THE WAY

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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. 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 this project will be especially welcome.

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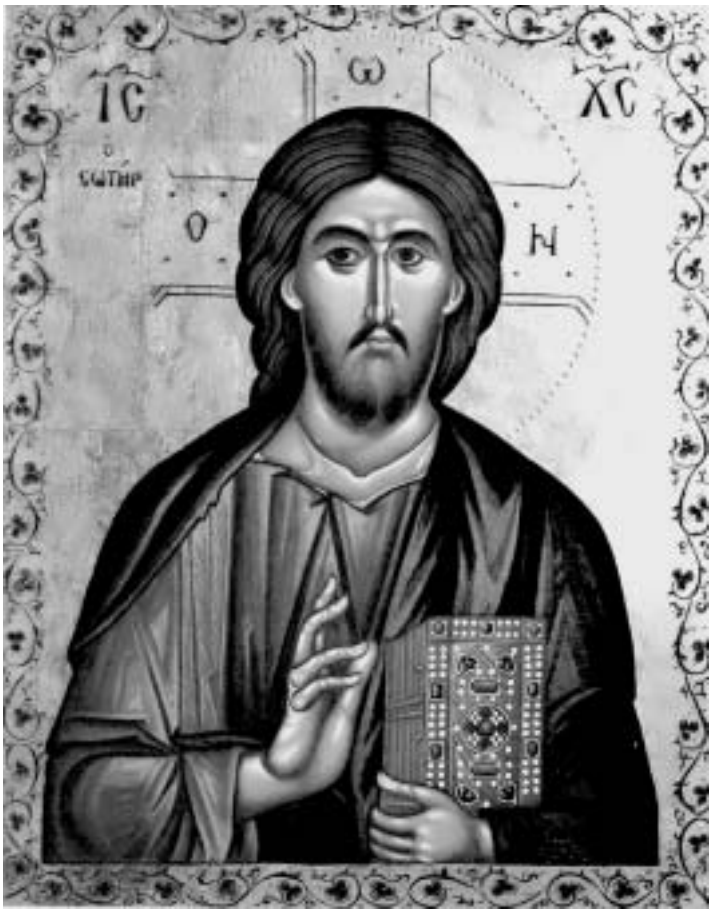

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:15-16)

'It is my will to conquer all the world and all enemies and so to enter into the glory of my Father; therefore, whoever would like to come with me is to labour with me, that following me in the pain, they may also follow me in the glory.' (Exx 95)

INTRODUCTION

IN THE SUMMER OF 1944, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER wrote from his prison cell in Berlin a series of letters that have become famous. Their formulations are trenchant, even swashbuckling:

> God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics or science has been surmounted and abolished; and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion …. For the sake of intellectual honesty, that working hypothesis should be dropped, or as far as possible eliminated. … And we cannot be honest unless we recognise that we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur* (as if there were no God). … Before God and with God we live without God.[1]

Lines such as these are eminently quotable, not least because they provoke many different interpretations. Bonhoeffer became famous in the English-speaking world largely thanks to Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God*. This book, published in 1963, took on a life of its own in a way quite independent of Robinson's intentions, let alone of Bonhoeffer's. Through the *Honest to God* debate, Bonhoeffer's moving letters came to be associated with a programme of radical demythologization and secularism. But it is closer to the truth to see Bonhoeffer in rather different terms. It was only the idea of God as a 'working hypothesis' that Bonhoeffer was rejecting. And the rejection enabled him to discover in a new way the true God, the God who is radically transcendent, the God whose creative and redeeming power interpenetrates all things, even the most secular, even the morally questionable.

'Humanity come of age' is a major theme in these prison letters. It is Bonhoeffer who has come to be seen as the most celebrated critic of 'God of the gaps' theology:

> Religious people speak of God when human knowledge (perhaps simply because they are too lazy to think) has come to an end, or

[1] *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*, edited by John W. de Gruchy (London: Collins, 1987), 290-291. Subsequent quotations are given within the text from this convenient edition, with occasional alterations to the translation.

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> when human resources fail—in fact it is always the *deus ex machina* that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure—always, that is to say, exploring human weakness or human boundaries. (p. 279)

Bonhoeffer distances himself from such a strategy:

> I've come to be doubtful about talking about any human boundaries …. It always seems to me that we are trying anxiously in this way to reserve some space for God.

His approach is different. We should recognise that human knowledge and maturity have reached a point at which it is quite possible for us to deal even with 'death, suffering and guilt' without invoking God. And Christian proclamation needs to take this reality seriously:

> I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in humanity's life and goodness. … Belief in the resurrection is *not* the 'solution' of the problem of death. God's 'beyond' is not the beyond of our cognitive faculties. The transcendence of epistemological theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. It is in the midst of our life that God is beyond. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.

On this basis, Bonhoeffer criticizes swingeingly what he calls 'the attack by Christian apologetics on the adulthood of the world' (p. 284).

It might seem strange that such confident talk of humanity's adulthood should be developed amid the cultural breakdown of Germany in 1944. But there is a profound spiritual logic here. Bonhoeffer is in no way denying human weakness, finitude or depravity, nor indeed the presence of God amid human suffering. He is, however, insisting that God is not to be *defined* in terms of what humanity cannot accomplish. God is not *simply* the one who compensates for limits, the one who is powerful where we are powerless, the one who rescues us when we are lost. Our spirituality has to move beyond rescue-fantasies. The God of Jesus Christ comes as a silent companion—'only the suffering God can help' (p. 291)—as we face life's 'duties and problems, successes and failures, insights and perplexities' (p. 294). As God takes the bleakness of our landscape into

the divine reality itself, God radiates a strange new light, that of a Christianity beyond our religious imagining.

Bonhoeffer writes of 'the profound this-worldliness of Christianity' (p. 293)—about our need to stop imagining Christianity as transporting us to another world, and instead to surrender ourselves to a God who does not, like ourselves, recoil from our wretchedness, but who rather stands in permanent, irrevocable solidarity with us. We can become the righteousness of God not because God's grace takes us out of the mess of our lives, but rather because God made the one who knew no sin nevertheless to *be* sin. As we grow into the life of God, we need not, and indeed must not, dress ourselves up as 'religious' subjects of some alien power. Rather, we must simply continue within the struggle of everyday living, knowing that our struggle is also God's. The way to fulfilment lies not through cheap escape, but rather in taking our experience seriously:

> Then one is throwing oneself completely into the arms of God, then one is taking seriously what are not one's own sufferings but the sufferings of God in the world, then one is watching with Christ in Gethsemane—and I think that this is faith, this is *metanoia* (change of heart); and so one is becoming a human being and a Christian.[2]

For God is not the inhabitant of some religious sphere into which we can imagine ourselves escaping. God is one who is permanently coming to our bleak, unfinished reality, filling us with strength and power until the life of God-with-us becomes all in all.

God in the Real

The articles in this issue of *The Way* can each in their own way be seen as continuing Bonhoeffer's vision, in that they are exploring God's action in human lives beyond the conventionally religious sphere. We learn from Miguel Elizondo, the spiritual guide of many notable figures in the Latin American liberation movement, about the prayer of Jesus, informed as this was by a vision of God at work in human reality in ways that the religious establishment of Jesus' time could only find

[2] *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 294 (retranslated). The letter from which this passage comes was written the day after the failure of the 20 July plot.

scandalizing. We mark not only the sixtieth anniversary of Bonhoeffer's death, but also the fiftieth of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's—the Jesuit mystic who developed a theology and spirituality of evolution at a time when conventional Christian authority preferred to remain obscurantist. We learn of Dorothee Sölle, a feminist theologian who drew on medieval traditions of German mysticism in developing a powerful theology of protest and resistance; and we hear about the experience of a group of people quietly trying to make Christianity intelligible in Leipzig—a city which is struggling with the inheritance both of Nazism and of state Communism. We explore, too, the spiritual challenges arising from the human realities which piety can easily lead us to deny: depression and gay sexuality. We also inaugurate a new series, 'Spirituality and Living', devoted to people's everyday experiences and their spiritual reflection upon them.

Bonhoeffer's vision is expressed with a prophetic passion and an intellectual power that are unique. But in different ways, each of these articles explores the agenda he indicated so powerfully, an agenda which should be the permanent concern of any journal of Christian spirituality. The path towards God, God who is always God-with-us, is also the path through the unfinished business of our culture. A God graciously present in all things is always leading us beyond religious convention, always drawing us into the unfamiliar grace of our 'this-worldliness'.

Philip Endean SJ

JESUS AND PRAYER

Miguel Elizondo

MISSION HAS ITS ROOTS in the kind of experience that Jesus had at his baptism: the Father was making him manifest, and sending him out, in the power of the Spirit, for the salvation, forgiveness and restoration of us all. Mission is therefore rooted in a relationship with the Father; and a relationship with the Father is rooted in prayer. It follows, then, that mission can never be accomplished without prayer.

But when we say that, we are making prayer a problem. Here we are, trying to carry forward a Christian mission within the nitty-gritty of how things really are—it's so complex, so hostile, so alienated from God. We know only too well how long we have spent worrying about how to fit in the prayer side of things when we are caught up in what we are doing, driven by commitments that tear us apart, that are always there, always pressing upon us. That is why we have so many problems about prayer, why we have all those different 'approaches' that people have suggested—all those treatises about prayer, all those methods, systems ….

At least in my experience, and in what I have seen and heard, the problem of prayer has been made far too complicated in comparison with the simplicity that we see in Jesus. How often have we heard people saying things like this about prayer:

> In the midst of so many things to be done, *if* there are any times for prayer … but sometimes a person can be tired, or needs to be thinking ahead to tomorrow because of their job ....

Last year, when I was giving a retreat to some laypeople in Panama, a young mother gave me a letter which her daughter had e-mailed to her from the United States. I must have been talking about prayer, and so she passed on what she had just received. It is a letter from Jesus addressed to any one of us:

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> I was looking at you as you were getting up this morning, hoping you would speak to me—even if it were only a few words to ask my opinion about something, or to thank me for something nice which happened to you yesterday …. But I noticed that you were very busy looking for the right clothes to wear for going to work. I kept waiting for you while you were rushing around the house getting organized. I thought there must be a minute or two for you to stop long enough to say 'Hello!', but you were too busy. I watched you as you were on the way to work, and I waited patiently all day. With so much to do, I suppose you were too busy to say anything to me.
>
> But that's all right. There's still plenty of time.
>
> Then you turned on the TV. I waited patiently. You were eating your supper as you watched, but once more you forgot to talk to me. At bedtime, I think you were already very tired. As soon as you said 'Good night' to your family, you fell into bed and almost at once went to sleep.
>
> No problem; perhaps it doesn't occur to you that I am always here for you. I have more patience than you imagine. And I would like to teach you how to be patient with others too. I love you so much that I wait every day for a prayer, a thought, or a little heartfelt gratitude from you.
>
> Oh well. There you are, getting up again. Again I'll wait, with nothing except my love for you, hoping that some time today you might find a little time for me.
>
> Have a good day.
>
> Your friend Jesus.

That's the kind of thing one hears in the course of a life which is dedicated, extremely busy, indeed busy for Christ's sake. Is there anything we can say that will help to get us beyond the impasse?

A Different Sort of Prayer

We can begin with the obvious fact that Jesus did pray—we need only open the Gospels and cast our eyes from one end of the text to the other to confirm the point. But it is noticeable how little Jesus *talks* about prayer, certainly much less than we ourselves do. He hardly says anything at all about the theory of prayer. He speaks instead about the Father and about going to the Father. When they ask him to talk about prayer, it is about the Father that he talks. The questions about prayer

come from the disciples, not from Jesus—and these questions are there so that Jesus can tell them how to pray not just in any old way but rather *from within Christian faith*.

Let me quote a few texts to illustrate how it is that Jesus' prayer is something that runs through the gospel. In Mark 1:35 Jesus prays in the early morning; in Luke 5:16 we are told that he sometimes went off to pray during the day; Luke 6:12 tells of him praying also during the night. All this is presented as somehow routine.

The gospels also show us Jesus praying at notable moments in his life. We have already mentioned his baptism, which took place while he was praying (Luke 3:21). Before he chose the twelve apostles, Jesus passed the night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13); Luke 9:18 shows us Jesus at prayer before putting the questions 'Who do the crowds say that I am? …. But who do you say that I am?' In Luke 9:28-29, Jesus is said to have been in prayer when the transfiguration took place; in Luke 11:1, Jesus is in prayer just before the disciples ask him to teach them to pray. Jesus prayed at crucial moments in his life: in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41-44), and on the cross, when he prayed to the Father, asking forgiveness for those who had brought him there (Luke 23:34). He died with a prayer on his lips: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'.

And *where* did Jesus pray? Nothing in the Gospels ever suggests that Jesus went to the Temple to pray. He used to go to the Temple to meet people, to talk to them—they came there in large numbers and he made the most of the opportunity. But nowhere do we see him going to the Temple to pray. Rather he seems to pray just about anywhere else: the texts we have just looked at mention the hills and lonely places. He prays in ways prompted by what is happening to him at the time, such as when he sees how the little children accept him, or when he is about to raise Lazarus, or when he is in the garden or on the cross. He prays out of his experience as it progresses.

Jesus did not go to the Temple to pray

So much seems clear enough; and it shows us that Jesus somehow drew a sense of God out of particular places, particular times, particular practices. He drew on God from where God was: in that life of love he was leading. God is love; Jesus was making that love flesh in lived life. It was out of that actual reality that Jesus' prayer was welling up.

There is a still more important question: *how* did Jesus pray? What was the source of his prayer? The prayer of Jesus always, always—and especially after his baptism in the Jordan—springs from his fundamental bond with the Father. The Father is everything in the mission of Jesus. That is why he will say, 'my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to complete His work' (John 4:34). 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.' (John 6:38) 'I do nothing on my own.' (John 8:28) When he breaks the Sabbath and the people attack him, his reply begins: 'My Father is still working, and I also am working' (John 5:17)—even on the Sabbath the Father is saving and loving, so Jesus does the same. In other words, the starting point of Jesus' prayer is the Father. Jesus is the Son. He has a task given him by the Father: to live in the world, and so to reveal Him. It is out of that reality, out of the Father, that his prayer wells up.

The Father and the World

All this—Jesus' life, Jesus' dedication, Jesus' mission that he shares with us—should make us realise that we are not the ones who call the shots in our mission. We are in no position to take our own initiatives when it comes to living out of who the Father is and what the Father wills. We can only do it in relationship with Jesus, starting from him.

We often speak of the great difficulties which are presented by the cultures in which we live and their relationship to religion. But it is in this world that Jesus is involved, the world as Ignatius presents it in the contemplation on the Incarnation, full of every kind of person and situation, full of weeping and laughing, of birth and death, of exploitation and so on (Exx 160). It is to this world that Jesus has been sent. We need really to let ourselves be shaped by this Ignatian experience, this vision of faith, this hope rooted in a God who wills to save the world—whatever it is like—and to rescue situations—whatever they may be—within the one act of love for Jesus Christ. If we can't manage that, then our vision will easily become worried, fearful, lacking any hope that things can be put right.

We can look at the world as a whole for solutions that are socio-political, cultural, economic and the like. We can also look at the world, at this same reality, with a view to making a discernment that comes from God, from the experience of the presence of God, and of

the hope that it brings. There is a difference, one that leads us to specific options and decisions which are quite unlike what comes from merely human overviews, merely human reactions.

When Jesus adopted the latter kind of view, he was facing a much more complex situation than ours. For he was *introducing*, in his every encounter, a revolution in how people imagined God and their relationship to God. Religious attitudes were very ingrained—they tapped into very deeply rooted subjective, affective and cultural attitudes that were in fact sharply counter to what Jesus stood for.

For me, though, the important thing is *what* Jesus prayed. His filial relationship with God sheds no little light on the nature of prayer. For a start, in all Jesus' explicit prayers as presented in the Gospels there occurs the word 'Father'. They might be prayers of joy, prayers of suffering, prayers of thanksgiving, but always, always God is Father.

What does Jesus pray about? From the texts we have we must say that Jesus prays about the things that are happening in his life. These are what he processes with his Father, and it is on these that he builds his relationship with his Father. Not 'religious topics', then, but the life that he is living and what it throws up, a life coming from the Father and lived for the sake of humanity.

From the evidence we have we can see this quite clearly. In Matthew 11:25, there is his experience of rejection by the religious authorities, by the wise and the powerful, and of acceptance by the simple. When Jesus sees this, what does he say? 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.' For prayer he uses what his experience gives him. When he is about to raise Lazarus (John 11:41), what does Jesus

say? 'Father, I thank you for having heard me'—he thanks the Father for having been able to respond to such a tragic situation for that family. When he is in a critical position, one that is really difficult for him, he prays 'Father, glorify your name' (John 12:28)—in other words, 'help me'. In the supreme crisis of his life, his prayer is 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want' (Mark 14:36). By the time he reaches the cross, it is quite clear that Jesus lives his life in relationship to the Father.

In John 17 (referred to as Jesus' priestly prayer) he lets us overhear his prime concern: 'those whom you gave me'. What does he ask the Father for? 'Protect them'—those who are about to go forth into the world and yet must not be of the world. 'Father … I made your name known to them.' What is it that is foremost in Jesus' mind? 'Father, that they may be one, as we are one'—one like you and me. In short, everything that he lives is his prayer.

Do Not Worry

When a whole life is lived like this, in accordance with what God wishes to be lived, there are no worries about prayer—not about times, or methods or systems or places. Prayer is just a way of life. If I live with faith—and that's the key—then from that life prayer will truly arise. Whatever I do, be it in a group, with a community, with trade unions, in teaching, education, pastoral or social work—whatever it is, the crucial point is that I live my life as a person loved by God, a person wanting to make God present in the world as best I can. Following my own lights, and discerning as best I can as I go along, it is here that I will find material for my prayer. And then there's no need to lose sleep about whether what I'm doing in my prayer is OK or not. The worries and uncertainties that we have, the contradictions we encounter, and the non-response we meet with, and whatever else that I cannot now imagine—all this will have to form the content of Christian prayer. That is how it was for Jesus—even if we do not have that inseparable bond which he had with God, the God of life, the God who is life for human beings.

Worries and uncertainties are the stuff of Christian prayer

It is from this source that prayer springs. We should not be surprised that St Ignatius, who lived all this out and was writing about

it, sends us into the world in the way he does, so exposed to resistance from outside, with so little help, and so on. For he believes that we must carry that profound experience with us, and that the law of prayer has to do with *discernment*, with prudent discrimination, not with times and places. The Church requires that there be fixed times—that's fine, but we must never be in a state of putting all our effort into these. It is that thought which has led us to worry about whether we have missed the hour or the time. But the real question is rather different: 'Did you, or did you not, *pray* during the time you were praying?'

Temples Are Finished

All this depends on one great innovation: Jesus says that temples are finished; there won't be any temples for meeting with God. The temple is going to be Jesus himself (see John 2:21). From now on, anyone who identifies with Jesus as the Life amid everything that we happen to be living will surely find God there.

We come across the elaboration of all this in the text in which Jesus meets with a woman who could hardly be called a contemplative: a Samaritan woman, living in an irregular marriage. It is to this woman that he reveals the great truth that there is no need to go to any temple in order to pray. Rather, God is spirit and truth—which we can translate as 'love and fidelity'. God is faithful love, love faithful to the end. Anyone who lives in this spirit with fidelity is already in the place where they will meet with this God who is just that: love and fidelity.

This represents an enormous shift. When prayer is concentrated in the Temple, one has to go to the Temple in order to meet with God. If one localises God in that way, that is what happens. One has to leave everyday life in order to go to the Temple to pray and to meet with God. But Jesus says that God has come to me, that God has come and dwelt with us, that He is still coming within us. The radical shift which the experience of Jesus presupposes depends upon whether or not one has grasped that truth.

When this shift is made, God acquires a new name: Father. And the relationship which this Father-God establishes is not tied to a place. The relationship between father and children is intimate and personal. That is why the Samaritans do not have to suffer the humiliation of having to go to Jerusalem to pray in the Temple.

Jesus puts it powerfully to the Samaritan woman that the Father is looking for worshippers of this kind: people who offer the worship for which the Father longs, and longs because He also longs to communicate with us. In other words, what is at stake here is what we find already in Hosea 6:6: 'I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice'—a contrite heart rather than holocausts. That is central to what Jesus came to tell us.

Beyond the Sacral

What does prayer depend upon? It depends on the image and the experience I have of God. If God is thought to dwell in the Temple, or in the sanctuary, then naturally prayer will mirror this image. Such ways of thinking have been communicated, inculcated through Christian catechesis. Somewhere Origen takes up the contrast in the Letter to the Hebrews between Christ and the High Priest of the Temple. Whereas the latter entered the Holy of Holies once a year, leaving the people behind, Christ has taken our flesh upon himself and is therefore with us all the year round—the year of the Lord's favour which he proclaims (Luke 4:19).

This is the reality of which Jesus makes us aware. And it alone provides the means for breaking down the wall that we normally feel to exist between prayer and a life of activity. We habitually think that prayer takes us to some other location inwards; conversely, action leads us outwards. We have one current of prayer directed towards the Father, and another one of action directed towards other people.

But Jesus lives his life on another basis. His encounter with his Father in no way leads him to forget his people in the world. Nor does his mission towards human beings in any way imply that he leaves the Father. His relationship with the Father never depends on some kind of impossible withdrawal from his responsibilities, from his functions, and

from everyone else. He stands before the Father in solidarity with the whole of humanity, saints and sinners; and in him the Father loves them all.

Christian spirituality, then (quite apart from anything specifically Ignatian or Jesuit), does not limit life in the Spirit to some particular area, such as the times of prayer, or the sacramental life, or works of explicitly Christian charity. The spiritual life is not confined in that way. It is the whole person in their prayer, the entire reality of their human existence, which becomes a holy place—a place where the action of God is revealed in order to commit us to the work of humanity's salvation. And so, when we pray the mysteries of Jesus' active life, we must allow ourselves to be touched deeply by the presence of the people whom the Lord places in our life; by the professional and ethical demands of our work, whatever it be; and by the affective concerns of a heart constantly affected by events, present and future. We must enter into solidarity with programmes of relief and consolation, informed by a discernment of the signs of the times as they announce the arrival of God's kingdom—a solidarity which is also compassion in the face of the injustice and evil produced by sinful structures. A person who prays is interrogating God about the events of real life, with a view to becoming able to receive them from His hands and to respond to Him in Jesus Christ, in the way that St Ignatius suggests to us.

Prayer beyond Religion

There is a shift here, certainly—one that upsets quite a few people. Obviously you need to teach people if you are to get across the real truth here, the real truth about prayer. Prayer touches us in very sensitive places. The most sacred reality for Christians, for those who believe in God, is God Himself. For such people, the most important thing is to have a right relationship with that God. And this has led to a system with its own momentum for regulating relationship with God, the system of Christian religion—a system which ordinary and simple people easily just pick up and internalise. This system generates, even among Christians, a religious conception of God which does not fit with the basic experience of Jesus. It just does not fit.

With the best will in the world, people focus their sense of God round the idea of the sacred; the sacred captures the imagination.

What is sacred is set apart: it stands above the everyday, above the merely human. From that starting point it is not easy to get across the truth about God. This truth must not come suddenly out of the blue; it has to begin with the proclamation of Jesus and what he is, and of the God whom Jesus came to share with us. From here we discover what prayer is, the true meaning of the 'Our Father'—this is not a 'religious' prayer, but rather a prayer composed out of the human and Christian content of our lives. Transforming people's image of God, then, is not at all easy. When we speak about what Jesus was really like, the effect is disorientating. It provokes resistance, and charges of heresy.

It follows that I must get to a point where I can let myself work through the saving power of that grace which Jesus gives me. I don't win my way to God; I let God win me. I don't try to look convincing to God; I let God convince me. I don't pray to God; I let myself be prayed by Him. I don't love God; I let God love me. All this is part of recreating, renewing an authentic prayer.

Movements are springing up nowadays which separate themselves from 'religion', from the Faith, because they see that religion does not help them to respond to how they really feel—'there must be more to God than this!' At the same time, there are movements in the Church which are well thought of, well accepted by the Church, yet which promote various kinds of religiosity as a relationship with God. But it is important not simply to identify Christian faith with religiosity. The chains which tie the Christian faith to religion cannot be broken; there do have to be signs. But when things go wrong, we identify living the faith with religious practice, and we say, revealingly, 'I am a practising Christian' or 'I go to Mass'. But things are not like that. Religion is not just a set of practices; religion should be expressing a *faith*. Jesus made that quite clear.

Again, the links between religion and faith have led us to talk often about 'doing our prayer' or 'making meditation'. But I ask myself: what does '*making* a meditation' mean once a person has begun to enter into the good news of Jesus Christ? It sounds as though we are in some way fabricating God. But for Jesus, prayer is not about '*making*' or '*doing*' but 'being'. Prayer is a matter of being chained to God, of being related to God, in every dimension of who I am and of my dealings with others.

Thus Jesus comes to tell me that the spiritual life, the life of prayer, is not a space filled with acts of piety which have to be performed, but

is the very essence of life itself, of the spiritual life. When you take the experience of Jesus as your starting point, *the life of prayer is the very essence of life.*

Of course it has to *happen;* we do have times and we do 'make our meditation'—these express a way of being and of living the totality of our life. But our prayer is above all a quality of life, an orientation of our life as a whole. It moves out from God towards all the relationships in our lives. Prayer, then, is not so much an act as a personal attitude—an attitude drawn from a person's life as a whole under God, the God of Jesus. Prayer is like love. Love is not a matter of doing something, but rather an attitude in which two people are captivated by each other, give themselves to each another. Love is shown in deeds rather than in words, as St Ignatius says; but love is shown in words too, and in fact love does not *consist* in either deeds or words. It is an attitude, a relationship of one person to another. What is communicated is not deeds or words, but the self. That is the central point of what Jesus came to tell us.

Prayer is not so much an act as an attitude

A Message at the Wrong Moment

A while ago, I came across the following passage, entitled 'A Message at the Wrong Moment':

> I have often asked myself what all this stuff is about prayer. I have heard so many versions! Some spoke to me about a special time which one had to observe until the clock struck. 'Don't abandon the full hour of prayer!' Others said to me that one had to find contemplation in action. In time, I got into yoga and zen. Just to be seated in total emptiness and silence, taken up in a cloud of unknowing, that too is prayer.
>
> Yesterday, while I was having a walk near my house, I saw an old man sitting on a bench. He was looking at the world with his glassy eyes, and seemed to be quite all right. It was as though he was there without being there, as if the square made no impression on him at all; as if he accepted that people passed by on their way to I don't know where and he was connected to a time without time. Once more I understood that God could not harm anyone.
>
> Prayer does not have to be some complex task. To pray is to be. Techniques, resources, methods eastern and western, doubtless

have their uses. But it occurred to me that the best form of prayer has to be something as simple and easy as breathing.

People were scandalized to read, in *The Silversmith and I*, by Juan Ramón Jiménez, 'Happy are the birds, for they don't have to go to Mass'. Obviously, birds don't have to go to Mass, because they are always at Mass, because they always behave in just the same way whether they are at Mass or not. And we humans, if we did not have so many masks, would equally live continually celebrating our 'Mass of the world' as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin did on that day in the great desert of China when he had no bread or wine with which to celebrate Mass.

Today I'd like to celebrate a Mass of the street-corner kiosk, a Mass of waiting under a street lamp, a Mass of the antique shop with its smell of Victorian furniture, or of the square with its little old men surrounded by dogs. I would like that. But then I imagine the president of the Bishops' Liturgy Commission looking at me sternly and saying, 'No, you can't do that. How can you celebrate Mass without vestments?'

At that point I will take refuge in the gospel and will remind myself of that homely Jesus who had so little to do with the priests of his time. I will remember that the priesthood, according to the most orthodox of theologies, is the universal priesthood of every Christian. Then I shall pray with Juan Ramón: 'Happy are the birds, for they don't have to go to Mass'.[1]

Miguel Elizondo SJ was born in the Basque country, and has worked for very many years in Latin America, serving as novice director (to, among others, Ignacio Ellacuría), as Provincial and, for more than thirty years, as tertian director in Colombia, Mexico and Central America.

[1] This article originally appeared in the Central American Jesuits' review of spirituality, *Diakonia*, and we are most grateful to the editors for permission to publish an English version. Both the original editors and the translators have adapted the text for written presentation, while trying to retain something of the original's informality and spontaneity.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AS ADORATION

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ (1881-1955)

Thomas M. King

FOR PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, SCIENCE AND PRAYER were intimately connected. 'There is less difference than people think between Research and Adoration', he once wrote.[1] Indeed he could make the point even more directly: 'Adoration's real name … is Research'.[2] In a letter from South Africa, he told a friend, 'I am … in close contact with old mother Earth: and you know that for me there is no better way for rejuvenation and even "adoration"'.[3] He even claimed that without research 'there can be no possibility … of real mystical life'.[4]

Devotion and Science in the Life of Teilhard

The author of these striking phrases was a Jesuit priest whose life's work as a scientist centred on the geology of Asia and the early human fossils found there, on which he published ten volumes of technical writings. But he is much more famous for his religious and philosophical writings, which were not published during his lifetime because of Church restrictions. When, shortly after his death, they became publicly available, he quickly became an international celebrity.

Teilhard was born in central France, the fourth of eleven children. He entered easily into the deep Catholic piety of his family. But,

[1] *The Phenomenon of Man*, translated by Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 250.
[2] *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984), 143: see Claude Cuénot, *Teilhard de Chardin, A Biographical Study*, translated by Vincent Colimore (London: Burns and Oates, 1965), 133. Texts cited directly from the French have been translated by Thomas M. King.
[3] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan, *The Letters of Teilhard de Chardin and Lucile Swan*, edited by Thomas M. King and Mary Wood Gilbert (Scranton: Scranton UP, 2000 [1993]), 285.
[4] *Letters from a Traveller* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 119.

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looking back to his childhood, he wrote that his 'real me' was elsewhere, practising a devotion to his 'God of Iron'. This was a devotion to scraps of metal found around the family farm: a hexagonal bolt, a wrench, empty shells from a neighbouring firing range. Iron awakened devotion because it appeared hard and durable, but he soon found out that it could rust. He had to look elsewhere for consolation. He turned first to the crystalline rocks in the neighbourhood, and then to the earth itself. This interest became a fascination with the All (*le Tout*) that remained a passion throughout his life.

Pierre attended a Jesuit college, and shortly before his eighteenth birthday joined the Jesuits, only to find that his interest in rocks distracted him from his prayers. His novice director told him to continue his work in geology nevertheless, and, after many years of confusion, he came to an understanding that reconciled it with his vocation. Drawing on his reading of St Paul, he saw Jesus as the Soul of the World. St Paul spoke of the Christian community as the Body of Christ, and several additional passages suggest—but do not state—that the universe could also be considered his Body. This identification of the cosmos as Body of Christ with Jesus as the Soul was central to Teilhard's reconciliation of science and faith.

Teilhard's conventional Catholic devotion enabled him to see Jesus as a brother, teacher and friend; and this devotion was encouraged by his entering the Jesuits. But, looking back, he would judge that his love for Jesus, as a man who lived 2000 years ago, was timid and constrained. For Teilhard's 'real me' continued to love the world: Jesus was a man he could admire, but not a God he could adore.

The situation of Teilhard has some resemblance to that of St Thomas the apostle. Thomas knew Jesus as a teacher and friend. On the first Easter the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples when Thomas was not there, and on hearing their story he could not believe: 'Unless I … put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe' (John 20:25). A week later the disciples were in the same place, and Thomas was with them. Jesus told Thomas to put his fingers into the wounds saying, 'Do not doubt but believe'. Thomas

exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' (John 20:27-29)

Though Thomas is known as 'doubting Thomas', his exclamation 'My Lord and my God!' is often considered the strongest statement of the divinity of Jesus in the New Testament. Thomas took the world seriously, and so he could not believe all that he was told. Thomas had known Jesus as teacher and friend, but in seeing and touching the risen Jesus he knew him as Lord and God, and could adore. Jesus called those who believe without seeing 'blessed', but Thomas was not among them. He wanted direct evidence. When he had the evidence, what he saw agreed with what he was told, and he could say, 'My Lord and my God!'

All those who take the world seriously can have the difficulty that Thomas had, and Teilhard took the world seriously. Most of Teilhard's fellow Jesuits came from devout families like his own, and accepted the faith on the word of their family and of a faith-community that they trusted. They could be called blessed, but Teilhard was not among them. The world meant too much to him. For him to believe, there had to be a reconciliation between what he was told and the tangible-visible world that he experienced.

Teilhard was reaching out to the All. He came to believe this was true of everyone. He would wonder how psychologists could,

> … ignore this fundamental vibration whose ring can be heard by every practised ear at the basis, or rather at the summit, of every great emotion? Resonance to the All—the keynote of pure poetry and pure religion.[5]

He would claim that every mystical system has been 'fed from the never failing spring within us of love for the great whole of which we are a part'.[6] Every religion worthy of the name was pantheist.[7] He would soften this term to speak of a Christian form of pantheism, or of a spiritual pantheism. He appealed to St Paul, who spoke of Christ descending to the lower parts of the earth so that rising from there 'he

[5] *The Phenomenon of Man*, 266.
[6] *Writings in Time of War*, translated by René Hague (London: Collins, 1968), 182.
[7] *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier*, 155.

might fill all things' (Ephesians 4:10).[8] On three occasions, St Paul speaks of the ultimate earth when God will be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28, Ephesians 1:23, Colossians 3:11). So Teilhard would identify himself as a pantheist in St Paul's sense.

For Teilhard the All was first identified with the material world, and was symbolized by rock. He approached rocks with religious awe, and claimed that many scientists were motivated by 'a great surge of worship towards the world'.[9] While he was studying theology at Hastings from 1908 to 1912, 'there were moments when it seemed to me that a sort of universal being was about to take shape in nature before my very eyes'.[10] Now the All was no longer seen as 'ultra-material' but as 'ultra-living': the cosmos was alive with a single life. Yet he still could not integrate human beings into his cosmic awareness; they seemed radically separate.

The cosmos was alive with a single life

In December 1914 Teilhard was drafted into the French army. There he felt a deep bond with his fellow soldiers, and saw them in battle acting with a single mind; the 'Human-million' seemed to be a single reality, and Humanity became 'as biologically real as a giant molecule of protein'.[11] Now he saw humans as the essence of the physical world, so that the All could be found in a humanity already real, but still coming into being.

Teilhard saw many scientists who were motivated to build a better world and dedicated to a common human future. He spoke of these scientists knowing a 'dark adoration', an adoration reaching toward an an immanent God, a '*Deo ignoto*'—an impersonal godhead they seemed to find in their work. 'Scientific research', he wrote, 'for all its claim to be positivist, is coloured and haloed—or irresistibly animated, when you get to the bottom of it—by a mystical hope'.[12] But all the while Christianity was presenting a more dualist vision: on the one hand, a transcendent God who was apart from it all; on the other a Jesus who

[8] Teilhard accepted the traditional attribution of Ephesians and Colossians to Paul himself; scholars today speculate that they may be the responsibility of a disciple writing in Paul's name.
[9] *Christianity and Evolution*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 64.
[10] *The Heart of Matter*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 26.
[11] *The Heart of Matter*, 31.
[12] *Science and Christ*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 22.

was a human ideal to be sure, but not a reality commensurate with the innate human capacity for adoration.[13]

For Teilhard, the Church was not presenting the fullness of Christ as he found it in the writings of St Paul. If faced with the cosmic Christ of Paul, many scientists, Teilhard believed, would recognise him as the God whom they had been finding in their work and worshipping with a 'dark adoration'. The unknown God would no longer be faceless, and the dark adoration could become luminous. At one time, Teilhard knew Jesus as a great teacher and a friend, while his 'real me' was looking for a God he could adore. But then he found St Paul speaking of a God who filled all things, a God whom Paul could identify with Jesus. Thereby the dark adoration Teilhard had once known in the rocks had become luminous.

Many have believed without seeing, and Jesus called them blessed. But Teilhard would not be among them. After telling how he had come to see the Lord present in all things, Teilhard addressed a prayer, not to Jesus his friend, or Jesus his teacher, but to Jesus his Lord and God. It was a prayer of adoration:

> What I discern in your breast is simply a furnace of fire; and the more I fix my gaze on its ardency the more it seems to me that all around it the contours of your body melt away and become enlarged beyond all measure, till the only features I can discern in you are those of the face of a world which has burst into flame. Glorious Lord Christ … you whose forehead is of the whiteness of snow, whose eyes are of fire, and whose feet are brighter than molten gold … it is you to whom my being cried out with a desire as vast as the universe, 'In truth, you are my Lord and my God'.[14]

[13] *Letters from My Friend Teilhard de Chardin*, translated by Mary Lukas (New York: Paulist, 1976), 149, 96; *Lettres à Jeanne Mortier*, 53.
[14] *The Heart of Matter*, 131-132.

Teilhard repeated the words of Thomas, 'My Lord and my God', but he added to them by saying, 'It is you to whom my being cried out with a desire as vast as the universe'. Jesus was now more than teacher and friend. Moreover, the universe was involved; both Teilhard and his universe were at prayer. No longer was Teilhard simply worshipping the God of whom he had been told; rather, his 'real me' had finally identified the unknown god he had once adored darkly as 'Iron'.

There is a long Christian tradition of turning from the world in order to find God. 1 John advises, 'Do not love the world or the things of the world' (2:15). St John of the Cross encourages us to deal with the world in a spirit of complete detachment, emptiness and poverty. Thomas à Kempis tells us to forget all created things. In this tradition only the heart that is free of all things earthly can give itself wholly to God. Only when the world means nothing to us can we adore, be totally at prayer.

But Teilhard believed he could still adore while loving the world, because he found that the world that he loved and that he let into his heart was itself reaching for God. Earlier writers had set love of the world in opposition to a love for God, and we are told, 'No one can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24). But Teilhard found an understanding of the world that assisted him in loving God. Perhaps no other writer in the Christian tradition has made such a claim as radically as Teilhard did.

A Parable Concerning Matter

A strong religious feeling for the All runs through the writings of Teilhard. It was evident in his first essay, and it is evident again in his final essay, written a few days before he died: 'Research, Work and Adoration'. He wrote that religious superiors often advised him, 'Go quietly ahead with your scientific work without getting involved in philosophy or theology'. (No such restrictions were ever placed on his scientific writings.) He judged such advice psychologically unviable; for he and other scientists were motivated by 'the fire of a new faith'.[15]

To understand his final essay better, consider an imaginative essay which was written some thirty years earlier, 'The Spiritual Power of

[15] *Science and Christ*, 216.

Matter'.[16] This essay or parable tells of two travellers (they could be seen as Teilhard and a fellow Jesuit), who are walking together in a desert. Matter swoops down, invading the soul of one of them (Teilhard), and moving within him like a hurricane. Matter says:

> You called me; here I am. Driven by the Spirit far from humanity's caravan routes, you dared to venture into the untouched wilderness; grown weary of abstractions, of attenuations, of the wordiness of social life, you wanted to pit yourself against Reality entire and untamed.[17]

The traveller has gone far from 'humanity's caravan routes' and 'the wordiness of social life'. He has even left his companion behind. Back on the caravan routes, people tell one another what they believe, bewildered by claims and counter-claims. But the call of the desert is a call to the 'real me' to set aside all that I have been asked to believe, and instead to see what IS. 'In the sweetness of a first contact' with Matter, the traveller feels 'a wave of bliss in which he had all but melted away'. Then Matter challenges him to battle. To survive, he must wrestle with Matter and see what it reveals. In the same way, the researcher wrestles with the world, and comes to understand it in a way that someone who simply gazes on it never can.

The traveller has left the confines of culture—including Christian culture—to return to immediate experience. Having done so, he can 'never go back, never return to commonplace gratifications or untroubled worship'. Should he return to society, he will find that many of its beliefs and claims do not hold up. For he has found a *point d'appui*, a place of support, in Matter, away from the claims made in the caravan. Now that he knows God immediately, he can no longer rejoin his faithful companion either. Henceforth, he will be separated even from 'his brothers in God, better men than he'. May they be blessed! For 'he would inevitably speak henceforth in an incomprehensible tongue, he whom the Lord had drawn to follow the road of fire'.

[16] *The Heart of Matter*, 67-79.
[17] *The Heart of Matter*, 68.

Science and Mysticism

When the traveller first encounters Matter, he feels a 'wave of bliss'. Teilhard was referring here to a spiritual tradition that tells of losing one's self in the great All by relaxing into a quiet contemplation. But this was not the way of Teilhard. He could find no rest in Nature until he had reached the ultimate term hidden within it. He wrote,

> Perhaps this peculiarity of my sensitivity derives from the fact that things in the cosmos and in life have always presented themselves to me as objects to be pursued and studied—never just material for contemplation.[18]

Teilhard was challenged to wrestle with Matter and he did. This sets his mysticism apart from other mystical traditions. St Ignatius could gaze at the stars all night and be at prayer, and so he advised other Jesuits that they could contemplate God in a blade of grass. Teilhard would sympathize with these passages in so far as they suggest an immanent God, but he would not go along with the quiet contemplation. His retreat notes make it evident that throughout his life he had difficulties with Ignatian prayer.

When the traveller in the parable first encounters Matter, Matter tells him, 'Your salvation and mine depend on the first moment'. The first moment is a moment of choice: which mysticism will he choose? His alternatives could be seen in terms of a distinction that the medieval philosophers made between *intellectus* and *ratio*. The *intellectus* rests passively, gazing at what is before it; while the *ratio* is the active power of discursive thought to search, abstract, refine and conclude. The medieval philosophers saw the *intellectus* as the basis of mysticism; and would-be mystics were advised to hush the busy *ratio* in order to gaze quietly. But in presenting a mysticism centred on research, Teilhard set the *ratio* at the centre of the mystical. Here the mystical act involves the synthesizing work of the mind as it gathers facts and strives to form them into a wider synthesis.

It is not difficult to see why Teilhard saw scientific research as essential to mysticism. For him, science was not a given set of truths about the universe; science, like the mind itself, was a process, always

[18] *The Making of a Mind*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 213-214.

probing into the unknown. Mysticism for Teilhard was therefore not a matter of contemplating a truth already established; mysticism lay in the very act of discovery that created a new truth. It is in these terms that we must understand Teilhard's talk of loving God 'not only with all one's body, all one's heart and all one's soul, but with every fibre of the unifying universe'.[19] The universe was in process; and one theatre of the unifying process was the mind of the scientist.

As scientists struggle to make sense of their findings—or, rather, as reality's elements order and reorder themselves in the scientist's mind until they fit—they are groping towards a unity and a form that will be new. The 'fibres of the unifying universe' come together in the scientist's mind, which is essentially process. The scientist's call to the love of God, to adoration, involves his or her research activity, an activity which is a participation in the universe's thought-fibres.

The scientist gropes about to form a hypothesis. Teilhard called this 'the supreme spiritual act by which the dust cloud of experience takes on form and is kindled at the fire of knowledge'.[20] This is the central activity of the mind, at the peak of its powers, vaguely aware of an awesome Power beyond it, a Power calling the mind to bring a new unity into being. Do we not, Teilhard asks, evaluate minds in terms of the synthetic power of the gaze?[21] This supreme spiritual act is an act of dark adoration, homage to the unifying Power. Drawn back to the moment of adoration, the scientist feels a holy mission to continue the process. When Teilhard returned to fieldwork in the African earth, and wrestled

[19] *The Phenomenon of Man*, 297.
[20] *Activation of Energy*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 9; *The Vision of the Past*, translated by J. M. Cohen (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 205.
[21] *The Phenomenon of Man*, 31.

with what he was finding, he was again able to adore. At such moments, he found, 'the Divine reaches the summit of adorability, and evolutionary [process] the extreme limit of activation'.[22]

In Christian mysticism there is a tradition, exemplified by St Gregory of Nyssa and St John of the Cross, known as the *via negativa*, that centres on a process of unknowing and thereby hopes to come to the God beyond all knowing. Teilhard is obviously not a part of this tradition. But there is also the *via positiva* of St Augustine and St Bonaventure; here the mind ascends to God by mounting up the ladder of creatures. Teilhard, however, would be apart from this tradition as well, because this way of understanding spirituality presupposes that we already know what these creatures are, and that we then, subsequently, find God within them. Teilhard's mysticism is intellectually creative, based on the activity of the *ratio*. It begins with a world that is not understood, and comes to know God at the moment when the dust of experience lights up with the fire of knowledge.

Science and Synthesis

There is a second point to be drawn from the parable of the traveller and Matter, one about convergence and synthesis. Prompted by the parallels which he sees between the process of evolution and the action of the mind bringing about ever larger syntheses, Teilhard speculates about a global society: human beings are themselves becoming synthesized as elements of a global society with a single Soul. As Teilhard's mind was effecting a synthesis, he felt that it was at the same time *being synthesized* into a higher Mind. And this was adoration.

Writing of his experience in the trenches of World War I, Teilhard speaks of the troops as being drawn into a new unity with 'a sense of rising to a higher state of existence'.[23] At the Front they acted with a single Soul.[24] Teilhard called such moments 'mysteries of profound affinity which appear only fleetingly'.[25] At such moments Teilhard felt his mind in immediate contact with other minds. Moreover, what he felt in the army he also felt as part of a team of scientists. Science is a

[22] *The Heart of Matter*, 101.
[23] *The Future of Man*, translated by Norman Denny (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 22.
[24] *The Heart of Matter*, 175.
[25] Unpublished letter to Joseph, 10 December 1945.

collaborative enterprise; as scientists' minds synthesize the data with which they are working, they come to feel their very selves being synthesized into a higher and common identity, into a humanity with a single Soul. Teilhard spoke of 'humanity grouped by the act of discovery'.[26] In the act of research it is not just that the data are being summed up in our minds; it is also that a greater Mind or Spirit is drawing our synthesizing minds into Itself.

Shortly before he wrote the parable of the travellers in the desert, Teilhard learned that Woodrow Wilson, then the US President, had called for what became the League of Nations: 'a single great enterprise that will unite all free people for ever', so that they would become 'a single body of free minds'.[27] Teilhard came to believe that others were coming to a similar intuition. At one time people worked for the future of their family, or sacrificed themselves for the future of their nation. But, Teilhard believed, many people—especially scientists—were now dedicating themselves to a common future for people as a whole, living and working to make the world as better place. For Teilhard, this also meant that they were intuiting a higher state of humanity united by a single Soul.

Science and Troubled Worship

The traveller in the parable is told that he cannot return 'to commonplace gratifications or untroubled worship'. Having been

[26] *Human Energy*, translated by J. M. Cohen (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 171.
[27] *The Heart of Matter*, 213.

raised to a higher state of being, he will taste 'the triteness of human joys and sorrows, the mean egoism of their pursuits, the insipidity of their passions, the attenuation of their power to feel'. Along with other mystics, Teilhard knew this sense of alienation. The answers that he found in his researches would sometimes be troubling, disturbing his prayer and worship. Many people do not operate in that way. They simply hold on to a set of religious beliefs, and know great peace no matter what troubles they endure. But Teilhard would struggle with the questions that his discoveries raised, and this gave substance to his prayer.

Scientists must test their hypotheses against experience. Consider a fundamental hypothesis that Teilhard developed: the claim that all people, believers and non-believers, were striving towards unity in a higher Soul. Was this really the case? Was there really a universal mystical sense? In the parable, Matter tells the traveller that henceforth he will be a burden to others, 'for they would sense his compulsion to be forever seeking something behind them'. In other words, he will be listening behind the words that others say in the hope of finding a mystical hunger like his own. Psychologists speak of a listening with the 'third ear'—listening behind the evident words for what is really being said.

All people were striving towards unity in a higher Soul

Teilhard often heard the mystical hunger in others and responded to it; and many were affected by his response. Lita Osmundson, who was office manager at the Wenner Gren Anthropological Foundation when Teilhard worked there in the last years of his life, said that people there believed that Teilhard was among their closest friends, because he seemed to understand them as others did not. He had addressed them in terms of such a hunger, and they felt understood.

But there were also times when he could not find this mystical interest, and this left him troubled. Did his hypothesis hold up? When Teilhard first went to Asia in 1923, he spoke of losing his 'moral footing' when he saw civilisations that had never known Christ. His letters told of the 'swarming populations' of India and Ceylon. He quoted a lama, an ascetic priest, from a novel by Kipling, who said that the world 'is a great and terrible place'. The lama was awed by Western civilisation; but Teilhard said, 'it is the immense mass of undisciplined

human powers that overwhelms me'.[28] On first arriving in Tianjin, he wrote in his Journal, 'The incoherence of Humanity = an agitated and broken sea'. Soon he wrote to a friend,

> How can we hope for the spiritual and heartfelt unification of these fragments of humanity, which are spread out in every degree from savage customs to forms of neo-civilisation considerably at odds with our Christian perspectives? … At first view, the appearances are contrary, and crumbling and division presently seem to dominate the history of Life.[29]

Listening with the third ear, he could not hear among the Chinese any interest in mysticism or in an all-embracing unity. This left him shaken; as he departed from Tianjin on his first Asian expedition, he noted in his Journal, 'Lord, that I may see'. On the expedition he wrote of the ocean of humanity troubling 'the hearts of those whose faith is most firm'. The people of China troubled his heart because they did not seem to fit in to his hypothesis. But he soon met a missionary with many years' experience of work in China, who assured him that the Chinese did indeed have an interest in mysticism, and who helped him understand the forms that Chinese mysticism had taken. This was important for Teilhard, for he was again able to see. Then he could adore; what he saw agreed with what he believed.

Teilhard, the desert traveller, was warned by Matter that he would never again know untroubled worship. He still took the troubled way, leaving behind the path to God trod by generations of Christian mystics. Did he do well? Years later he reflected,

> Even today I am still learning by experience the dangers to which … one is exposed who finds one's self led away from the well beaten … path of a certain spiritual ascesis.[30]

He would claim that the path left him at times 'unable to shake off a feeling of terror'. But he wondered how else one could find nourishment for one's prayer.

[28] *Letters from a Traveller*, 70.
[29] *Lettres intimes* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1972), 104.
[30] *The Heart of Matter*, 46.

Teilhard's need to see often left him troubled. He had formed the hypothesis that all people desire a mystical union. When it seemed that all people and things were calling, 'Lord, make us one', he could see. For then what he saw converged with what he believed, and he could adore: he could cry to Jesus, 'with a desire as vast as the universe, "In truth, you are my Lord and my God"'.[31] But he could also, wonder why he was the only one to see what he saw. In the last months of his life, he told of being unable to quote a single 'authority' (religious or lay) in which he could claim fully to recognise himself, and asked, 'Am I, after all, simply the dupe of a mirage in my own mind?' This is the troubled question of one who has stepped apart from the human caravan.

But Teilhard could also sense that the human caravan was coming to accept his ideas; he heard,

> … the pulsation of countless people who are all—ranging from the border line of unbelief to the depths of the cloister—thinking and feeling, or at least beginning vaguely to feel just as I do …. The unanimity of tomorrow recognises itself throbbing in my depths.[32]

Towards the end of *The Phenomenon of Man*,Teilhard wrote, 'Religion and science are the two conjugated faces or phases of one and the same complete act of knowledge'.[33] In science, the first phase, we do the synthesizing; in religion and adoration, the second phase, we find our own selves being given their place within a higher synthesis. 'Adoration's real name … is research.'

Thomas M. King SJ entered the Jesuits after graduating from the University of Pittsburgh. Following his ordination in 1964, he did his doctoral studies at the University of Strasbourg, and returned to the USA to teach theology at Georgetown in 1968. His dissertation was published as *Sartre and the Sacred* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1974). His research has centred around the philosophers of religion, and he has published abundantly on Teilhard, most recently, *Teilhard's Mass* (Paulist, 2005).

[31] *The Heart of Matter*, 132.
[32] *The Heart of Matter*, 101.
[33] *The Phenomenon of Man*, 285.

RETREAT NOTES, BEIJING
October 1945

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Teilhard's recently published retreat notes[1] *powerfully illustrate his vision of adoration as research, and his struggles to reconcile his devotion to Jesus Christ with his sense of the universe's vastness. His retreat of 1945 (21-28 October), shortly before his return to France after spending the World War II years in China, bears moving witness to how he sustained his creative vision not only amid the hostility and incomprehension of Church and Jesuit authority, but also when confronted with personal fragility and advancing age.*

First Day. (Creation 1) — Existence, Presence

Seldom have I felt so fragile, divided, incohesive,[2] right down to the last fibres and atoms of myself … May this retreat be a long, patient, intimate, multiform act of pan-communion with the omnipresence of God-Evolver … Actively to let myself be calmed, patiently, as serenely as I can, minute by minute, without disturbing thoughts about the future.

But for this, the first condition, essential, radically gratuitous: '*Domine fac ut videam, ut te videam, ut te omni-prasesentem et omni-animantem*

[1] *Notes de retraites 1919-1954*, edited by Gérard-Henri Beaudry (Paris: Seuil, 2003); the extract reproduced here comes from pp. 261-272—© Editions du Seuil.

[2] *inconsistant*. Cognates of this word appear frequently in the text that follows. 'Inconsistent' and 'incoherent' are now too narrow in English—'disintegrated' would have been defensible, and more idiomatic than 'incohesive', but it would also have narrowed the range inappropriately to the psychological.

videam et sentiam':[3] the first and the last, the most elemental and the supreme, the most gracious of graces …

Eight days of slow, confirmed, total, omniformed immersion in the Christic energy: interior and exterior climate, sun and shadow, calm and winds, incidents, visits, different arrangements … everything, everything: the creational arrangement, loving and enloving.[4]

Jesus-Omega, make me serve you, proclaim you, glorify you, make you manifest right to the end—through all the time left to me to live—and above all through my end!

May this end not disgrace anything—and therefore may it be in beauty! Now I feel myself so radically pusillanimous, incapable of making the step … My final active years, my death—these I confide to you in desperation, Jesus; may they not come to weaken what I have so much dreamt of finishing for you.

Perhaps it's inevitable, good, necessary that I feel myself as if incapable of moving forward, at every moment, never sure or confident of the next step …

Second Day. (Creation 2) – 'Cohesiveness'
'*Sine me, nihil potestis facere*'[5]

– To consider the difficulty I'm going through (an anxious giddiness of the understanding, and then of action) as a test that is decentring me (in the awkwardness) onto the Cohesiveness of Christ-Omega,[6] my only life-support. = Ultimate foundation of calm, within a supreme Baptism[7] …

[3] 'Lord, make it that I can see, that I see you, that I see and sense you as omnipresent and omnianimating.' (See Mark 10: 51.)
[4] *aimant et amorisant*—the latter word is not standard French.
[5] 'Without me, you can do nothing' (John 15: 5).
[6] 'Christ coinciding with both the theological notion of universal centre and the … ultimate convergence of cosmic evolution': Siôn Cowell, *The Teilhard Lexicon: Understanding the Language, Terminology and Vision of the Writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2001), 30. Central to Teilhard's thought is an identification between Christ and his message, on the one hand, and the term of the evolutionary process. It is in such contexts that he speaks of Omega.
[7] Probably alluding to Mark 10: 38, where Jesus speaks of his death in terms of a particular baptism.

'*In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*.'[8]

– An essential point in Omegalization: the preservation of Christ's humanity in his Super-Humanity[9] …. All the strength is there—it's not been replaced within 'modern man', and it's irreplaceable. (Cf. Foerster, Christ and the modern soul).[10] Neither Goethe nor Nietzsche has ever 'saved' or consoled anyone.

It's true. The necessary Revelation of Omega is unimaginable biologically, or evolutionarily, without a 'humanisation' of the Jesus kind. And why should this not be just Jesus? … Jesus, the initiator and the ever growing object of Super-Charity.[11]

Why?—because there remain people, so to speak, 'on the side'.

In my Love of Evolution, to insist on this VITALITY of Jesus, and his necessary action within the passionate gift to Cosmogenesis. Without the historical and trans-historical Jesus, Evolution loses all the warmth in its real life. …

'A common Spirit': made possible by a common Objective, respecting, by virtue of convergence, all the orientations that seem so incompatible in appearance (azimuths) ...

Third Day. (Creation 3) **– 'The One Thing Necessary'**

To continue to make out of this retreat an exercise in Pan- and Super-Communion. To let myself, every bit of me (even my anxiety), be basically calmed, in the super-gratuitous flow, creating and

[8] 'In your patience, you will possess your souls' (Luke 21:19).

[9] 'Higher state that humanity appears destined to attain if it succeeds in becoming fully totalised on itself and submitting to the vivifying action of grace' (*Teilhard Lexicon*, 183-184). There are obvious questions about how this Teilhardian notion relates to the doctrine of Jesus' divinity.

[10] Erich Förster (1865-1945), a Protestant theologian writing in Germany. In 1897, he had published a notable book on the difficulties of faith in the modern urban world.

[11] The prefix indicates the higher stage towards which we are constantly aspiring. Teilhard's vision touches on the point of controversy among theologians at the time—not resolved—regarding the relationship between the 'supernatural' and the merely 'natural'. The marginal note added later is cryptic. It appears that he thought better of the evolutionary interpretation of Christ suggested in the original text, reflecting that such a vision would still somehow exclude people who were not Christian. Teilhard is struggling in this retreat with the relationship between the particularity of Jesus and the sheer vastness of the universe.

consolidating. To accept and love the feeling of total, personal incohesiveness ...

O creative flux, consolidating, expanding, I vow myself and abandon myself in my desperation to your universal, profound influences!

– At root, what makes me suffer is the anguish and vertigo 'of fragility' ... The direct remedy: God my cohesion …

– 'If the worst comes to the worst', were all future in speaking and writing to be closed in my face, there would still be, with Jesus' help, the possibility for me of making this gesture, the supreme affirmation and witness of my faith: to disappear, to go under, in a spirit of super-Communion with the Christic forces of Evolution. … [12]

[12] Here Teilhard seems to be accepting the frustration, within a human perspective, of what he thought was his personal mission. He was to die without seeing any of his religious works published.

– The extraordinary and unique and irreplaceable Christian solution:

To 'Humanise' the Universe (without diminishing it)

1) theoretically
2) practically (in a mystic act made general to the whole mass of humanity)

= To cover everything, { from the irreducible element of humanity (the most humble life) / to the Cosmic Totality.

Fourth Day. (Incarnation / God Incarnating Himself.

The birth of Christ. In order to be the Evolver,[13] he must be evolving; consequently he must insert himself and recapitulate.[14] A biological and psychic necessity for the supra-human Noosphere.[15] If Christ had not entered through what is below, he would never have been able to force cosmic Immanence towards what is above, except if his Ego were to confuse itself with the Sum [fused!!] of elemental egos.[16] –

[13] See a sentence from a 1943 essay cited by Colwell in *The Teilhard Lexicon*, 76-77: 'To say that Christ is the term and mover of evolution—to say that he reveals himself as "evolver"—is to recognise that he becomes attainable in and through the whole process of evolution'.

[14] See Ephesians 1:10; Christ recapitulates the creation, gathers up all things in himself.

[15] 'The spiritual (or thinking) layer of the world … distinct from the biosphere, the non-spiritual (or non-thinking) layer … represents as important an evolutionary leap forward as the atmosphere and hydrosphere.' (*Teilhard Lexicon*, 131)

[16] The sense of this comment cannot be certain—but the use of *confondre* and *fusionée* with reference to the need for Christ's presence 'below' may allude to the Chalcedonian definition's 'without confusion'. If so, Teilhard is evoking the principle that the divinity and humanity of Christ, for all their inseparability, must remain distinct. In the introduction to the original edition, Gustave Martelet neatly summarises what is at stake in Teilhard's vision of Christ: 'Under the name of Omega, God is the One who dispossesses Himself in His Incarnation in order to make us, divinely, all the more ourselves—and not through some sort of evasion with regard to reality and the human, but through the medium of a real passage through both reality and the human.' (p. 13)

In all truth, quite simply, it is only God who can really help us, reach us at our root, interest Himself in us constantly and in a living way, heal us and save us from death—which is in fact to say: however surrounded we may be by people and friends, we are, each one of us, alone before God (the others not touching us or sustaining us except in function of God). = Application and mystery of Omegalization.

Fifth Day.
Incarnation. { Our Lady –
Purity
Prayer

– The universalisation of Our Lady *qua* woman. What about her? How is she to be 'cosmified'? … Queen of the Universe, however (or is it only of the Noosphere? …): the whole question of the pluri-Incarnation of the Christ. … Here obviously lies the great difficulty of Christ-Omega. In theory, there would need to be as many Christic[17] forms as there are living Planets. Christianity cannot however be tied to the absolute uniqueness of humanity in the Universe! … Quite independently of my personal *Weltanschauung*, there's a problem here facing any Christian thought, even the most conservative. What now, then?

Here lies, here is revealed the difficulty 'Christianity = Anthropocentrism' … This essential difficulty is in Anthropomonism (applying especially in the case of Mariology),[18] and also in how we can admit that the Christic ego could still need to suffer in a future planet! … So once again: how to detach Christology (and Mariology) from Anthropomonism? And everyone, I repeat, needs this. In one sense, science is less troubling in its formidable expansion of space-time than in the probability it establishes that Humanity is not the only thinking group existing in the Universe …

[17] In Teilhard's vision, this adjective denotes 'a fundamental energetic and transforming quality … both a property of the universe and the spiritual sense that allows the believer to live by faith in the divine milieu' (*Teilhard Lexicon*, 32).

[18] 'Anthropomonism' refers to a claim that humanity is the only intelligent species in the universe, for Teilhard an implausible doctrine. It applies particularly to doctrine about Mary because of the dependence of such doctrine on the belief that Jesus Christ took flesh, human flesh, from her. Whatever adjustments to Christianity might be imaginable as a way of coping with intelligent life on other planets would leave Mariology without foundation.

There might be a Christic Ego that is pluri-incarnate. But there won't be any Marian Ego of that kind … And, however, it is impossible that Christianity be essentially constructed for a Universe that has only one thinking form![19] … Wouldn't that be Christianity's condemnation? … Is the right attitude one of bowing down before a mystery that is currently insoluble—and to hold provisionally to a 'partial' line of truth? … But that smacks of defeat.

Partial line, yes. But a line of progress, and if one follows it, one's view will broaden and clarify. What do we know about the coincidences and the things that come before and the things that come after in space-time? ...

Sixth Day. (Incarnation. Day of Confidence).

– Yes, the vertigo of fragility, of instability … There remains the all-enveloping hand and the Heart of the Universal Christ. 'Come to me, once more, across the shifting, moving waters. Why be afraid, *modicae fidei*?'[20]

– To make this retreat culminate in a complete gift to Christ-Omega, the Agent of Evolution; asking him to make me finish my life with the highest possible gesture for his glory and his revelation … May my end spoil nothing, deny nothing, betray nothing; may it be the example of a perfect Super-Communion … But, if my soul is 'pantheist', I'm such a bad 'subject' (in my physiological nature) for giving an example of calm and renunciation, and of gentle faith. If I make 'the gesture', it's that Our-Lord-Omega will make me make it—by a gracious intervention. – And this would be the seal that He recognises my effort.

As I wait:

intrinsecus
extrinsecus
and 'ahead'[21]

} I feel myself absolutely dependent on Him, on His action of giving cohesion …

[19] '*pour un Univers mono-noïque*'.
[20] '[people] of little faith' (Matthew 14: 31).
[21] 'intrinsically', 'extrinsically'; 'ahead' is written in English.

Seventh Day. – (Redemption.
Day of diminution in communion)

– To accept, to love, the fragility within – and age – with its long shadows, and its ever-diminishing perspectives ahead. *Usque ad senectam ne me derelinquas, Domine* ...[22]

– To analyze and deepen the conditions of the highest possible[23] 'communion'. Identifying with the other? By submission or capture? … That my being may become His being. …

Solution: along the lines of the laws of union. What I 'bring to God' is his 'external being', in so far as all that I am is an effect of union, engendered by union. – Created union
the movement constitutes[24] ↗

Eighth Day. – 'Omegalization', 'Pleromization'
In one sense, isn't there a 'kind' of fourth mystery in Christianity, distinct

from { Creation = generative side
Incarnation = unitive side
Redemption = labouring side

and synthesis—crowning of the three:
Pleromization = the supreme constitution of totalising Being (the maximum of spirituality in the maximum of unification).
= It would seem yes …

– Last meditation: the 3 consecrations:
1) *O Domina mea …*
2) *Tu autem, Domine mi …*
3) *Sume et suscipe.*[25]

[22] 'Even to old age, do not forsake me, O Lord'; Teilhard is alluding to Psalm 71:18 in the Latin Vulgate.
[23] Teilhard uses the Latin *maxima*.
[24] Teilhard seems here to be struggling with issues of grace and good deeds, and to arrive at a classical formula of saying that our good deeds are the fruit of God's grace in us. 'The movement constitutes' was added later, and a mark in the text points us to 'created union' as the object.
[25] Three prayers of consecration. The first is a traditional prayer of consecration to Mary. The second is a prayer to the Sacred Heart quoted in full at the culmination of 'The Mass on the World': 'Lord,

Retreat Resolution

Clearly, I am going to enter a new and very different phase of my life. Perhaps the last? … The grace of ending <u>well</u>, in the most effective manner for the prestige of Christ-Omega! … The grace of graces.

An existence dominated by the unique passion of promoting the synthesis of Christ and the Universe. Therefore, love of <u>both</u> (most especially of Christ-Church, the supreme axis).

Fundamental attitude. The same: 'To supra-commune with the one who is coming (<u>*Adveniat regnum tuum*</u>), in reality (the <u>Virtue</u> of him who realises himself in Christ-Omega, his charm ...)

= During every day: a long act of active and passive pan-union. (The practice of love of Evolution)

– Place for the feminine influence of Our Lady …

– Meditation drawn each day from something in the Office. Psalm, reading …

Christmas: *Apparuit humanitas* … S.H.[26]

Masses[27] { 1) for the Cosmos [Cosmogenesis]
2) for the Noosphere (planetization)
3) for people close to me everywhere

2 Cor 5:4: *volumus* <u>*super-vestiri*</u>[28]

(Evolution's Super-Charity)

lock me up in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there, burn me, purify me, set me on fire, sublimate me, till I become utterly what you would have me be, though the utter annihilation of my ego'. The third is the Ignatian 'Take, Lord, receive'.

[26] 'Humanity has appeared'. S.H. is thought to stand for *Super-Humanité*.

[27] A reference to Teilhard's Mass intentions for the three Christmas Day Masses.

[28] NRSV: 'We want to be further clothed'—but here Teilhard is using the Vulgate, with the nuance of 'super-clothed' or 'clothed from above', linked to his idiosyncratic usage of 'super' as a prefix to other common words.

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GODTALK WITH THE RELIGIOUSLY TONE-DEAF

Bernd Knüfer

THE POPULATION OF LEIPZIG is roughly 16% Christian (4% Catholic), and 84% without any professed religion. Those belonging to other religious faiths are too few to appear in the statistics. Elsewhere in the former East Germany, the situation of Christianity is a little stronger, but in general the society is without religion. New Age movements and the like are notably less attractive here than in the West. The German philosopher Eberhard Tiefensee follows Max Weber in speaking of the 'religiously tone-deaf', and of *homo areligiosus*. The norm is to be uninterested in religion. The anti-religious education system of the old German Democratic Republic was all too successful.

It is in such a situation that, following the changes of 1989, the Society of Jesus, with the agreement of the local diocese, set up in 1997 a kind of Catholic enquiry centre, including a meditation room. Alongside myself, there is a sister, a half-time office assistant, and some thirty volunteers—mostly the recently retired, but also some young people.[1] It is out of the experience of working in this centre that the present article springs.

Biding One's Time

We do not just offer courses and events in our own space; we are also trying to talk to people in non-Church groups and settings, such as adult education classes. For years there has been in Grünau—a large prefab estate in Leipzig—a 'reflection club'. It meets monthly to talk about politics, society and life in general. Most of the members are of retirement

[1] See www.jesuiten.org/glaubensinfo_leipzig.

An accordionist on a Leipzig street corner

age, and nearly all of them were educated relentlessly within the socialist system. At the start, one of the members was an Anabaptist brother. During a discussion after a few months about the point of life, he told the members of the group that they were all leading meaningless lives because they did not believe in God. They were unwilling to accept this, and the brother's response was to write the group a letter, with many quotations from Scripture threatening judgment and damnation. After that, he was never seen again. This made people angry. I stayed in the group, and did not identify myself either with the claim that their lives were meaningless or with the threat of damnation, because I felt no 'divine commission', no inner impulse, to do so. In the end, I just did not know—and I still do not know—what God thinks about these people.

For more than five years now, I have been a member of this circle. When the co-founder died, I was elected its chair. The co-founder, having talked with his wife, invited me before he died to conduct his funeral—this despite the fact that whenever I had talked to him before his death he had insisted that for him there was no God and no personal life beyond the grave. This was the first time I had conducted a funeral outside a Church. Most of the people there were his former Communist comrades. The texts consisted of the dead man's writings, and my own thoughts about hope for 'seeing each other again'—

something of which, surprisingly, the dead man's boss, a Communist, also spoke.

A couple of years ago, I was asked to tell the group a bit about my life as a Jesuit, and also about the Jesuits in general—but the stress was to be on my personal history in this 'association'. Shortly after I had done that, the group wanted to know more about religions in general and about Christianity in particular. It was all a matter of waiting—waiting and sharing life, or some aspects of life, with those for whom I thought I had a message. If we wait in this way, then when we are asked—in whatever form the request comes—for 'an accounting of the hope that is in you', we can give an answer, calmly and with respect for the convictions and life-history of those with whom we are speaking. Our consciences are clear (1 Peter 3:15). We do not need to justify ourselves; we can afford to begin just by listening.

Sharing Life

Before you can do any proclamation, you have to live with people and understand them in the context of their problems. Thus our centre in Leipzig has always combined information and discussion about matters of faith with counselling. In counselling it is important just to be there, to listen, to enter into the client's inner world. You should not try to bring things to a religious conclusion if that is not somehow being asked for, or if the door seems closed to such things. Most of the time, that is how it is, particularly with non-Christians, and also quite often with believers. But then again, the counsellor or preacher can be blind to a God who is often present in these conversations, even when this only becomes clear later.

Let me give an example. I once challenged a doctor to think about how she could, as a Christian, talk to people about God. She later wrote to me:

> What actually is one talking about when one speaks about God? It's a stupid question for me to ask you, because after all you're always showing us how to do it. But perhaps everyone has to find their own answer. My answer, if I were to give one, would go like this: get rid of all sentimentality; constantly be looking for your own truth; don't speak in clichés; try to look at the reality of life as it stands before you and to talk about *that*. I notice that God's name is not mentioned in my answer, even though I do think it important to proclaim His name. I also notice that my answer is

> pretty earthy—and it only touches on a part of what you're always going on about in your sermons.

I have the sense that God is present in some conversations even when His conventional name does not pass our lips—whenever we listen to people, especially people in need, whenever we accept them, whenever we reach out for meaning. God seems to me more present then than when I have spoken expressly about Him before the other person can hear or understand what I am saying. In those situations, God does not come to live between us, because the communication is not working; but when there is good contact, then there is a trace of God in our togetherness.

It regularly happens that people who do not raise directly religious questions in individual conversation later turn up to one of our more explicitly religious sessions. The relative anonymity of the group gives them a safe space in which they can feel their way towards asking religious questions.

Experience First

But those who are seeking their way religiously—whether or not there is any Christianity in their life-history—appear more often at meditation sessions. They are not looking for religious information, and certainly not for dogmas. They are looking for a way in to a sense of life's meaning and to transcendence, but generally not in terms of creed or doctrine. Rather they are looking for an experience, individual or collective, and for a structured way of life that is somehow credible. Without necessarily naming it, they are looking for a religious experience; unemployed or overstretched as they are, they are wanting peace, calmness, some meaningful content in their life. They may be reaching out for genuine contact with people, in contrast to the vacuum in which they are often living.

Nevertheless, many soon find the quest offered by such practices as meditation too demanding, too boring, too fraught with anxiety. Some remain, constantly looking for silence, in order to try to become inwardly empty, inwardly free from everything that dominates them and drives them. Some find the stillness threatening and meaningless, but others discover that the stillness can be sustaining and protective, and that taking time for oneself and just being there can bring strength and inner peace. Is this sub-Buddhist nonsense? Sometimes I suggest

to the group that when we as men and women are just being there, we are living out what the Bible calls our being in the image of God—our likeness to the one who said of Himself, 'I am who am'.

To understand God in these terms is to stress the divine immanence. Such an approach is more accessible to those among our contemporaries who are undertaking the religious quest than a concept of God centred on transcendence, which speaks of a distant, holy God whose life has been communicated to us through prophets, or through a Son who lived two millennia ago. What matters here is that God, the Absolute, is within us; that there is something of quite unnegotiable value in us; that what we can see is only the surface of things; and that there is something more, something wholly other, or at least something very different. That sort of language gets across more easily. From here we can begin to speak, carefully and reticently, preferably avoiding any conventional theological or religious language, in words that emerge chiefly from the mystery of our human relationships.

What matters is that God, the Absolute, is within us

Amid the various uncertainties of life, people can come to recognise how much our life as a whole is in question. They get in touch with a vague, diffused feeling that our life as a whole really has no basis within itself. However, such experiences often resist interpretation—especially when they are somehow stimulated by religious functionaries. The first step is always one of being present with the people, just staying with the situation.

Another example, this time showing how the movement towards faith by way of meditation is a long-term, slow business. At Easter in 2003, a young man was baptized in Göttingen who had begun some ten years early to do meditation with me in the university chaplaincy. He had needed ten years before his life stabilised to the point that he could enter into relationships and explore serious questions. Only then could he discover and articulate his relationship with God, and overcome his scepticism sufficiently for a proper conversation about this relationship to be possible. Then he had found another faith-community that had enabled him to find his way to the Church in an institutional sense.

Of course, meditation is not the only form of religious experience. People can have such experiences in nature, in conversations, through their commitments, in their anxieties or joys, in their experiments with

A Communist-era building in Leipzig being demolished

prayer. But I am convinced that many people cannot understand the Christian message about God, and that religion for them will be a dead letter unless they are given access to what the words are talking about: the experience of life pointing beyond itself. Unless they are given some kind of way in, they just lack what it takes to have such experiences—or if they do have them, they cannot reflect on them, do something with them, or clarify what they mean.

I cannot talk about colour to a colour-blind person unless I somehow give them some purchase on what it is to experience colour. I cannot talk about the Reality behind all reality, about the love that passes all understanding, unless the person I am talking to has undergone, and noticed, an experience of this reality—at least in the

form of longing. When such a person hears words like 'faith' or 'hope' or 'love', they do not connect the words with any religious experience. What people are looking for, then, is not so much information as a person—a person who can open them up to a 'spiritual' experience, to an experience of something sustaining life as a whole. Such people will obviously need to have had and accepted this kind of experience themselves, and to have reflected upon it.

Talking Intelligibly about God

It might be objected that 'faith comes from what is heard' (Romans 10:17): faith needs words, and ultimately faith needs dogmas. I am not disputing this claim. But the Word needs to be intelligible. Christians in general, and theologians in particular, assume far too quickly that people can obviously understand what they are saying. Sometimes I hear my colleagues saying, 'those who don't understand don't want to understand'. Of course that is sometimes the case. But many people have no idea how much Christian language provokes incomprehension among people who are quite sincere and in good faith, but know nothing whatever about Christianity, or have received only a garbled version of it. Moreover, surveys and our own experience of conversations suggest that the situation among baptized Christians is not much better. We talk conventionally about God and with God, and thereby make religious language a dead skeleton which does nothing but mislead. Why are we talking about grace, salvation, redemption, forgiveness of sins, and heavenly glory? Why are we not speaking instead about everyday experiences which might lead us to go more deeply, of freedom from inner and outer compulsions, of overcoming loneliness and hatred, of an insatiable thirst for love and life, of unconditional love and affirmation? Why cannot we make it clear that everyday things, whether pleasant or burdensome, can be heralds of God—as we see in Jesus' parables?

When I was doing teaching practice in Frankfurt, this point came home to me in a way I shall never forget. I was meant to be explaining what heaven was. I decided I would begin with the young people themselves, and I managed to get them to talk about what they really wanted: about their desire for a place of love and safety (most came from broken families), for a sense of acceptance, for experiences that would be fascinating. They began to speak quite unrestrainedly about

their dreams. When I said to them that they were describing heaven, their jaws dropped. The teacher supervising me stopped marking her exercise books, and the class began to listen. Up till then, heaven had been boring for them, and not something worth striving for. But love without betrayal or exploitation—that was something else, that was worth it. I can't remember how long it lasted—but at that point we communicated, and there was understanding. Heaven was near. It is 37 years since that class, and I have never forgotten it.

Finding God in People's Lives

Why don't we show how a knowledge of God's love and the thought of life within death can free us to overcome our compulsions and to live fully? Is it perhaps that we live in such a tense and unintegrated way that we do not want to be put to the test ourselves?

Perhaps one of the reasons why theologically trained people avoid talking to people who are searching is that they can only stutter, or else lapse into incomprehensible jargon, when they are asked just what some proposition of faith, or liturgical ritual, has to do with real life. But we say that our God is a God of life. Why do we find it so hard to preach on how it is of such importance to us that God is Trinity, that God is at once above us, within us, and among us? And yet we bless ourselves everyday in the name of the Triune God.

When a Christian, or someone trained in theology, is talking about the faith and begins a sentence with 'But you must understand …', my reaction is, 'there is absolutely no reason why they *must* understand'. It is the religious professional who has to do the learning, learning to translate God's message into the other person's life-experience. They should avoid saying such things as 'in their world there are no words for God and prayer'. If a person is alive, they have some idea of what life is. And God is the Living One. We cannot but, therefore, be able to speak about God, about the yearning within human life for infinity.

A recent survey has shown that more than half the population in the former East Germany are 'atheistic believers in Life'. They believe 'in Life'—Life in general, rather than conceived in personal terms. If they are believing in 'Life', are they really atheists in the full sense, or is it just that their faith in 'Life' has not yet been fully developed? And can we understand their 'Life' well enough—which will always be a matter of starting from what 'Life' means for individuals, not from the

The foyer of a new cinema centre in Leipzig

general idea of 'Life'—to point to elements within it that might lead them on further?

We need to stop complaining about how non-believers lead lives that are just materialistic, closed to the religious dimension. Perhaps such claims are true in one sense. But these people are capable of dying peacefully and calmly. I think of a simple old lady who told me that she was content with her life, and wanted nothing more. I think of people who helped others during the 2002 floods to the point of exhaustion, and who can name as the values that sustain them in time of crisis their friends, their family, their recreational interests, and the ideals to which they can commit themselves. I think of 55-year-olds, made redundant and sent into a harsh early retirement, who nevertheless can still find meaning in their lives. For me, people like this are the dwelling-place of God.

Obviously the people of the former East Germany see the matter differently. They do not use the word 'God' as a way of interpreting their existence. This word still appears 'unscientific', not respectable—a virtually ineradicable result of Communist propaganda and of an

earlier fundamentalist approach to religious instruction. It has been brought into disrepute by its association with the lifeless compulsiveness all too easily visible in churchgoers. I must take their self-description as 'godless' seriously, and I am not going to say to them, 'you actually do really believe in God—it's just that you don't realise it'. But that does not stop me reverencing the presence of God in other people, and trying to express this verbally in those peaceful, meaningful moments when this can be done without a sense of things being forced.

Why should I bother offering my interpretation of people's existence when they are quite happy with the interpretation they have? What justifies my doing this? My answer is rather pragmatic. I only talk about a religious interpretation of life with people who ask for it, either individually, or—as happens rather more frequently—in the context of an adult education course or of the various things we offer in our information centre. But it is hard to distinguish those who are happy with themselves from those who are not, and therefore we make what we can offer widely known. Anyone who wants to move beyond the merely conventional in this context is someone we can talk to. And we must make ourselves visible enough for such people to be able to find us.

I also think that human society, collectively and as experienced by individuals, is impoverished if the question about transcendence is not alive within it. This does not mean that society will survive only if it uses our language and our images. Karl Rahner once said that Christianity's task in the future might be simply to keep the question about God alive. This is the vision that I find inspiring—not the sense that I have to talk people into something, or get something across to them.

Growing in Dialogue

I hope it is clear from what has been said that we see proclamation as a matter of dialogue. I sometimes see and hear my colleagues saying that dialogue with non-Christians must in the end be monologue, because we have a truth to proclaim that other people do not have. This seems to me not to recognise the dignity of our dialogue partners. Is it really that we *have* the truth? Or is our conviction rather that we are *being led*

by God along a secure path, a path that can never lead us completely astray?

Vatican II observes that salvation can occur also in the other religions. It follows that we can profit from this. When we engage with people whose beliefs are different, we too are being constantly challenged to concentrate on what is essential in our faith. We need to become liberated from time-conditioned and all too human magical distortions, and to discover new aspects of our faith. Simple Christians often concede that they shy away from real dialogue with people whose beliefs are different from theirs, and that they are incapable of listening patiently. And they give a reason: they are uncertain in their own faith, and are worried that their sense of religious identity might collapse. There are some with theological training who cannot let themselves make such an admission. Perhaps we need first to deal with the unbelief within ourselves before we can understand and address our contemporaries whose beliefs are different from ours, and who are allegedly without any religion.

If parents really accept that bringing up children is a process of honest dialogue, and commit themselves to such a process, they themselves also become personally enriched. Similarly, if we let ourselves be challenged in conversation by our fellow citizens who are non-believers, or else believers in something very different from Christianity, the experience can increase and purify our own faith.[2]

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[2] This article was first published in *Stimmen der Zeit*. We are most grateful to the editors for their permission to reproduce it here in English. The images are taken from contemporary Leipzig.

ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AND SEVERE DEPRESSION

Joseph A. Munitiz

IN RECENT YEARS THE PREVALENCE of severe depression has become an acknowledged fact of life. Personal or second-hand experience of this painful state has become commonplace. And with more reflection and analysis it has become possible to recognise its symptoms, and hence to reinterpret earlier incidences of this affliction.

A talk on 'depression in old age'[1] alerted me to the possibility that certain elements in the life of St Ignatius point to his having suffered a bout of very severe depression. In a general way, the Freudian analysis by Fr Meissner had already prepared me for this conclusion.[2] But on this occasion, the approach was via cognitive therapy,[3] in which greater recognition is given to subject's conscious thoughts and mental schemata. Given the complexity of the human psyche, both approaches can be illuminating. The cognitive approach has the advantage that one is dealing with easily recognisable phenomena that can be expressed in straightforward terminology, as opposed to the elaborate neologisms that most Freudians seem to need in order to express themselves.[4]

[1] The British Province of the Society of Jesus organizes an annual meeting for the benefit of older members; during four days different topics—some theoretical (on subjects like spirituality for the ageing) and some very practical (for example on physical exercises or continence)—are discussed in agreeable surroundings. The talk in question was given by Roger Dawson, a Jesuit scholastic who qualified as a clinical psychologist before joining the order.

[2] W. W. Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint: Ignatius of Loyola* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 74: 'From July through October of 1522, he suffered a severe depression'. Meissner illustrates his point by quoting from the description in the *Spiritual Exercises* of 'desolation' (Exx 317), though the latter phenomenon needs to be distinguished from clinical depression, as will be discussed further below.

[3] Developed by Aaron T. Beck in several studies, for example *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976).

[4] See Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint*, 74 and 366: **'**In Freud's [1917] classic analysis of depression, the essential mechanism is the turning against the ego of the sadistic impulses of the superego'; 'We need to recall his [Ignatius'] largely narcissistic and phallic personality structure'.

The Way, 44/3 (July 2005), 57-69

The Problem of Scruples

In the autobiographical *Reminiscences*[5] Ignatius gave much space to one particular trial that he underwent while living at Manresa: 'here he came to have many problems from scruples' (n. 22). At first sight one might not recognise under this term an experience that deserves to be classified as 'depression'. But the description given by Ignatius of his state of mind leaves little room for doubt. Even before his scruples, there were times when he could find 'no savour [relish] either in praying or in hearing mass or in any other prayer' (n. 21); there was 'sadness and desolation' that covered him like a cloak (n. 21). However, with the onset of scruples one recognises quite a different phenomenon: he was 'in great pain' (n. 22); he felt that the scruples 'were doing him a great deal of harm' (n. 22), they were 'tormenting him' (n. 23); he was at times in 'a state of great distress' (n. 23). All of this reveals a man under terrible mental pressure.

A man under terrible mental pressure

The immediate occasion was the fear that he had not made a full confession. Doubts continued to return, even though he had made a perfectly adequate general confession up at the monastery of Montserrat, and had done the same in the Cathedral (the Seo) of Manresa, actually writing down on his confessor's orders all that he could remember. The confessor's advice not to repeat anything 'unless it was sufficiently clear' (n. 23) was of no help, as the thoughts would recur with the startling clarity of ever-new detail. Long hours (seven each day) devoted to prayer on his knees gave no relief over several months (n. 23).

His self-contempt grew to such a pitch that he declared himself willing to crawl behind a dog if that would satisfy God (n. 23). There were even times when he seriously thought of suicide by jumping out of a window (n. 24), but the realisation that this would be sinful restrained him: 'Lord, I won't do anything that would offend you!' (n. 24). Instead he began a rigorous course of fasting, resolving neither to eat nor to drink unless he was in danger of dying. It was only later that he realised how ridiculous it was to think that by the time he was in

[5] The *Reminiscences* were dictated to Gonçalves da Câmara, beginning in 1553 and continuing, with interruptions, until 1555, the year before Ignatius' death. All references are to *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, edited by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin, 1996).

danger of dying he would have been able to stop the process (n. 24). Fortunately the confessor stepped in at the end of the first week, and ordered him to break his fast. His prompt obedience seemed to cure him from his scruples, but in a short while, to his horror, they returned with greater force than ever (n. 25).

Release came at last thanks to a curious extra 'temptation', but this time one that he could recognise for what it was: he was tempted to abandon his new form of life. As he says, he was filled at times with great disgust 'for the life he was leading'—after all, he was eating badly, sleeping and dressing badly, not washing properly, and spending long, boring hours in unanswered prayer! But as he saw this 'disgust' for what it was, a temptation to give up, he recognised that his 'scruples' were in the same category: they were 'feelings' that could not be coming from God, but must be from the Evil One. With the decision not to accord them any more importance, and to cease from further confession of past sins, his happiness and security returned and he felt 'liberated' (n. 25).

The Roots of Depression

From the point of view of cognitive psychology, depression can come when a chance occurrence or experience triggers off accumulated negative thoughts. Usually these have their roots quite early in the subject's life: as a child the person has failed to receive the love and affection which would provide a base of secure self-appreciation.

In the case of Ignatius—or Iñigo as he then was—a mother was lacking. He was the last of twelve or thirteen[6] children born to Marina Sáenz de Licona, and it is known that shortly after his birth he was sent to be breast-fed and nurtured in a farmhouse near the family home. His mother is not subsequently mentioned, and she is likely to have died while he was very young. His wet-nurse, María de Garín, probably provided the only affection he knew as a child.[7] Quite apart from the unconscious (which may be labelled 'Freudian') implications

[6] Twelve according to Ricardo García-Villoslada, *San Ignacio de Loyola: nueva biografía* (Madrid: BAC, 1986), 61, but thirteen according to Félix Juan Cabasés, *Explicación de la Santa Casa de Loyola* (Loyola, 1997), 35.

[7] Winston Churchill, who also suffered from chronic bouts of depression, confessed that the only person who showed him real affection as a child was his nurse.

of such maternal deprivation,[8] there are also cognitive, or semi-conscious, consequences.

For Iñigo, further doubts about his own self-worth must have been sown when his father decided to send him away, while he was still in his early teens, to serve as a page in the courtly household of the Treasurer of Castile, Juan Velázquez de Cuéllar, in Arévalo. However well-intentioned this move was, it had the effect of uprooting a young lad from a familiar context—the hilly green Basque countryside and a homely household packed with older siblings—to a foreign, alien and formal setting—court life in the dry Castilian *meseta* with its burning heat and icy winters. It is hardly surprising that the young Iñigo sought compensation for such a wrench in superficial self-adornment (fine clothes, careful grooming, martial prowess with sword and dagger[9]), and in sexual satisfaction. He applied for permission to carry a sword

[8] Analysed in detail by Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint*, 362-363; he draws a parallel between Ignatius and Michelangelo, who also lost his mother very young.

[9] James Brodrick, *Saint Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956), 47, draws on the evidence that emerged when Iñigo (along with his priest brother) was brought before the judges in 1515; see n. 11.

because he had been threatened by someone furious at an affront, which was probably the result of an affair. It is notorious that what the 'Don Juan' type is seeking in pleasure is a security which is always eluding him. Iñigo was to confess to Laínez that he was very much a ladies' man.[10]

A turning-point in Iñigo's conversion process in Loyola came when he was granted a striking grace: 'being awake one night, he saw clearly a likeness of Our Lady with the Holy Child Jesus, at the sight of which, for an appreciable time, he received a very extraordinary consolation' (n. 10). The effect of this concerned his sexual feelings and behaviour: he was left 'sickened at his whole past life, and especially at matters of the flesh'. From then on, 'he never again had even the slightest complicity in matters of the flesh' (n. 10).

But it is probably true that Iñigo's sexual proclivities had been more of a symptom than a true cause. Cognitive therapy tries to uncover how a person thinks about their basic safety and vulnerability. For Iñigo, the strange world of Arévalo must have seemed threatening enough, but worse was to come with the disgrace of his patron, the Treasurer of Castile. The Treasurer joined protests against the curtailment of privileges that followed the accession of the foreigner Charles V to the Spanish throne. He eventually submitted on being threatened by troops, but this disgrace, along with other disasters, led to a fit of melancholy during which he died.

Iñigo had to leave the palace and seek employment with another nobleman, the Duke of Nájera and Viceroy of Navarre, Pedro Manrique de Lara, who was a professional soldier. Iñigo had seen one world dissolve around him; he now entered a new, military world, for which he was probably not prepared. In fact the Duke used his services more on diplomatic missions, which Iñigo carried out with some aplomb, than on military ones. But at the defence of Pamplona, Iñigo allowed himself to be carried away in a wild flight of chivalry, against the advice of the professional soldiers, and he was seriously wounded. As a result, he had a permanent limp.

[10] MHSJ FN 1, 72, 76; see also Polanco in MHSJ FN 1, 154-156.

Depressive Crisis

The features of a 'typical' depressive crisis include an unrealistic appreciation of personal limits, and a conviction of special status coupled paradoxically with a sense of worthlessness. These stem from the failure to satisfy certain basic needs—for safety, for the ability to control oneself and the immediate environment, for autonomy, for self-esteem, for self-expression. We know, because his contemporaries tell us so, that Iñigo was subject to fits of anger,[11] in which he found self-control very difficult. It clear that respect for the lives of others did not rank highly with him: he was prepared to stab a Moor who spoke doubtingly about the perpetual virginity of Mary (n. 15), and earlier he was accused of serious offences which probably included bloodshed.[12] Further light is thrown on the type of depression that seems to have afflicted Ignatius when one examines more closely the thinking process involved in his scruples: basically he was striving to be perfect, but he thought that he could not rid himself of his former imperfections. He had projected for himself an ideal picture of what a 'saint' should be, and he became more and more frustrated as he saw that he did not coincide with it.

Another common feature of depression is 'black and white thinking': sufferers are incapable of admitting grey areas, and make 'all or nothing' judgments. They are also completely focused on the self: guilt is wholly personal to themselves. They become incapable of seeing things in a wider context; the smallest fault or error justifies wild generalisations and instant conclusions. Their thoughts become negative and pessimistic: because one thing is wrong, everything is wrong. And, perhaps most distressingly, they

[11] MHSJ SSI 1, 566: in 1560, the Bishop of Salamanca recalled having seen Ignatius' reaction to being jostled in a Pamplona street. He went after the men responsible with his sword; 'if there hadn't been anyone to hold him back, either he'd have killed one of them or they'd have killed him'.
[12] MHSJ FD, 229-246, especially 235, 237-238, 241-242.

are oppressed and crushed by 'shoulds' and 'oughts': 'I should have told the confessor such-and-such a detail', 'I ought to have mentioned that there were four and not just three offences', and so on, *ad infinitum*. They may experience a feverish loss of control over their own thought processes: again and again, the same persistent preoccupations keep recurring, driving them to the brink of madness.

For Ignatius, an additional set of half-conscious assumptions were clearly at work: the picture that he had formed of God in his earlier years was woefully defective. Authority in his home was probably represented by a remote and dominant father; Don Beltrán was the only son of Iñigo's bellicose grandfather, who was exiled to the south of Spain in punishment for his part in the clan wars of the Basque country. He had succeeded in building up the family's economic and social position, but at the cost of active service in defence of the Castilian monarchs. This had won him important iron-mining privileges. Most of his sons would scatter to military or naval careers, and many to early deaths, including his eldest, the direct heir to the Tower-Palace of Loyola. One son was given to the Church, probably to ensure that the local parish church remained under family control, and was well known for his dissolute life.

Ignatius' first God-image was woefully defective

One can form some idea of Iñigo's conception of God from the incident of the Moor mentioned above: God is a power who intervenes under duress from His saints. The saints were great because they did great penances; and it was the masochistic attraction of the really great penances that seduced Iñigo. He decided not to become a Carthusian because 'he was afraid he wouldn't be able to practise the hatred he had conceived against himself' (n. 12). At this point his ignorance was complete:

> … not knowing what humility was, or charity, or patience, or discernment in regulating and balancing these virtues. Rather, his whole purpose was to do these great exterior deeds because so the saints had done them for the glory of God …. (n. 14)

There is an element of fear in Ignatius' scruples before a God whom he sees as one who punishes,[13] although there are also traces of another image of God—just but loving—which is striving to break through.

[13] In the Exercises of the First Week one is recommended to summon up feelings of fear (Exx 74).

Overcoming Depression

The effects of Ignatius' crisis were classical signs of major depression: poor concentration, indecisiveness, recurrent thoughts of death and suicide, loss of interest and pleasure in prayer or in attending liturgical functions, agitation and great distress, self-punishment (fasting) with loss of weight and probably chronic fatigue.

The cure for depression, in terms of cognitive therapy, consists in persuading the patient that their thought processes should be replaced by different ones. In the case of Ignatius, the initial step was the realisation that the thoughts troubling him belonged to the category of 'evil' thoughts, and were not the 'good' thoughts that superficially they appeared to be. This shift of perspective came about, significantly, less through his listening to what the confessors were telling him than through his attention to his own experiences. When Ignatius could see that what he was taking to be good was *really* evil, he was back in touch with *reality.* Once he had regained this objectivity, he was on the road to further development.

Fortunately for him, there were some elements in his upbringing that would now serve as the basis for a fairer appraisal of his own worth, and would open the way to an intimate knowledge of God. He had known what disinterested love could be—partly through his brother Martín and the latter's young wife, Magdalena de Araoz, and partly through María de Velasco, the widow of his first patron, who found him new employment with the Duke of Nájera. He had known a God who became a child in the arms of a mother. He was aware of the deep peace of consolation, and of compassion for himself.

Severe depression, however, usually has long-lasting effects, even if it is only experienced once. These can include an extraordinary enrichment of one's power of sympathy for others. In later years Ignatius often gave signs of this ability to penetrate into the minds and hearts of those he met, particularly in his dealing with novices in Rome. It is also remarkable that in the 'Helpful Notes' (sometimes called 'rules') for 'the perception and understanding of scruples and of the insinuations of our enemy' (Exx 346), Ignatius condemns what he calls 'erroneous' scruples (incorrect notions about what is and what is not a sin), but has sympathy for 'true' scruples (troubling doubts about sin). Such doubt can be 'of no small benefit for a time. Indeed to a great extent it cleanses and purifies ….' (Exx 348) But scruples are

often the sign of an excessively sensitive conscience, and the remedy may be to coarsen that conscience, or at least to 'seek to establish a position in the just mean' (Exx 350).

Was Ignatius Manic-Depressive?

In considering whether Ignatius was prone to depression, or even manic-depressive, it is important to distinguish between what is now termed 'bipolar disorder' (formerly called 'manic-depressive psychosis') and 'major depression' (also referred to as 'unipolar disorder'). A recent survey-study of psychology notes:

> According to several estimates, about 10% of all men and 20% of all women in America will suffer from a major depressive episode (defined as one that lasts for at least two weeks) at some time during their lives.[14]

In the case of Ignatius at Manresa many of the classic symptoms of a major depressive episode were present.[15] However, this episode seems to have been isolated, and later in life it was his constant serenity that mainly impressed his contemporaries: 'a tiny little Spaniard, a bit lame, with joyful eyes', as one man described him.[16] Ignatius himself claimed that it would not take him more than quarter of an hour's prayer to recover even from the suppression of his beloved Society of Jesus.[17]

As for signs of manic exaltation—the feeling that some manic-depressives experience that 'everything is possible'—they are not evident in what we know of Ignatius' later life. He was capable of ambitious undertakings, some of which (such as the famous Irish venture entrusted to Frs Broët and Salmerón in 1541 for which Ignatius drew up very detailed advice[18]) were doomed to failure. And

[14] Henry Gleitman, *Psychology* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995 [1981]), 737.

[15] The American Psychiatric Association has published a classification system (DSM-IV, that is, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) which lists the criteria for identifying a major depressive episode: compare Gerald C. Davison and John M. Neale, *Abnormal Psychology* (New York: John Wiley, 1996 [1974]), 227.

[16] Fr Laínez reported this description of Ignatius: see *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius Loyola: The* Memoriale *of Luis Gonçalves da Câmara*, translated by Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), n. 180.

[17] *Memoriale*, n. 182.

[18] A letter and a memorandum on this mission are available in English in *Iñigo: Letters Personal and Spiritual*, translated by Joseph A. Munitiz, selected by Michael Ivens (New Malden: Iñigo Enterprises,

at times he was considered foolhardy in the way he pressed ahead with projects, for example the founding of the Roman and German colleges when financial backing seemed non-existent.[19] But even in these cases Ignatius' projects were inspired by the realism and practical good sense that led to their eventual success, rather than by a delusive optimism.

There is a passing remark in Fr Meissner's Freudian analysis which may be relevant here:

> The loss of his mother would have left him with a deep-seated unconscious wish for reunion with her, specifically through death. Correlative with this wish, we could infer unconscious fantasies, formed at an infantile level in his mind, of rejoining his mother in the heavenly kingdom, where mother and son could be reunited in eternal bliss. A consequence of this dynamic would be *an essentially depressive core to his personality organisation*, rooted in his sense of abandonment, intolerable and inexpressible rage at the abandoning mother, and a devalued sense of himself as a child who was not worthy of his mother's love and fidelity.[20]

Despite this remark, Meissner lays much more stress on the *obsessive* features of Ignatius' personality than on the depressive: 'a salient aspect of Ignatius' personality is his obsessionality'; 'as we study Ignatius' post-conversion life, we get a sense of discipline, tenacity to the point of stubbornness or obstinacy, and a pattern of behaviour impressive for its consistent degree of control—especially emotional control'.[21]

The *Memoriale* of Luis Gonçalves da Câmara reveals several examples of this. There is Ignatius' obsessive insistence on rules, all duly numbered. There is a touchiness which leads him

1995), 52-58; a translation of the letter is also included in *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1959), 51-52.

[19] *Memoriale*, n. 16, n. 234.

[20] Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint*, 362 (my italics).

[21] Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint*, 373, 374. The role of fear in the Exercises, briefly mentioned in a previous note, is one among other features that may provoke untoward reactions in retreatants inclined to depression; even a prayer such as the famous 'Take, Lord, and receive' (Exx 234) from the Contemplation to Attain Love in the Fourth Week can be excessive if presented too bluntly.

to react with what seems excessive ferocity to undue noise or to forms of pretentiousness. He can look ridiculous in his meticulous respect for titles, both those of others and his own (a trait picked out for criticism by the unsympathetic Dominican Melchor Cano[22]). As a recent study has shown, one should not confuse (as Gonçalves da Câmara seems to do) extraordinary sanctity with infallibility: Ignatius' excessive compliance with aberrant medical advice nearly cost him his life, and his hyper-sensitivity in sexual matters seems to have warped his judgement.[23]

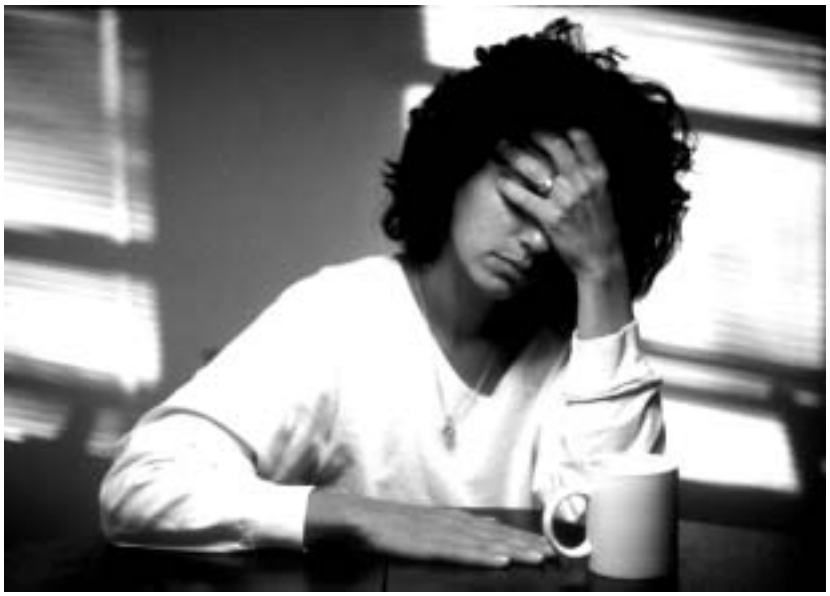
Overall it would seem unlikely that Ignatius was manic-depressive, although he experienced a major depression, from which he emerged as a living witness that one can not only survive the experience but build on it for the greater glory of God.

Depression or Desolation?

The relationship between depression and the Ignatian concept of 'desolation' is also important here. Someone unfamiliar with the specific characteristics of spiritual desolation might easily confuse it with depression, but in fact they operate on different wavelengths, even when they coincide. 'Desolation', for the mature Ignatius, is the work of the devil, and is independent of feelings of satisfaction or distress: a married man happily going to see his mistress can be in a state of 'desolation' for Ignatius; an unhappy student who has failed an examination, but continues to trust in God's love for him, may not be. Usually, of course, sadness and distress are typical of desolation, as are many of the features that characterize depression; but in this case they come because of *spiritual* causes—one is being tried, and tempted, and troubled by 'the enemy of human nature' (Exx 7, Exx 317). Ignatius describes the symptoms mainly in relation to prayer-life; we need 'a

[22] Terence O'Reilly, 'Melchor Cano and the Spirituality of St Ignatius Loyola', in *Ignacio de Loyola y su tiempo*, edited by Juan Plazaola (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1992), 369-379 (especially 371-373): the full text of Cano's critical report on Ignatius (whom he had known in Rome) was published by Professor O'Reilly in his Variorum volume (1995), *From Ignatius Loyola to John of the Cross: Spirituality and Literature in Sixteenth-century Spain*, chapter 5.

[23] Ignacio Cacho, *Iñigo de Loyola: ese enigma* (Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto and Mensajero, 2003), 381-393; he is discussing the *Memoriale*, n. 35 and n. 56.



wider account … in order to sketch out the typical expressions of desolation in relationships and in various circumstances'.[24]

Sometimes a spiritual director will be able to recognise quite quickly that a person asking for advice is under psychological pressure, which may be revealed in insomnia, in loss of self-esteem, or in a painful lack of interest and energy. But the director may also gradually realise that although a person has suffered, and may still be suffering, from psychological depression, this accompanies a genuine state of spiritual desolation, in which the person faithfully strives to pray despite temptations to doubt and even to despair.[25] In the first case, the best policy is to direct the sufferer to a competent psychotherapist; in the second, both psychological and spiritual help may be needed.

Ignatius' spiritual director at Manresa, although clearly following the rules for dealing with scruples, could do nothing to help him, and in fact just made matters worse (n. 23). Ignatius was able to break out of the vicious circle of depression only when he regained contact with

[24] Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary—A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Gracewing: Leominster, 1998), 217.

[25] Examples of the different cases that may arise are outlined briefly by Brigitte-Violaine Aufauvre, 'Désolation spirituelle et/ou dépression', first published in *Christus*, 197 (January 2003), 27-35, then translated into English, 'Depression and Spiritual Desolation', *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), 47-56.

reality. Should one conclude that he was not undergoing at the same time the experience of spiritual desolation? My own opinion is that one should accept this conclusion. However spiritually profitable the experience of depression may have been for Ignatius, it belongs to a different category, and I think it would only be confusing to identify it with 'desolation' as intended in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Nobody in a state of depression should be encouraged, or even allowed, to undergo the Exercises. They are certainly not a cure for psychological depression, and they are more likely to aggravate the condition than to help. This is not to deny that perseverance in prayer when a person is in depression can be helpful and very profitable. If nothing else, the example of Ignatius' severe attack of depression can be an encouragement to others to believe that a cure for depression is both possible and full of promise for the future.[26]

Joseph A. Munitiz SJ, by profession a Byzantine scholar and editor of Greek texts, has also translated a selection of the writings of St Ignatius of Loyola and the *Memoriale* of Gonçalves da Câmara; he worked in Leuven and Oxford, and is now retired, living at the Jesuit novitiate in Birmingham.

[26] Some very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article reached me from a number of Jesuit friends: Thomas E. Clarke, Robert Costello, the late Jock Earle, Philip Endean and Russell Pollitt. My thanks to them all.

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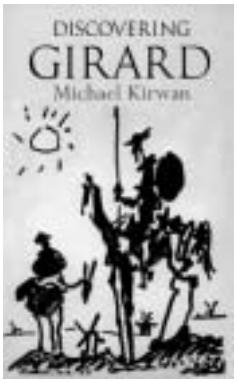

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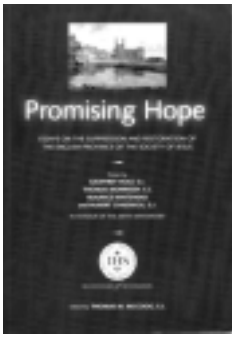

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FROM ILLUSIONS TOWARDS TRUTH

Thomas Merton's 'True Self' and Gay Spirituality

Patrick W. Collins

IN THE LAST DECADE OF HIS LIFE Thomas Merton's writing was dominated by a passion for human growth. References to a fixed human nature receded in his writing; he wrote in 1966: 'I am not so sure of myself and do not claim to have all the answers'.[1] What he says here resonates with the experience of many same-gender orientated people, which often raises profound questions about identity. Like Merton, gay people are in search of their unique, God-created identities, and Merton's appeal for gay people comes from a lifelong search for truth, which was neither guided nor limited by the need for final conclusions.

Merton viewed sexuality as opening the way towards personal wholeness and communion with others. He had learned this through the vicissitudes of his own experience; in his last years he had reaffirmed his commitment to monastic life out of the depths of his evolving humanity, following a brief but intense relationship with a young nurse.[2]

Coming Out and Coming In

Spiritual growth for those orientated towards their own gender involves two distinct, although not necessarily separate, movements. First they must *come out* of the closet of denial and repression. They come out to themselves, to other people who are important to them,

[1] Quoted in *Passion for Peace*, edited by William Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 3.

[2] Robert Nugent, 'Thomas Merton and Sexual Wholeness', *The Merton Annual*, 1 (1986), 9-11. See also Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 435 onwards.

The Way, 44/3 (July 2005), 71-84

and to the One who created us all. Full spiritual maturation is unattainable from a closeted environment. But subsequently, or simultaneously, they must also *come in*, to an awareness and an appropriation of their own uniqueness, which includes their spirituality. As Tim McFeeley writes:

> The coming out process and the quest for spiritual transcendence are affiliated journeys, and the skills acquired in leaving the closet are useful in understanding our spiritual needs as well.[3]

The process relates to what Merton called the journey from the false self toward the True Self, which is the God-self within each person. On that journey same-gender orientated people, like everyone else, need to learn to stop looking primarily outside themselves to find their identity and their truth. Being and identity are discovered on the journey into their interiority. One gay writer, Ed Steinbrecher, put it this way:

> Many gay men are looking for something outside themselves when they should be looking within themselves and creating this incredibly satisfying inner man. You're not going to find it at all unless you go within and do the work of consciousness.[4]

But the quest is not simply individual. Merton wrote that the transformation of human consciousness will 'liberate the truth in each person, with the idea that it will then communicate itself to others'.[5] If same-gender orientated people go through the processes of *coming out* and *coming in*, they can receive a deeper, richer sense of true identity with which to come back out again, liberated, to serve society.

[3] Tim McFeeley, 'Coming Out as Spiritual Revelation', *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*, 3/4 (Fall 1986), 9-11.
[4] Ed Steinbrecher, quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Mark Thompson (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 204. This article specifically addresses the experience of men rather than women; the two experiences are in some ways similar, though in others quite different.
[5] Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1975) 332-333.

Gay Spirituality, the Gay Wound, and the True Self

Thomas Merton wrote about the True Self:

> I must therefore know myself, and know both the good and the evil that are in me. It will not do to know only one and not the other: only the good, or only the evil. I must then be able to live the life God has given me, living it fully and fruitfully, and making good use even of the evil that is in it …. To live well myself is my first and essential contribution to the well-being of all mankind and to the fulfilment of man's collective destiny …. To live well myself means for me to know and appreciate something of the secret, the mystery in myself: that which is incommunicable, which is at once myself and not myself, at once in me and above me.[6]

So how might gay people 'live well' and 'contribute to the well-being of all' at the beginning of a new millennium? What must be courageously faced, and what must be joyfully appreciated, in gay realities?

Same-gender orientated people are as varied in their life-histories and experiences as straight people. Nevertheless, there are things which they have in common that shape their spirituality. In most cultures such people begin their journeys toward self-identity and self-affirmation several steps behind heterosexuals. Heterosexuals at least think that they understand their orientation and their identity. Straight reality is assumed to be 'normal' by society, by the Churches, and even by some gay people. In the past everyone was assumed to be heterosexual; only now is that assumption beginning to be less current, and openness about sexual orientation growing.

Heterosexuals at least think that they understand their identity

Gays can be considered abnormal, at least statistically. Yet, throughout history, a minority has always been same-gender orientated—and it has included creative, spiritually aware and inspiring people in every age. But their gifts have not usually been understood as coming from their full human identity, which of course includes their sexual orientation. This part of their identity has been unknown, or denied, or dismissed.

Thomas Merton was deeply aware that God deals with human beings in and through their vulnerability, their wounds. It is at the

[6] Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 95.

point of their apparent powerlessness that divine power can act to make them whole. Heterosexist and homophobic assumptions and attitudes have created what has been termed the 'gay wound'—the internalisation of homophobia. As Guy Baldwin has said: 'At this time in history, homophobia is the single most defining element in … gay consciousness'.[7]

Same-gender orientated people grow up feeling, acting and being different in a straight society which sets the standards for 'normality'. Some try to live out these standards, while others deliberately express themselves in a way quite contrary to straight traditions. Either way they have implanted within them a sense of being misfits and aliens. This can create a profound self-loathing which often leads to self-destructive behaviour and an unhealthy self-stereotyping—reactions which in their turn reinforce prejudice among straights. Ram Dass says: 'One of the deepest issues plaguing gay men is inner-directed hate'.[8] Yet this suffering can become the gateway to deeper truth, healing and wholeness.

At least until relatively recently, most gay people have begun their life-journeys in self-hatred. This deep wound often causes them to spend too much time consumed by sexual orientation issues. No one has to struggle with an orientation toward the opposite sex. The same-gender orientated, on the other hand, must engage with their sexual identity as something making them different. In the process there can be a tendency to focus more on questions of some unique 'lifestyle' and on particular genital acts than on the quest for their unique human identity. Gay people can too readily come to experience their identity as primarily focused on sexuality. The reasons for this are not

[7] Quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 190.
[8] Quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 164.

straightforward. We cannot simply claim that same-gender orientated people have an unintegrated sexual identity. Many are well integrated, yet we must recognise that the psychic damage caused by society's homophobia can make gay people compulsive about sexuality. But there are possibilities here, too. As Andrew Harvey, a gay contemplative writer, says,

> From the deepest wound of my life grew its miraculous possibility … transforming the pain of self-betrayal into self-discovery …. Had I not been so wounded, I wouldn't have constantly hungered and searched, certainly not with the intensity I have.[9]

But how can this wound be healed? Through personal and communal prayer, and through sound spiritual companioning, gay people may be opened to their whole being in a non-judgmental way. They can realise that the wound is in their ego personality—or, in Merton's terms, in their 'false self'—rather than in the depth of their soul where the True Self, the God within, resides. For being gay is not a person's central, defining characteristic. The core of the self—the True Self—is more than the person's psychic states, more than such things as thinking, willing, feeling, remembering, imagining or sexuality. None of these states form the basis of personal identity. To mistake what is merely a part of the self for the whole is, in Merton's terms, to live out of the false self—to live out of a partial self and a partial truth. The truth of who we ARE—the 'I AM' of us all—is larger than any single modality or description. Indeed, it is more than all of them combined.

In Merton's later writings, the True Self is presented as our whole self in God. In Christian terms, this is the self found in and through Christ, in which Spirit merges and meshes with spirit. It is the self whom God is creating us to become from the inside. We become who we are. Merton puts it this way:

> At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This

[9] Quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 51.

> little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.[10]

The True Self is the person of whom St Paul speaks when he says: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). One might add that there is 'neither gay nor straight, married nor single'. In Christ all are whole and all are one.

When someone *comes out* from hiding their true sexual orientation from themselves, from others and from God, and begins to *come in* to their deepest truth, they are able to grow from self-hatred towards self-appreciation. Those who have successfully come out and come in feel full, in Richard Isay's words, 'of something that they have never experienced before: a sense of power. That power is caused, in part, by freeing the energy that [they] have previously been using to deny and disguise [themselves].'[11]

To grow from self-hatred towards self-appreciation

Starting on this journey, deliberately and with passion, is what it means to become true, whole and holy for all people, in every age. Thomas Merton wrote of this with great clarity and beauty:

> For me to become a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my True Self. … God leaves us free to become whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please. We are at liberty to be real, or to be unreal. We may be true or false, the choice is ours. We may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if we so desire, appear with our own true face. But we cannot make these choices with impunity. Causes have effects, and if we lie to ourselves and to others, then we cannot expect to find truth and reality whenever we happen to want them. If we have chosen the way of falsity we must not be surprised that truth eludes us when we finally come to need it …. We are called to share with God in creating our true identity.[12]

Honesty is the path.

[10] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 142, quoted in James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978), 19, 149.
[11] Richard Isay, quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 41.
[12] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 31-32.

If they answer the call toward the True Self, those orientated towards their own gender can come to understand and experience their inner realities and their innate feelings of attraction and love as a blessing rather than a curse. Many are forced to live closeted, untrue lives, both by the homophobia that permeates our culture and some religious teachings, and by their own internalised homophobia. Such self-hatred obstructs the journey toward their own unique reflection of the image and likeness of God, and may inhibit the inner and outer freedom that they require if they are to create with God their true identity.

This 'falseness', of course, is not unique to those who are same-gender orientated. Merton wrote: 'Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self'.[13] True identity is not that which appears on the surface. Who we really are is not the mask we wear or the role imposed by our upbringing and our society. We are more than that, and much of what is on the surface is not truly us at all.

The Second Closet

Merton's spiritual insight is sound for gay people. It encourages them to leave the closet, and to reject the deceptions, roles and masks of the false self imposed on them by heterosexist and homophobic definitions and expectations. But, regrettably, at least some of them can then become trapped in another closet, created by gay people themselves: the gay subculture. Being 'that way' can become more of a lifestyle issue than a matter of integrating one's sexual orientation into one's personal identity. The so-called 'gay lifestyle' creates a 'second closet' of uncommitted and irresponsible promiscuity and/or materialism and consumerism.[14] Fortunately many who 'come out' today are not seduced by this lifestyle, but are moving towards greater maturity and greater spiritual depth.

This second closet, like the first, confines members of the gay subculture within prescribed places, behaviours, images and stereotypes. While there is clearly a value in safe places and in joyous and comfortable sharing with people of the same orientation, the

[13] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 34.

[14] See Urvashi Vaid, *New Republic* (May 1993), and also Bruce Bawers, *A Place at the Table* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 31-33.

danger is that this can produce a new kind of isolation through separatism. The second closet is not imposed by heterosexism, but rather freely chosen by same-gender orientated people themselves. When they isolate themselves for the sake of security, they avoid an engagement with heterosexuals which could stimulate the spiritual growth of both. Mature spiritual growth leads towards the integration of the whole of creation.

Gay spiritualities need to be especially aware of this second closet and its entrapments. Like everyone, gay people need to transcend the cultural location of the ego personality and of the false self, and discover themselves more profoundly in the True Self. Speaking to those who may become trapped in the gay subculture, Ram Dass reflects on the wisdom of creating a more integrated gay identity—something which is increasingly happening among the maturing gay population today. He encourages those who live largely in the gay subculture to let go of their models of gay existence and to live in the richness of the moment:

> Sex and social relationship is not enough … eventually you will be driven into spiritual awakening ….
>
> Awakening is the recognition that there are many planes of consciousness and that you exist on all of them. You are limiting yourself incredibly to define yourself only in terms of the physical/psychological planes, as if they were absolutely real …. You've reduced yourself to a shadow of who you are … through clinging to concepts instead of understanding that the true nature of being is not knowing you know, it's simply being …. There is something else going on, and realising this is awakening ….[15]

Ram Dass would probably agree with Merton: 'If what people want is food and sex, let them have that, and see if they can get along with that only, and without meaning'.[16]

But how are gay people to overcome the falsity and the illusions created first of all by heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, and then by the gay subculture? How are they to escape from the second closet? Once again Merton's words seem relevant:

[15] Ram Dass, quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 161 and 166.
[16] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 301.

> The difficult ascent from falsity toward truth is accomplished not through pleasant advances in wisdom and insight, but through the painful unlayering of levels of falsehood, untruths deeply embedded in our consciousness, lies which cling more tightly than a second skin.[17]

It is like peeling away the layers of an onion—tears and all.

Many such people live—or try to live—the lies of the first closet, having experienced years of homophobic self-hatred. Coming out joyously into the light of gay identity and self-affirmation with others who share the same sexual orientation is an awesome, liberating experience for them. But there is more to learn and still more falseness to face. Being gay is not a lifestyle, but a unique way of being in, of and for the world, and of relating to God, for a great variety of people. The illusions of the gay lifestyle must be confronted. Sexual orientation must become a friend, a servant and a midwife to the birth of the True Self.

Being gay is not a lifestyle

Same-gender orientated people can become defensive when confronted by the falseness permeating the gay subculture. Yet such confrontation is unavoidable if their liberation is to be spiritual as well as sexual. Quoting C. G. Jung's *Spiritual Disciplines*, Merton wrote: 'People will do anything no matter how absurd to avoid facing their own psyches'.[18] And he could have been describing people trapped by the limitations of the gay subculture when he said:

> This false, exterior, superficial, social self is made up of prejudices, whimsy, posturing, pharisaic self-concern and pseudo-dedication. The false self is a human construct built by selfishness and flights from reality. Because it is not the whole truth of us, it is not of God. And because it is not of God, our false self is substantially empty and incapable of experiencing the love and freedom of God.[19]

The gay subculture—that is, a subculture within the culture of same-gender orientation—reacts against straight lifestyles by constructing its own world of bars and bathhouses, promiscuity, and extremes of both effeminacy and hyper-masculinity. Yet it can also

[17] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 296.
[18] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 251.
[19] Quoted in *The Legacy of Thomas Merton*, edited by Patrick Hart (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 148.

imitate the materialism and consumerism of straight society. This subculture cannot provide an authentic path toward the True Self. It marks a phase that some gay people may go through, but they need to pass beyond it. Otherwise what may have seemed a journey towards freedom, like the Exile of the Hebrew Scriptures, can become a new oppression. The theologian Richard Cleaver suggests that the movement toward liberation has been sidetracked into,

> … a system of commercial products and institutions …. We have created a new Egypt, where we can feel as if our liberation has already been won. Such outcomes are inevitable once gayness and lesbianism are conceived of as lifestyles rather than as membership in an oppressed class. We have tried to buy ourselves out of bondage ….[20]

A good number of gay people—who are unlikely to have children to support—have the disposable income to do just that. Their security comes to reside in what they have rather than who they are. Their quest for more and more is insatiable because it is doomed to be unsatisfying.

To grow spiritually, gay people need to journey through, and then beyond, the familiar territory of gay sexual orientation—not only the gay lifestyle, but also the more serious concerns of sexual and genital behaviour, relationships and unions, AIDS, human rights, ethics, Church teachings and societal attitudes. Having *come out* of the first and the second closets, they must also *come in*, moving into the depth of the soul where sexual orientation is not seen as a curse but as a divine blessing.

The Shared Journey

Reaching out and embracing the True Self cannot be done alone. Spiritual companioning is essential at this stage in the inner and outer liberation of same-gender orientated people. This is particularly true because of the second closet and the trap of gay illusions. Susan Rakoczy describes such spiritual sharing as,

[20] Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 24-25, 39, 35.

> … a privileged meeting of hearts. Built on trust in the bond of the Spirit of God, two persons come together in faith to hear the story of the workings of the Spirit in the life of one of them. For the person who shared her or his experience of God, there is always the moment of 'stepping out on the water' as one begins to speak of what is most sacred in life. The listener, who is companion on the journey, is called to receive that sharing in trust and love, with encouragement and support, and, at times, with the invitation to challenge to further growth, even at the cost of pain and suffering.[21]

In the process of spiritual searching with a companion or companions, such spiritual seekers can discover what Merton understood so well.

> The perfect person … is not the one who has it all together—the one who has 'arrived'. No, perfection is never such a possession of the person …. It is not a matter of achieving some impossible and inhuman saintlike condition, but of being fulfilled as the person we were created to be. Perfection is rather a pursuit, ever moving forward deeper into the mystery of God … and each fulfilment contains in itself the impulse to further exploration.[22]

For everyone, whether gay or straight, becoming whole and finding one's True Self means discovering 'that there is a deep underlying connection of opposites'.[23] But this is especially important for gay people because of the difficulties that they face in coming into communion with the True Self. Becoming whole means passing through the wilderness of the false selves which are imposed by others and which can also be constructed by same-gender orientated people themselves. On the spiritual journey such people may well understand, from painful yet rich experience, one of Merton's most profound statements: 'We must contain all divided worlds within ourselves'.[24]

Merton's description of the stages of the human spiritual journey also has particular application to the divided worlds which exist both within and around gay people:

[21] Susan Rakoczy, *Common Journey, Different Paths* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 9.
[22] *The Legacy of Thomas Merton*, 54.
[23] *Thomas Merton, Monk: A Monastic Tribute*, edited by Patrick Hart (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 61.
[24] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 21.

> In the first part of our life, our psychic energy flows outward in the construction of our social role or persona. The more rigid the society, the stronger the mask—till we get so far out of touch with our True Self that a neurosis may develop which stops the outward flow of energy. Our psychic energy then seems to be dammed up, it returns to us and often we find a reintegration more in tune with our deepest selves. This permits us to experience and reach an inner unity, which is the noblest effort man can make for his own good and for the good of all men.[25]

Gayness as a Gift for All

All spiritual journeys are for the good of all, not just for the one on the quest. And gay spiritual journeys can be a gift to humanity. As Andrew Harvey says:

> Gays have a unique function in registering the cruelty and craziness of patriarchy and working to transcend it …. We've had a false masculine presented to us, an ideal of control and domination that is really a frozen hysteria, a condensation of fear and panic. It has nothing to do with the real masculine. In fact, gay men are closer to the real masculine than the so-called masculine ones are. Gay men in the way in which they interpret and live masculinity might be models for straight men, models for a deepening of the heart, a more tender and playful humour, a greater acceptance and tolerance of diversity.[26]

A real man is a whole person. Harvey's sense of the gay mission in culture may sound somewhat rhetorical but it represents a significant challenge.

For C. G. Jung, those who are same-gender orientated have a profound gift for friendship, one of particular significance in these violent, competitive and materialistic times. Jung writes of the gay person's,

> … great capacity for friendship, which often creates ties of astonishing tenderness between men, and may even rescue friendship between the sexes from the limbo of the impossible. …

[25] Quoted in William Peatman, 'Spirituality Reunites Us with Selves', *National Catholic Reporter* (8 December 1995), 26.
[26] Quoted in *Gay Soul*, edited by Thompson, 62.

> Often he is endowed with a wealth of religious feelings which help him bring the *ecclesia spiritualis* into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes him responsive to revelation.[27]

Gay experience can become redemptive for others, too, in helping them to appreciate the importance and the delight of the human body in responsible, reverential and relational ways. During too much of its history Christianity has suffered from a negative attitude towards the body. A spirituality which ignores or denigrates the body was unacceptable to Thomas Merton, because such a spirituality would block the total response of healthy and fruitful living:

> The 'spiritual' life thus becomes something lived 'interiorly' and in 'the spirit' or worse still in the 'mind'—indeed in the 'imagination'. The body is left out of it, because the body is 'bad' or at best 'unspiritual'. But the 'body' gets into the act anyway, sometimes in rather disconcerting ways, especially when it has been excluded on general principles.[28]

Gay spiritual journeys begin with a *coming out*, and then become a deeper *coming in* to the whole identity of the soul, only a part of whose truth is that it is gay. But, in the end, identity and sexual orientation are not there only for the person making the journey. That person must *come out again* for the sake of others, indeed, for all creation. This awareness that the gay gift is for others is important if gay people are to avoid the pitfall of narcissism. They must return to the rest of the world. The same-gender orientated are uniquely well placed to help humanity expand its imagination about what it means to be human and to be in loving relationships.

People who are gifted with an orientation to their own sex, and who make the journey 'out and in and out again', will undoubtedly experience the searing flames of life. But this is a necessary and inevitable purgation of the unique 'untruths' which have been given to and assumed by gay people. As Merton wrote, surrendering to the fire of the Spirit within—the True Self—is essential for all human growth. Poetically, he described all human souls as being like wax, waiting for

[27] Carl Gustav Jung, *Complete Works*, volume 9, part 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 71.
[28] Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 277-278.

the seal of true identity to be impressed upon them. By themselves souls have no identity, he believed.

> Their destiny is to be softened and prepared in this life, by God's will, to receive, at their death, the seal of their own degree of likeness to God in Christ. And this is what it means, among other things, to be judged by Christ. The wax that has melted in God's will can easily receive the stamp of its identity, the truth of what it was meant to be. But the wax that is hard and dry and brittle and without love will not take the seal; for the hard seal, descending upon it, grinds it to powder. Therefore if you spend your life trying to escape from the heat of the fire that is meant to soften and prepare you to become your True Self, and if you try to keep your substance from melting in the fire—as if your true identity were to be hard wax—the seal will fall upon you at last and crush you. You will not be able to take your own true name and countenance, and you will be destroyed by the event that was meant to be your fulfilment.[29]

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[29] Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 161.

DOROTHEE SÖLLE

Radical Christian, Mystic in Our Midst

Nancy Hawkins

THE SAD NEWS OF THE DEATH of Dorothee Sölle, German theologian and radical Christian, spread throughout the world in April 2004, when the message of Easter was still fresh. It seemed impossible to believe that this vibrant voice was gone. Right up to the moment of her death, Sölle was giving workshops, leading discussions, and sharing her poetic message of hope. Her final, unfinished writing project, a book on death and mysticism, affirms her love of mystical theology and the fact that she was facing her own mortality. Even though Sölle is no longer with us physically, her words and her vast collection of writings will live on.

This essay celebrates Sölle as a radical Christian and as a mystic, and explores how her work fosters a spirituality for our time. Sölle's spirituality is fuelled by the desire for prayerful and political resistance. She rejects any simple idea that God is omnipotent, and she mounts a critique of the role that such beliefs have played in society. It finds its depth in Meister Eckhart's mystical concept of 'living without a why', and in the belief that all people are called to be mystics. It is a spirituality inspired by the themes of liberation theology and feminist critique, and honed by the memory of Auschwitz. Sölle's theology and spirituality are multifaceted. Her work appeals to people of many faith traditions as well as to those who search for a more humanistic, secular approach to life. Her experiences drive her reflections, keeping her writings concrete and honest, and offering her readers an accessible, challenging spirituality.

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A Life in the Shadows of the Holocaust

Dorothee Sölle grew up in Cologne in Germany, and was fifteen years old when the Second World War ended. This reality colours all of her theology and her life's work. She lived in a liberal Protestant household and was exposed to a highly refined culture, with literature, philosophy and music playing a large role in her upbringing.[1] But Sölle's childhood was filled with the harsh realities of the war, especially since her family hid the mother of one of her half-Jewish classmates in their attic. One of her brothers died of wounds suffered on the Eastern Front, and as a child Dorothee experienced a world 'defined by hunger, bombings, coldness and need. Spiritually, it was a ruined landscape as well.'[2]

After the war, Sölle found herself suffering from what has been termed 'collective guilt'. Many Germans asked themselves to what extent they, and with them the German Christian Churches, had contributed to the mass murder of the Jewish people. This sense of collective guilt, when coupled with the national alienation present in Germany after the war, resulted in Sölle experiencing a deep sense of

[1] Sölle's family were Protestant church members, and outspokenly anti-Nazi.

[2] Dorothee Sölle, *Beyond Mere Dialogue: On Being a Christian and Socialist* (Detroit: Christians for Socialism, 1978), 1.

personal estrangement. This estrangement would give birth to Sölle's political questioning and to her search for a 'new' form of religion that had not been handed down to her 'from the fathers'.

It was during these years of personal upheaval that Sölle discovered the writings of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855). She devoured his thought, and his work provided a path toward interior freedom for the young Sölle. He taught her that anxiety is a moment that changes one, that drives one to conversion. Kierkegaard's insistence that anxiety can be an uplifting, redeeming power that draws one to God helped Sölle rediscover her faith.

Dorothee Sölle held two doctorates, and she began a career as a school teacher of religion before moving into full-time theological writing. She always found academic work 'oppressive' and this realisation propelled her into political activism, through which her theological views could be embodied in praxis. Along with Johannes Baptist Metz and Jurgen Moltmann she was to 'found' a theology that consciously defined itself 'after Auschwitz': political theology.

Political theology is a distinct theology, a new and original theology which starts from the insight that all our experience of reality is inevitably mediated through society and through the world. Sölle would declare, 'Theology has to become political theology'.[3] Sölle came to understand that her theology could not be done in the abstract, focused on the afterlife or on somewhere other than where human beings live. Instead, political theology seeks to work out the meaning of gospel truth within the social and political arena.

Sölle was a significant participant in the Christian-Marxist dialogue of the 1960s, which turned many committed Christians into revolutionaries. It was Sölle's desire that such dialogue should help to overcome the alienation, exploitation and destruction prevalent in the twentieth century. She believed that the modern social situation is intelligible and transformable. There are specific social conditions and patterns of behaviour which must be changed if genuine life is to be available to all human beings. Even though the Christian-Marxist dialogue collapsed, the wisdom that Sölle gained from it found its way into all her writings.

[3] Dorothee Sölle, 'The Role of Political Theology in Relation to the Liberation of Men', in *Religion and the Humanizing of Man*, edited by James M. Robinson (Waterloo, Ontario: Council on the Study of Religion, 1972), 132.

In 1975 Sölle accepted an invitation to teach systematic theology at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. For the next ten years she would move between her home in Hamburg and the seminary, making wonderful friends and mentoring countless students. It was at Union that Sölle was exposed to feminist theology with its powerful critique of sexism, androcentrism and patriarchy. Eventually she was drawn to the work of the liberation theologians. Sölle credits this theology of praxis with moving her beyond political theology and into a much richer understanding of the needs of the poor and of the message of Jesus. Latin America became very close to her heart. Sölle went there to publicise human-rights violations, and one of her daughters lived and worked as a medical doctor in Bolivia. Sölle was profoundly moved by her encounters with those who provided sanctuary to people fleeing repression and terror in Central America. Their work, along with all the peace movements around the globe, had a profound impact on Sölle's theological writing and speaking.

When Dorothee Sölle died, at the age of 73, she was known throughout the world as a radical Christian of deep personal conviction. She gave countless talks and never missed an opportunity for lively theological discussion. Her final book, *The Silent Cry*, expressed her love of mysticism and its impact on her life. It is no surprise that her final written thoughts, found after her death, lie in the mystical realm. Her funeral, which was attended by so many of her colleagues and friends, was a tribute to the gift of her life and the power of her thought.

Standing before God: Resistance

The stance that Dorothee Sölle chose, in the face of God and of society, was a stance of resistance: hers is a spirituality of resistance. For Sölle, resistance has many aspects. First, it is the way that members of First World nations can truly participate in the quest for personal and societal liberation. It is also the way that human beings can confront evil and suffering head on. Sölle ties resistance to the act of praying when she declares,

> To pray is to revolt. The one who prays is not saying, that's the way it is and that's that! The one who prays is saying, that's the way it is, but it should not be that way![4]

To share in a spirituality of resistance means to enter willingly into a relationship with God through prayer that will challenge, change and disturb us. It also means willingly to hear the liberating message of the gospel, as it applies not only to our own lives but also to the lives of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Spiritual resistance is about saying 'No' to those elements in the Churches, in the political arena, and in society as a whole that demean human beings, deny justice and use power exploitatively. Sölle was always fearful of the privatisation of religion. Spiritual resistance counters this tendency in Christians and makes people personally accountable for the choices they make. Prayer, for Sölle, was not something that necessarily brings peace to our hearts. It is a moment of confrontation and a moment of conversion. Sölle wanted the Christian Churches to become communities of resistance. This can only occur when our theology is in continual conversation with our politics, and when true liberation is the goal of our journey with God.

True liberation is the goal of our journey with God

One important example of Sölle's theological resistance is her critique of the image of the omnipotent, male Father-God that has dominated centuries of Christianity. Sölle connects the symbol of a powerful Father-God with unjust and oppressive social structures. Her experiences as a woman in a male-dominated society, growing up under Nazi rule, made it difficult for her to accept the symbol of God as father, begetter, ruler and the manager of history. She reminds us that theology has linked power, maleness and fatherhood for centuries. And she actively resists any kind of God-language that diminishes the mystery of God or creates a situation of dependence and helplessness among believers.

The God-language that Sölle advocates emphasizes spirituality and avoids both idolatry and excessive rationalisation. It is rooted in the narrative and the poetic, and it has the capacity to confront

[4] Dorothee Sölle, *Not Just Yes and Amen* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 40.

modernity's faith in power and success as well as the limitations of patriarchy. To ignore narrative, myth and poetry is to ignore the Bible, the place of God's definitive self-revelation. It is also to ignore those texts that create a new symbolic language with which to address and praise the Divine. Sölle fears that Christian theology and spirituality will remain patriarchal unless they integrate myth and narrative. Sölle's spirituality invokes symbols and images from feminist theology, mystical theology, and the natural world. She writes in *The Strength of the Weak* that nature symbols are useful because 'they do not imply power or authority and do not smack of chauvinism'.[5] Sölle draws on the variety of God-images offered by the mystical tradition to develop an innovative, inclusive spiritual language, meeting the concerns of feminist critique.

Responding to God: To Live without a Why

A central idea in Sölle's work is the notion of *sunder warumbe*, meaning 'without a why'. This phrase is Meister Eckhart's description of essential being, the innermost ground of life itself. For Sölle, it is an indispensable guide for anyone who wishes to understand both Eckhart's theology and the mystical way of life. Living 'without a why' represents for Sölle how believers must respond to the promptings of God's spirit. It is the principle that guides resistance, and all ministry. This spiritual practice focuses on living life in the present moment, letting go of the compulsive need to see results from our prayer or to see just acts. The Christian who lives without a why lives without intentions, goals, purposes or power. Such a person is truly free to respond to God's grace as it influences their life.

Sölle is adamant that whenever human beings are torn between being and doing, or feeling and acting, they are no longer living in the spirit of *sunder warumbe*. Instead, they find themselves caught up in a frantic response to the world around them, seeking to measure their success, calculate benefit, and receive praise. The idea of living without a why is especially significant for those trying to minister in our fast-paced, fearful and violent times. The soul that is able to live in this spirit has no need to justify its existence; it simply appreciates the beauty of being alive in the now. To live without a why is to live and

[5] Dorothee Sölle, *The Strength of the Weak* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 114.

love as God lives and loves. It is about accomplishing one's actions without the need for recognition and success.

This aspect of Sölle's spirituality is profoundly liberating, and for her it is the only way to combat the violence of our world. Sölle, the political theologian and activist, declares:

> There is an inner strength of being-at-peace that cannot make the goal orientation of action the measure of all things. All non-violent action in a violent world participates, in this sense, in the 'without a why' of the rose.[6]

She refers to the beauty of the 'mystical rose' spoken of in the poetry of Angelus Silesius (Johannes Scheffler, 1624-1677). Silesius wrote: 'The rose is without any why, it blooms because it blooms. It does not look at itself, and does not ask if it is seen.'[7] The mystical rose, which is a metaphor for the mystical lifestyle, declares its worth simply by being itself and doing what it is destined to do. Sölle recognises that this rose, which is content simply to bloom for the sake of blooming, is also a symbol of non-violence, because it does not need to see the fruits of its existence: it is content to be powerless and even vulnerable, trusting that some day its way of being in the world will nevertheless bear fruit. As Sölle explains in *Against the Wind: Memoir of a Radical Christian*:

> Once, when I was particularly depressed, a friend and pacifist from Holland told me something very beautiful: 'The people who worked to build the cathedrals in the Middle Ages never saw them completed. It took two hundred years and more to build them. Some stone-cutter somewhere sculpted a beautiful rose; it was his life's work, and it was all he ever saw. But he never entered into the cathedral. But one day, the cathedral was really there. You must imagine peace in the same way.'[8]

As one reads over Sölle's vast body of work, one is continually struck by the importance of *sunder warumbe*. It became for Sölle the

[6] Dorothee Sölle, *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 40.
[7] Maria M. Bohm, *Angelus Silesius' 'Cherubinischer Wandersman': A Modern Reading with Selected Translations* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 104.
[8] Dorothee Sölle, *Against the Wind: Memoir of a Radical Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 121.

mainstay of her life with God and with others. It gave her life direction and balance. Sölle believed that the only way truly to find joy in this life is to live without a why. She wrote that this attitude was the one 'little thing' she most desired to pass on to her children and her grandchildren.

Loving God: Embracing Mysticism

Sölle's spiritual stance is one of resistance, and her response to God is rooted in Meister Eckhart's idea of living without a why. These two elements together lead naturally to the third aspect of her spirituality: the mystical journey. Sölle's final book, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, focuses on her understanding of the mystical life. Its title reflects Sölle's conviction that we must explore the relationship between mystical experience and social consciousness as we try to lead a spiritual life.

Dorothee Sölle's admiration and love for mystical theology began early in her life, when she attended a lecture on the life and work of Meister Eckhart, and recognised the importance of mystical prayer for her own spirituality. For Sölle, the mystical life originates from the experience of the human soul, not from within the defined limits of organized religion, nor from books, nor from the authority of religious teaching. The mystical tradition presents a 'new' form of religion born out of relationship rather than out of submission and obedience. This relationship provides the opportunity for a profound unity with God. It is open to everyone, no matter what their personal background or lifestyle.

For Sölle, the only possible way to relate to God is through the mystical journey. Central to her spirituality is the conviction that all people

are called to be mystics. She declares, '*Wir alle sind Mystiker und Mystikerinnen*'—'All of us—women and men—are mystics!' Sölle's theological and personal goal is to democratize the idea of mysticism and cleanse it from what she views as a 'false elitism'. The mystical lifestyle is not meant only for a select few; it is offered to everyone by God.

Mystical sensibility is an act of resistance for Dorothee Sölle. She cannot separate her understanding of mysticism from her social and political commitment. This may startle many who believe that in order to be a mystic one must withdraw from the distractions and concerns of the created order. In the past, mystical experience has often been viewed as a private matter between the soul and God, with no ramifications for life in society. But Sölle believed that there is an essential connection between mysticism and social responsibility. She convincingly points out that many mystics have been reformers. We have only to read the lives of Teresa of Avila, Thomas Müntzer and Daniel Berrigan to understand what Sölle is saying. Such individuals challenged and continue to challenge the accepted social practices of their time. Only through mystical prayer can one embrace a life of resistance that declares a radical 'no' to individuals, governments and social systems that oppress and demean others.

There is an essential connection between mysticism and social responsibility

How are we to live a spirituality of mystical union and resistance? According to Sölle, it is done by embarking on a mystical journey into God and back again into society. There are many ways to speak of this inward path. For Sölle, the mystical journey begins with the *via positiva* of amazement, moves through the *via negativa* of letting go, and concludes with the *via transformativa* of resistance.

The first stage of this mystical journey is all about celebrating God's revelation in creation. Sölle calls us spiritually to experience the profound beauty and intimacy of the physical world. This experience brings us to radical amazement and ecstasy, and fuels our desire to praise God. Surrounded by amazement, we begin the second stage of the journey: that of letting go. Sölle writes that this stage is the familiar 'dark night of the soul'. It is the process of facing fears, addictions and the compulsive aspects of the modern lifestyle. This part of the journey prepares us to 'resist' anything that counteracts our amazement at the goodness of God's creation. Only by letting go can the soul live a God-oriented life.

Traditionally the final stage of the mystical journey is called the *via unitiva,* in which the soul is united to God. For Sölle, the third stage is more appropriately called the *via transformativa*. This description best mirrors Sölle's belief that the mystical lifestyle is an act of resistance. The soul, which has praised the wonders of creation and entered into the 'dark night' of transformation, is now ready to live in God. It is at this point that we face the essence of God and discover that the mystics address God as '*du stilles Geschrei*' ('you silent cry'). God is the silence and the scream. This paradoxical name illustrates Sölle's belief that the cries and cares of all humanity are contained in the very being of God. In the stillness of the mystical union the wounds of the entire world appear. The challenge now is to return to the world and become a source of healing for those whose screams have entered into the very being of God.

Sölle's Significance for Today

In the twenty-first century, we are living in highly unstable times. There is a loss of confidence in our religious institutions, people are fearful of each other, and peace seems very distant. We miss the prophetic and challenging voices that propelled Roman Catholics towards and beyond Vatican II, and that awakened us to the need for social justice. It is easy at this moment to be discouraged, withdrawn and cynical. The theology and spirituality of Dorothee Sölle, with their emphasis on resistance, on the spirit of '*sunder warumbe*', and on mystical prayer, can provide a needful beacon for our journey.

Sölle's understanding of spiritual resistance inspires those of us who view the gospel seriously as a force for personal and communal liberation. We might be fearful of the word 'resistance', but when it is understood spiritually it is the inner fire that enflames Christians to meaningful activism. Toward the end of her life, Dorothee Sölle was especially distressed by the willingness of the USA to go to war in the Middle East. She was dismayed by the anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe, and by the rise of what she viewed as a 'new fascism'. She was appalled at the way in which many Christian Churches treat their members—especially their women members. Her concerns and fears need to be our concerns and fears.

Sölle's words urge all of us to stand up and be counted when we feel overlooked and dismissed. They challenge us not to be satisfied

with meagre steps forward but to aim higher, for real change. Our prayer will never again be complacent if we embrace Sölle's precept that to pray is to revolt. Instead, prayer will propel us forwards to do as she suggested: to look at the world and to notice where it cries out for the gospel. A spirituality of resistance creates an energy within ourselves and ultimately within the world. It is this energy that can become a force for true change.

Not only do we of the twenty-first century need to live a spirituality of resistance, we need to live it in the spirit of *sunder warumbe*: living without a why. This is the mainstay of Sölle's theology and spirituality. She personally strove to live her life in its wisdom, and she offers it to us as a tool for discernment, as a guide, and as a means to embrace mysticism. Sölle was a Christian activist and she was proud of that fact. Yet she came to understand that 'doing just for the sake of doing' could lead to egoism and lack of focus. We are all faced with the temptation to act too quickly without reflection and prayer. It is very easy to allow our distorted desires to direct our lives. Living 'without a why' keeps us grounded and focused on God. After all, it is God who must be at the centre of all we do and all we hope for.

Another aspect of living without a why that is sorely needed, not only by Christians but also by the entire world community, is hope. This is the kind of hope spoken of by Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright, poet and politician. He writes that hope is not the same as joy, but is rather an ability to work for something because it is the right thing to do. This is what *sunder warumbe* is all about. It offers us a sense of hope in ourselves and in our abilities, but most especially hope in what God can do with our efforts. It frees us all to believe in the potential of our actions. While we may never see the fruits of our efforts, we can still be like the mystical rose. The rose is brave, and confident that its beauty can heal the world.

Finally, the spiritually of Dorothee Sölle reminds us that we are all called to be mystics, and that the mystical journey itself is an act of resistance. We need this reminder because so many people wrongly view mystical prayer as a passive and even selfish act. Another truth to remember is that the invitation to mystical union is not dependent upon organized religion. Rather, it originates deep within the soul. Mystical spirituality affirms that God desires union with every human being regardless of gender, ethnic background, sexual preference or race. It is an inclusive spirituality, and consequently it can offer solace to those who are disenfranchised from organized religion.

It takes courage to embrace the mystical journey into God, but it takes even more courage to return to the world after hearing the silent scream within God's heart. Sölle's words give all of us the courage to make this mystical journey; Sölle herself made the journey throughout her life, and she and her words can be our guide. Sölle's spirituality of resistance, of living without a why, and of mystical union is exactly what we need to live meaningfully in our pluralistic and challenging times. It is a mature spirituality, and it challenges us to become mature Christians in an unstable age.

At the end of her final book, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Sölle describes those who have embraced the mystical quest. Her words not only demonstrate her respect for them, they also describe her own life:

> There are human beings who not only hear the 'silent cry', which is God, but also make it heard as the music of the world that even to this day fulfills the cosmos and the soul.[9]

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[9] Dorothee Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

DISCERNING THE SPIRITS WORKS

A Recent Example in Early Morning

John Smith

I LIVE ON A ISLAND in the Pacific Ocean, one hundred miles off the north-west coast of Canada. My main source of heating is wood, and my water flows from heaven. Recently I set up a system with a thousand-gallon tank to collect the rain from the roof of my mobile home. And only three days ago I finished replacing the kitchen and bathroom sinks as well as the toilet. I felt so proud. Everything had been rusty because the well water I used before is full of iron and manganese; it is not fit even for cooking.

In his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, St Ignatius explains some of the tactics the enemy will use to plunge us into desolation. He says: ' … it is characteristic of the evil spirit to cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden and to set up false obstacles. In this way he unsettles these persons by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress.' (Exx 315) Because I am a controller, I panic and become very anxious when I am not in control, even in little things. As sure as day follows night, I end up in desolation. The positive side of this is that I am now more aware of my destructive pattern and I am managing (not controlling!) these events a lot better. I have come to realise that desolation for me is to be robbed of my peace and inner harmony—it's that simple. It doesn't have to be a major catastrophe. Anxiety is enough—it is my weak point for the enemy to attack.

My alarm goes off at five o'clock, and what an effort it is to get out of my warm nest into an icy room! The wood stove dies about an hour after I go to bed. Last night was our first heavy frost. As I fumbled my way towards the bathroom, I heard the water pump starting and stopping, and my heart just about stopped too. Talk about being out of

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control, false reasoning and anxiety! My imagination went crazy, even though I was half asleep. The worst had happened. Despite the insulation, one of the pipes had burst. Or worse still, the thousand-gallon plastic tank had split. No water. It's Saturday, on an island. And it's winter. I can't walk down to the beach and bathe.

The adrenaline kicked in. It's amazing how it warms you up. I slid my cold pants over my pyjamas, grabbed a flashlight, and ran in the pitch dark to the sound of gushing water. The hollow sound of the tank said it was empty, and my heart sank to my boots. All I could do was unplug the motor and hope it was not burned out. I would have to wait till daylight to see whether my nightmare had come true.

On my way back inside I began talking to myself. Here's the gist of my conversation:

> John, keep cool. Don't panic. Remember the other times when you feared the worst and it didn't happen. You are into distorted thinking. Remember how you usually handle desolation and return to consolation.

Ignatius tells us to store up a good bank account of consolations so that we can draw on it in desolation. Up until this I had been blessed with much consolation and had been banking it away for a rainy day. At five-thirty I headed to my prayer room for my hour of contemplation. I picked up my Bible and went to my favourite passage, John 17:9-15, which never fails to restore consolation. Here Jesus is praying for *me*. He prays that I may be one as he is one with the Father; that I may have his joy; and that I may be delivered from the evil one. When I am in desolation I feel abandoned, alone, vulnerable, sad, lonely, helpless, scared and very anxious. I have lost my peace. This for me is evil and frightening. I piggy-back on Jesus' prayer and tell him how I feel. My desire is for him to deliver me from this evil and restore my peace. I sit for the hour.

My hour followed this pattern. By the end I felt relaxed, hopeful and at peace. The problem still loomed before me; I felt anxious too, but the difference was that I felt grounded and rooted in peace. The storm still raged on the surface, while below I was at peace—just how I experience the ocean across the road from me when it storms. I call this kind of consolation 'hard consolation'; it seems to be the natural route from desolation to full consolation. My thought pattern became

more positive and realistic as I remembered the millions who have no water at all.

After breakfast I sat down to Office of Readings and Morning Prayer with a mug of coffee. Being so relaxed, I fell asleep for forty minutes. At first light I went to inspect the damage. Peeling off the insulation on the hose was like being a surgeon opening up a patient, not knowing what he would find. I couldn't believe my eyes! The tank had obviously sunk under the weight of the water, and the hose had become detached. There was no damage at all. Just nine hundred gallons down the drain. And the miracle continued. I noticed that the clamp was loose, which meant the plumber had not tightened it when we installed it two months ago; the hose had just slid off. Had it been securely tightened, something would have had to break with the weight of the tank sinking. A break where the hose joined the surface of the tank would have resulted in the tank bursting. Gratitude welled up in me. While I thanked Jesus I also thanked myself. I tried to imagine how I would have felt had I spent five hours worrying—for nothing!

This was a powerful growing experience for me. My confidence in handling desolation shot up. I am now reading *Ignatius of Loyola* by Karl Rahner, in which Rahner writes a letter to the Jesuits as though he were Ignatius. Two points are important for me here. One is that Rahner, speaking through Ignatius, confidently proclaims that he experienced God. The other is Ignatius' inner freedom, as Rahner reports it, to deal with the possibility of his Society collapsing: 'I would not need more than ten minutes to be near to God and at peace again'.

I felt something of that freedom. From experience, I know that Discernment of Spirits works in everyday life, in little and in big events. I know too that John 17:9-15 works, every time. What a grace! Don't get me wrong; it's no magic wand. The guru who was asked to explain his sense of peace and tranquillity said: 'Well, before I was enlightened I was depressed. And after I became enlightened I am still depressed!' It's all about the storm on the surface of the ocean and the calm below.

As I reflect on my experience, Ignatius' 'Finding God in All Things' is making sense. I experienced God at five in the morning in a sinking water-tank and gushing water! How? I was catapulted into desolation, but through getting my focus off myself and on to Jesus I experienced salvation in the raw, with the peace that results. I

experienced death and resurrection in the mundane. I see more clearly the similarity in the movements between desolation and consolation on the one hand, and between death and resurrection on the other. Because of this connection, the daily Eucharist is taking on a whole new meaning. Desolation and consolation are the bread and butter of spiritual growth. The more I become aware of the movements of the spirits, the clearer the pattern of death and resurrection is in my daily life. In the Eucharist I celebrate desolation and consolation. These are the concrete, tangible and messy ways in which I experience death and resurrection daily.

Tomorrow morning, if I am alive, I will pick up John 17:9-15 again. But this time I will be expressing my profound gratitude for my consolation. I will read the passage, and my prayer will be something like this:

> Thank you, Jesus, for rescuing me from the evil one. Thank you that I feel at one with you again. Thank you for the deep joy I am experiencing.

And I will let that joy wash over me for the hour.

John J. Smith is a Roman Catholic priest ministering on the Queen Charlotte Islands, 100 miles off the north-west coast of British Columbia. He has worked as a missionary in Guyana, where he was influenced by the Jesuits. After the experience of making the Spiritual Exercises, he went on to study Ignatian Spirituality at St Beuno's, at Guelph and at Creighton University. He is actively involved in directed retreats, in spiritual direction, and in Nineteenth Annotation retreats within parish settings.

RECENT BOOKS

Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52526 9, pp. 137, £10.95.

'I think one needs to read [my work] like a thriller. All the elements are given at the beginning, but it is necessary to read to the very end for the meaning to become completely apparent.' These words of René Girard, quoted on the first page of Michael Kirwan's introduction, give the clue to the title of this book. *Discovering Girard* has overtones of exciting involvement, and of facts that initially seem to make little sense until at last it all becomes 'completely apparent'.

It is easy enough to schematize Girard's discoveries; he has done it himself on many occasions. And most of his friends, colleagues and enemies have done likewise—their way. But few have done it with the comprehensive and objective clarity, as well as with the subjective excitement, humour and style that Michael Kirwan, a British Jesuit, brings to the task. These characteristics are very much in tune with those of Girard's own work. No wonder then that Girard himself says of this book: 'Really wonderful; an elegantly written initiation into the mimetic theory. I am lucky to have interpreters who understand what I want to say and who can write so well.'

Michael Serres has remarked that Girard's ideas 'can be understood by an eleven-year-old child'. But many sophisticated adults neither start from, nor reach, the level of children (in the gospel sense), and so they find Girard's writings perpetually baffling. Kirwan's combination of gifts make him exceptionally well qualified to guide us through Girard. He has the knowledge and expertise of the scholar, and the daring, directness and breadth of Girard himself. His qualifications, like Girard's, are initially literary, including a particular enthusiasm for Shakespeare. And, again like Girard, he also has competence in the human sciences, in philosophy and in theology. Kirwan did his doctoral research on Girard, and is certainly an admirer, but by no means a slavish one. Like all the more thoughtful followers of Girard, he is not content merely to repeat the master, but rather he explores new implications and applications of Girard's insights.

In the first three chapters, Kirwan follows the standard account of the three 'moments' of Girard's own personal process of discovery. Girard himself has epitomized these well in an interview with James Williams, which forms an epilogue to the still indispensable *Girard Reader*. Kirwan's first chapter, 'Desire is Mimetic', deals with mimetic theory, and outlines

Girard's important, basic description of mimesis as 'desire according to the desire of another'. The second chapter presents the idea of the scapegoat, with its implications of violent sacrifice (however well concealed), and of a sense of identity achieved by violence against others rather than by harmony with them. The third chapter Kirwan entitles 'Dionysus versus "The Crucified"'; here he describes Girard's discovery of the Bible's historical and continuing relevance for the gradual transcendence of violence. The definitive exposure of violence as deceptive and satanic occurs in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as it continues to empower his disciples through the Holy Spirit. Girard may be a sophisticated, contemporary thinker influenced by Nietzsche, the 707th indeed of the 'immortals' elected to the Academie Française. But he also has the courageous simplicity to let the gospel message of love, forgiveness and reconciliation stand at the heart of his thought.

With the Bible, and what it says about God's vindication of victims through the resurrection of Christ, all the clues in the thriller fall into place. At the outset of the fourth chapter, Kirwan attractively draws together his exposition of Girard by looking at the latter's account of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*—a play that, with its elements of rivalry, violence, counter-violence and ultimate reconciliation, powerfully illustrates Girard's theories. Kirwan then moves on to explore some of the many thinkers who have taken up Girard's ideas. The discussion here is obviously selective, but Kirwan gives many sound references for readers to follow up, both to Girard's disciples and to his critics.

The fifth and final chapter, 'The Future of Mimetic Theory', all too briefly indicates other exciting possibilities that lie ahead. Like Girard himself, Kirwan has few illusions: 'overcoming mimetic compulsions and turning our backs on configurations of sacred violence may sometimes seem like a superhuman task'. This is why constant conversion, creative imagination and Christ-like compassion are more than ever needed if the cosmic conflicts of these critical times are to be confronted and exposed for what they are. And one important resource for seeing through them and beyond them is Girard's discerning analysis of the profoundly influential reality of imitation in all its forms, ranging from the squabbles of infants to the Divine Trinity's loving, reciprocal non-competitive relationships—relationships in which we are all invited to share.

Billy Hewett SJ

***Promising Hope: Essays on the Suppression and Restoration of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 2003). 88 7041 597 3, pp. xii + 483, £15.00.**

In 2003, the British Province of the Society of Jesus celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of its Restoration in 1803. To understand that event in a country where there already had been a Jesuit presence since 1580, some background is necessary.

In 1773 Pope Clement XIV published *Dominus ac redemptor*, the papal letter that ordered the suppression of the Society of Jesus throughout the world. Through a series of totally unexpected events, well summarised by Thomas McCoog in the historical introduction to the book, a remnant of the Society remained canonically extant in Russia, in territory annexed when Poland had been partitioned in 1772. A few years after the suppression, Pope Pius VI gave verbal approval to the continued existence of the Society in Russia. In 1801 Pius VII publicly confirmed this in written form, and in 1802 the papal secretary of state, Cardinal Consalvi, confirmed that former Jesuits living outside Russia could aggregate themselves to the Society there while remaining in their own countries.

Jesuits had first come to England in 1580 and, despite persecution by the English government, had grown numerous enough (clandestinely to be sure) that an English province had been established in 1623. At the suppression in 1773 there were about 140 Jesuits working in England and Wales, and not quite thirty more in Ireland and Scotland. The English were among the first to associate themselves with the Russian Jesuits, and on 1 March 1803 the Jesuit Vicar-General in Russia appointed Marmaduke Stone, one of the pre-suppression English Jesuits, as first Provincial of the restored Society in England and of the missions in Scotland and Ireland.

To honour the bicentenary of that happy event, the British Province, as it is now called, commissioned this equally felicitous book. Its contents consist principally of a series of articles written over a forty-year period by Geoffrey Holt, all but one previously published in the *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu.* They deal with a great variety of circumstances of the English Jesuits from just before the suppression to the restoration of the Province itself. These studies by Fr Holt are complemented by an essay by Maurice Whitehead on educational development and corporate identity at the Academie Anglaise at Liège and at Stonyhurst; an article by Hubert Chadwick on the English adventures of the Paccanarists, that strange would-be Jesuit group that existed during the suppression; an essay by

Thomas Morrissey on Ireland and England and the restoration of the Society; and an afterword by Thomas McCoog.

In their totality, the articles by Fr Holt give a marvellously detailed picture, from the first, 'The State of the English Province on the Eve of the Suppression', to the last, 'A Bicentenary, 1803-2003'. In between, his other essays treat such matters as the ruinous effects on the English Province of the financial speculations of the French Jesuit Lavallette; free places at the colleges of St Omer and Bruges and at the Liège Academy; the English Jesuits and ex-Jesuits and the missions from 1773 to 1814; and some of the fascinating correspondence from Rome of the English Jesuit John Thorpe during the years leading up to and following the suppression. Father Holt's essays are models of clarity and scholarship founded on primary source material. So, too, are the other chapters of the book, and the afterword. This closes with the rescript of 1 January 1829 from Pope Leo XII, finally putting to rest the contention of some of the English vicars apostolic that the Society of Jesus was not truly and legitimately re-established in England.

On the basis of the introduction, the essays and the afterword alone, this book is a valuable contribution to an important period in Jesuit history. But five appendices, which take up almost half of the total pages in the book, enhance its value and usefulness. The first appendix contains, among other items, the first complete Latin texts and English translations of the letter of suppression of 1773, *Dominus ac redemptor*; the official public recognition of the Society of Jesus in Russia in 1801, *Catholicae fidei*; and the bull of universal restoration of 1814, *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*. There have been earlier partial English translations of the letter of suppression, but no previous published English versions of the documents of recognition and restoration. To make all of these available now in the vernacular is a great service.

The most important item in the second appendix is a catalogue of the English province in 1773, listing in alphabetical order the names of all the members of the province with dates of birth, of entrance into the Society, of last vows, and of places of residence. The enormous number of 'colleges' and residences will surely surprise readers. There are also lists of the suppressed English Jesuits alive in 1801, and of admissions to the Province between 1803 and 1807 as the restoration got under way. The third appendix details the financial arrangements among the English ex-Jesuits during the suppression, whereby they helped support each other and provided for the preservation of the property of the Society; the fourth gives eleven letters about the Paccanarists; and the fifth gives correspondence between the English Jesuits and with the Vicar-General in

St Petersburg on the re-establishment of the English Province. All of these original documents add further life to the essays in the books, as do the nineteen wonderful illustrations, all fully described and many in colour. Although one has to search them out throughout the volume, some of the allegorical engravings are particularly remarkable. Where, for instance, would one otherwise behold together Catherine the Great, King David the Psalmist, and a veiled woman wearing a Jesuit biretta (representing the suppressed Society)?

Any library that takes Jesuit history seriously will want to have this volume in its collection. Anyone who is interested in the Society of Jesus in England will also want to have it, and will find it a mine of important and interesting material. The present British Province has done its ancestors proud, has given its current and future members a standard against to which to measure themselves, and has provided to what ought to be a wide readership a genuine service.

John W. Padberg SJ

Alan Bartlett, *Humane Christianity: Arguing with the Classic Christian Spiritual Disciplines in the Light of Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52513 7, pp. xvi + 208, £12.95.

A book entitled *Humane Christianity* elicits a positive response before one opens the covers. Of course the Christianity which I (and, I have no doubt, you) desire to practise is humane: it is a Christianity that values humanity and has love as its driving force, that liberates us to lead a life of love here and now. This is a Christianity which is rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the Scripture of Jesus, rather than being an attempt to grasp, for instance, the mechanics of the process of salvation. It is a way of life in which we rejoice in the gifts of a generous Creator whilst accepting that we walk the way of the cross; a life illumined by freedom, not restricted by fear.

Bartlett comes from the evangelical tradition which, he says, 'has both nurtured and frustrated me' (p. xv), and his book is based on a series of Lent talks that he gave at Durham Cathedral in 2002 on the theme of 'Humane Christianity'. It is not surprising, therefore, that the book has a strong Anglican flavour, drawing on the insights of noted Anglican writers such as Richard Hooker and Jeremy Taylor, alongside St Benedict, St Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, and several modern novelists. Each chapter ends with a reflection on an incident taken from St Luke's Gospel

and with a prayer, the intention being to encourage deeper reflection and pondering on the material of the chapter. The prayers, drawn from a wide range of sources, I especially liked.

But what distinguishes this book from the general run of Lent books and books of spiritual encouragement is made clear by its subtitle. Bartlett roots his exposition of the humane practice of Christianity in a critical examination of the Church's history and of its continual failure to be humane. He sets out to rethink past patterns of behaviour and the understandings of Christianity that shaped them, and to advocate a more positive living of Christian values. As he says constantly, 'God is always the life-bringer'.

I found myself resonating happily with Bartlett's views as I read his introductory chapter. So it came as something of a jolt to discover that he was using what the book jacket describes as the 'harsh reality' of the Rule of St Benedict as a framework for his study,. The titles of its six chapters make this evident: 'Inhumane Christianity', 'From Poverty to Simplicity', 'From Obedience to Responsibility', 'From Chastity to the Joy of Sexuality', 'From Stability to Patience', 'From Conversion to Christ'. The traditional values of religious or consecrated life are challenged, and negative, anti-body, anti-life interpretations of them are emphasized. So consecrated life, as it has been lived, becomes the vehicle for Bartlett's presentation of the inhumane Christianity of the institutional Church, contrasted with the life-enhancing Christianity that he advocates—and that I, in spite of forty years in a religious congregation, advocate too.

This book certainly presents the rule of St Benedict in a very different light from the cache of pro-Benedictine books that have appeared in recent years. Bartlett is no Kathleen Norris or Esther de Waal. But underneath, as I read the book, I felt a constant niggle: what can a married Anglican priest rooted in the evangelical tradition really know about how consecrated life has been lived out? In spite of this, there was nevertheless something extremely refreshing about reading the unvarnished opinion of another committed Christian, an opinion that differs so markedly from the traditional Catholic reverence for religious life and its values. I found Bartlett's interpretation of the ideals of religious life stimulating and thought-provoking as well as challenging.

Of course, religious life has undoubtedly sustained inhumane attitudes and interpretations of the gospel message, and probably continues to do so. But at its best it has not been about the discipline of Bartlett's subtitle; it has been about love and life. It is more than capable of encouraging and enhancing the positive and humane and life-enhancing Christianity that is dear to Bartlett's heart. I thoroughly recommend this book to religious

everywhere, as well as to anyone who wants to reflect honestly on our unexamined assumptions about Christian living and the behaviours they underpin. An open-minded reading of Bartlett's book will only encourage authentic living of gospel values: God is always the life-bringer.

Judith Lancaster SHCJ

John Chryssavgis, *Light through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 524734 4, pp. 156, £9.95.

John Chryssavgis is a deacon of the Greek Orthodox Church, born in Australia, but deeply and personally acquainted with Greek Orthodoxy in its homeland, and especially among the monks of Mount Athos. As a deacon of long standing, he has served the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, and is now in the United States. In both countries, he has been teaching in seminaries, and has been especially concerned with the students' personal and pastoral formation. He has written several valuable books on pastoral theology, and has been courageous in his warnings about abuse, especially in a pastoral context. He is ideally qualified to make this contribution to the series *Traditions of Christian Spirituality*.

Deacon John's contribution is distinctive in several ways. He seeks to evoke something of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian in today's world. Its structure, therefore—in this respect unlike the other comparable volume in this series, Fr John McGuckin's *Standing in God's Holy Fire: The Byzantine Tradition*—is not historical. Rather, the author takes a major theme, the 'light through darkness' of the title, and works this out in various contexts of lived Orthodox experience: liturgy; knowledge of God as prayer; repentance; monasticism, both in itself and as a source of spiritual wisdom; concern for nature and the environment; and finally spiritual guidance and the place of the spiritual father in Orthodox life.

The authenticity of this presentation of Orthodox spirituality is guaranteed by the author's rootedness in the Orthodox tradition, and by his willingness to give us glimpses of his own experience. No one reading this book could come away without a deepened sense of what might be meant by Orthodox spirituality. But they might well be surprised, even if they are Orthodox themselves. The face Orthodoxy presents to the world is often one of considerable splendour: a liturgy that rejoices in a celebration of beauty, with beautiful icons, gorgeous ceremonial, and

deeply moving singing. Deacon John's picture seems to be in stark contrast: it is the experience of darkness that is central to his presentation, darkness that expresses the alienation from God caused by our sin and by our complicity in the sin of the world in which we live.

A pivotal chapter in the book concerns the place of tears and weeping as an expression of repentance, something that, as Deacon John remarks, seems much more prominent in the Orthodox tradition than in the West. Those, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, who say that the tradition of the 'dark night of the soul' is foreign to Orthodox spirituality will find much to think about here. But it is not at all a gloomy book: experiencing the darkness of sin and separation from God, rather than trying to evade it, is to make a beginning on the path towards the light, and it is this path that Deacon John is concerned with. For Orthodox spirituality is about the possibility of real change in ourselves, since, as we respond to Christ and share in his death, we are promised a share in his resurrection too.

The path towards the light is one on which we need help, and it is for this reason that Deacon John devotes so much time to monasticism. For monasticism is seen in the Orthodox tradition not only as a way of committing oneself seriously to progress along this path, long and hard though it is, but also as a seedbed, as it were, for those who can help others on the spiritual path as spiritual elders, or *startsi*. Another chapter of Deacon John's book gives brief sketches of three such elders of the twentieth century: Fr Sophrony, who founded a monastery in Essex; Elder Joseph the Hesychast of Mount Athos, whose disciples have fostered a revival of monasticism in the United States; and the Elder Paisios, also of the Holy Mountain.

A chapter that might occasion some surprise is that on ecology and the environment, but Deacon John (who has been personally involved in the current Oecumenical Patriarch's endeavours in this respect) makes clear how this grows naturally out of the tradition he has been expounding, though he could have made this even clearer by revealing the source of his remark, 'whoever does not love trees does not love God', namely Elder Amphilochios of Patmos, who died in 1970.

This book is, to repeat, a thoroughly authentic presentation of Orthodox spirituality. Some might, however, find it 'impractical', in that, though there is much on, say, the Jesus prayer and icons, there is nothing about how Orthodox use these in prayer. It seems to me, however, that Chyssavgis is wise not to offer such material. A series like *Traditions of Christian Spirituality* runs the risk of encouraging a pick-and-mix approach to the spiritual life. Deacon John avoids this danger; he evokes, rather, a strong sense of the wholeness of the Orthodox tradition—a wholeness

which, precisely as such, can call forth authentic responses from those of other spiritual traditions.

We have here, then, a demonstration of how a deeply traditional spirituality can be presented in a thoroughly modern idiom. Indeed, Deacon John also demonstrates how characteristically modern concerns, for instance the concern for nature and the environment, may find already articulated in the tradition principles that could provoke deeper and more radical reflection. There is nothing cosy about such demanding and prophetic spirituality.

Andrew Louth

Sarah Jane Boss, *Mary* (London: Continuum, 2003). 0 8264 5788 6, pp. xi + 156, £14.99.

In this book Sarah Jane Boss continues her writings on the Virgin Mary by looking theologically at Mary's relationship to God's fundamental work: the creation. Boss brings together a rich variety of traditional Marian interpretations from the pre-modern era, and connects these with some modern secular theories and philosophies, notably those of Rupert Sheldrake and James Lovelock. Her aim is to develop a 'green mariology', an account of Mary's part in the theology of nature.

Part of the book's value lies in its presentation of traditional Catholic teaching on Mary, and in its succinct explanations of terminology that might be unfamiliar to the general reader. However, Boss also has her own distinctive claim: 'the Blessed Virgin Mary shares an identity with the elemental matrix, or *chaos*, of which the world is created' (p. 4). As a result all created matter is sacred, for when Christ unites himself to Mary he also unites himself to 'the elemental stuff that is symbolized by the unformed waters of Genesis' (p. 5), the stuff which is itself the foundation for the whole of the cosmos. The Annunciation parallels and recapitulates the creation. Once the creation and the Annunciation are paired in this way, then the incarnation is not seen solely as a response to human sin. Boss follows John Duns Scotus, who argued that the purpose of the incarnation was the glorification of God's creation, thereby setting the fall and redemption within a broader framework of creation and glorification. The movement of the incarnation leads to the glorification of 'all the living and dying creatures … with whom we share our elemental matter' (p. 16).

Drawing particularly on 'The May Magnificat', a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, Boss elaborates upon the association of Mary with the natural world often found in Christian devotion to the Virgin. The theological truths expressed here require of us a thoroughgoing spiritual re-orientation:

> To be properly concerned with Mary as she is known in doctrine and devotion, is to be equally concerned with the relationship between God and creation, and the human responsibilities which follow from that. (p. 40)

It is against such a background that judgments should be made about what sorts of technology may legitimately be devised and used.

Boss attaches considerable importance to the mariology of Francisco Suárez, which focuses specifically on the physical relationship between Mary and Jesus. For Suárez, the flesh of Mary remained always in Christ. Moreover, since Christ was also united to the eternal Son and in immediate relationship to the Father, he established a connection between heaven and earth. Boss develops Suárez' vision by invoking the solidarity of Mary's flesh with all other matter, and on that basis claims that the connection extends to the creation as a whole.

The book also contains a fascinating study of the mysterious black Madonnas, the blackness of which is seen to evoke the primal darkness, or the chaotic matter of which the earth is made. Boss discusses various theories about their spiritual significance, including that of Jacques Bonvin. Bonvin believes that the formation of the human soul corresponds to the earth's energy. The soul has an innate capacity to be moved from the bad to the good, from darkness to light. The black Madonna symbolizes this process.

For Ramon Llull, it was not simply that God created the world from Chaos; rather, the Chaos itself was made by God out of nothing, and constitutes an elemental matrix, in which all things are potentially present, and 'in virtue of which bodily things as such participate in one another by identity' (p. 89). If, then, Christ's conception in his mother's womb is truly the re-creation of the world from the foundations of the cosmos, then, Boss argues, there must be some sense in which there is a true identity between Mary and the elemental matrix or Chaos. In other words, Mary is in some way identified with the very foundations of creation. The black Virgin thus represents a challenge for human society as it tries to cut itself off from its origins, from the primeval forest. She summons us instead to know and love the Chaos from which we try to separate ourselves, and to know it as made by God, beloved of God.

Quite apart from its stimulating content, the book contains charming illustrations, delightful extracts of poetry, and prose of a quality to match:

> God the Father created all things—from the breathtaking galaxy of the clear night sky, down to the softest damp blades of green moss. (p. 12)

Anne Inman

Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52406 8, pp. 224, £10.95.

Controversy about the morality of euthanasia and assisted suicide seems unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future. The standard arguments go round and round each other, and there seems to be no way forward. Nigel Biggar's contribution, however, does move the debate forward by showing how careful examination of the different positions can lead to a mature judgment.

The virtues of this book include its structure, its tone of consistent charity, its realistic examples, and the clarity of its exposition, marked by excellent summaries at key points and at the end of each chapter. Biggar considers criticisms from both theology and philosophy of the traditional Christian position, focusing particularly on the idea of human life as intrinsically valuable, on the rule that the intentional killing of the innocent is always immoral, and on contemporary 'slippery slope' arguments. Each chapter opens with a presentation of the criticisms, which are then distilled into a set of main objections. Responses to these objections are then made, leading to an overall conclusion. The book's form is not unlike that of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*.

This may make the book sound dry, even a little tedious. It is not. The presentation of the arguments is careful without being pedantic. The exposition is not only of the *content* of ethical positions, but also of the *how* of ethical thinking. This enables those who have only examined the various positions in general to assess the quality of the reasoning behind their conclusions. Biggar is at pains to identify common ground among the wide range of Christian and secular authors against whom he tests his arguments, so as to highlight precisely the points of discussion. If the reader does not agree with him, his structure and approach make it possible to see clearly at what point the difference of opinion arises.

Biggar considers a set of practical and empirical questions: How possible is it to settle the limits of permissible euthanasia or assisted suicide? What might be the consequences of limits that are too relaxed? How likely are these consequences? Although Biggar's answers to these practical questions are decisive in his argument, the questions are ultimately about the application of moral principles. These can be summarised as:

- the lives of responsible human individuals are intrinsically valuable;
- one ought never to take human life intentionally, or to accept its taking, without proportionate reason;
- society ought to foster in its members a disposition to help other people flourish, even when they are in a state of pain or handicap.

Biggar identifies many of the problems arising when a culture regards individual autonomy, without qualification, as the paramount value. For example, the view presupposed in many of the arguments for euthanasia and assisted suicide requires that I should respect another's decision because each individual is the absolute arbiter of their own value. I cannot question or criticize the decision because it is not accountable to any reason outside itself. There is, in fact, nothing to discuss. This kind of respect assumes that human beings are essentially cut off from each other, isolated monads, operating in private moral worlds of their own conjuring.

Biggar's theological reason for rejecting this atomistic individualism rests on Karl Barth's vision of the dignity of our individual vocation from God. Barth too believes that I should respect the special dignity of another individual. But the dignity is not the individual's arbitrary invention; it is rooted in a vocation issued by God. Thus a vocation is not *a*moral; it occurs *within* the bounds set by the moral law. So my perception of my own vocation is accountable to moral criteria. It is open to critical discussion and, if I am truly concerned to hear it correctly, I will gladly enter into dialogue with others, joining them in the common task of trying to discern the Word of the one God, and thereby constituting a human community.

The reality of community and of its demands on each member is at the heart of Biggar's analysis. All morality is located within responsible relationships—including the responsibility towards others of those who are themselves undergoing severe suffering. He argues that there is good reason to suppose that the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia might render patients more vulnerable to careless or malevolent pressure to end

their lives. This, in turn, might undermine society's general affirmation of the intrinsic value of the lives of human individuals and its concomitant commitment to support them in adversity. If the demands of patients would encourage such legalisation, then a patient's choice simply to endure suffering, rather than asking to be killed, could be an act of love, and even of justice. This example of attention to the moral responsibility of each person demonstrates the breadth of the discussion, and the ways in which an ethics of responsibility can highlight otherwise neglected issues.

Whether the reader is already familiar with the detail of the debate, or is coming to it from a more general background, there are valuable insights to be found here. This book is highly recommended.

Catherine Cowley ra

***Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, edited by Anne Y. Koestler and Barbara Searle (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical Press, 2004). 0 8146 2943 1, pp. xviii + 270, £24.95.**

The publication of this book in 2004 could not have been more timely. As the 'full, conscious and active participation' in the liturgy demanded by the Second Vatican Council comes under scrutiny (and indeed subjection to a certain amount of revisionist backsliding), it is vital to keep in our active memory these ten texts by Mark Searle.

Searle was an English liturgical scholar who lived through the changes brought about by Vatican II, and provided us with some remarkable writing on such topics as pastoral liturgy, liturgy as metaphor, and the interaction between liturgy and social justice. He had a short but extraordinarily productive life, succumbing to cancer on 16 August 1992 at the age of 51.

The articles presented here appear in chronological order, with thoughtful introductions from colleagues and friends who are themselves imbued with Searle's pastoral liturgical vision. Those who are involved in the preparation of children for Christian initiation should not miss what is still regarded as a seminal study, 'Infant Baptism Reconsidered' (1987). It is particularly opportune to have available and in print the three articles at the heart of the volume: 'Reflections on Liturgical Reform' (1982), 'New Tasks, New Methods: The Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies' (1983), and 'Images and Worship', first published in *The Way* in 1984.

In the first of these, Searle analyzes what progress has been made in liturgical reform and what remains to be done. Twenty-two years after Vatican II, he finds it troubling that the leaders of the Church have progressed little, if at all, in inculcating a true sense of active participation by all the people in the celebration of their liturgical life—because of 'the bishop's unwillingness to rock the boat … the sheep look up and are not fed' (p. 92). Moreover Searle's understanding of 'reverence' has not yet been realised. He states:

> Reverence … goes beyond a preoccupation with sacred things. Let it be a reverence for the word as well as the sacrament, for the world as well as the Church, for the people of God as well as for the ordained and the vowed. (p. 99)

The second article marks Searle's presentation of a new field of liturgical scholarship: pastoral liturgy. We have highly trained and effective historians of liturgy, and also theologians of liturgy, he argues: what we need now are interdisciplinary scholars who can draw on different academic skills to explore the actual practice of liturgy and the ways in which this practice could be enriched and developed. Such work would assist the Church by,

> … serving not only the interests of the official leadership, but attending to the experiences, frustrations, and hopes of the Christian people as a whole, committed as we are to the proposition that the sacred liturgy is the worship of the whole Church and that its benefits are intended even for the least of God's people. (p. 120)

In the third article, Searle reminds us of the importance of the imagination in worship. Liturgy is more about gestures, symbols and tradition than about words, text and rubrics. This article is one of a number of responses to Romano Guardini's challenging suggestion of 1964 that in our liturgies 'an "epiphany" can take place' (p. 128). Searle invites us to regard the ritual as an opportunity; it is not a collection of texts to be 'got through', but the means by which we come into contact with the Holy Spirit through the reverence we bring to our liturgical prayer. We should begin with recollection in our preparation:

> In fact, it is essential that one practise such recollection oneself before attempting to turn it into a programme for improving parish liturgy. If those responsible for liturgy—the celebrant, the musicians, those responsible for the readings, the selection of songs, the composition of the bidding prayers—themselves come to the liturgy this way, the effect will register itself in the celebration without a word being said. (p. 136)

A few of the selections are of particular interest to readers in the United States of America, especially Searle's remarkably astute prediction of how church and social structures have fallen into an ideological quagmire, 'Private Religion, Individualistic Society, and Common Worship' (1990). A warning to the rest of us, perhaps, this book provides a vital testimony of the vision of a man imbued with a passionate love for liturgy and for the Church.

Andrew Cameron-Mowat SJ

Keith Ward, *The Case for Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004). 1 85168 337 2, pp. viii + 246, £16.99.

Keith Ward outlines four points as his programme for this, his latest book on the study of religions: it will demolish a set of fashionable arguments against religion; it will explain and assess the significance of the differences between religions; it will offer a rational justification for religious belief; and it will explain why established religions must change if they are to be forces for good in the modern world. No small agenda, then. Yet he does in fact cover all these points, neatly and persuasively, in what is a wide-ranging and sharply argued book. The reader is not distracted by large amounts of scholarly detail or bibliographical footnotes; Professor Ward wears his learning lightly, with the result that the style of the book is entirely readable—indeed really lively—without ever giving the impression that the research behind it is sketchy or unreliable.

Ward opposes various arguments which reduce religion to its most primitive forms and then assert that it has been superseded by science, or psychology, or social engineering. He disputes the claim that the 'real essence' of religion (if there were such a thing) is to be found in its earliest manifestations. If the essence of the science of chemistry, for example, could be found in its earliest form—alchemy—it would be easy to see why we would not need to pay it much attention. But the absurdity of this proposition is clear: though it may have originated in alchemy, contemporary chemistry cannot be dismissed in the same way. Analogous criticisms of religion, Ward argues, are equally absurd.

Attempts have been made to show that religion, in its essence, is simply a way of explaining and trying to control threatening events, a primitive mechanism of explanation which has obviously been superseded by modern science; or that it is a way of handling primitive fears and complexes which are best dealt with by modern psychology; or that it is a

way of ensuring social co-operation and stability, a goal much better attained by democracy and the rule of law. Ward shows how these theories fail in quite similar ways: none of them makes much attempt to defend the assumption that to criticize primitive religion is to criticize the essence of religion and therefore all religions. And none even begins to explain the way in which religion actually functions. Such oversimplified theories have encouraged a very incomplete search for evidence, and have not been properly assessed against other more positive accounts which fit the facts at least as well.

Ward considers a very large number of writers on religion, including Frazer, Darwin, Evans-Pritchard, Durkheim, Marx, William James, Freud, and Jung. He writes:

> There are explanations, such as those of Tylor and Frazer, which see religion as a primitive form of science, long outdated. There are explanations in psychological terms, showing how religious beliefs originate in various states of mind, usually subconscious which rise to consciousness in dreams and visions. There are explanations in social terms, seeing how religious beliefs help to consolidate certain forms of social order, or perhaps compensate for the inability to gain social satisfaction. A modern variant, evolutionary psychology, tries to show how some beliefs have been conducive to survival in human history and have continued to be selected because of their efficacy in sustaining certain sorts of society. (p. 54)

Ward argues that none of these accounts is complete, and that if they are taken as such they are seriously misleading. They share the mistaken assumption that the only important feature of religious beliefs is that they are means to some (often unacknowledged) end. From the point of view of believers, however, religious beliefs are intended to express truths, and cannot be understood or evaluated unless this function is also taken seriously. Once it is, the apparent incompatibilities between different faiths will make generalising about 'religion' seem problematic.

The second part of Ward's book consists of an examination of the major world religions. He has already set the scene for this in his treatment of the Enlightenment, which insists on the need for rationality; but, interestingly and controversially, he prefers to rest his case for religion on the reasonable interpretation of experience rather than on evidence in any scientific sense. This sets up the framework within which he reaches his final conclusions. He denies Hick's view that all religions are equally true interpretations of an unknowable ultimate reality: the claims of different religions are surely mutually incompatible, and so cannot equally be true. Moreover, there is no general agreement that that the divine reality is unknowable. For Ward, there is truth in the interpretations

offered by all the great religions, in that they afford some grasp of what the Transcendent Being is like. But none of them have the whole truth, and some of their beliefs will turn out to be straightforwardly false. All can learn from each of the others. Any individual believer will of course wish to say that his or her own beliefs are true, or at least closer to the truth than any others. One cannot coherently say, 'I believe this but I don't think it is true'. But believers can also admit that they should be both tolerant of believers in other traditions and, at least in principle, willing to learn from them.

The conclusions of this book are subtle and nuanced. But the argument throughout is non-technical; the style is extremely readable and on occasions even humorous; and the deft use of counterexamples to demolish over-simple claims is very persuasive. It is never dull. It is an admirable addition to Professor Ward's already enormous contribution to the field.

Gerard J. Hughes SJ

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, *At the Heart of the World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52481 5, pp. x + 118, £8.95.

Roderick Strange, *The Risk of Discipleship: The Catholic Priest Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52512 9, pp. x + 166, £10.95.

What emerges from the pages of *At the Heart of the World* is Cardinal Cormac's immense love for the Church, and his firm conviction that it has a vital role to play at the heart of today's world. With honesty and a touching simplicity, he draws upon his own lived experience: his faith-filled environment from early childhood; his years as a student in Rome; the insights and blessings that have come from years of pastoral service in various settings. Inspired by his namesake, Cormac the Pilgrim, who 'went beyond what was deemed possible', he focuses on the Vatican II image of the Church as the 'pilgrim people of God'.

Some readers might therefore expect a 'cutting edge' kind of exploration into the conversation between Church and world, the 'launching out into the deep' to which John Paul II has called us. Instead, what we encounter is a more familiar kind of book, full of wise reflections, evoking an experience of the Church that most Roman Catholics would

recognise and feel comfortable with. The Cardinal voices concerns raised by many—about the evangelization of young people, the nurturing of family life and support for single parents—and looks forward to a renewed ecumenism marked by our working together for a community of justice and peace. From his rich pastoral experience he offers practical suggestions for revitalising parish life, for example by promoting small communities in order to develop 'a spirit of communion'. This is a gentle book that will bring comfort to many.

Perhaps it is only in the final chapter that the Cardinal touches the heart of the matter for our postmodern world. He realises each person's need to experience 'a God who speaks to us about who we are', who tells us 'that we matter, that we are forgiven and cherished', and who 'accepts our lives with love'. In our time, he writes, we live in an 'epoch of homelessness', not realising that our true home is in the One who will never abandon us, and who loves us with an unfailing love. Too often, we are bereft of 'spiritual fathering', an anchor or bedrock that allows us to go beyond the belief that we have 'freedom without reference to binding moral truths'. The author never fails to encourage his readers by stressing the compassion of the Creator: 'If the fundamental malady in our society is the unsatisfied hunger for some meaning in our existence, our healing lies in coming to know that God, the Creator of all that is, loves us unconditionally'.

Nevertheless, it is the Church which is at the heart of the Cardinal's world. It is the air that he breathes, the context for finding meaning and depth in our often confusing world. And perhaps that is why this book is limited in its capacity to appreciate the radical disclosure that *the world itself* is the primary revelation of God's presence. All the examples in this book are taken from within the Church's life and institutions. This is an ordered and predictable place from which to evaluate the precariousness of existence. But is it too narrow a lens through which to read the reality of a world both chaotic and compassionate, both cruel and beautiful? Is there not always the danger of standing and observing, from too far outside, the raw turmoil of a swiftly expanding, ever-challenging universe?

I had somewhat similar reflections when I read *The Risk of Discipleship*. Roderick Strange is direct, easy to read and anecdotal. Shaped around a narrative of personal experience, his book incorporates other people's stories, experiences and wisdom. It is also, in the best sense, traditional, being firmly grounded in Scripture, history and theology.

Strange presents his observations with a graceful humility, and is willing to hold together, without rushing into judgment, the inevitable contradictions that any exploration into priesthood brings. There is a

refreshing openness to the insights and beliefs of others. Above all, I was impressed by the spirit of honest searching that coloured every page. The author recognises that questions are as important as answers, and this attitude runs throughout his consideration of the topics discussed in the book. These include the notions of servanthood and leadership; the risks involved in being a priest; the example of Jesus; the place of prayer; celibacy and commitment. Fr Strange bravely faces the reality of today's clerical crises, with which we are all too familiar, and finds rays of hope in those brooding clouds. The whole book, in fact, has a lift and an optimism that will nourish the anxious hearts of many priests.

This book is full of good, interesting and helpful things. But what it lacks, I feel, is a heart—a central, powerful passion that would give all the chapters a unifying vision. If the Incarnation took place so that God could now be revealed within the human condition, then the work of the priest (indeed all our teaching, catechizing and pastoral ministering) is to discover the reality of God in every human experience. Does not Karl Rahner hold that the sacraments celebrate what is 'already there' within our daily lives?

For me, then, 'the risk of discipleship' lies in taking the Incarnation literally. The two main implications for the priest are, first of all, that he must forever endeavour to become as authentically human as he possibly can. Only then will his very presence reflect the presence of God. 'We preach who we are.' Secondly, his work must be focused on revealing to others the hidden divinity in their own humanity. 'God became human so that humans could become divine.'

In fairness to Fr Strange, he does, throughout the subject matter of his book, try to hold the human and the divine together, but in a 'both/and', 'as well as', 'but also', kind of way. Yet there is a raw reality about Incarnation. No longer are there two separate strands in our lives: one human, the other divine. Christians, rather, are called to recognise the divine *within* the human. Beyond more *knowledge about* God, young and old today want an *experience of* God. It is the work of the priest to make this possible.

Both books make for fruitful spiritual reading. They are written by thoughtful and experienced authors. I recommend them highly. But what needs to be emphasized clearly in all such literature is that Jesus changed our lives from the inside out. Incarnation was the affirmation of the goodness of creation itself. Maybe what is needed now is a rousing call to all of us to realise the amazing power we carry, an act of trust in the holiness of everyone and everything good, an affirmation that it is from our very earthiness that the light of our salvation will continue to come.

With fresh language, the Church and the world today need to be offered new horizons of hope and imagination. They need to be challenged to be true to themselves—carefully and compassionately fashioned in God's own image, a divine work of art. For that is the delightful mystery lying *at the heart of the world*. And revealing it is part of *the risk of discipleship*.

Daniel O'Leary

John J. O'Donnell, *Karl Rahner: Life in the Spirit* (Rome: Gregorian UP, 2004). 88 7652 982 9, pp. 140, £7.50.

Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004). 0 415 25965 7, pp. x + 162, £17.99.

Grace, God's self-gift, can be experienced, in moments both of joy and of emptiness. Grace may not always be recognised as grace, but the human person is always searching for ultimate meaning and fulfilment, a quest which culminates in surrender to Holy Mystery. Such were the convictions at the heart of Rahner's theology and spirituality, the subject of what has turned out, so sadly, to be the last book written by John O'Donnell. Until his sudden and premature death at Easter this year, O'Donnell was dean of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. He presents many of Rahner's key themes attractively and accessibly. In his writings on grace, on the Church, on the sacraments, on Mary and the saints, and on other topics, we see Rahner helping to work out the full implications of the theological renewal inaugurated by Vatican II in all aspects of the Christian life. O'Donnell provides excellent orientation for those wanting to know more about Rahner's spirituality and theology, and gives brief references at the end of each chapter to the relevant Rahnerian writings. O'Donnell always wore his learning lightly—here he could also let something of Rahner's own voice come through.

Karen Kilby's work, on the other hand, is a book for specialists, concentrating in an innovative way on the relationship between Rahner's philosophical and theological writings. Kilby keeps her distance from standard interpretations of Rahner that, in her view, have tended to emphasize his 'foundationalist' stance—interpretations that see everything in Rahner as based on an indisputable prior knowledge of being, or on an implicit knowledge of God. Kilby suggests instead that it might be possible to offer a 'non-foundationalist' reading of Rahner, a

reading of Rahner's theology as 'logically independent' from his philosophy.

This claim seems doubtful. Rahner himself saw philosophy as an indispensable dialogue-partner for theology. Some of his philosophical premises, such as the assumption that everyone has an experience of God, may well need nuancing, but his theology remains linked to a philosophical vision, albeit one rather more tentative than what Kilby identifies as 'foundationalism'.

Where Kilby is right—and where she and O'Donnell are at one—is in her insistence that Rahner was primarily a theologian. Rahner engaged with philosophy as part of a wider theological enterprise about God's grace and about our experience of that grace. These convictions are ultimately founded on Christian revelation (which for Rahner includes both the text of Scripture and the universal reality of grace). But they presuppose a philosophical account of the reality to which grace is given—and here it is that Rahner's more philosophical works, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word*, find their place. It is God's desire to communicate God's own self to humanity; this communication can be experienced by each person, albeit in different ways; human beings are created for this gift of God's self. Rahner's one desire was to express this mystery; and it is a sign of his creativity that he can continue, twenty years after his death, to stimulate such lively discussion as we find in these two books.

Declan Marmion SM

John O'Donnell's book on Rahner is available from The Way and can be ordered online at www.theway.org.uk/bookservice.shtml.

Jeremy Young, *The Cost of Certainty: How Religious Conviction Betrays the Human Psyche* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52580 3, pp. viii + 191, £12.95.

John B. Thomson, *Church on the Edge?* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). 0 232 52566 8, pp. x + 114, £10.95.

Jeremy Young is an Anglican priest and a psychotherapist. His book records soundings taken in a sea of suffering, the anguish of afflicted souls who have been tormented by what he calls 'the gospel of conditional love'. This 'gospel' is anything but good news. It is the message that God loves and accepts us, but only on certain conditions. These conditions are

rarely spelt out. What is usually intoned from the pulpit are comforting words to the effect that we are welcomed by the good Lord just as we are. The conditions lurk, as it were, in the small print. The anxious soul comes to feel that requirements must be fulfilled if God's approval is to be won. The struggle to meet these requirements often proves deeply damaging. There are, it seems, a lot of sick Christians out there.

We hear much in this deeply-felt book about 'the Christian complex', 'the Christian shadow', 'the Christian persona' and so on, in other words about the manifold mechanisms by which the devout try (and generally fail) to cope with what they feel the Church demands of them. Whatever pieties they hear to the contrary, they sense at a visceral level that their forgiveness and acceptance by God will happen only if they put their lives in order first. Feelings of guilt and failure may be repressed, but they become a sump of poison and a continuing source of debilitating neuroses. The Church's cruelty extends beyond the Inquisition, the Crusades, and certain Irish laundries.

Young believes that what does most injury spiritually and psychologically to church people is the insistence on certainty. Nothing is more harmful for our spiritual health than being made to think that we can and must *know.* The mysteries of faith can never be susceptible to the kind of demonstration or proof which grounds our knowledge in the empirical sciences, and yet Christians are often made to feel bad if they have doubts about them.

As a therapist, Young is dealing all the time with the victims of religious abuse. His plea is not for more ordained psychiatrists. The need is not for casualty clearing-stations to cope with the wounded, but for a Church more aware of the necessarily provisional nature of its assertions, and thus more affirming of the doubtful. Young calls for a 'spirituality of uncertainty'. Our contingent ecclesiastical structures and formularies, he says, must be reformed on the foundation of 'our ultimate ignorance of God'. Typically Anglican though this may sound, the transformation of attitude which it implies is a long way off, even in liberal-minded Churches.

John Thomson's book about the Church on the edge has a question mark tacked onto the title. It is hard to see why, because Thomson has little doubt both that the Church is now marginal in society and that the margin is the right place for it to be. Like Jeremy Young, Thomson writes as an Anglican whose view of the Church has been shaped by his own experience, though he also owes much to Stanley Hauerwas, on whom he wrote his doctoral thesis. He feels that much of his own story—childhood in Uganda, teaching in South Africa in the last days of apartheid, ministry

in an inner-city parish—has been lived out on the margins, and episodes from this story illustrate his study. Thomson is half-apologetic about the autobiographical and colloquial tone of his book but he need not be. Criticisms of the Church carry more weight coming from someone ready to own up to not getting everything right. (Thomson tells us that he had his ears pierced and his head shaved to identify with his tough parishioners—and then discovered that they preferred their priests to look like priests.)

The book's chapter headings convey its approach. 'Marginal speech': the Church must learn the cultural 'dialects' spoken on the edges of society, but it must not betray its own 'mother tongue'. 'Marginal worship': again, what the Church does must be attentive to the local context but not in thrall to it. 'Marginal mission': Churches on the margin must learn 'to loiter with intent' (the author has an ear for the nice turn of phrase). Thomson is not in the least impressed by Churches with huge congregations and powerful charismatic leaders. Our exemplar, that singularly liminal figure Jesus of Nazareth, did things rather differently. 'Marginal story': Thomson has a suggestive image of how scripture should be used by the Church. Scripture is like a musical score which must be played if it is to be more than print on a page. To turn a score into music is an interpretative process, reflecting the dispositions of the players; but the players must, of course, learn to play 'in concert'. So the marginal Church makes its music its own in its specific situation, studying the biblical 'score' among its members.

In subsequent chapters, with similar catchy titles, Thomson reflects further on the character of the Church and its ministry at the margins. He is sometimes content to be eloquent about ideals, rather than engaging with practical questions about what can actually be done. Occasionally he degenerates into in-talk ('minster models of ministry') which will only make sense to Anglican clergy. But much of what he says is both pertinent and perceptive.

John Pridmore

***The Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*, edited by Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (London: Continuum, 2004). 0 8264 7782 8, pp. xx + 194, £16.99.**

For many Christians, sacramentality is the theological foundation for all aspects of Christian faith. For others, sacramental language is a benign but foreign language; and for yet others, sacraments are anathema, associated with misguided priorities. A new book on sacramentality might seem, against this background, divisive. But in fact, the series of essays which make up *The Gestures of God* raise questions of great importance, and show quite clearly why we should care about how sacramentality is understood in the twenty-first century.

The eleven pieces in the book originate from a consultation on sacrament and sacramentality at St George's House, at Windsor Castle, in the UK, in 2003. The ecumenical, international gathering was convened to address two particular concerns. The first concern was the perception that sacramental theology, as traditionally conceived, seems to 'feature less and less on academic teaching and research programmes in many parts of the world' (p. xvi). The second concern was that the 'sacramental reality of the Church itself' seems to be vanishing as a theological starting point for internal and ecumenical discussions. In her introduction, Christine Hall speculates that 'the concepts of "sacrament" and "sacramental theology" have been drifting apart' in recent theology—partly because of the theological narrow-mindedness of much past writing on sacraments, partly because the concept of sacramentality is just not understood. The consultation sought to move beyond this impasse in four ways. Firstly, it was trying to overcome the sense of a dichotomy between incarnational and eschatological emphases. Secondly, it was gathering information internationally about how understandings of the sacraments have changed. Thirdly, it was encouraging further work on the biblical roots of sacramental theology. Finally, it was challenging scholars to work on the complex 'philosophical and theological paradigms that continue to govern sacramental theologies' as those theologies are inculturated and contextualised in very different settings and circumstances (p. xviii).

The presidential address at the symposium was given by Geoffrey Rowell, Anglican Bishop in Europe. 'The Significance of Sacramentality' is an apologia for a sacramental world view, set in the context of the Feast of St Michael and All Angels. Rowell uses the feast to remind us that the sacraments are not about some religiously legitimated escape from the everyday world, but rather about that world's transformation. Rowell

pleads for a concept of the sacramental that can counter 'the fleshless word' (p. 15). The Word was made flesh; we are graced into participation in the fleshed Word. A Christianity of the fleshless word seems perverse. If we are to communicate the faith fully, and draw ourselves and others into authentic worship, we need to engage the imagination.

From the remaining ten essays on various aspects of sacramental theory, three are particularly noteworthy. In 'Re-conceiving the Sacramental', David Brown, professor of theology at Durham, challenges us to recognise the pervasive influence of a utilitarian approach in our theology of sacrament, and to repudiate it. Such thinking has only served to promote a disenchantment with the working of God in and through the world. '[T]he Church has been its own worst enemy in endorsing purposive or instrumental rationality as the norm … and so contributed to the further disenchantment of God's world.' (p. 23) There is a place for the claim that sacraments need to be relevant to people's lives. But it needs to be balanced by a sense that the Christian sacraments bring something unique, something which is more than what we happen to find useful—particularly when contemporary society has now lost a sense of the divine dimension of public life. True celebration should not be about end products; rather, the creation's mediation of God is 'a sacramental reality to be valued in its own right irrespective of what further benefits it may bring' (p. 34).

More sobering is the wake-up call to the Church by John Drane, entitled 'Contemporary Culture and the Reinvention of Sacramental Spirituality'. The Church needs to capitalise on the widespread 'postmodern' openness to spirituality and to sacramentality found in so many young people today. For Drane, the Church's mission is not about asking 'How can we make people spiritual?' but rather, 'How can we connect with their innate spirituality and point them towards Christ?' (p. 48) There are important connections between a reformed missiology and a sacramental world view. If we can acknowledge the human need for transcendence, and honour the ways in which created goodness expresses that need, then we are well placed to draw individual spiritualities into the larger 'story' of salvation history (p. 50).

In an essay called 'Sacred Persons', Timothy Jenkins points up the difficulties for sacramental life arising from the 'homogenization of space and time' (p. 58) in modern democratic society. In the name of equality, differentiations between persons and relationships have been eroded. But the sacramental presupposes a kind of collective representation of the sacred in particular places and people. It can only occur successfully in a

society which can sustain differentiation and particularisation, and which can move beyond the banality of repetitive individualism.

Other topics covered include the Old Testament roots of Christian sacramentality (Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis); an Eastern Christian sacramental theology (Peter C. Bouteneff); what contemporary feminist theologies contribute to the renewal of sacramental theology (Susan A. Ross); sacred space and image (Jyoti Sahi); the power of the metaphorical word in the sacramental language of justice (David N. Power OMI); preaching and the fullness of sensate liturgy (Ann Loades); and music-making as sacramental (Jeremy S. Begbie).

The overall impression of this book is rich indeed. It says much about how perceptions and emphases in sacramental theology are changing. But perhaps the issues will not be fully addressed unless we can also hear the voices of 'non-sacramental' Churches, with their profound challenges to assumptions that all concerned with this book—and indeed the present reviewer—hold dear.

Lizette Larson-Miller

Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad, 2004). 0 8245 2138 2, pp. xiv + 290, £14.99.

Mark McIntosh, an Episcopalian priest and theologian, teaches at the Jesuit-run Loyola University in Chicago. He has already established himself as a leading figure in the younger generation of scholars who are articulating the re-engagement of spirituality and theology. Following his widely praised *Mystical Theology*, McIntosh here turns his attention to the Christian tradition of spiritual discernment, and again produces a demanding but important book. For McIntosh, discernment is both practical (it addresses how Christians should go about seeking truth) and theological (it implies a certain view of God's self-communication and of God's interaction with human knowing).

McIntosh begins with the theory of knowledge, with the questions of what is there to be known (is there truth or merely opinion?), of what it is to know, and of we come to know truly. He identifies two dominant views on such questions in modern Western culture. The first suggests that there is a truth to be known in what we see (but equally, that by and large what we see is all there is). The second suggests that there are only 'dominant views of reality'—that is, all we have are our perceptions,

perceptions which are necessarily culturally constrained. McIntosh's case is that the Christian tradition of spiritual discernment amounts to a 'third way', and therefore makes a major, though overlooked, contribution to human understandings of knowledge and knowing. 'Discernment', as developed in a range of Christian spiritual traditions, offers a genuinely *critical* theory and practice of truth, but of a kind that cannot be accommodated purely to scientific or philosophical perspectives.

McIntosh's book has three main parts. In Part 1, 'History and Theology of Spiritual Discernment', he offers a very creative general account of discernment in terms of a permanent cycle of five 'moments'. The cycle begins with God (thus originating in a contemplative stance), and then moves us to the point of clarifying how our lives are animated, before focusing on the practical task of seeking wisdom in given situations. In its turn, that task engenders a sensitivity to God's will 'in all things', before finally we return to a contemplative wisdom grounded in God's own knowing. There follow two chapters that offer a selective, but very useful, study of elements of the history of Christian discernment. McIntosh begins with the New Testament origins in 1 Corinthians, and moves through patristic and early desert sources to key figures of the Western Middle Ages: Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St Victor, Catherine of Siena and Jean Gerson (only recently recovered as a theologian of the spiritual life). McIntosh concludes with insightful sections on Ignatius Loyola, and on the Puritan writers John Bunyan and Jonathan Edwards. Part 1 concludes with a chapter on 'Constitutive Themes'—four major issues in a historical-theological reading of discernment: how we are formed in discernment; how we distinguish inner impulses; the problem of deception; and finally, albeit all too briefly, the eschatological dimension.

Part 2 consists of what McIntosh terms 'Three Case Studies', illustrating different aspects of Christian discernment. He first explores how St Paul and the early desert tradition demonstrate that the death and resurrection of Christ is the fundamental context for discernment, with the Easter narrative recreating and transforming human understanding and perception. Second, McIntosh discusses the discernment of vocation as truth-bearing, illustrated by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* and in so doing offers a short but excellent theology of vocation overall. The third chapter outlines a Trinitarian theology of discernment, particularly in reference to John Henry Newman. The Trinity becomes the basis for revaluing mystery and *apophasis* in our human processes of knowing.

Finally, in the two chapters of Part 3, 'Discerning Truth', McIntosh attempts a constructive theology and spirituality of truth. The first chapter concerns aesthetic judgment; the second and culminating chapter

is about mystical illumination. Here, McIntosh develops the theme of communion with God as the deepest way of knowing reality—both in the sense of knowing *what* reality is and of what it really is *to know.* McIntosh also offers a brief but important exposition of the Church as a 'communal living of truth'.

The importance of McIntosh's book for readers of *The Way* is twofold. First, while making significant references to the Ignatian tradition, it reminds us that spiritual discernment is not a purely Ignatian possession. Second, the book challenges our approaches both to theology and to spirituality. It insists both that the contemplative tradition raises questions about our sense of what theological knowledge is, and that an adequate grasp of practical matters is dependent on our engagement with the underlying theological issues. It may be a temptation to detach the two chapters on the history of discernment and suggest that they alone should be compulsory reading for people involved in spiritual formation or spiritual direction. However, even though the book may be demanding, its important message is precisely that the 'practical wisdom' of spiritual discernment needs to be set within the kind of clear theological framework that McIntosh offers.

Philip Sheldrake