writers was informed at every point by the Incarnation, Williams can use their writings as a starting point for reflections on community, on stability, and on engagement with the world's real issues. And because the Spirit of God is at work within all of humanity, these ideas apply to the human condition as such—there is nothing narrowly Christian about them.

The four chapters originated as addresses to the 2001 John Main seminar in Australia. The first looks at how love of neighbour fosters our growth in relationship with God. Drawing upon the teachings of such authors as Anthony the Great, John the Dwarf and Abba Bessarion, Williams brings out how any community will depend on people learning to put the interests of the weaker members before their own—a teaching which of course goes back to Paul. At a time when both abject materialism and simplistic spiritualities place self rather than God at the centre, this wisdom, embodied by Christ to the utmost, needs to be heard. Moreover, the building of community requires honesty, commitment and stability in relationships, both with oneself and with others. Again, there is something prophetic here in a world where stickability ranks low in the list of priorities, and subjective sincerity substitutes for the quest for truth. The relevance of this claim in the British political scene after the Iraq war hardly needs highlighting.

The second chapter focuses on the need for self-critical objectivity. Here we are nourished by a compassion that Williams himself takes over from the desert writers he is describing. His words, like theirs, are non-judgmental. They are motivated by a deep concern for the care of people who marked by both goodness and frailty. They also apply, if in different ways, to human communities, whether political, social, ecclesial or monastic. The remaining two chapters explore the themes of 'leaving'—the ascetical withdrawal from normal society—and 'staying'—our need to resist the desires for constant change and for control over our lives.

Each major theme is introduced early in the book, and then echoed and expanded in subsequent chapters. This allows for a meditative style of reading that fosters both critical and prayerful thought. There is also a helpful introductory note on the sources, as well as a short bibliography with recommended further reading. And, though one should not begrudge the price of this book's hardback edition, the good news is that a paperback has now been published.

Josette Zammit-Mangion IBVM

Gerald O'Mahony, *A Way in to the Trinity: The Story of a Journey* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004). 0 85244 591 1, pp. xviii + 124, £7.99.

This is a delightful work. It is about the Trinity, but decidedly not a dogmatic treatise; it is something after the manner of a spiritual autobiography, the distillation of the wisdom that painful experience alone can bring. Above all it is the history of Gerry O'Mahony's lived experience of the love of the triune God. Many older Catholics will nod in recognition (often in pained recognition) of the successive stages of his spiritual awareness and understanding, and they will rejoice with the author at the place to which he has finally come. Like many of his generation, O'Mahony is still angry at the way the notion of Hell dominated his entire religious education, as was the case with many who have subsequently suffered the agony of religious scruples. At the same time, though, he learnt the healthy habit of intimacy with God. Over time, this has enabled him to recognise that that grace is a relationship with the triune God.

O'Mahony's story includes some charming and appropriate images for the Trinity, as well as a moving account of the nervous breakdown that he endured at the age of 23. He tells us also of an important and healing dream that he had subsequently, while in a medically induced coma—a dream which gave him the certainty of being loved by Jesus. Gerry

O'Mahony has a sensitive love for the Gospel of Mark, and this book includes some original and helpful ideas about how to read that gospel.

Many people are likely to be helped by reading this book. Among its principal merits is O'Mahony's serene ability to share his own vulnerabilities with the reader. Readers of *The Way* are likely to be particularly struck by his use of Teresa of Avila's seven mansions, some engaging diagrams relating the Trinity to our spiritual life, and some sound and down-to-earth spiritual advice.

Nicholas King SJ

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