THE WAY

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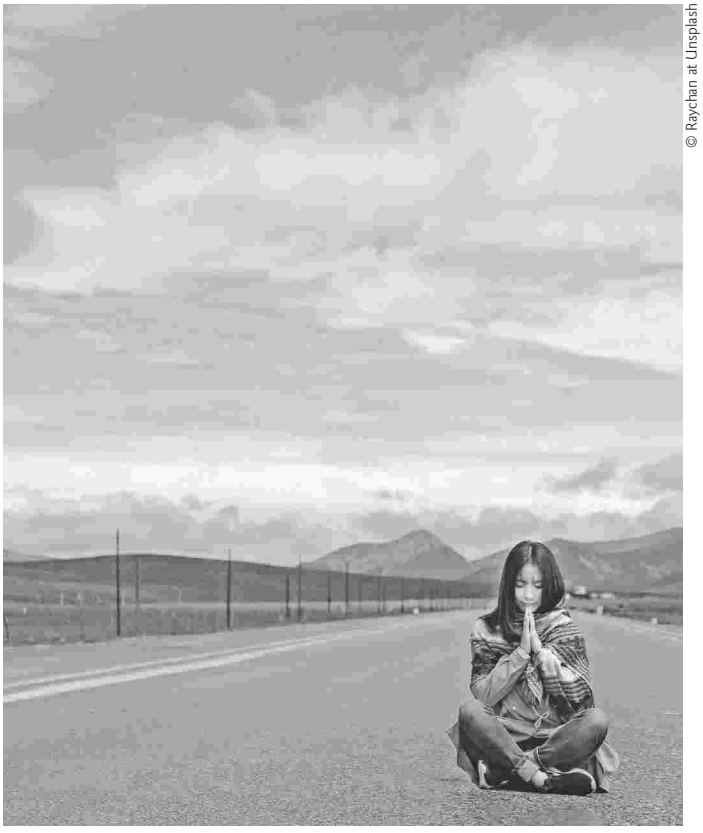
THE BODY IN SPIRITUALITY



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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.

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ABBREVIATIONS

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

Papal documents may be found at www.vatican.va

FOREWORD

IN THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES*, St Ignatius is always attentive to the spiritual importance of the body. He invites us to inhabit the gospel not only through our thoughts and feelings but also through our posture, gestures and senses. In this way we enter into a deeper relationship with Christ, who has become human for us. This Special Issue of *The Way* explores and celebrates the place of the body in our spiritual lives. It draws on the 2024 St Beuno's conference, 'The Body and Prayer', to set prayer practices in a wider spiritual and physical context, embracing sickness and well-being, sexuality, the Eucharist and incarnation among other themes.

Ignatius particularly emphasizes attentiveness to the body in the Additions to the *Spiritual Exercises*. There he reminds us that our bodily posture can be conducive to finding the graces that we desire. All we need to do is to rest in those positions where God's intimacy is more tangibly felt (Exx 76). Frédérick Fornos and Véronique Marie Hervé describe a nuanced approach to this process, which attends to the body as a communicative symbol within the dynamic of the Exercises. And Fredrik Heiding brings the Additions together with St Dominic's Nine Ways of Prayer to develop practices of bodily prayer for today that affirm how 'faith … is in the whole person'.

Taking the Additions as a foundation, Mariano Ballester proposes that prayer can become embodied by making use of yoga postures that resonate with the dynamic of each of the Four Weeks. John Russell explains how the Christian interest in embodied spirituality has waxed and waned over the centuries, and again relates the practice of yoga both to the Exercises and to ideas about embodiment in contemporary culture. You can hear more about his transformational journey as a spiritual practitioner in a special edition of *The Way*'s podcast, available on the website.

The lives and writings of two female medieval mystics, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, offer an insight into the ways in which assumptions about the human body have shaped theology. Luke Penkett argues that both women invite us to reconsider what it means to say that humanity is created in the image of God. And Kirsty Clarke describes how the experience of Margery Kempe speaks powerfully to men and

women today, now that her voice and body language have been liberated from silence. In an article republished from the online journal *Thinking Faith*, Jan Graffius goes back earlier to the first traditions of the Church to celebrate the 'sense of reconnection through physical artefacts' represented by the veneration of the bodily relics of saints and martyrs.

Timothy Radcliffe explores how Christ's selfless gift of himself in the Eucharist offers us a model for giving our bodies to others in affective and sexual relationships: with freedom, compassion and forgiveness. The foundation of our attentiveness to our own bodies, and to the bodies of others, is the loving regard that Jesus has for all humanity. Martin Badenhorst shares with Radcliffe (and with John Russell) a commitment to how we think and speak spiritually about both. Writing from an African context, he cites Pope Francis to address the Church's need for 'a mature approach to sexuality' across the diversity of cultures and genders.

These writers invite us to take either a tentative or bold step forward so that in becoming attentive to the bodily experience of others we might also bring our own bodies into prayer, just as they are. Beth Crisp, who suffers from chronic fatigue, discovers that her condition is an invitation to go at her own pace, so that God can come to meet her where she is. And Marion Morgan draws on her personal experience to relate spiritual life to everyday life in the search for unity and renewal. As each of us brings our body before God in prayer we are drawn into a deeper relationship with God, so that we might love and be loved, just as we are.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

AFFECTIVITY AND THE EUCHARIST

Timothy Radcliffe

IN ENGLISH, 'AFFECTIVITY' implies not just our capacity to love, but how we love, as emotional, bodily, passionate and sexual beings. It is as these beings—sometimes a little messed up—that we have to learn to love. In Christianity we talk a lot about love. Sometimes this love sounds a little abstract, unearthly. But we must love as the people that we are, sexual, filled with desires, strong emotions, and the need to touch and be close to each other.

It is strange that we are not good at talking about this, because Christianity is the most bodily of all religions. We believe that God made these bodies and said that they are very good. God became bodily among us, a human being like us. Jesus gave us the sacrament of his body, and promised the resurrection of our bodies. And so we should be at home in our bodily, passionate natures and at ease talking about affectivity. Otherwise we will have nothing to say about the God who is love. But often when the Church talks about this, people are unconvinced. It does not have much authority when it comes to sex! Maybe God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, but we are still learning to be incarnate in our own bodies. We need to come down to earth.

I wish to talk about the Last Supper and sexuality. That may sound a bit strange. But think about it for a moment. The central words of the Last Supper are *This is my body, and I give it to you*. The Eucharist, like sex, centres on the gift of the body. This is very hard for our society to understand because we tend to see our bodies as objects that we own.[1] But the Last Supper points back to an older and wiser tradition. The body is not just a possession. It is me. It is my being as a gift from my parents, from their parents before them, and ultimately from God. So when Jesus says *This is my body and I give it to you*, he is not disposing of a possession. He is passing on the gift that he is. His being is a gift from the Father which he transmits to us.

[1] See Timothy Radcliffe, *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 95.

Sexual intercourse is called to be a living out of such self-gift. Here I am, and I give myself to you, all that I am, now and for ever. So, the Eucharist helps us to understand what it means for us to be sexual beings, and our sexuality helps us to understand the Eucharist. Christian sexual ethics is usually seen as being restrictive compared with contemporary mores. The Church tells you what you are not allowed to do! But actually the basis of Christian sexual ethics is that of learning how to give and receive gifts.

The Last Supper was a moment of unavoidable crisis in Jesus' love of the disciples. In his journey from birth to resurrection, this was the moment through which he had to pass. It was the moment when everything exploded. He was sold by one of his friends; the rock, Peter, was about to deny him; and the other disciples would run away. As usual, it was the women who remained calm and with him until the end. At the Last Supper Jesus did not run away from this crisis. He grasped it with both hands. He took hold of the betrayal, the failure of love, and made it into a moment of gift. *I give myself to you. You will give me to the Romans to be killed. You will hand me over to death. But I make this a moment of gift, now and for ever.*

Becoming mature people who love means that we will encounter these unavoidable crises, when the world may seem to come to pieces. This happens very dramatically when we are teenagers, and it may happen all through our lives, whether we get married, or become religious or priests. Often people have such a crisis five or six years after they make a commitment in marriage or priestly ordination. We must face these crises. For most of us, this does not happen just once. We may pass through various crises of affectivity during our lives. I certainly have, and who knows what is around the corner? But we have to grasp them, as Jesus did at the Last Supper, with courage and trust. If we do, then we shall slowly step into the real world of our flesh and blood.

God sends us the loves and the friendships that are part of our journey towards God, who is the fullness of love. We await whom God sends, and when and how. But when that person comes, then we must dare to grasp the moment, as Jesus did at the Last Supper. Jesus could have escaped out of the back door and run away. He could have rejected the disciples and had nothing more to do with them. But no. He grasped the moment in faith, and it is important for us to do likewise.

I remember a few years after ordination I fell very much in love with someone. For the first time, here was a person whom I would happily

have married, and who would happily have married me. Here was the moment of choice. I had made solemn profession sincerely. I loved my Dominican brothers and sisters. I loved the mission of the Order. But when I made profession I had a little bubble of fantasy in my head: *I wonder what it would be like to be married*.

At that moment I had to accept the choice that I had made at solemn profession. Or better, I had to accept the choice that God had made for me, that this was the life to which God called me. It was a painful moment, but it was also a time of happiness. I was happy because I did love this person, and we are still very close friends. It was also a moment of happiness, because I was being liberated from the fantasy that I had kept alive at solemn profession. I was coming slowly down to earth. My heart and mind were having to become incarnate in the person that I am, with the life that God has chosen for me, in this flesh and blood. The crisis brought me down to earth.

Opening ourselves to love is very dangerous. We will probably get hurt. The Last Supper is the story of the risk of loving. That is why Jesus died: because he loved. And it is particularly perilous if we are priests or religious. We will awaken deep and confusing desires and passions. We may be in danger of ruining our vocation or living a double life.

The Last Supper, *by Jacob Jordaens, 1654–1655*

We will need grace if we are to negotiate the perils. But not to open ourselves to love is even more dangerous. It is deadly.[2] The desire and passions contain deep truths about who we are and what we need. Just suppressing them will either make us spiritually dead—or else one day we will go bang. We have to educate our desires, open their eyes to what they really want, liberate them from small pleasures. We need to desire more deeply and clearly.

When we do, then we shall have to learn how to be chaste. There are two fantasies in which desire can trap us. One is the temptation to think that the another person is everything, all that we seek, the solution to all our longings. This is infatuation. The other is to fail properly to see the other's person's humanity at all, to make him or her just meat for the eating. This is lust.[3] These illusions are not so different as they might at first seem: they are mirror images of each other. But chastity is living in the real world, seeing the other as she or he is and myself as I am—neither divine nor merely a hunk of flesh. We are both children of God.

We have histories. We have made vows and promises. The other has commitments, perhaps to a partner or a spouse. We as priests or religious have given ourselves to our Orders and dioceses. It is as we are, engaged and bound up with other commitments, that we can learn to love with open hearts and open eyes. This is hard because we increasingly inhabit a world of virtual reality, where we can live inside fantasies as if they are real. Our culture finds it hard to distinguish between fantasy and reality. But chastity is the pain of discovering reality. How can we come down to earth?[4]

It is hard to imagine a more down-to-earth celebration of love than the Last Supper. There is nothing romantic about it all. Jesus tells the disciples plainly that this is the end, that one of them has betrayed him, that Peter will deny him, that the rest will all run away. This is no lovey-dovey dinner in a candlelit trattoria. This is realism in the extreme. A eucharistic love faces us fairly and squarely with the messiness of love, with its failures and its ultimate victory.

When we celebrate the Eucharist we remember that the blood of Christ is shed for 'you and for all'. At its deepest, the mystery of love is both particular and universal. If our love is just particular, then it risks

[2] See Radcliffe, *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* 96.
[3] See Radcliffe, *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* 97, 99 and 100 following.
[4] See Radcliffe, *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* 98.

becoming introverted and suffocating. If it is just a vague universal love of all humanity, then it risks becoming empty and meaningless. The temptation for a couple might be to have a love that is intense but enclosed and exclusive. It is often only saved from destructiveness by the arrival of a third person, the child, which expands their love. The temptation of celibates might be towards a love that is just universal, a vague warm love of all humanity.

The first stage of chastity is coming down to earth. I will very quickly mention two others. The second step, briefly, is to open up our loves, so that they do not remain private little worlds to which we retreat. Jesus' love is shown when he takes the bread and breaks it so that it can be shared. When we discover love we must not keep it in a little private cupboard for our solitary delight, like a secret bottle of whisky. We must open it up for others to share and to enjoy. We must share our loves with our friends and our friends with those whom we love. In this way the particular love becomes expansive and reaches out to universality.

The particular love becomes expansive and reaches out to universality

For what are we searching in all this? What drives us in our infatuations? I can only speak personally. I would say that what has often been behind my occasional emotional turbulence has been the desire for *intimacy*. It is the longing to be utterly one, to dissolve the boundaries between oneself and another person, to become lost in another person, to find pure and total communion. More than sexual passion, I think that it is intimacy that most human beings seek. If we are to live through crises of affectivity, then we have to come to terms with our need for intimacy.

Our society is built around the myth of sex as the culmination of all intimacy. It is this moment of tenderness and complete physical union that brings total intimacy and utter communion. Many people do not have that intimacy, because they are not married, or because their marriages are not happy, or because they are religious or priests. And we can feel excluded unfairly from what is our deepest need. That seems unjust! How can God exclude me from this deep desire?

I think that every human being, married or single, religious or lay, has to come to terms with the limits of intimacy that we may know now. The dream of total communion is a myth, which leads some religious to wish that they were married, and some married people to wish that they were married to someone else. True, happy intimacy is only possible if we accept its limitations. We may project on to married

couples an utter and beautiful intimacy that is not possible but is the reflection of our dreams. No person can indeed offer us that totality of fulfilment that we desire. That alone is found in God. To quote Jean Vanier, 'Loneliness is part of being human, because there is nothing in existence that can completely fulfil the needs of the human heart'.[5]

For those who are married, a wonderful intimacy is possible, once, as Rilke says, it is accepted that we are the guardians of the solitude of the other person.[6] And for those of us who are single or who are celibate, we can discover also a profoundly beautiful intimacy with others. Intimacy comes from the Latin *intimare*, which means to be in touch with what is innermost in another person. As a religious, my vow of chastity makes it possible for me to be incredibly intimate with other people. Because I have no secret agenda, and my love should not be devouring or possessive, then I can draw extremely close to the centre of people's lives.

So many of the sad cases of sexual abuse of minors have come from priests or religious who were unable to cope with adult relationships with equals. They could only seek relationships in which they had the power and the control. They had to remain invulnerable themselves. At the Last Supper Jesus takes bread and gives it to the disciples, saying 'This is my body which is given for you'. He hands himself over. Instead of taking control of them, he hands himself to them to do with what they like. And we know what they will do. This is the immense vulnerability of true love.

Every society lives by stories. Our society has its standard stories. Often they are romantic stories. Boy meets girl (or sometimes boy meets boy), they fall in love and live happily ever after. This is a good story that often happens in real life. But if we think that it is the only possible story, then we shall live with possibilities that are too small. Our imaginations need to be nourished by other stories that tell of ways of living and loving. We need to open up for the young the vast diversity of ways in which we may find meaning and love. This is why the lives of the saints were so important. They showed that there were different ways of loving heroically—as married or single, as religious or lay. I was very moved by the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, *The Long Road to*

[5] Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998), 7.

[6] See Rainer Maria Rilke to Emanuel von Bodman, 17 August 1901, in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke: 1892–1910*, translated by Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1945), 57: 'a good marriage is that in which each appoints the other guardian of his solitude, and shows him this confidence, the greatest in his power to bestow'.

Freedom. He was a man who gave his whole life to the cause of justice and the overthrow of apartheid, and that meant that he did not have the sort of married life often for which he longed, as he languished for years in prison.

Enough! I must stop now, after a last though. Learning to love is a dangerous matter. We do not know where it will lead us. We will find our lives turned upside down. We will surely get hurt sometimes. It would be easier to have hearts of stone than hearts of flesh, but then we would be dead! If we are dead, then we cannot talk about the God of life. But how do we dare live through this dying and rising?

At every Eucharist, we remember that Jesus poured out his blood for the forgiveness of sins. This does not mean that he had to placate an angry God. It does not even mean *just* that if we fail, then we can go to confess our sins and be forgiven. It means that and much more. It means that in all our struggles to become people who are alive and loving, God is with us. God's grace is with us in the moments of failure and muddle, to raise us to our feet again. Just as on Easter Sunday God made Good Friday a day of blessing, so we may be confident that all our attempts to love will be fruitful. And so we have no need to be afraid! We can set out on this unknown adventure, confident and with courage.

Timothy Radcliffe OP is a well-known preacher and speaker, and former master of the Order of Preachers. He founded Dominican Volunteers International and played a key role in helping to establish the Franciscan–Dominican representative offices at the United Nations. He has an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford and twelve other universities, and his books have been translated into 24 languages. He is also a consulter for the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, a Sarum Canon of Salisbury Cathedral and a freeman of the City of London.

BODY LANGUAGE BEFORE THE FACE OF GOD

Fredrik Heiding

HOW FAR IS IT POSSIBLE to experience God? The saints assume that such an experience is within reach in the life of prayer, at the same time remaining aware that God is an ineffable mystery. One line of thought in the long Christian tradition sees prayer as verbal communication, a conversation of the heart; but there is also a tradition based on prayer as body language. One example is St Dominic's Nine Ways of Prayer.[1] Since views of the human person, the life of the Church and also society in general have moved in the direction of disembodiment in recent centuries, the physical dimension of prayer life needs to be rediscovered.

Prayer as Verbal Communication

What is prayer? An intimate conversation between friends—this is how several spiritual figures describe prayer life. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and others proceed from a close relationship in which the human person and God engage in a personal dialogue. There are also many examples in Holy Scripture of prayer as conversation. The prophets give voice to what they have heard God say, and Jesus himself converses with God the Father. The conditions of ordinary human communication can indeed serve as a model for the dialogue between God and human beings. Many people in our time testify to a mutual exchange in conversation with God, although probably the believer more often addresses God than clearly manages to hear God's response to his or her prayer.

At the same time, every experienced believer knows that prayer, as a rule, has a character different from the mode of human conversation. The German Jesuit Karl Rahner (1904–1984) discussed this in his article 'Colloquy with God?'[2] Rahner suggests that the dialogue between the

[1] *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, in *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, edited and translated by Simon Tugwell (New York: Paulist, 1982).
[2] Karl Rahner, 'Colloquy with God?' in *Spiritual Writings*, edited and translated by Philip Endean (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 84–91.

human person and God should not necessarily—or at least not only—be considered as a conversation between two parties. One likes to expect God to say something, deliver lines like a character in a play, but it does not always turn out that way. Moreover, the difficulty of distinguishing between God's voice and one's own can cause frustration. Is it just my own thoughts buzzing? Rahner is, of course, convinced that ordinary people are not identical with God: that there is a difference between the Creator and created beings. But in prayer viewed as conversation, we humans are in some sense God's word, an extension of God's message or God's expression through us, if you will. Instead of clear replies from God's side, God's presence can be picked up in a mood, in a sensation of depth, Rahner proposes. God communicates Godself as a gift.

The value of verbal conversation in human encounters is usually overestimated. Around 80 per cent of communication between people consists of body language. This corporal reality should affect the contact with God in prayer life during individual devotion as well as the common devotion in church. You can use gestures to speak to and listen to God, aware that God's response is different from that of a human being. Of course, you can sit as stiff as a poker and worship the Holy One in that way, but reverence can be expressed more clearly by actually bowing, kneeling or even lying prostrate on the floor.

Body Fixation and Disembodiment in Our Time

The lifestyle of many people today has become increasingly sedentary, especially in the West, and in many Christian contexts hardly any body parts below the neck are involved in religious practice. This *Zeitgeist* is characterized at once by fixation on the body and by a lack of physical means of expression, in what can be called *disembodiment*.

Obsession with the human physical dimension can be seen in unattainable ideals of beauty and an excessive exercise culture where fitness and well-being have almost become a religion. Taking reasonable care of your appearance and exercising regularly are of course to be recommended. What is meant by body fixation is an almost fanatical preoccupation that collapses into vanity and self-absorption. Few people are ashamed that they are prejudiced and judgmental in their minds, for example, but do feel embarrassed if they are overweight or otherwise physically imperfect. Corporeality is a sensitive issue.

At the other extreme there is something we could call being *disembodied*, which is possibly a greater problem than being obsessed with

the corporeal. Disembodiment is manifested in the sedentary lifestyle and a virtualisation of human interactions by which physical experience is being lost. A lot of time spent in front of a screen and constant connection to a mobile phone engages limited and mostly primitive parts of the brain, but hardly any other parts of the body. Historically, the dualistic tendency of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) must also be mentioned here as it has shaped the understanding of the human person in the West. In his philosophy, the human being is identified with the intellect, the consciousness (Latin: *res cogitans*), which is perceived as separate from the body and from the rest of the world (*res extensa*). The immaterial intellect is disconnected from everything else.

The introduction of pews in churches after the Reformation is another aspect of the drama of lost corporality. Sitting still reinforces the role of listener and spectator, promoting an intellectualisation of the practice of faith. The great spiritual traditions of the Middle Ages already distinguished between the active and the contemplative life; the former was often physically burdensome, with the result that prayer (contemplation) was often characterized by rest, including physical recovery. The Swedish author Alva Dahl aptly comments on the matter:

> When people laboured with their bodies, it was more natural that prayer took place when seated. But nowadays, most people work sitting in chairs. Then to sit even more when we need to pray is perhaps not what our bodies long for. Maybe I should be more understanding of those who choose football training with their children on Sunday mornings?[3]

Another and perhaps simpler reason why the physical dimension has come to be overlooked in Christian contexts is that our increasingly sedentary bodies are prone to stiffness and various ailments, especially as we age.

If we go even further back in history, we can claim that the transition from oral to written culture in and of itself brought about a new type of

[3] Alva Dahl, 'Kroppen talar med Gud', *Pilgrim*, 1 (2023), 59.

civilisation, something that the professor of church history Joel Halldorf lucidly describes in his latest work, *Bokens folk* ('People of the Book').[4] Although Halldorf expresses a preference for written culture, he begins his presentation by pointing to the advantages of oral culture, which include a more direct and concrete form of address. To this can be added that an oral culture does more justice to the human person's whole existence as a soul-body creature.

It is therefore worth highlighting the importance of physicality in spiritual life: what can be described as body language before the face of God. The weightiest argument to justify focusing on the body and physicality in Christian spirituality is the incarnation—that God became man. The Word has taken on flesh; God has become corporeal. Lack of interest in the body, or even a contempt for it, entails a denial of the incarnation. When corporeality is emphasized in Christian spirituality, the ultimate goal is to become less self-centred and more focused on the Triune God. It is important for this reason to avoid the two unhealthy extremes of obsession and disembodiment.

Lack of interest in the body … entails a denial of the incarnation

Dominic's Nine Ways of Prayer

The Dominican tradition of prayer and theological reflection can be helpful here. The founder of the Order of Preachers, St Dominic (*c.* 1170–1221), liked to pray in different physical positions, and the same order's foremost theologian, Thomas Aquinas (*c.* 1225–1274) contributed with a systematic explanation of the human being as a spiritual and bodily creature. Dominic shows in practice what Thomas explains theoretically.

De modo orandi ('On the Way to Pray') is the name of a short anonymous text with coloured illustrations from the second half of the thirteenth century. It describes how Saint Dominic prayed in the chapel of the convent as well as outdoors when he was walking. He stands humbly bowed before the altar (the first way of praying); he lies with his face to the ground (second); he chastises his body with an iron chain (third); he makes repeated genuflections with his eyes fixed on the crucifix (fourth); he raises his hands in various ways (fifth); he stands with his arms extended in the form of a cross (sixth); he stretches his whole length towards the sky like an arrow shot from a bow (seventh); he makes the sign of the cross, discusses and makes gestures as he reads

[4] (Stockholm: Fri tanke, 2023).

spiritual texts (eighth); he walks about while contemplating (ninth). One can read about the fifth way, for example:

> Sometimes, when he was in a convent, our holy father Dominic would stand upright before the altar, not leaning on anything or supported by anything, but with his whole body standing straight up on his feet. Sometimes he would hold his hands out, open, before his breast, like an open book, and then he would stand with great reverence and devotion, as if he were reading in the presence of God. Then in his prayer he would appear to be pondering the words of God and, as it were, enjoying reciting them to himself …. At other times, he joined his hands and held them tightly fastened together in front of his eyes, hunching himself up. At other times he raised his hands to his shoulders, in the manner of a priest saying Mass, as if he wanted to fix his ears more attentively on something that was being said to him by somebody else.[5]

I will come back to the Nine Ways of Prayer and relate them to my own experiences of praying with the hands, but first some background. The original text is written in Latin, but a Spanish translation was also made very early on which is preserved by the Dominican sisters in Madrid. The Dominicans themselves don't make a big thing of it; there seems to be some uncertainty about what to do with the material. Lay Franciscan and stage magician Angelo Stagnaro expresses a certain perplexity among people, even confusion over the matter:

> Most people (Dominicans included), when they come across the medieval manuscript *The Nine Ways of Prayer of St Dominic*, with the miniature illuminated illustrations of the prayer postures that St Dominic used, tend to be impressed and edified by the postures that our saint used, but they see no practical applications of these to their lives. The curious would find them quaint, but even serious seekers and believing Christians, though impressed by the use our holy Father made of these common medieval postures, would tend to shy away from trying them out in their own prayer life.[6]

In 2022 I published a book on the Nine Ways of Prayer, *Låt kroppen tala. Dominikus nio sätt att be* ('Let the Body Speak: Dominic's Nine Ways of Prayer').[7] My contribution in this context is to show creatively how

[5] *Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, 30.
[6] Angelo Stagnaro, *How to Pray the Dominican Way* (Brewster: Paraclete, 2012), 1.
[7] (Skellefteå: Artos and Norma, 2022). I initially translated the entire text from the high medieval Spanish version into Swedish, only then to be gently persuaded by both the experts in the field, the

these forms of prayer can be applied to the conditions of our own time, in a kind of modern version of these old prayer positions that date back at least 800 years (some go back to Old Testament times). Students from the Catholic Chaplaincy at Uppsala University and some Dominican sisters shared their experience anonymously, and I have included their responses in the book. The rediscovery of physically orientated prayer needs to be anchored in a robust theology: God must be at the centre to avoid body fixation and thus, indirectly, self-absorption. I also try to contribute some historical context to explain how the dualism between body and soul has increased since the sixteenth century. As one student said to me, 'Now I understand why we have become cephalopods!'

Dominic and Ignatius

How does the body language of prayer fit into Ignatian spirituality? In his Additions to make the Spiritual Exercises better (Exx 73–86), Ignatius gives concrete instructions for posture and for a careful attention to the body. He recommends that before each spiritual exercise you stand next to the place where you are going to meditate or contemplate, and there make a bow or some other sign of reverence (Exx 75). In this way, you express respect, and do not rush into the exercise but show reverence in your body language. Ignatius then suggests entering into contemplation 'now kneeling, now prostrate on the floor, or lying face upward, or seated, or standing' (Exx 76).

It is conceivable that Ignatius was influenced by Dominic's nine ways of prayer through his contact with Dominicans in Manresa, in Paris and in other cities. He also read the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The parallels are obvious between the Dominican and Ignatian traditions in this respect. For Ignatius' early Jesuit companion Pierre Favre (1506–1546) it was natural to pray with the body, something of which we see several examples in his spiritual diary entries. He speaks there of going through 'the most significant parts of the body' or 'the main limbs of the whole body' in his mind in order to collect himself.[8]

Although Ignatian spirituality definitely involves all the senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch—as well as the emotions, and indeed the

British Dominican friar Simon Tugwell, and the Swedish Dominican Anders Piltz, that there is really only one original text, the one in Latin. I therefore owe Anders Piltz a debt of gratitude for his translation from the Latin that appears in my book.

[8] Pierre Favre, *Memoriale*, in *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, edited and translated by Edmond C. Murphy, John W. Padberg and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), n. 22.

whole body, there has been a noticeable intellectualising tendency in the Ignatian literature of our time. The dominant view is to play down the physical and to be most interested in reason or 'soul'. It is surely symptomatic that the Jesuit James Martin, in his book *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*, barely touches on the question of physicality.

Listening to Our Body and to God

The body can indeed be a meeting place between human beings and the triune God, but getting to know Jesus Christ through our body—through corporal prayer—can require time, practice and conversation with others who are also learning to pray this way. As with speaking a foreign language or playing a musical instrument, it is necessary to proceed step by step. One step might be to perform the prayer positions routinely, without much thought. The next step might be to note what thoughts and feelings they evoke. A third, significant, step could be to focus on God in two-way communication—something that for many people is not easy.

Since the publication of my book, I have set up a number of events at which people could share their experience of listening both to their own bodies and to God's voice. These include a day with priests and deacons in the Church of Sweden, a three-day retreat for Catholic deacons, and three-day vocational retreats in the classical Ignatian form with bodily prayer for half an hour at morning prayer. Several participants testify that the physical method of prayer is unexpectedly powerful and goes very deep, but it is also playful and liberating.

Praying with the Hands

Consciously using one's hands in prayer can be a simple way to sense God's presence. The language of hands can evoke different associations. Prayer with joined hands can give the feeling that we humans cannot cope on our own, that we need help: someone to hold on to. It can become a reminder that we are dependent on God and on each other. Praying this way may help us remain in the emotional state that the prayer (or Godself) conveys and then express it verbally in some way to God. Our formulations are

less likely to be affected by either performance anxiety or a desire to control our verbal utterances. It is important to find a balance between body language and reason's attempt to clothe the experience in words and images. Otherwise, there is a risk is that in attempting to find the right words we become too cerebral and start to think too much. Perhaps prayer is most authentic when we listen attentively and then speak without thinking about what to say, capturing the experience without inhibitions.

A closely related position of the hands is to bring the palms together at chest height or in front of the face. My experience is that this prayer with joined palms contributes to collectedness, calm and concentration. With a murmur, simplicity emerges. Everything is not as hopelessly complicated as we often find it to be in life. The Benedictine monk Anselm Grün (b.1945) has a fine description of the flowing energy that characterizes this prayer position and speaks of an experience of 'the cycle of divine love'.[9]

A variation on this way of praying is to stand with outstretched hands as though holding an open book. At first it can feel strange to stand like that, we stare at the palms of our hands and maybe even feel a little stupid. Eventually, however, this may change. We experience that we feel that we are being addressed. The open book speaks to the praying person. One retreatant said:

> *When I have prayed with my hands like an open book, close to my heart, it has awakened a feeling of being recollected and open, receptive, at the same time, of having a heart open to Christ, as he has his heart open to me. It has somehow strengthened my closeness to Him.*

Another way to pray with the hands is to hold them cupped in a bowl shape, as beggars do. A Dominican sister once told me that the sisters in a convent in France like to pray with cupped hands, close to each other, like those receiving alms. It helps them to realise their dependence on God and be ready to receive a gift. This position can lead to a strong experience. Whoever begins the day in this prayer position may come to the realisation that we stand with two empty hands and that all human creativity is dependent on the resources God gives us. Initially, we may just experience that we have nothing at all to offer the world, nothing to give. A great need and a feeling of really wanting to receive with two empty hands can then arise.

[9] Anselm Grün, *Gebetsgebärden* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1988), part 2.

Finally, we can take our problems and conflicts with us into our prayer time and process these concretely by handing them over to God with a physical gesture and asking for God's help. At evening prayer, I usually thank God for the day that has passed, but also leave the difficulties and conflicts to God, particularly if my human efforts to take responsibility have proved to be insufficient. Tensions, problematic relationships and conflicts are part of life. I usually hold out my hands with open palms as if I were holding a tray and in that way hand over these things to God. Instead of dwelling on them and trying to solve the problems on my own, I leave them concretely to God, which is liberating, incredibly consoling and brings relief.

To Take Some Dance Steps

In the ninth way of prayer, Dominic begins to move, walking around and contemplating. From there to dancing in prayer might be perceived as a big step both culturally and religiously, at least in our latitudes. Dance is perceived as something completely different, that primarily belongs to the secular world. One thinks of Monty Python: *And now for something completely different*. But the systematic theologian and medievalist Laura Hellsten, among others, has shown that this division between religious and secular only emerged some time during the Enlightenment, while the sacred and profane were more intertwined in earlier times.[10] Biblical references also exist. For example, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap [*skirtēsate*] for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. (Luke 6:22–23)

Many bible versions translate *skirtēsate* as 'dance'.

[10] Laura Hellsten, *Through the Bone and Marrow: Re-examining Theological Encounters with Dance in Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 108–135.

Today there is liturgical dance inside the church building in various Christian denominations; in the Church of Sweden this is called 'sacred dance'. There is also dance among Catholic congregations during the offertory in the Mass, especially in countries such as Burundi, Uganda and Eritrea. Dance during the service inside the church may be a sensitive issue, and ideally needs to have developed organically and be an integral part of both the liturgy and local cultural customs.

Both during the retreat I organized for Catholic deacons and the day with Church of Sweden priests and deacons, I found it fruitful for participants to take at least a few small dance steps in prayer. The physical movement prompted them spontaneously to express gratitude or joy in relation to God. In some cases, it felt as though God was in them and moved them. In a way, the distinction between the human and divine dissolved, as bodily prayer reduced the distance between human person and God, a distance that cognitive prayer sometimes maintains.

The Seat of Faith

In conclusion, I would like to ask a question: 'Where in the body is faith?' Don't think too much, just listen to what instinctively comes to you. For some, the answer may be the heart or the soul. For others, it is the hands that hold, the ears that listen, the eyes that see, the feet that walk or dance. Perhaps some of you think that faith encompasses the whole body. Of course, one does not have to choose between exclusive alternatives: faith resides in reason as well as in emotions, in thoughts as well as in the body. It might be worth doing this thought experiment—or, we might say, 'body experiment'. Faith is, after all, in the whole person and in the whole church community.

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[11] Available from The Way Ignatian Book Service, www.theway.org.uk/bookservice.shtml.

POSTURE + BREATH + DESIRE = TRANSFORMATION

John Russell

I ALWAYS USED TO BE a very heady and bookish type of person. As an English Literature undergraduate in the early 1990s, I got very into the most vertiginously deconstructive literary and psychoanalytic theory that was in fashion at that time. And then—when I discovered that having a doctorate in psychoanalytic textual criticism was not much of a gateway to gainful employment of any kind—I retrained in law and specialised in actions against the police, prison law and deaths in custody. I found my abstractive mind well suited to interpreting my clients' traumatic stories in terms of legally recognisable categories and processes. My spiritual life was sporadic and fragmented.

My dad had been raised in a boys' home run by the Daughters of St Vincent de Paul but—other than having been baptized in the local Roman Catholic church—faith was not part of my upbringing. As a lonely teenager, I started to pray in bed before I fell asleep and found a deep comfort. I could feel someone there: someone listening, someone who knew me, who could read the whole of me like a book—all my adolescent yearnings and frustrations and resentments—and loved me still. But I had not grown up with any context to make sense of that prayer experience, other than a religious studies class where we joylessly took turns reading through the gospel story and learnt various theoretical arguments for the existence of God, none of which I found very convincing.

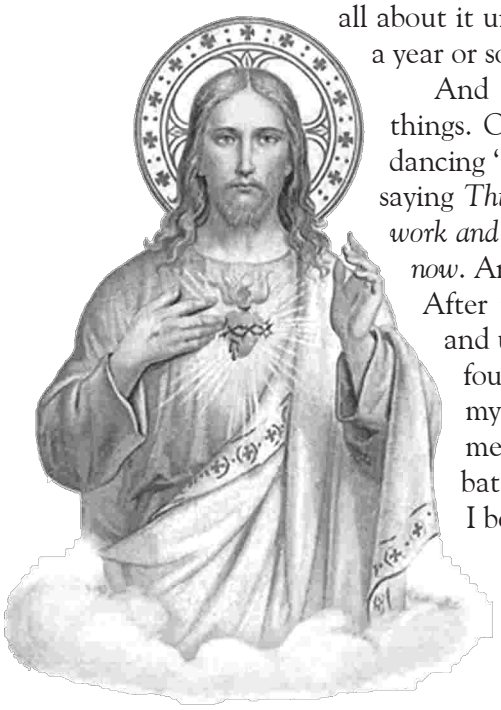
As a young adult, I found my way to my local Buddhist centre and learnt to meditate. Meditation filled me with a glorious golden light. I revelled in its expansiveness. I was seeking a spiritual path and community and I make some effort to try and get on board with Buddhist teachings. But I struggled to connect with the idea of hundreds of tantric deities and learning Sanskrit terminology, and I saw a ready potential for me to distort Buddhism into an individualistic pursuit of becoming more enlightened than my neighbour—a potential that I needed to resist.

I had one Catholic friend with whom I very occasionally had awkward, stumbling conversations about God. She suggested that, seeing as I liked

meditation, why didn't I try going to the Quakers. I took to silent Meeting for Worship like a duck to water. For an hour, I would sit absolutely motionless, eyes closed, gradually discarding all the concerns of myself and my life, and drifting into an intense and thoroughly out-of-body prayer experience with a God who seemed very far away in some transcendent spiritual realm. The good thing for me about Quakers was that you could not really do Meeting for Worship better than anyone else. Just sit still, shut up, listen to God—there were no opportunities for competitive enlightenment. I spent most of the time feeling that my prayer was a bit self-involved compared with all the Quakers, who seemed very knowledgeable and concerned about national and global politics.

God Moving

After about eight years or so, Jesus started showing up to my Meetings for Worship. He looked just like his pictures: Anglo-Saxon, two-dimensional, one hand raised in blessing, rays of light streaming from his Sacred Heart. Sometimes during Meeting for Worship, I found I was saying 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus' to myself. At the end, I would wonder briefly what had happened. I put it down to cultural conditioning and trace memories of religious studies class, and—as I stepped my foot on to the busy central London pavement outside the meeting house—promptly forgot all about it until the next Sunday. This went on for about a year or so.



And then something happened—or a series of things. One night, after I had been out drinking and dancing 'til the early hours, I heard a voice in my heart saying *This drinking that you think is you unwinding from work and having fun is going to kill you. You need to stop now*. And I knew God had spoken an irrefutable truth. After twenty years of drinking alcohol excessively and unmanageably, I abruptly stopped. And then I found I wanted to pray more, and—when I asked my Catholic friend for prayer material—she posted me her old single volume of the divine office, in battered leather covers smelling of incense, and I began saying the daily office by myself.

Over the next few weeks, sitting in my bedroom and praying, I had the most visceral experience of God *moving*. God was no longer

far away in the heavens beyond the firmament, but now suddenly and increasingly around me and *in my body*. As I sat cross-legged, saying the office, I felt spiritual energy climbing up my spine and spreading out across my shoulder blades like a big pair of feathery angel's wings, and it felt gorgeously grounding and healing and strengthening.

I am sure it is no coincidence that it was around that time that I had begun to practise yoga. I had had chronic lower back pain for years and a dancer friend noticed my awkward posture and suggested I might try going to yoga classes. I took beginners' courses in Hatha and then Ashtanga and I had begun to experience my body in a new way. I had been encouraged to be in my body, to notice my body, to engage with my body, to learn from my body. And that really seemed to awaken something, or release something, and so—combined with a new sobriety—what had been for me up until that point quite a transcendent out-of-body spirituality that was a bit disconnected from my everyday life, a bit compartmentalised, now became something which was much more embodied and immanent and started to weave itself deeply into the whole of my being and my living.

Ignatian Embodiment

When I began training for ordination with the monks of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, I had expected—because of my academic background—to get excited by systematic theology. I was surprised to find it barely interested me at all beyond the essays I had to write. Instead what drew me was prayer and spirituality, and especially the spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises, which had slipped quietly into my life and just kept hanging around and showing up again.

In the year I moved from the Quakers to the Anglican Church, I attended an eight-week beginners' course in Ignatian spirituality at the London Jesuit centre and went on my first individually guided retreat at Barmouth, led by Fr Damien and his team—a glorious combination of imaginative prayer, sea-swimming, hillwalking and doing yoga at dawn on the little patch of paving slabs in the front garden of the retreat house looking at the Irish Sea. At the end of my second retreat, my director suggested I might make the full Spiritual Exercises, which I quickly dismissed because I was off to theological college. But after a year of theology and liturgy, I remembered her suggestion and made a Nineteenth Annotation retreat; then a three-year training course in Ignatian spiritual direction while I was serving my curacy; and then a

thirty-day retreat in Loyola in Spain with the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow, a couple of years ago.

For the past dozen years or so now, Ignatian spirituality has spoken to me with a depth and richness and relevance that I have never found before in my faith journey. And partly that is because, for me, Ignatian spirituality is a very embodied spirituality. It is a very affective spirituality. It is extremely interested in our feelings and desires. It understands spiritual energies as *movements* which are active at all levels of our being, including the prompting system of our body. It appreciates that in order to discern spiritual movements, and to understand and negotiate our excessive attachments and make ourselves as free as we can be both to notice and to take up the invitations that God offers us, we need to become keenly aware of our moods, our feelings, our desires, our movements and our deep-seated obstacles to Godward movement, all of which have mental, emotional and physical aspects to them.

Ignatian spirituality is a very embodied spirituality

I have always experienced Ignatian spirituality as being about having a deep *felt knowledge* of God. That, for me, was very much the gift of making the Spiritual Exercises for the first time. Just before I was due to start my Nineteenth Annotation retreat, I got knocked off my bicycle by a car on the hill outside the college where I was studying. I broke my collarbone and had a painful metal plate and screws put in to stabilise the fracture. I could barely get out of my chair and all my meals were brought to my room. I was in a state of mild panic as to whether I would get the use of my right arm back. I entered the First Week fervently praying Romans 7:24—'Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' 'We might call this "congruence"', observed my director gently.

As I prayed my way imaginatively through the gospel, Jesus became a real person. I came to know what Jesus *felt* like, which was very different from all the abstract concepts that I had from religious studies, and which meant a complete reconfiguration of all that I thought I knew about myself and the world. When Fr Oswin first mentioned 'discernment', I thought *Oh yes, I am good at that. I have very good critical faculties.* And then I slowly began to learn that what I thought was my good holy discerning voice was actually rather an unkind voice that judged myself and others quite severely. And that there was something else entirely, which began as the distant sound of joyful music being played on a sunny hillside far away that I could sometimes just catch tantalisingly upon the breeze.

Over that year, I gradually came to know what Jesus felt like *in myself*, and then—quite soon after my retreat, as I began conducting hours of qualitative interviews for a research MA into new monastic communities—I realised that I could also begin tentatively to feel that same quality in what someone else was saying. Looking back now, I would say I was learning to discern spirits and 'follow the consolation', though it would be a couple more years before I picked up that Rob Marsh phraseology.[1] Often on spiritual direction training courses, when we are talking about Ignatian discernment of spirits, we will use that hand gesture of rubbing your thumb and fingers together to indicate that we recognise the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit through some sort of felt knowledge: a taste, a touch, a quality that feels real, and authentic, and true, and good, and of God—something we cannot quite put into words but we know it just *feels* right.

Ignatian Yoga

While I was serving curacy and training as an Ignatian director, I went to a workshop on 'Christian Yoga' at the Jesuit spirituality centre in London, led by a young Catholic woman, who was passionate about yoga and her Catholic faith and wanted to experiment with bringing them together. She was dazzlingly spirit-filled and inspiring, and spoke about experiencing the 'Christ-Light' in a wonderfully matter-of-fact, tangible way. I had noticed, too, that a US group was exploring 'Ignatian Yoga'.[2] When I messaged them on Facebook to ask if there was anything similar in the UK, they commented back to say, 'Not yet. Why don't you set something up?' By the time I decided to leave parish ministry in the Anglican Church to begin full-time spirituality work with the Jesuits, I had trained as a yoga and breathwork teacher and begun to offer embodied prayer online during the COVID pandemic to my church congregations and anyone else who decided to rock up.

I had wanted to see if we could somehow mitigate some of the separation and disembodiment of meeting online, and enable everyone to feel as much as possible that he or she was fully present and participating. So I began creating online embodied prayer every morning that used posture and breath alongside vocal prayers and quiet meditation. There

[1] Robert R. Marsh SJ, 'Receiving and Rejecting: On Finding a Way in Spiritual Direction', in *Imagination, Discernment and Spiritual Direction* (Oxford: Way Books, 2023), 17–29.
[2] See https://ignatianspiritualityandyoga.com/.

seemed to be a natural and obvious synergy between these different spiritual practices, and it created a real sense of joy and online community. Rather than just trying to duplicate a pre-existing church liturgy online (which we were already doing plenty of), it was something new and special that helped Zoom feel energizing and enabling rather than just an unsatisfying alternative to meeting in person. As the days ticked by, we began to be joined by people who were not previously churchgoers and it became a way of introducing people who were not used to praying to how sustaining and fruitful prayer could be at a time when lots of people in lockdown were really struggling emotionally and spiritually.

When I applied to join the spirituality team at the London Jesuit Centre, I was a little hesitant about banging on too much about yoga on my application form. There had always been a bit of push-back about offering yoga in a Christian context, with one or two people worrying that I would be converting susceptible Christians to worshipping Hindu deities. Then at interview, the second question from the then director was, 'And can you start an Ignatian yoga class?'

So for the past two years now I have been running an in-person class called *embody*, which is ninety minutes of breathwork and postures to awaken and move spiritual energy around the body.[3] We start a class with some breathwork and warm-up exercises to help people let go of the concerns of the day, reset their stress system, and reconnect with themselves, their bodies and their sense of the divine. We set an intention, which we will keep revisiting and developing: what are we desiring as we participate in this session, what graces are we seeking? Then we will do a series of energetic postures that each last for a few minutes, with short periods of contemplative stillness in between. The rhythm of action and contemplation begins to release a lot of dopamine, serotonin and endorphins into the body, changing the hormonal flow and making the contemplative space of the 'neutral mind' more accessible. The quality of people's stillness begins to deepen and intensify, and we head towards a longer period of prayerful relaxation or guided meditation to end.

The breath and body work of yoga is really all for the purpose of becoming still. In our modern Western forms of yoga as cardiovascular exercise, we have often forgotten this.[4] I went for a year to a Hatha yoga

[3] *embody* runs at least three times a year at the London Jesuit Centre. The next five-week course starts on Monday 11 November 2024. See www.londonjesuitcentre.org for more details.

[4] Browsing around online, you can easily find at least 25 different types of yoga classes currently on offer in the UK. If you see 'yoga' in the UK, without any additional descriptor, then it is probably a

class at which, when we got to the final *shavasana* relaxation pose, a third of the room would promptly jump up and leave to get back to their busy days, however many times the teacher softly sought to explain that the whole class had been leading up to this climactic posture of stillness. We flex and stretch and release the contractions in the body so that we are able to be at rest in contemplative stillness. And after the stillness comes the calm. And after the calm comes the peace and divine union.

Posture + Breath + Desire = Transformation

An embodied spirituality wants to challenge the binary opposition between body and spirit, and to celebrate our bodies as a marvellous part of God's creation. We are embodied souls; we are ensouled bodies. The human body is one of the most complex phenomena in existence—a divine gift that we should respect, cherish and revere. And we can discover how the whole body can be a place of divine encounter. To put this all very simply, you might think of it in terms of an equation: posture + breath + intention = transformation. Or if you want to sound terribly Ignatian, you could say posture + breath + *desire* = transformation. Which is just to say that the more we can bring the whole of our embodied system of human beingness into prayer—and activate the body and the breath alongside our intentions, our desires—then the deeper, the more wholehearted, and therefore the more transformative, our prayer can become.

Western version of Hatha yoga, and will focus mostly on physical posture and have little engagement with the other seven traditional 'limbs' of yoga that include breathwork, meditation and moral disciplines. For a critical study of modern Western postural yoga, see Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010). Singleton is a Senior Research Fellow at SOAS and his study unsettled the Western yoga world by claiming that modern postural yoga was a 'global fraud' that owed much more to nineteenth-century Scandinavian gymnastics than ancient Indian traditions.

This does not mean we need to be dancing in the offertory at every Mass or trying to do Breath of Fire while saying the daily office. I was trained for the priesthood at an awfully traditional Anglo-Catholic college, very much in the liturgical practice of 'noble simplicity' (although I spent my first year bursting into ugly crying during the Eucharistic prayer, which rather annoyed my personal tutor). I am not seeking to make our authorised liturgies any more complicated than they already are. Personally, I most enjoy a nice simple quiet Eucharist, with a focus on praying into the words, listening to the gospel, focusing on the sacrament and keeping any avoidable distractions to a minimum. And I also want to be much more creative and radical with embodiment than just trying to squeeze in a few extra hand gestures into the authorised liturgy.

When you have cultivated a sense of embodied presence for yourself, and you are more tuned into your body—however you might have done that, whether through yoga, dance, tai chi or joining a community choir (which is a great way of learning about breath)—then you begin to carry that new awareness with you wherever you go, including into the Eucharist.[5] And you experience authorised liturgy differently with those fresh levels of awareness—and being in your body, being your body, in a new way.

New Horizons

The Church is full of pendulums where we swing one way for a decade or two and then we react and swing the other way—and, at least in the Anglican Church, different tribes are busy reacting against each other too. The Christian interest in embodied spirituality seems to wax and wane. At least since the 1960s we regularly seem to rediscover that Western Christianity is very disembodied, and then some people get very interested in embodied spirituality for a little while. Then it seems to fade away until someone rediscovers it again.[6] So we should probably be hesitant in proclaiming a new Age of Christian Embodiment, much

[5] For an inspiring spiritual reflection on the transformative power of dance, listen to Jemimah McAlpine sharing how this embodied practice helped her reconnect with her body and changed her understanding of God and the enjoyment of life: Jemimah McAlpine, 'The Power of Embodiment', *Nomad Podcast* (11 June 2021) at https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/jemimah-mcalpine-the-power-of-embodiment-n250/, accessed 17 April 2024.

[6] As a trio of influential examples from the past fifty years, I offer Anthony de Mello, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991 [1978]); Peter A. Campbell and Edwin M. McMahon, *Bio-Spirituality: Focusing as a Way to Grow* (Chicago: Loyola, 1985); and Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1995).

as some of us might love to see that. The Church has a lot of attraction to a more embodied spirituality but also probably a lot of resistance to some of the challenges that embodiment might bring with it. We may soon decide it is time to re-emphasize the transcendence of God again, and all get very apophatic.

But embodiment is not going anywhere just yet in our wider culture. At the moment, it seems to be a necessary counterbalance to an increasingly online world and to the leaps forward in artificial intelligence that provoke lots of questions about what it is to be human, and to be physically or virtually present. Modern trauma theory is having a large cultural impact that is far from exhausted. Contemporary neuroscience is only just beginning to discover the importance of the vagus nerve, the fascia, the intestines. Bodily tissues that for centuries were just thought to be passive and largely irrelevant to the life of mind and spirit are being discovered to be highly active and communicative, and to store embodied memory and affect our cognitive and social functioning.[7] We are beginning to see the emergence of innovative forms of somatic therapies and new interpersonal neurobiological concepts of resonance and attunement are getting picked up by sociologists.[8]

There has been a lot of neuroscientific research over the past ten to fifteen years, partly triggered by the growth of the mindfulness movement (originating in Buddhism), looking to understand different forms of meditation and embodied practices, and to gather empirical evidence for what methods seem to be most beneficial. These days, even distinguished clinical professors of psychiatry talk enthusiastically about seeking a holistic understanding of the human being which 'embraces everything from our deepest relational connections with one another to the synaptic connections we have within our extended nervous systems'.[9]

Empirical scientists do not tend to acknowledge God as being an important contributor to prayer, but their conclusions are nevertheless

[7] On embodied memory in general, a key text is Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Allen Lane, 2014). On the modern science of the fascia, David Lesondak, *Fascia—What It Is, and Why It Matters* (London: Handspring, 2017). On the gut and intestines, Giulia Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Under-rated Organ*, translated by David Shaw (London: Scribe, 2015).

[8] Deb Dana, *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation* (New York: Norton, 2018); Harmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (first published in German in 2016; Cambridge: Polity, 2019); Pat Ogden, Kekuni Minton and Clare Pain, *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy* (New York: Norton, 2006).

[9] Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, edn 2 (New York: Guilford, 2012), 3.

fascinating as to what—from the human side of the conversation—we might be able to do to help ourselves be most open and receptive to God's grace. Polyvagal theory and the broader climate of interpersonal neurobiology has invigorated scientific interest in 'mind–body' therapies as forms of biobehavioural intervention that might refresh the parts that mental therapies alone cannot reach.[10]

Back in 2008, one study of participants from nine different eight-week stress-reduction programmes found that yoga practice time was more strongly correlated with improvements in stress, anxiety and psychological well-being than simple sitting meditation time.[11] Then, in 2014, in an ambitious review of the existing evidence, a group of psychologists and neuroscientists identified yoga as,

> … a complex, adaptive and widely applicable method of physical and mental training with multiple tools for self-development, and … for improving self-regulation through both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms.[12]

In a 2015 review of 'stress, trauma, and the bodymind therapies', Payne and Crane-Godreau concluded that, among nine different mind–body interventions, yoga had the most extensive evidence for various benefits, including restoring alignment to the musculoskeletal structure, enhancing neurochemical secretion and altering the autonomic state.[13] In 2018, the 2014 study was confirmed by Marlysa Sullivan and others, who added to the model by incorporating polyvagal theory as well as recent work on resilience that showed yoga also improved participants' ability to 'bounce back' and adapt to stressful circumstances.[14]

[10] See Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation* (New York: Norton, 2011), 6. For a critique of Porges, see Paul Grossman, 'Fundamental Challenges and Likely Refutations of the Five Basic Premises of the Polyvagal Theory', *Biological Psychology*, 180 (May 2023).

[11] J. Carmody and R. A. Baer, 'Relationships between Mindfulness Practice and Levels of Mindfulness, Medical and Psychological Symptoms and Well-Being in a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program', *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, 31/1 (February 2008), 23–33.

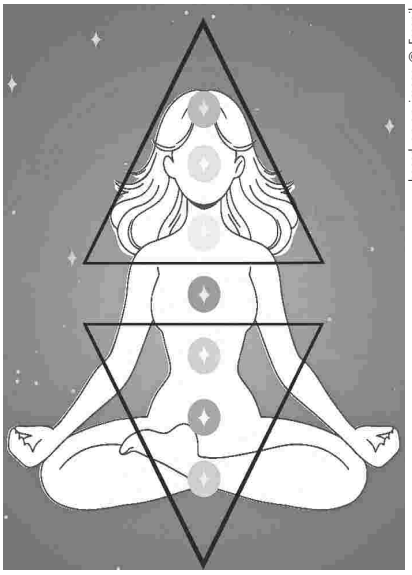
[12] Tim Gard and others, 'Potential Self-Regulatory Mechanisms of Yoga for Psychological Health', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8 (30 September 2014), 2. 'Top-down' regulation strategies utilise higher brain regions whereas 'bottom-up' strategies engage subcortical brain regions without recruiting higher brain functions.

[13] Peter Payne and Mardi A. Crane-Godreau, 'The Preparatory Set: A Novel Approach to Understanding Stress, Trauma, and the Bodymind Therapies', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 9 (1 April 2015), 13.

[14] Marlysa Sullivan and others, 'Yoga Therapy and Polyvagal Theory: The Convergence of Traditional Wisdom and Contemporary Neuroscience for Self-Regulation and Resilience', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 12 (27 February 2018).

Problems with the Body

It is probably a fairly obvious thing to say that a lot of spiritualities have a problematic relationship with the human body. They are often working with some kind of body–spirit binary opposition, suggesting that in order to become more spiritual we need to escape from our messy, compromised human bodies into a purer, higher spiritual realm. Historically, we have tended to locate God somewhere *up there*. You could identify certain strands of Christian doctrine and practice as particular examples, although the body–spirit binary exists in a lot of other spiritual traditions too. Christianity is not the only religion that has struggled with the body, and the Christian tradition can also be rich and diverse in its attitudes, especially if we look at the early Church and the medieval period. Caroline Walker Bynum has written a superb series of academic studies on the body and Christianity from the patristic period up until the twelfth century.[15] Roland Betancourt has published a couple of excellent books on the Byzantine body.[16]



based on an image © Freepik

Even yoga has its problems with the body. Some traditions speak of the 'upper triangle' (our higher faculties, mental and spiritual) and the 'lower triangle' (our primitive impulses, digestive and sexual), with the idea that we need to move our spiritual energy up into the more sacred upper triangle. As so often in traditional spiritual hierarchies, a gendered distinction can come into play, with men deemed to have better access to the ethereal upper realms, and women confined to the earthy lower triangle.[17]

[15] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: California UP, 1982); *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991); *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia U, 1995).

[16] Roland Betancourt, *Sight, Touch, and Imagination in Byzantium* (Cambridge; Cambridge U, 2018); and *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton U, 2020).

[17] The yoga tradition also contains its own challenges to this gender discrimination, such as the bodhisattva Tara who—when told that she cannot achieve enlightenment as a female and needs to be reborn as a man—dismisses this as male foolishness and resolves always to be reborn in a female form.

In the past decade, a number of historical sexual abuse scandals involving the 'founding fathers' of Western yoga (including Bikram Choudhury and Yogi Bhajan) prompted many involved in training yoga teachers in the UK to re-evaluate their work with a heightened awareness of safeguarding and with a more critical eye as to how women and the female body were being regarded in their traditional teachings. I am grateful to have done my yoga training as the only man on a course full of female yogis determined to debunk some of the old misogynistic spiritual nonsense and claim their power to inhabit the upper triangle, as well as exploring and rehabilitating the lower triangle as another route to the divine. One of our first required reading books was *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* by the Italian American feminist Silvia Federici, and I sometimes felt like a privileged male observer on a women's consciousness-raising group.[18]

The body–spirit binary opposition exists in a lot of religions, but it really is quite curious that a Church which worships an incarnational God made flesh does not have embodiment at its heart. I wonder whether the Church's erratic interest in embodiment could be something to do with the topic tending to lead into discussion of sex, gender and sexuality, with which our Church sometimes struggles. Really to embrace embodiment means to embrace our particular bodies: male bodies, female bodies, trans bodies, gay bodies, queer bodies.

It is no accident that in academia embodiment theory has been most associated with feminism and queer theory. It often involves engaging with the foundational stories of a historically Christian culture—such as the creation of Adam and Eve—and wanting either to debunk them or reimagine them. Such theorists feel that the some of the traditional ways in which these stories had been presented privilege cisgender heterosexual men and causing real harm to women, to trans people, to gay people. My Catholic friend who so carefully and respectfully nurtured my emergent faith is wonderful at revisioning scriptural depictions of women.[19]

She meditates for ten million years, releasing tens of millions of beings from suffering, and achieves supreme enlightenment as the Goddess Tara who manifests in many forms as a playful, compassionate saviour deity who stops people from taking the spiritual path too seriously or being entrapped by dualistic distinctions. See Samhita Arni, 'Gender Doesn't Come in the Way of Nirvana', *The Hindu* (9 March 2017). Available at https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/samhita-arni-points-out-how-caste-and-gender-prejudice-are-inextricably-linked/article17433634.ece, accessed 17 April 2024.

[18] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (London: Penguin, 2021 [2004]).

[19] Sara Maitland, *Daughter of Jerusalem* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1978); *A Book of Spells* (London: Michael Joseph, 1987); *A Book of Silence* (London: Granta, 2008).

Respecting the Body

Embodiment is particularly intrinsic to Ignatian spirituality, and in our desire to share Ignatian spirituality with new audiences in the culture where we are, it makes sense for us to emphasize that fact because we want to engage with what is already there, with what God is already doing, and to offer Ignatian spirituality in ways that are accessible and relevant to people, to 'go in through their door'.[20] And that Ignatian spirituality and accompaniment can itself also be further enriched by meeting and engaging with the wider cultural context.

We have barely scratched the surface—the skin—of embodiment so far. There is still much further for us to go, both broader and deeper, in terms of fleshing out a fully embodied Ignatian spirituality, of offering spaces of embodied spiritual encounter, of making embodiment more interwoven into our Ignatian spiritual accompaniment training, and of strengthening links with ecological and social concerns. We need to reclaim respect for the body—love for the body—and to encourage people to look upon the body, their own body, other bodies, all bodies, as the greatest of God's creations.

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[20] This is Ignatius' own description of how to engage with others in talking about spirituality, from a letter of 1541, MHSJ EI 1, 180.

WOMEN'S VOICES AND WOMEN'S BODIES

Margery Kempe's Struggle to Make Herself Heard

Kirsty Clarke

IN HER BOOK *Venomous Tongues*, Sandy Bardsley writes of the complex relationship between speech and gender in the medieval period, and its negative association with women. For example, the fifteenth-century morality play *The Castle of Perseverance* says of women's speech,

> Go forth, and let the whores cackle!
> Where women are, are many words:
> Let them go hopping with their hackle [finery]!
> Where geese sit are many turds.[1]

Here, women's speech is *too much*—too vociferous—and likened to excrement. Such detrimental assessments abounded in medieval culture, society and theology. Notions of 'deviant' or 'illicit' speech were progressively feminised; women's words were not only perceived as wasteful and full of 'cackle' but also as dangerous and unruly. As Liz Herbert McAvoy writes, 'the theme of the seductive and uncontrollable voice of women … permeated much of the literature of the medieval period'.[2]

In a culture which was still predominantly oral, so-called 'sins of the tongue' were controlled to prevent heresy and societal or ecclesiastical instability, with the 'monstrosity' of female speech seen as the most likely source of contagion.[3] With Eve's calamitous words in Eden as an exemplar, women's speech was that which threatened patriarchal hegemony:

[1] Cited in Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania, 2006), 1.

[2] Liz Herbert McAvoy, introduction, in *The Book of Margery Kempe. An Abridged Translation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 1. For a detailed discussion of the fear of women's speech, which abounded in the medieval period, see the first chapter in M. C. Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3–37. Likewise, for a good overview of medieval misogyny see Anke Bernau, 'Medieval Antifeminism', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 72–82.

[3] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 21; Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"': Body, Voice and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Women's Writing*, 9/2 (2002), 159; and *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 170.

> The sweeping range of the attacks against women's speech points to a more deeply disturbing objective. The aim was to control every conceivable aspect of women's speech by deconstructing and fantasising its powers, interrelationships, and mobility.[4]

Such control extended to women's bodies, 'read' in conjunction with their words.[5] Links were made between the tongue and sexual promiscuity; women who 'could not keep their lips together' were defined as sexually deviant.[6] 'Loose' words implied a 'loose woman', with Geoffrey Chaucer's (*c.* 1343–1400) Wife of Bath being the most famous example.

Much less fictitious, however, is the eponymous character, often compared to the Wife of Bath, of another medieval text: *The Book of Margery Kempe*. A wife, mother, mystic and pilgrim, Kempe (*c.*1373–after 1438), was the subject of the earliest female autobiography in the vernacular.[7] Written in the third person, it recounts the pilgrimages, divine encounters and diverse reactions experienced by 'this creature' (as she calls herself) who, at times, appears overwhelmed by the weight of her own loquaciousness. Yet, her talkative text confirms Luce Irigaray's contention that female mysticism is the 'only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in such a public way'.[8]

The Wife of Bath, from the Ellesmere manuscript, early fifteenth century

Despite her verbosity, until the twentieth century all that existed of Kempe's text was a highly edited version published by Wynkyn de Worde (d.*c.* 1536) in 1501. Here, Kempe is rendered mute, and assumed to be an anchoress like her near contemporary Julian of Norwich (1342–after 1416).[9] Her words are relegated to footnotes, and she is

[4] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 29.
[5] Bernau, 'Medieval Antifeminism', 78.
[6] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 29.
[7] This claim has recently been disputed, with some scholars arguing that the *Book* is more akin to a hagiography than an autobiography. See Barry A. Windeatt, introduction, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 1994), 22. For good overviews of Kempe's life and the themes in her text see Santha Bhattachariji, *God Is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (London: DLT, 1997); and J. M. Nuth, *God's Lovers in an Age of Anxiety: The Medieval English Mystics* (London: DLT, 2001).
[8] Cited in Sarah Beckwith, 'A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe', in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, edited by Jane Chance (Gainesville: U. of Florida, 1996), 195.
[9] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 20.

made more palatable as a quirky and marginal figure of late medieval English spirituality. But with her full resuscitation by the discovery of a complete manuscript in 1934, there began a corresponding resilencing of the significance of Kempe's voice—ironically as she became one of the most written-about of medieval women.[10]

As Sarah Beckwith has suggested, there has been both critical excitement about the discovery of an 'authentic medieval voice' and great anxiety as to the *nature* of that voice.[11] Consistently belittled or regarded as a cause of embarrassment, both Kempe's character and the veracity of her *Book* have traditionally been dismissed, corroborating McAvoy's contention that 'because she is noisy, she is not believed'.[12] Thus, Sandra McEntire writes: 'Seen variously as unconventional, mediocre, mad, sensational, monotonous, hysterical, abnormal, trivial, and even morbid, Kempe seems to have little to recommend her'.[13]

I would like to argue, in support of the burgeoning feminist discourse on the *Book* that Kempe deserves to be heard, both in her medieval context and today.[14] Kempe is far more than an incidental interruption in the history of English vernacular spirituality. Despite manifold efforts to silence her, Kempe not only succeeded in getting her voice heard but also left an important legacy—if we but choose to listen. The theme of voice and voicelessness, although central to the *Book*, has in itself been sidelined by our continued unwillingness to hear.

'Tyrannies of Silence': The Feminist Rearticulation of Speech[15]

In her book about the encounter with silence, Sara Maitland shares a letter from her friend Janet Batsleer, who was highly sceptical of her exploration:

> Silence is the place of death, of nothingness …. There is no silence without the act of silencing, someone having been shut up, put bang to rights, gagged, told to hold their tongue, had their tongue

[10] R. N. Swanson, 'Will the Real Margery Kempe Please Stand Up?' in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, edited by Diana Wood (Oxford: Oxbow, 2003), 141.
[11] Sarah Beckwith, 'Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Language, Agency, and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Exemplaria*, 4/1 (1992), 176.
[12] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 170.
[13] Sandra J. McEntire, 'The Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine Spirituality', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), 51.
[14] For an overview of feminist responses to *The Book of Margery Kempe* see Nancy Bradley Warren, 'Feminist Approaches to Middle English Religious Writing: The Cases of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich', *Literature Compass*, 4/5 (2007), 1378–1396.
[15] Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, California: Crossing, 1984), 41.

> cut out, had the cat get their tongue, lost their voice. Silence is oppression and speech, language, spoken or written is freedom.[16]

This argument is characteristic of second-wave feminism, which above all seeks to name, proclaim and protest against the subordination of women by men. It can be applied to the many ways in which opponents attempted, but ultimately failed, to silence Margery Kempe.

One of the most fundamental objectives of the feminist theological project has been the recovery and rearticulation of women's voices: voices shrouded in silence and subjected to 'the act of silencing'. The scholarship of Beverly Lanzetta, for example, seeks to bring about a *rapprochement* between mysticism and feminism in the concept of the *via feminina*. By resisting and dismantling patriarchal definitions of 'woman'—often through bodily wounds—the words of the mystics resonate down the centuries, bringing us to the borders of a new linguistic country.[17]

'How Could a Woman Occupy One or Two Hours with the Love of God?': The Talkative Margery Kempe[18]

Voice and speaking are dominant themes in the *Book*; the text draws extensively on the cataphatic mystical tradition (*via positiva*).[19] Kempe, a woman who seemingly could not stop talking, even when threatened with violent assaults or execution, confirms Denys Turner's definition of cataphaticism as 'the verbose element in theology'.[20]

Continually attracting both supporters and opponents, Kempe is anything but quiet. For her adherents, she was a prophet, a visionary, a local saint, bypassing the Church, like all good mystics, through direct communication with God. But for detractors, her words were 'hysterical' and inconsequential, the potentially dangerous rantings of a madwoman.[21]

[16] Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence: A Journey in Search of the Pleasures and Powers of Silence* (London: Granta, 2008), 28.
[17] See Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). Although Lanzetta does not directly refer to Margery Kempe, her argument can be applied to Kempe and the possibilities that her speech and body present.
[18] So said the vicar of St Stephen's church in Norwich on meeting Kempe in chapter 17. References to *The Book of Margery Kempe* use Luke Penkett's forthcoming modern English translation in the Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist, 2025) and are cited by book and chapter in the text.
[19] Cataphatic theology (*via positiva*) sees God as manifest throughout all of creation, and uses an explosion of words, images, experiences and sensations to speak of the divine and our relationship with God. See Harvey D. Egan, 'Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticisms', *Theological Studies*, 39/3 (1978), 403.
[20] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1995), 20.
[21] For Kempe and 'hysteria' see Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell U, 1983), 210–212.

Her voice and presence were often annoying, unwelcome, unwanted and inappropriate, as they were for her pilgrimage companions:

> And they were most displeased for she wept so much and always spoke of the love and goodness of our Lord, [as much] at table as well as in other places …. They made her sit at the table's end below everyone else, so that she hardly dared speak a word. (1.26)

Despite slander and opposition, Kempe took great nourishment from her conversations with Christ, knowing she would be rewarded for enduring sharp words as He bore the sharp wounds of suffering and crucifixion.[22]

Body as Text and Voice[23]

To understand Kempe's success in getting her voice heard, it is imperative to look *beyond* straightforward speech to other linguistic strategies. Kempe, heir to the affective, embodied and participative mystical tradition, also drew upon her body as a powerful communicative tool. She importantly inscribed her very body as a text to 'voice' her experience of the divine and challenge the patriarchal power of the church. For McAvoy:

> Like her literary equivalent, Chaucer's voracious, gap-toothed and garrulous Wife of Bath, Margery Kempe insists upon promoting the experience of her own body as a challenge to the Latinate learning of the ecclesiastic intelligentsia, and in so doing embodies her own discourse and rhetoric.[24]

Likewise, M. C. Bodden argues that Kempe, by physically taking her body back from her husband with a vow of abstinence, created 'a language of transgression and disruption' as she sought to understand the relationship between the power of her words and that of her body.[25] Thus, speech and body can regarded as inseparable, as Kempe's body is her text, and her text is written—enfleshed—in her body.

Perhaps even more than for her loquaciousness, Kempe was known for her noisy—and bodily—tears:

> On practically every page of her *Book*, she weeps, cries, howls, shrieks, screams out her grief—over her own sins, her longing for heaven,

[22] See *Book of Margery Kempe*, 1.5, 1.34, 1.53 and 1.54.
[23] For a detailed survey of the subject of voice and body see Beckwith, 'Very Material Mysticism', 195–216; McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, 210–212.
[24] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 160.
[25] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 126.

> her compassion for Christ's suffering, or, increasingly as she grows older, over the sins of the world and sinners' need for salvation.[26]

However, the majority of scholars have wrenched Kempe's voice away from her crying, treating the latter as simply part of the long tradition of 'holy tears'. But there is more to it than this, for Margery's tears, particularly after her Holy Land pilgrimage, were profoundly physical, rooted in compassion and participation in Christ's suffering, accompanied by bodily writhing and a loud crying 'noyse'.[27]

Kempe's outbursts caused her much distress as she was excluded from pilgrimage parties, forced to take communion alone and even banished from the sermons of the famous Friar William Melton, who said, 'I wish this woman were out of the church; she is annoying the people' (1.61). Often accused of crying as a means of disruption and attention-seeking, Kempe understood her tears as a gift from God and beyond her control,

> And therefore, when she knew that she was going to cry, she kept [her tears] in as long as she might, and did all that she could to withstand it, or else suppress it, until she became the colour of lead …. then she fell down and cried wondrously loud. And the more that she would labour to keep it in, or to put it aside, [so] much the more did she cry, and the more loudly. (1.28)[28]

The inarticulate and non-verbal sounds which accompany Kempe's tears represent a new language *in the process of becoming*. This hesitant language may sound like a 'speaking in tongues', an extreme form of *glossolalia*, abounding in the primeval and the semiotic, yet it is, as Wendy Harding suggests, 'a different order of communication'.[29] Unable to speak through her words, Kempe relocates her utterance to her scripted body. Likewise, for Julie Orlemanski, Kempe's tears cannot be translated into letters (*vox inarticulata illiterata*); becoming instead an important example of *sonus simplici vocis*, 'the sounding of bare voice'.[30] From this vantage

[26] Nuth, *God's Lovers in an Age of Anxiety*, 135. For discussion of Kempe's tears see Dhira. B. Mahoney, 'Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, 37–51; and Julie Orlemanski, 'Margery's "Noyse" and Distributed Expressivity', in *Voice and Voicelessness in Medieval Europe*, edited by Irit Ruth Kleiman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 123–138.

[27] See Jessie Gutgsell, 'The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity', *Anglican Theological Review*, 97/2 (2015), 239–253. Kempe's tears at the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem appear in 1.28. The tears are usually dismissed in the *Book* as a menace and a 'noyse' rather than anything more significant. See Orlemanski, 'Margery's "Noyse" and Distributed Expressivity', 123.

[28] Also read the discussion between Christ and Kempe in 1. 14.

[29] Harding, 'Body into Text', 173.

[30] See Orlemanski, 'Margery's "Noyse" and Distributed Expressivity', 125.

point, with each bout of boisterous tears, Kempe was edging closer to the full incarnation of a new linguistics. For as Nellie Morton (1905–1987) the US theologian, feminist campaigner and civil rights leader wrote:

> I want to posit the possibility that there is a word, that there are many words, awaiting woman speech. And perhaps there is a word that has not yet come to sound—a word that once we begin to speak will round out and create deeper experiences for us and put us in touch with sources of power, energy of which we are just beginning to be aware.[31]

Kempe's voice has often been dismissed for its 'hysterical' character. Yet, this was not a sign of weakness but of a suppressed voice struggling to express itself through the very site of violence: the female body. This confirms Elizabeth Petroff's contention that Kempe's tears were 'an inarticulate cry of one needing a voice, needing to have words, in a world that would deny that voice'.[32] For her, the body itself becomes a text, an agent of change, a particular language, a new and emancipated feminine utterance. As Diane Uhlman writes: 'the convulsive writhing and preverbal roaring of the more violent "cries" make of her whole body a "tunge" that communicates the very dilemma of that which defies language'.[33]

Manuscript decoration from a book of hours, c.1280–1290

Reflective of medieval culture, an explicit link is made between Kempe's voice and the desire to contain her married, unvirginal, 'unsealed' body.[34] As a female pilgrim in an unconventional (celibate) marriage, Kempe threatened the dichotomy between the public (male) and private (female) spheres, as well as acceptable notions of female religiosity. Sarah Beckwith writes:

[31] Cited in Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 1.
[32] Elizabeth Petroff, introduction, in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, edited by Elizabeth Petroff (New York: Oxford U, 1986), 39.
[33] See *Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by McAvoy, 125–126; Diane R. Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice, the Solace of Script: Orality and Literacy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Studies in Philology*, 91/1 (1994), 59.
[34] For the 'sealed' body and female intactness, see Karma Lochrie, 'The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse', in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, edited by Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 115–140.

> Margery was a religious woman who refused the space traditionally allocated to religious women—the sanctuary (or imprisonment) provided by the anchoress's cell or the nunnery. Her lack of circumspection, her insistence on living in the world, enables the social dimension that makes her mysticism distinctive.[35]

Physically and geographically beyond the control of men, Kempe's voice and body were considered dangerous. A monk at Canterbury said, 'I wish you were shut up in a house of stone, so that no one could speak with you' (1.13). But Kempe's adoption of multifarious linguistic strategies meant she was one step beyond the grasp of men and his wish went unfulfilled.

'It Is Full Merry in Heaven' (1.3): Giving Voice to Joy[36]

While Kempe's tears have been copiously studied, little mention has been made of the joy in the *Book*, which Marian Glasscoe suggests has either been ignored or not yet discovered.[37] Yet, for Karma Lochrie—a notable exception—Kempe almost unexpectedly laughs as much as she cries:

> It is through laughter that she makes a place for her own voice and her body by crossing the taboo which brackets the spiritual away from the material .... Kempe's own laughter—and the reader's as well—are crucial to her discourse because they bring the female body into language and spirituality.[38]

As 'non-verbal' as her tears, laughter and merriment are also an important linguistic strategy for Kempe. This is especially so as a way of defusing the bullying words of her detractors:

> And the archbishop's household asked her to pray for them, but the steward was angry, for she laughed and made good cheer, saying to her, 'Holy folk should not laugh'. She said, 'Sir, I have great reason to laugh, for the more shame and spite I suffer, the merrier I may be in our Lord Jesus Christ'. (1.54)

Kempe found a way to laugh in the face of those who laughed at her: a tactic which undermined and wrong-footed her opponents. Laughter was employed for what Kempe called a 'good game' (1.13): a way of

[35] Beckwith, 'Very Material Mysticism', 197. As Terence N. Bowers explains, the female medieval pilgrim was a transgressive figure, constantly trespassing on (male) public spaces. She can thus be regarded as having a liminal/marginal status in the medieval world. Cited in McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 4.
[36] This exclamation came as a result of hearing heavenly music, which accompanied Kempe's conversion.
[37] Marian Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London: Longman, 1993), 275.
[38] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 7; and see her chapter 'Fissuring the Text: Laughter in the Midst of Writing and Speech', 135–167.

both mocking the culture that excluded her and underscoring the ridiculousness of its patriarchal boundaries. Kempe's laughter is a successful language in its own right; Karma Lochrie notes that it was,

> … a sign of her resistance, a refusal to exchange words of guilt, contrition, shame, or fear in return for their judgements of her. At the same time, she proclaims through her laughter a spiritual mirth which exceeds institutional authority. Hence the dual gesture of resistance and celebration in her good game.[39]

A 'Short Treatise' for 'Great Solace and Comfort': Kempe as Prophet and Intercessor[40]

Although Kempe does not explicitly call herself a prophet, her words soon take on a prophetic—and intercessory—role, as she engaged in both *fore-telling* and *forth-telling*, correctly predicting the fate of ordained and lay people alike.[41] Christ told Kempe to speak boldly in his name, saying, 'many hundreds of thousands of souls shall be saved by your prayers' (1.7).[42] Even Kempe's most persistent detractors found themselves drawn to the power and effectiveness of her intercessory prayer. This corresponds with Kempe's growth in confidence in the authority of her words, and Christ's reassurance that he and Margery are in each other: indicating a mixing, and confusing, of the human–divine voice. The merging of voices suggests a mutual absorption of identity between Kempe and Christ.[43] Annoying she may have been, Kempe was nonetheless called upon in times of crisis, such as attending a deathbed. Santha Bhattachariji writes:

> Her cries and shouts are given a positive value by the people of Lynn when she is asked to pray at the bedside of the dying: here her commission to pray for all sinners, and her general stress on contrition, find an outlet in a highly appropriate form of ministry.[44]

Likewise, Kempe seemingly even had the power to save her church from being ravaged by fire, causing snow to fall to put out the flames (1.67).

[39] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 143, and see 136–137.
[40] From the Proem, which sets out the objectives of the text, and the many difficulties of its production.
[41] Ellen M. Ross, 'Spiritual Experience and Women's Autobiography: The Rhetoric of Selfhood in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 59/3 (1991), 540–541; and Bhattachariji, *God Is an Earthquake*, 116.
[42] See also 1.22, 1.29 and 1.78.
[43] See 1.10 and 1.34. Also Sandra Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 83. For an interesting discussion of the interplay between Christ's voice and Kempe's voice see Barbara Zimbalist, 'Christ, Creature, and Reader: Verbal Devotion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41/1 (2005), 1–23.
[44] Bhattachariji, *God Is an Earthquake*, 20. For example, see 1.23 and 1.72.

Teacher or Preacher?

When the archbishop of York accused her of preaching, which was forbidden for women, and asked her to swear never to do so again in his diocese, Kempe retorted,

> 'No, sir, I shall not swear', she replied, 'for I shall speak of God and censure those who swear grave oaths, wheresoever I go, until such time that the pope and Holy Church have ordained that no one shall be so bold to speak of God, for God Almighty does not forbid, sir, that we should speak of him …. And, therefore, sir, I think that the Gospel gives me leave to speak of God' …. And at once a great cleric brought forth a book and quoted St Paul to support his position against her, that no woman should preach. She, answering this, said, 'I do not preach, sir, I come into no pulpit. I use but conversation and good words, and that will I do while I live.' (1.52)

Notwithstanding her subtle distinction between preaching and teaching, Kempe arguably strayed into the male sphere of public homiletics when she 'preached' from an upstairs window to a gathered crowd while under house arrest in Beverley.[45] Such was the power of her words that she elicited tears from her female 'congregation' below (1.53). Here, Kempe's speech blurred the public-private dichotomy by preaching (male role) at the same time as being enclosed in a domestic (female) setting, thus demonstrating the power of the female voice in transgressive mode:

> Margery's contravention of the boundaries of this female sphere is executed quite literally by means of her shouting from the window to other women in the public street. In so doing she throws down a challenge to accepted notions of female behaviour and illustrates how the judgements of the male Establishment can be circumvented and an alternative system of support established in its place.[46]

It is therefore hardly surprising that men in positions of authority wanted to silence Kempe.

Heresy and Lollardy

Given her propensity for speaking out, Kempe's frequent arrests for heresy, and Lollardy (a precursor of Protestantism) more specifically, are

[45] For the role of teaching in the *Book* see Barry Windeatt, '"I Use but Comownycacyon and Good Wordys": Teaching and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, edited by Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 115–128.
[46] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 167.

unsurprising.[47] Clarissa Atkinson observes: 'Mystics in any period are vulnerable to charges of heresy and disobedience, because their direct communication with God tends to bypass the services and sacraments of the Church'.[48] Travelling across the country at a time when control of the Word of God and fear of Lollardy were at their height, Kempe was called 'Cobham's daughter' (1.54) and 'the greatest Lollard in all this region' (1.53). It is unlikely that she really was a Lollard since she said that Christ called her 'a pillar of Holy Church' (1.13) and, when examined, she was always shown to be orthodox.[49]

Kempe not only ran the gauntlet of ridicule and verbal abuse, but suffered physical assaults and violent threats to her dignity and even her life, as on the occasion when she feared that the steward of Leicester was about to rape her (1.47). Some abuse even came from other women,

> And with that came forth a woman of the same town … who loathed this creature, cursed her, and said most cursedly to her in this manner, 'I wish you were in Smithfield, and I would carry a faggot to burn you with; it is a pity that you are alive' (1.16).

What is important is how she assertively—and bravely—responded to her accusers, after having been perceived to have trespassed across boundaries with her unbridled tongue.

The Voice of Authority

One of the key debates in scholarship on the *Book* is the extent to which Kempe is viewed as the 'author' of her text.[50] She was illiterate in the sense that she was unable to write, yet she was imbued with a deep knowledge of theology and a keen aptitude for remembering the spoken word.[51] Kempe's inability physically to put quill to parchment meant that her text had a problematic birth as she relied on at least two amanuenses, as described in detail in the Proem and chapter 89 of the *Book*, which sets

[47] For a detailed overview, distinguishing between accusations of heresy and Lollardy see J. H. Arnold, 'Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent', in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by J. H. Arnold and K. J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 75–95, at 82. Kempe was cited or arrested seven times: at Norwich (c. 1423), Bristol (1417), Leicester (1417), York (twice), crossing the Humber, and at Ely.
[48] Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 103.
[49] Referrin to the notorious Lollard John Oldcastle (Lord Cobham). See Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 106.
[50] See Lynn Staley Johnson, 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe', *Speculum*, 66/4 (1991), 820–838.
[51] For example, Kempe needed help during a vision to identify her own name in the Book of Life. Yet, as Carolyn Dinshaw suggests, although Kempe was unable to read her name, she well knew the power of writing and naming. See 'Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, edited by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2003), 227.

out the production of the text and emphasizes the truth of its words.[52] This means that the text is (at least) 'double-voiced', in the sense that she was in dialogue both with her scribe and with God.[53] But despite the naturally collective nature of the *Book*'s production, Kempe should—contra earlier scholarship—be accepted as the leading, if not sole, voice of her text: 'The relation of author and scribe in this work is complicated and uncertain, but it remains Margery's book, even if the shadowy scribal presence clouds the image in the mirror'.[54]

Liz Herbert McAvoy convincingly argues against the view that the *Book* was subject to major scribal input and structural shaping. She writes that it is the very strength of Kempe's voice which has been her undoing in terms of critical response to the *Book*:

> Her female voice is everywhere to the forefront of her narrative, recorded as it is in direct speech, and ironically it is this insistent orality with its capturing of the cadences and intonations of her own voice, which has provided most ammunition for her main critics.[55]

If her text was edited, it was only with the lightest of touches, as it remains chronologically haphazard and reads very much like a spoken conversation, abounding with Kempe's character. The second scribe—once convinced of Kempe's veracity and thus able to write with a clear conscience—was at pains to assert that Kempe was in charge of the writing process, while he (also a character in his own right) merely acted as Kempe's hands physically birthing her words on the page.[56] He is primarily the instrument by means of which Kempe's *Book* is produced, with her as the 'author'.[57] The writing took place 'in her chamber' (1.88) and the scribe wrote 'after her own tongue' (2.1). Indeed, for Lynn Staley, the scribe acts as nothing more than a 'figure of speech' mediating our response to Kempe: who is rendered more credible by his insertion into the text,

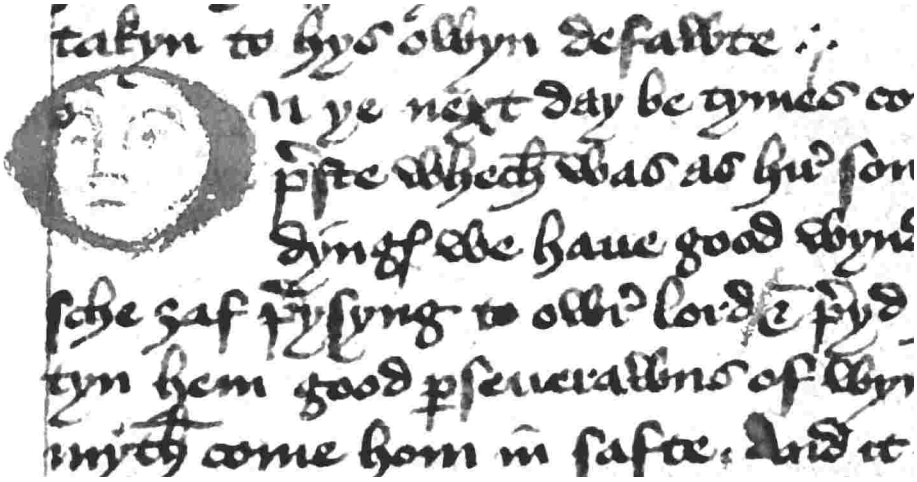
> By emphasising her singularity, the scribe isolates Kempe and gives her the freedom, the flexibility, the safety … to speak against the spiritual laxities of her own age. Kempe does not directly address

[52] See also the end of book 1 and the opening of book 2.
[53] Beckwith, 'Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism', 189–191.
[54] Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 36.
[55] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 170.
[56] Uhlman, 'Comfort of Voice, Solace of Script', 55.
[57] Julie Marie Smith, '*The Book of Margery Kempe* and the Rhetorical Chorus: An Alternative Method for Recovering Women 's Contributions to the History of Rhetoric', *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*, 17/2 (July 2014), 179–203, at 190–191.

> the reader; she addresses the reader through the scribe. Only God speaks directly, and he does so only to Margery Kempe herself.[58]

It is also important to appreciate that understandings of writing and authorship are historically contingent, with the speech–writing binary being far from rigidly fixed. Indeed, Kempe presents writing not so much by *contrast* with speech but as an *extension* of it through another means.[59] The medieval writing process was predominantly collaborative, meaning that Kempe was far from unusual in her adoption of scribal support.[60] Julia Marie Smith points out the unfair way in which Kempe has been singled out as somehow a lesser 'author' for her use of scribes whereas male authors such as Chaucer and Thomas Aquinas (*c.*1225–1274) did the same and are still regarded as the sole authors of their texts.[61]

Several scholars have also drawn attention to the assumed superiority of speech over writing—the privileging of the voice (*phonocentrism*)—in medieval mystical texts, and in Kempe's *Book* in particular. To write was merely to commit the prior and superior act of speaking to the page; therefore the role of the scribe was not as significant as scholarship tends to assume.[62] David Lawton argues,



***Manuscript page from the* Book of Margery Kempe**

[58] Staley Johnson, 'Trope of the Scribe and Question of Literary Authority', 838.
[59] Harding, 'Body into Text', 179.
[60] Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 281.
[61] Smith, 'Book of Margery Kempe and Rhetorical Chorus', 183–184 and 199.
[62] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 164; and Uhlman, 'Comfort of Voice, Solace of Script', 50–69.

> Generically, the editor is there as part of Kempe's story, the male cleric subordinate to the laywoman. Authority thus passes from what is written to what is spoken: to voice …. Writing in this book is seen as something provisional, always on the verge of being overthrown by speech.[63]

'The Rest Is Silence'. Or Is It?[64]

Despite severe opposition and multiple attempts to silence her, 'Margery succeeded in making her voice heard'.[65] Her challenge to us now, perhaps, lies less in her words—their power has been subsumed under the 'safe' heading of 'holy speeches and conversation' (1.18)—but in our ability to hear and respond. Although inextricably rooted in her medieval context, Kempe has much to say to us today, especially as her troubles seem to resonate with ours. Women still have an ongoing battle to make themselves heard, understood and taken seriously: think of pay differentials, sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement. When women dare to speak out it is made abundantly clear that 'we still do not like noisy women'.[66]

Kempe intended her *Book* to be written for the 'great solace and comfort' of others and, like Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, it was only produced after twenty years of silence and Christ's bidding her to write.[67] Because Kempe reflected on her experience for so long, Sandra McEntire suggests that her words come with a greater confidence vis-à-vis the official discourse of Church and state. Paradoxically, Kempe replied on the written word to 'incarnate' her orality, but the very act of writing means that her words transcend time and space, being heard by far more people her wildest imaginings could have conceived. Thus, 'once translated into text, her voice cannot be silenced'.[68] Indeed, as Barbara Zimbalist notes, the *Book* contains an 'as-yet-unperformed verbal devotion of future readers'.[69] And so we, Kempe's contemporary readers and hearers, continue her conversation by bringing her words alive anew.

[63] David Lawton, 'Voice, Authority, and Blasphemy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, 102–103.
[64] *Hamlet*, V. ii. 370.
[65] Classen, *Power of a Woman's Voice*, 274.
[66] Bodden, *Language as the Site of Revolt in Medieval and Early Modern England*, 126.
[67] Orlemanski therefore ponders why, despite the pressure on Kempe not to write and unsettle the Christian community around her, did she choose to write the *Book* in the first place? This is a question the text itself is unable to answer. See Orlemanski, 'Margery's "Noyse" and Distributed Expressivity', 130.
[68] McEntire, 'Journey into Selfhood', 192, 68.
[69] Zimbalist, 'Christ, Creature, and Reader', 14.

Yet, even as notorious a 'chatterbox' as Kempe does, on several occasions, suggest her words are insufficient to convey her experiences of the 'unutterable love' of God (1.28). The most cataphatic of mystics thus acknowledges an ultimately apophatic presence, an ineffable verbal falling-short of the fullness of divine revelation. For Lochrie, this knowledge means, 'her speech is already undermined by the inadequacy of language; it blasphemes in its presumption and in the tainted nature of all human utterance'.[70] Like Julian, whose divine requests temporarily 'passed from my mind', Kempe 'forgot' much of the content of her contemplations.[71] This suggests a mutual enfolding of the cataphatic and apophatic, and an understanding that experiences of God are ineffable.[72] But in spite of the inadequacy of language, Kempe 'passes over' the apophatic opportunity, and ultimately chooses to speak aloud whether through tongue or body or tears or laughter.[73] In so doing, Kempe's mystical experiences are both *communicable* and *communicated*, while for McAvoy, 'Her refusal to remain silent is her ultimate strength'.[74] Yet, finally it appeared Kempe simply ran out of words, as her *Book* comes to a sudden 'Amen'. We may not know the conclusion of Kempe's life and speech, but it is up to us—her readers—to speak our own truth and, as Julian instructed her, not to fear the 'speech of the world'.[75]

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[70] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 125.
[71] In chapter 2 of the Long Text of *The Revelations of Divine Love* Julian tells the reader that two of her requests—for a meditation on the passion and a serious illness—'passed from my mind'. See *Showings*, edited and translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist, 1978), 179.
[72] Clarissa Atkinson says, 'If she spoke to her confessor right after a contemplation she could tell him about it, but very soon she "forgot" what she had learned' (Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 46).
[73] McAvoy writes, 'From the outside, Margery consistently emphasises how language remains inadequate for the task of explicating her insights, and that, when it fails, the body takes over' (McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 170); Uhlman, 'Comfort of Voice, Solace of Script', 57–58.
[74] McAvoy, '"Aftyr hyr owyn tunge"', 171.
[75] Windeatt writes in his introduction, 'In fact, Margery's dictation of her recollections ends here characteristically and authentically without any formally contrived or artistic sense of climax. She has simply ceased to speak.' (15) The meeting between Kempe and Julian of Norwich is recounted in 1.18.

EXERCISES TO FEEL AND RELISH THINGS INTERIORLY

Véronique Marie Hervé and Frédéric Fornos

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT 'making the exercises better and finding more readily what one desires' (Exx 73)? Over the past five years we have been searching for an answer to this question in response to the difficulties faced by an increasing number of retreatants entering into the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises.* These difficulties seem to arise from an overly mental approach that does not leave room for the bodily dimension of spiritual experience. The Exercises, however, call upon the whole person to enter into them. How can the difficulties we still have today be explained? We are more than ever convinced that the path of the spirit is to be found at the heart of the bodily dimension, given that it is an experience of encounter with the Word made flesh.

From this conviction we have offered, in the course of a long journey, a number of workshops, whose results have been better than we expected. We developed a proposal for a retreat, which was initially called 'Bodily Exercises in Listening and Awareness', but this expression quickly created problems. In effect, it was often understood as though it was about 'adding the body' to prayer, or was just a preamble of relaxation and gesture before passing to the Spiritual Exercises proper. Our process, however, fully integrates the bodily dimension into the dynamic of the Exercises. It converges with the task proposed in the Additions.

But are the Additions themselves not frequently considered as 'add-ons' to the exercises of meditation and contemplation? They are usually understood as suggesting a detailed plan of physical activity that structures the daily routine of the exercitant. Rooted thus in the bodily dimension, spiritual experience is inscribed into the reality of existence. This way of considering the Additions is entirely fitting because, in effect, this is where they point. After all, the additions certainly constitute one of those small collections of notes that complement the prayer exercises. But to look at things only in this way could present the prayer exercises as somewhat disembodied moments to which something 'bodily' needs to be added.

Do we have to understand the place of the body in the Additions solely in terms of exteriority, as the gestural expression of a prayer that is itself wholly interior? It seems that this way of conceiving the Additions could limit their intention, their reach and so their role in the prayer exercises. If the Additions try to inscribe spiritual experience into what is real, this is no more than the consequence of a deeper movement through which exercitants are led by work on the bodily dimension itself.

Indeed, why did Ignatius insist so much on the bodily process? What was he seeking in an attentiveness so great that he even asked exercitants to examine themselves, throughout the four Weeks, for 'faults and negligences' concerning not just the Exercises but also the Additions (Exx 160, 207)? The Additions seem without doubt to be more important than a simple 'add-on'; moreover they could even be the necessary condition for exercitants to enter fully into the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises.

This is what we propose to study here. So we will ponder the text of the Additions and their place in the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, in order to see how the pedagogy that we propose for realising the Additions interrogates the way the Exercises are presented today.

'Additional Directives for Making the Exercises Better and Finding More Readily What One Desires'

This title presupposes that if something 'better' is sought, there must be something that already exists. The exercitants have already begun to search for what they desire, and have already lived the primary experience. For Ignatius it seems necessary that they should have had this experience before being given the Additions. In effect, to give the Additions before any personal process takes place runs the risk of formalising *a priori* an experience that does not yet exist. The Additions could be perceived as something exterior. Thus the word 'addition' expresses an 'add-on' inscribed into a previous experience—but in the sense of something that allows exercitants to go further in the search for what they desire, and not of an extra which remains external.

Lived externally, the Additions run the risk of not being inscribed into 'seeking and finding what they desire' but merely into an agreed form of prayer and a daily framework. The bodily dimension would be no more than a ritual that does not truly include this experience of desire,

but is rather a model to reproduce, an exterior framework. The intention of the Additions—which consists in making the Exercises better and finding more completely what is desired—would slip between the cracks. Seeing the Additions in the key of exteriority involves an approach to the body in the same exterior key. What is at stake is not so much the conception of the bodily dimension in the Additions as such, but true access to the profound function that Ignatius appears to give them.

The Structure of the Additions

The organization of the Additions can reveal something of their intention. Together, they try to dispose exercitants towards a new experience of encounter. They achieve this in different ways, at greater and greater depth. They can be grouped into three sub-categories:

1. ***Additions that permit the creation of a certain 'atmosphere' orientating what is concrete in daily life towards what is desired.*** The first and second Additions mobilise the memory and imagination—'upon going to bed at night', 'upon awakening', 'as I dress' (Exx 73, 74)—with the aim of creating an atmosphere that promotes the search for 'what is desired', for example, an atmosphere of 'shame for my many sins' in the First Week.

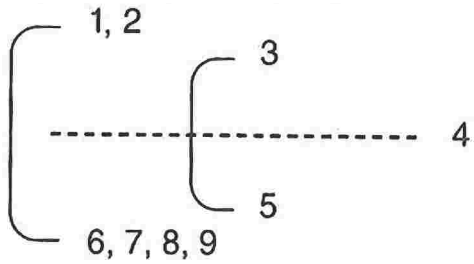
   The sixth to ninth Additions develop our relationship with the world, the manner in which we are to use what comes from outside: the things about which I could think (sixth, Exx 78), the 'darkness or light', 'good weather or bad' (seventh, Exx 130), relationships with other people—'I should not laugh' (eighth, Exx 80), 'restrain my sight' (ninth, Exx 81). Ignatius affirms that created things affect, influence and act profoundly on exercitants. Taking this seriously, in particular in Addition Seven, supposes taking seriously the activity of the senses that puts us in relation with the world and so affects us. By being attentive to what I look at, hear and touch, I can feel what does or does not help me to find what I desire. So exercitants have to convert 'created things' into allies that help them in this search.

   Together, these additions permit exercitants to become present to what they hope for, living its effects in advance and disposing themselves better to make progress towards what they desire.

2. ***Additions orientated towards an encounter within the framework of prayer.*** The third Addition (Exx 75) is placed before the time of prayer and allows exercitants to prepare themselves for an encounter by establishing an appropriate distance between themselves and God: 'a step or two away'; 'to raise my mind'; 'think how God our Lord is looking at me' …. This distance is established by thinking and embodying a concrete act by which it is signified: 'an act of reverence or humility'. It is about recognising the radical otherness of the one before whom I make myself present and who is ready to meet me: 'God our Lord is looking at me'.

   The fifth Addition (Exx 77) is also a form of distancing, but after the time of prayer. The distance is established by giving voice to the way in which the encounter has developed. It invites me to look back over it: 'I will examine how well I did in the contemplation or meditation'. This distancing is not only a recognition of what has been lived, but also inscribes the encounter in space and time: 'either seated or walking about', 'use the same procedure next time'. This addition is an invitation to involve myself, to put the encounter to rest and let it take flesh within me.

The role of these latter two Additions is truly to involve the exercitant in an encounter. The two sets of Additions together allow us to detect the presence of a structure: the first set in the exterior world (1, 2/6, 7, 8, 9), and the second in its interior (3, 5). The fourth Addition is situated at the heart of this structure:



3. ***In the fourth Addition (Exx 76), 'I will enter upon the contemplation … always intent on seeking what I desire'.*** It is time for the encounter itself. Ignatius indicates how to proceed in order to dispose ourselves for it. In general only these words are retained from this Addition: 'if in any point I find what I

am seeking, there I will repose until I am fully satisfied, without any anxiety to go on'. This means listening within myself to the resonance of the Word and staying where I find relish. Such is without doubt the perspective of the fourth Addition, but to apply this step solely in relation to the gospel text turns the bodily attitude into nothing more than an external approach. 'Now kneeling, now prostrate on the floor, or lying face upward, or seated, or standing': this is not to be understood as the mere search for a posture that does not hinder the exercise of my prayer. Why does Ignatius insist so much on a bodily attitude that is always being discovered rather than acquired once and for all upon starting the prayer?

Perhaps it is necessary better to understand the words: 'if I find what I desire while kneeling, I will not change to another posture; so too, if I find it while prostrate, and so on'. It is clear that, as prayer goes on, exercitants are continually searching for a bodily posture that permits them to encounter what they want. There is no posture that is convenient in itself for every person in every moment. Posture is not neutral; it depends upon my personal history and my particular desire, and is always the object of a search.

So it is by listening to my bodily posture that I become more open to my desire, because it is this posture that brings my desire before the Other. My bodily posture draws on my relationship with myself, embodying my desire and raising it physically towards the Other. Ignatius rightly hopes that by inviting exercitants to search for and recognise the bodily posture that helps them to make contact with their desire, the fourth Addition may bring their attention back to the resonance of the Word. If they are not following this path, it will be difficult for them to remain attentive to the effects of the Word within themselves.

Certainly the constant search for a bodily posture—which is not only exterior in form—has as its objective the better disposition of exercitants to an encounter. However, it is not the whole encounter itself. Ignatius remains at the exercitants' side, indicating what is relevant for them. He shows them how to dispose themselves, how to be attentive to what is produced in the encounter, and finally how to live it: 'If I find what I am seeking' … 'without any anxiety to go on' … 'until I am fully

> satisfied'. But Ignatius stops himself there. He says no more: 'allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord' (Exx 15). The essential element for exercitants in the prayer is to find the bodily posture that best enables them to be moved by the effects of the Word of the Lord that comes to meet us when and where it wants.

In this way the importance of the Ignatian Additions can be better understood. They not only form an exterior framework for the prayer exercises, but allow a true entrance into prayer, 'making the exercises better and finding more readily what one desires'. There is no true experience of encounter that does not also move us. The search for a bodily posture in prayer generates this capacity to be moved.

Taking the bodily dimension seriously is the way to search for and find what I want and desire, to the extent that my body comes to be, through the exercise of prayer, the place of an encounter. That is to say, my body becomes a body-word, a human being of desire, open to myself and to relationship. This may be verified in accompaniment through my capacity to speak of what has moved me in the course of the encounter. For Ignatius, the exercises are spiritual to the extent that the Spirit reaches me in my entire affectivity[1] as it is convoked in bodily experiences.[2]

The Additions Illuminated by the Third Annotation

It would seem that the insistence on the role of affectivity in the spiritual process overflows the text of the Additions and also appears in the Annotations. In order to make progress in our search, it is necessary to go deeper, very carefully, into the Third Annotation. In it, following the classical anthropology, Ignatius presents the 'faculties of the soul involved in spiritual experience. The memory is not mentioned but only presupposed, since it is the basis for the activity of the other faculties. The intellect intervenes 'in reasoning' so that comparison can be made

[1] All the Additions aim towards reaching the seat of affectivity. The first and second Additions achieve this through the imagination. In the Exercises, imagination plays an essential role, as can be seen from the prayer exercises: composition of place, seeing and hearing the characters 'just as if I were there' (Exx 114), and so on. This imaginative work opens the exercitant's capacity to be moved, because the imagination has an affective structure. In effect, beginning from the work of the imagination, the intelligence will locate the characters that I see in relation to my own story. It will place them in a relationship that will move me because my story, implying the whole of my affectivity, is inscribed in my bodily dimension.

[2] Even though it is certain that the tenth Addition about penance is written from this perspective, and that this gives it real interest, further research is required beyond the limits of this article.

between what the contemplated characters live and what the exercitant lives. Finally, the will is the faculty charged with 'eliciting acts of the affections'. The annotation then specifies that in what concerns the will 'greater reverence' is required than 'when we are using the intellect to understand'. What then is the will, for it to have been placed at the summit of the 'faculties of the soul'?

For Ignatius, as much as for the tradition, the will is an affective faculty. It is not governed by human effort but by the dynamic of desire. The will appears primarily as the capacity to let oneself be moved. This affectivity does not exist in and of itself but in relation to others and to the world. It cannot be considered in a sentimental way, as self-affection turned in on itself, but as the relational dimension of the human being. This affectivity, or *affectus*, is primarily the capacity to let oneself be moved in relationship. It is to accept that the other, as other, touches me, moves me, transforms me in the deepest aspects of myself, in who I am and in my story. For exercitants it consists in allowing Christ to reach out to them so that his word might come to affect them in a transformative way.

Affectivity … is primarily the capacity to let oneself be moved in relationship

The *affectus*, the capacity to let oneself be moved, is also capable of involving itself in relationship to the point where the seat of one's own desire accepts and opens itself to the other. This openness of my desire to the other is what gives access to the word, because the other, in moving me, reaches out to my story. So exercitants never have more direct access to the word than when they allow themselves to reach out within their own story to the Word of God. Only then does their own word take on the depths of their life. As a result, for Ignatius, 'the affective acts which spring from the will' require 'greater reverence … than when we are using the intellect to understand' because 'when we are conversing with God our Lord … vocally or mentally' we commit all our affectivity, the whole of our person, in the encounter. Only then, when exercitants speak the truth, do they find themselves fully within the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises.

The characteristic novelty of Ignatius consists in inscribing the spiritual dynamic within the heart of the *affectus*. Therefore, what is required of exercitants is, simultaneously, the capacity to let themselves be moved and the capacity to commit themselves to a relationship. These are the two aspects of the will, as understood in the tradition: 'The capacity to be moved, at once by what Christ has done for me, and to respond to it with the whole of my person, "as one making a gift

with great love" (Exx 234)'.[3] It is understood that those who do not allow themselves to be moved at depth cannot let themselves be transformed by the encounter with Christ and make a decision for him. The Spiritual Exercises cannot then bear all their fruit.[4]

> The Third Annotation describes the mainspring that powers all the Exercises. It determines how the engine runs which will allow the exercitant to make progress: the engine that will have to be set in motion before beginning the journey.[5]

We began by asking ourselves about what Ignatius intended in the Additions. Far from being 'add-ons' external to the Exercises, we have seen that their profound function was to dispose exercitants to true encounter, in which it is better for 'the Creator to deal immediately with the creature' (Exx 15). In the course of prayer, thanks to the search for a bodily posture that helps them reach their desire, exercitants can capture the resonance of the Word within themselves. The search excites their capacity to be moved and to become involved in relationship with their Creator and Lord. This place of the *affectus* is considered in

Christ in Gethsemane, *German manuscript illumination, 1204–1219*

[3] Claude Flipo, 'L'expérience de Dieu dans la vie des premiers jésuites', unpublished conference paper, 1997.

[4] It is within this perspective that Ignatius conceived of the discernment of spirits. Opening myself to the other permits the difference of the other to erupt within what I am. This is what produces movements in my affectivity, in the heart of which the Holy Spirit is acting. It is there and nowhere else where we we have to discern. We must be more and more present to what moves us. This is what must be in play in order to avoid an abstract approach to the discernment of spirits.

[5] Adrian Demoustier, *Lecture du texte des Exercices Spirituales d'Ignace de Loyola. La Proposition des Exercises*' (Paris: Médiasèvres, 1999), 28.

the Third Annotation as the 'mainspring' of the Exercises. Throughout its weeks, the Additions accompany exercitants, opening their desire to the encounter with Christ, so that, day by day, they are transformed entirely to the point of deciding for Him within themselves.

In this way the Exercises bring exercitants to consider what God our Lord has done, how the same Lord desires to give himself 'embracing it [the soul] in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future' (Exx 15). That is the decisive function of the Additions 'for making the exercises better and finding more readily what one desires' (Exx 73): to help exercitants reach the seat of the affects. This is the necessary condition to enter into the experience that is offered by the Exercises. The Additions situate exercitants in this place—the place where the dynamic of the Exercises will consolidate its work—by proposing a bodily experience that is fundamental. If the Additions are not taken seriously—as the dynamic heart of the Exercises themselves and not merely as an external 'add-on'—we run the risk that the Spiritual Exercises will not bear fruit.

'Additional Directives for Making the Exercises Better and Finding More Readily What One Desires' Today

A significant number of exercitants, above all young people, who desire to live the Spiritual Exercises, do not find it easy to enter into them today. They have the impression that the Exercises are nothing more than an intellectual method that does not engage them completely, that is directed at the head and not at the whole being. Our culture is marked by a lack of confidence in the body, whether that is because, in our Western philosophical and theological tradition, a tendency to pass over or negate the body has dominated, or because nowadays the body has been reduced, in an idolatrous way, to a search for feeling and looking good.

In this context the body remains a stranger whom we rub shoulders with but do not know, a stranger who remains outside us. Sometimes we are trapped in a dualism that separates the mental and the bodily, and makes us think that spiritual experience is not bodily. For this reason, many of our contemporaries who desire to live a true spiritual experience, one taking the place of the body seriously, turn to traditions that have come from the East, or become susceptible to the search for 'personal growth'. However, as we have seen, the process of the Exercises

calls for the whole person to be involved. Why then are they so often lived as 'mental exercises'? Why do exercitants not feel completely drawn into them? Why is it so difficult to allow ourselves to be moved at depth by the Word of God? In fact, the cultural context by which each of us is marked often prevents exercitants from being 'grabbed' by the Exercises, especially since the place where the Additions are supposed to play out is difficult to reach.

How can we make sure that exercitants, in our cultural context, get to the place intended by the Additions, summoning up all their affectivity and starting from bodily experiences? Whether we like it or not, their way of relating to the world, to others and even to their own bodies has changed. Taking this cultural gap seriously is not so much a matter of adapting the Spiritual Exercises—sweetening them in order to make them appear more accessible—but rather helping exercitants enter truly into their dynamic. More precisely, we have to work on the articulation between the exercitant and the Exercises themselves, which is the function of the Additions.

Achieving this is not a matter of adding on to the Exercises a bodily dimension that they already have, but of helping exercitants to become more aware of their affectivity as the capacity that allows them to feel and to involve themselves in relationship. In spite of the cultural context that marks them, this is what will permit exercitants to move towards the bodily dimension fundamental to the dynamic of the Exercises. It is only thus that they can enter fully into the experience of the Exercises, disposing themselves to encounter the God of Jesus Christ who reaches out to them in the concrete reality of their lives.

This is what we have tried to do over a number of years by putting forward, through a framework of retreats of three to seven days, a pedagogy directed towards the space where the Additions work.[6] This includes diverse types of exercise within a coherent progression: exercises about openness and listening, about relating to the other and the world. It tries to make us attentive to how the exercises affect us and what they reveal about us in our relation with others, with the world and with God. The exercises are constructed from simple postures, gestures and actions that we do every day without realising their importance (standing, shaking hands, calling someone by name, listening to music…).

[6] For more detail on this pedagogy see the pastoral article, Frédéric Fornos, 'Les Exercices corporales d'écoute et d'éveil', *Lumen Vitae*, 55/3 (September 2000).

These everyday actions, integrated into a pedagogical framework and followed by a time of reflection, acquire a totally new significance because, as we know, such exercises cannot be lived exteriorly, but require attentiveness to their effects and affective resonances. They awaken the depth of our story. They dispose us to listen to the word of God, which affects us deeply and reveals a God who reaches out to us and gives Godself to us in our concrete existence. Because the Word of God comes to exercitants there, their own word takes on the depths of their life, something that the person accompanying them has to verify. Then they find themselves fully within the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises.

Now we understand that, if the Spiritual Exercises are to produce fruit today, it is necessary to give the Additions their full importance; what is at stake is the awakening of the *affectus* through bodily experiences. However, in our cultural context, the Additions are understood as exterior and cannot perform their role. It is necessary that new pedagogies rediscover that function. This is our aspiration in developing our proposal: to help exercitants, through work on the bodily dimension, reach the seat of the *affectus* as the capacity to be moved and to involve themselves in relationship (on which the dynamic of the Exercises is based), so opening them to the action of the Spirit. It is here that our pedagogy may be recognised as a realisation of the Additions at the service of the Spiritual Exercises.

The name that this article has been given can now be better understood: 'Exercises to Feel and Relish Things Interiorly'.[7] Here are some testimonies from exercitants:

> *I have been touched in every meaning of the word, touched by the Word made flesh, the word grasped by all of my being and not only by the understanding.*
>
> *It is the experience of a word that captivates me completely along with my life.*
>
> *In the exercise with the hands it was easier for me to receive than to give, because this complete self-giving … was linked to my story, to what is lived.*
>
> *I realise that my exchanges with others are limited, in the life that I spend alongside others without authenticity.*

[7] Exx 2, in the translation by Elder Mullan (New York: Kenedy, 1914) [Ed].

These exercises have allowed me to bring down certain barriers, certain masks. I think that I would not have arrived at this point without that.

I have discovered that I can truly exist.

My Christian education has inhibited me a lot because it was necessary to respond to a predetermined ideal. This time it was about feeling interiorly without repression, letting out whatever would arise from my depths, even if I was sometimes a little anxious when I realised what was coming.

If He is my God, so I am His creature, with everything I am, including this body that I accept so badly.

I have discovered what is in my desire. At the beginning I did not want to go to the sacrament of reconciliation, but I listened to this desire in myself. I went; and I am happy.

It is a new experience: the felt encounter with Jesus in prayer, that has frankly changed me. His greater desire is that I allow myself to love. It is easy to allow yourself to be guided. The surprise of this deluge of desire makes it possible for me to encounter him again.

It appears to us that our proposals allow exercitants not only to enter fully into the experience of the Spiritual Exercises, but also—by the transformation produced in them, in the encounter with Christ—to face up to the bodily dimension as the place of encounter with God in daily life.

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translated by Philip Harrison SJ

TOWARDS UNION

Personal Reflections on Spirituality and the Body

Marion Morgan

WHEN I FIRST ENTERED a Roman Catholic church in 1968, at the age of 26 I was immediately struck by the sheer physicality of the worship space. There were candles for people to light; holy water at the entrance; people in the pews using their beads as they prayed the rosary; and even a row of doors down one side proclaiming silently that this was where sin was dealt with—so very practical. This was a church where you did not need to have a facility with words: you could pray equally sincerely with the body. Coming from the tradition of an evangelical Anglican church in a London suburb, interspersed with attendance, along with my family, at an English-speaking Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in central Wales, I found that the abundance of Catholic worship practices and the inherent joyfulness made my head reel.

My job, with the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, involved visiting many families and individuals who found the use of words more often threatening than helpful. My background in evangelical Christianity told me that I should try to convert these people or introduce them to a church. How could I? They would have been most uncomfortable and ill at ease in the church I was then attending. So the importance of a spirituality which reached right down to the very practicalities of bodily living became a central part of my search for an expression of Christianity that made sense of both body and spirit—and preferably mind as well.

Years later, after I had moved to Bristol and was leading an RCIA group in the parish, a rather strict Anglican candidate expressed his horror at one of the participants who was following the Stations of the Cross during a lunchtime in Lent and carrying a takeaway cup of coffee round with him. The Catholics in the RCIA group (there in a supporting role) collapsed with laughter. It seems to me that Catholic theology and worship take as their heart the incarnation of Jesus, with all its implications. The Word became flesh—flesh and blood, as we are. And

more—this tremendous miracle is made present to us the whole time through the sacramental life, especially the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, through the Church, which *is* sacrament, and its people who are (or should be) constantly growing as sacraments of Christ to the world. For me, this is where spirituality and the body truly meet.

The Whole Creation

Human bodies are, of course, not isolated organisms. Today we are learning to appreciate more and more the facts of creation, the development of all life and ourselves as part of the whole process. The scientific study of nature and the universe can bring us to our knees at the wonder of creation. In the letter to the Romans (8:18–21), St Paul supports our growing realisation that the foundation for our thinking should be that all created life warrants our care, as it was created by God. Although all is subject to corruption, likewise all is destined for eventual resurrection as part of a new heaven and a new earth. So bodies should certainly be taken seriously. We are destined for resurrection—body and spirit. The integration and transformation of these two are the hoped-for end result of earthly life.

'As we have all undertaken to *subdue the body*, may we all be *renewed in spirit*.' The familiar phrase from the Divine Office (Morning Prayer, Friday, Lent 1) can in some ways be confusing. Yes—we know what it means. The body can be lazy, demanding and unresponsive, and can lead us into many vices. But so can the spirit. An inflated sense of spirit can lead to pride, stubbornness, self-centredness and the rest. Both body and spirit need to be subdued; both need to be renewed.

Although unity is our aim—because body and spirit should not be separated—the purification of each and every part of ourselves takes place in time and space, and so they do need to be considered separately. Our being is so complex and multifaceted that we need in practice to concentrate on one aspect at a time in order to subdue our so human bodies and spirits into something more able to enter into heaven and participate in the new heaven and new earth. We need to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Body

The ways of purifying our bodies are multiple. Most people are familiar with the idea of 'giving up something for Lent'. This can sometimes feel like another version of a New Year resolution. To make it more

meaningful we need first to recognise what is in fact wrong with our body currently: in other words, to make an examination of conscience. Our passions may start from bodily urges. They may start with psychological needs. The problem becomes more complex when we bring into our thinking the influences of bad spirits and good spirits, and even the activity of demonic forces. The stories of many saints outline various penitential ways of life, aimed at subduing the body—there is no need to go into further detail now. The aim should not be to suppress but to achieve some measure of control and direction with all this inner energy. The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and the Ignatian experience and teaching on discernment are strongly relevant here.

But it is also relevant to *celebrate* the body, as we celebrate all creation. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). It was created by God. In health it is beautiful. The activity of the body in sport, dancing, music, is uplifting and inspiring and may often lead us into awe and wonder at what it can do, apart from the elation brought by artists' and athletes' actual achievements. We know that those who bring us such experiences have sacrificed a great deal in order to do so. Moreover it is a wonder of Christianity that sick and disabled bodies play a crucial part in the great mission of the salvation of the world: the path of transforming current reality.

The intense suffering that we see all around us, especially in war zones and in the face of natural disasters will always remain one of the world's deepest mysteries and cannot be explained like this. But we can offer up our own pain and suffering, linking it to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and so hand it over to the whole redemptive process. Teilhard de Chardin affirmed that the suffering of his sister Marguerite-Marie,

who founded the Catholic Union of the Sick and eventually died from spinal tuberculosis, was integral to his own mission and achievements. They were partners in the same task. He wrote in tribute to her of 'the astounding Christian revelation of a suffering which (provided it be accepted in the right spirit) can be transformed into an expression of love'.[1]

Spirit

All parts of our being are destined for transformation until, after death, we eventually receive a new spiritual body. Our belief in the bodily assumption of Mary affirms this. What she is we also will be, through the transforming grace of God through our baptism and our receiving of Christ's body and blood at the Eucharist, through the Holy Spirit. So it follows that, here on earth, signs of this transformation may be apparent and the process can sometimes be charted. A *spirituality* shows one of the very many ways in which this transformation can be brought about.

'Spirituality' is a word so widely in use today, with so many types of meaning, that it appears to mean everything that is *not* the body. It calls to my mind the teaching from my early youth of what a sacrament is: an outward and bodily sign of an inward and spiritual truth. But inward truth now includes the mind, the intellect, the will, the imagination, the spirit, the emotions and passions as well as what we sometimes call the soul—the deep self where our true identity is hidden. Yet a spirituality which ignores the place of the body can never be complete. All genuine spiritualities take account of our personal needs and experiences and lead us gently through the various purifying experiences that we meet throughout our lives.

A spirituality which ignores the place of the body can never be complete

Maybe we should start by considering the work of the Holy Spirit, who is so instrumental in our eventual transformation into beings ready for heaven. If we allow it, the Spirit guides us in our actions, our thoughts, our decisions, our hopes, our fears—all of which are played out in our actions. We need God's help, through Jesus, our incarnated Lord, and the Holy Spirit: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain' (Psalm 127:1). It follows that all our efforts should be prompted by the Lord, whether through direct experience in prayer or through mediated experience from other people who have trodden the road. Which road we choose is a matter of discernment, and we may

[1] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Spiritual Energy of Suffering', in *Activation of Energy*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 248.

have many false starts before we find the right road for ourselves. Sometimes I think that our only real decisions are whether or not we say 'yes' to the Spirit, and whether or not we comply cheerfully (as distinct from doing so with a bad grace).

How Do We Respond to the Spirit?

We respond first through the many forms of prayer. Once again, our bodies are involved. We kneel or lie prostrate, or muse in our beds, or pray as we walk in the countryside or elsewhere. We may raise our arms in exultation as we praise God; we may clap or dance or burst into songs of praise. The charismatic movement, with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit, is a spirituality which very much involves the body: clapping, raising hands, and arms in praise, singing vigorously with accompanying physical movement, being 'slain by the Spirit'. Or we may sing restrained and beautiful music as we chant in chorus the ancient psalms. Often our very bodies react to the movements of the Spirit, through expressions of love, fear, joy, excitement—and action.

At any time on our journey—adolescence, retirement, old age—we may find ourselves tiring of the infinite number of words that abound in our life. lf we read the Divine Office, it may all seem too much. Actual participation in the liturgy in church, for example as a reader, may feel like a distraction. We are attracted and drawn into a more contemplative, wordless form of prayer. There is no need to be afraid or troubled by this. Commit it all to the guidance of the Holy Spirit: it is all part of the journey. And, like all the stages, it is not permanent. The experience will be absorbed into our growth and serve as a resource through the rest of our life.

If we are called to care for our neighbour, the form this takes can be seen as engaging in a spirituality in its own right. The active apostolate (as distinct from the contemplative apostolate) has given rise to many different ways of prayer—and religious orders or associations marking the general course of each of them, encouraging and teaching those who start on their particular path. Hence we have teaching orders, nursing orders, missionary orders, parish work orders and the rest. Priesthood may be exercised through a religious order; or if a priest is a diocesan priest, his manner of prayer is his own choice, in the Spirit. He can follow the guidance of many great saints and examples. The same applies to laypeople, single or married. They work out their own ways of prayer and their own ways of living the Christian life. Often they are attracted to a

different parish from their local one. It could be said that they prefer the style—or spirituality?—of the one they have chosen.

There are so many spiritualities, and so many charisms, yet they have in common the twin desire to love God and to love our neighbour; and all rely on the salvation wrought by Christ and the Holy Spirit, His gift.

Two Worlds

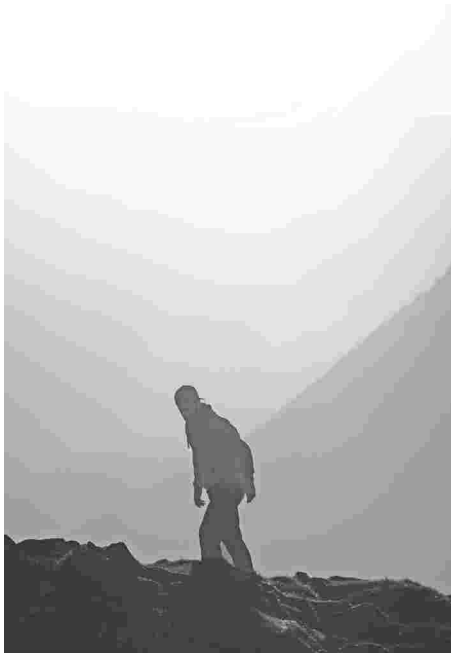
Like Peter, James and John in the Gospels, some are invited by the Lord to climb up a high mountain and to experience an intense spiritual time, as these disciples did when they saw Jesus transfigured. St Teresa tells us that she always started her prayer by calling to mind the physical presence of Jesus. We need him to accompany us. Contemplative prayer is certainly a time when the spirit seems to take precedence over the body—but although bodies are secondary, they nevertheless contribute in different ways to this experience.

We may be over-tired, or stressed, or sick—but when the body becomes inactive, the spirit soars. Many religions, including Christianity, promote this effect. There are numerous examples of people from all races and backgrounds undergoing penance, fasting, moving into deserts of varying types, existing on 'locusts and wild honey' like St John the Baptist: St Simeon Stylites on his pillar; St Ignatius at Manresa; hermits and others. Many, if not all, of the saints experienced great hardships alongside deep visions.

But I want to go back to the account of the Transfiguration. It was Jesus who invited the three disciples to accompany him up the mountain. Many try to do it on their own, with varying results. Sometimes it happens involuntarily through a particularly stressful time or for other reasons. Jesus is there with us. The ascent can be painful—it may take years—we may not have realised that we were climbing. When we are there, there is no mistaking the experience. The clarity of the view is breathtaking. The presence of the Lord is overwhelming. Our own sinfulness and inadequacy become clear, but that is just a small part of the vision now. We may experience heightened perception. The world appears more wonderful and beautiful than we could have imagined. The mundane world, however lovely, is only a shadow of the Real world. Our only response is to fall prostrate and worship. Time means nothing.

Going down the Mountain

How long this state lasts is variable. But sooner or later, the time comes when we have to go down the mountain once again and enter into



the frustrations and problems of the exasperating living of our ordinary lives. Going down the mountain is more painful than going up. How can we leave such beauty behind? How can we accustom ourselves once more to ordinary life? Jesus is still with us but the decision has to be ours. Are we willing to take on our human responsibilities once more?

We begin to glimpse what it cost Jesus to leave heaven behind and become incarnate. We have experienced in our own limited way the miracle of *kenosis*—the emptying out of all our desires, even our desire for spiritual consolations. But we have to rely on our bodies to take us down the slope, to make us eat once more, to urge us to engage in the life we temporarily left behind. We will need rest and time to take in all that has happened. This is hard and demands discipline and concentration. We must not allow ourselves to try to retain the experiences and feelings we have been through, the deep consolations of the spiritual vision. We must let it fade and not hang on to it.

This can involve a profound grief—a pain which will always remain, deep in our psyche. It will be a salutary pain. As the years of ordinary living progress, that pain is always there to jerk us back into the Reality of things, if we stray too far away. If we encounter times—even years—when Jesus seems very distant and consolations are few, then that pain reminds us that we are still on the journey and have not been abandoned—there is simply more to learn and experience, in the body. It is a long way to death and final union with the inexpressible reality of our Trinitarian God—this God who became incarnate through the Virgin Mary.

It is love that prompts us to return to mundane life. We see the needs of the world around us: physical need, psychological need, intellectual need, spiritual need. We have received so much that we realise this was not for our benefit alone: it has to be shared, in whatever way the Spirit shows us, with the outside world. This love is the basis for mission. The need to share means, first of all, learning what the world is actually

doing, how it thinks, what its concerns are. It means engaging with the community in which we live. The desert father St Antony returned to the city to teach after twenty years in the desert. St Teresa of Ávila was still travelling right to the end of her life.

The World's Wisdom

A 'dry' period in prayer can be the ideal time to mix with others who are not part of our existing community. We can update ourselves on what is going on around us. We can learn the current language of our neighbours so that our experience and our knowledge of age-old truths can be expressed in ways that can be welcomed and understood. Our neighbours may also want to learn the meaning of some of our well-used but rather old-fashioned words, but need to know that we also understand their own terms of reference. Knowledge and ways of education and lifetime experiences have changed so much since some of us first became aware of spiritual matters: we may have some catching up to do!

It seems to me that many of us believe all sorts of truths in our heads, but these do not always seep into our conscious minds—or our hearts. If spiritual consolations are withdrawn—especially over a period of years—there can be a chance to resolve this. If we talk with people who believe differently from ourselves, we may find we are fumbling to find the words to express our own thoughts and feelings and beliefs. With practice, this comes more easily. When we see so many good people serving the disadvantaged in so many diverse ways, it can stir our consciences in a manner that a weekly sermon or Bible reading simply does not. If we take the time to study the Bible itself, preferably with a good commentary, or in a group, we begin to see truths and practices in a new and personal way. It will make us think. If we read secular literature we may find ourselves recoiling from some of the themes or values expressed or, contrarily, find ourselves inspired by what we read. If we continue mixing with the world and dialoguing with it, after a time we begin to realise what we ourselves do actually believe. It may even save us from making fatuous comments or presenting naïve answers to genuine questions. We may well accept, with St Paul, that the wisdom of men and women is foolishness in the light of the wisdom of God, but prayerful engagement with the world's wisdom can bring us closer to understanding the wisdom of God.

Between Two Worlds

Any conflict between spirit and body is often most acutely felt by ordinary people in ordinary situations. I believe that little attention has been

paid to the difficult space between the two worlds: our spiritual growth and sensibilities, and the outside world where we have to engage ourselves, our brains and our bodies in the very mundane things around us.

Yes—St Ignatius encourages us to see God in all things. Of course.

But that is very different from making the transition from a very nourishing time of prayer, maybe, to engaging fully in our business affairs, meetings, calculations, engagement with all sorts of different practical and ideological situations. How do we move from one mindset to the other? After a busy day at the office, or the school, or wherever, all we may want to do is relax at home and engage with the entirely practical and domestic side of things—although these also pose numerous problems and stresses. Or we may want to disengage and retreat into prayer, but that is not always possible. Our children may be clamouring for attention; our wives or husbands may need us. We may well have to postpone our quiet and reflective time until later.

But it works the other way too. When we are having a satisfying and happy day in ordinary activities, we may feel strangely reluctant to switch on our spiritual side and engage in deep reflection or prayer. We may even resent the amount of time it takes when there is so little time available to be spread around so many pressing—and authentic—engagements and activities. There is a double grief that needs to be worked through and managed. Firstly, when we have to tear ourselves away from situations where we are experiencing spiritual nourishment and peace. Secondly, when we have to tear ourselves away from family and domestic and work activities to engage in specifically 'spiritual' activity.

It is this transition from one world to another that I want to stress. There is a sort of spiritual epiglottis inside us. Just as the physical epiglottis switches between opening the airway to our lungs and the route to our stomach, so the spiritual epiglottis switches our energy and perception from the spiritual way of thinking and experiencing (which should be growing within us), to the practical living of our beliefs in our actual busy lives. It does not seem possible to be aware, or to live, both ways at the same time. Later in life, there should perhaps be some integration of the two, but that may be much later, in old age, when the hustle and bustle usually subsides.

Integration and Union

Which brings us right back to the way that St Ignatius resolved this problem of uniting body and soul in his Spiritual Exercises, motivated by love, both of God and of the world and all who live in it.

As I said at the beginning, God's purpose is to unite all things in God. That means we first of all have to be united in our own selves, body and soul. Throughout life, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the transforming effect and nourishment of the sacraments, we will experience ups and downs, penances and consolations, so that by the end of our lives we may have already undergone a considerable transformation from the person we once were. Although it is hard to see, the world also is undergoing a transformation. We still yearn for a transformed and peaceful world and cling to the promise that, despite much distressing evidence to the contrary, there will be a new heaven and earth, just as we also look forward to death and resurrection in our own journey.

The wonderful contemplation for seeing God in all things is a way forward in our journey towards integration and union. Having looked at our sins in the First Week, and tried to purify our desires and orientate ourselves and our will to God, through Jesus, in the Second and Third Weeks; having accepted and embraced the need for salvation and the reality of suffering in the Third Week; then we may hope firmly in a resurrection which is both bodily and spiritual.

As our bodies gradually give up functioning and our spirits, we hope, grow stronger, we take inspiration and hope not just from the resurrection of Jesus, but also from the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary: our renewed bodies and spirits become our spiritual form and we are complete at last, recognisable as our true selves. We await only the final renewal and resurrection of the new heaven and new earth in which we shall at last be fully at home.

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TIME FOR A MATURE APPROACH TO SEXUALITY

A View from South Africa

Martin Badenhorst

> All that we are is the result of what we have thought: we are formed and moulded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfish thoughts cause misery when they speak or act. Sorrows roll over them as the wheels of a cart roll over the tracks of the bullock that draws it.[1]

IMAGINE A FRENCH CAT—*le chat*—living in Forbach near the German border. Being masculine, he happily dangles a Gauloise from his lip, wears his beret and hangs out with the boys in the local café. One day he crosses the border into Germany, whereupon he becomes feminine—*die Katze*. The beret comes off, a fetchingly shaped corset slips on over a traditional blouse, setting off the wide skirt of a dirndl, as she goes to hang out with the other girls.

We know reality does not conform to language like this. Yet, when it comes to people and their experience of self there is a tendency to behave as though it does: we try to force people to become what we feel comfortable with, rather than acknowledging their own experience. This gives a new perspective on the insight of the Buddha voiced in that opening *gāthā* of the *Dhammapada*. Our mind shapes our thoughts in words; words shape our reality. We think and form our reality within the structures of our mother tongue. Those structures are analogues of reality.

Language and the Common Good

Language both liberates and enslaves. This is profoundly true in approaching the matter of sex (our bodies), sexuality (our feelings and attractions) and gender (our self-presentation to the world and sense of self in the world). Language shapes our understanding and, as we communicate that understanding, we acknowledge or distort the perceptions of other people.

[1] *The Dhammapada*, translated by Eknath Easwaran (Berkeley: Nilgiri, 2007), 105.

South Africa has twelve official languages, but only two of them—Afrikaans and English—have Indo-European roots. Afrikaans is the third most spoken language, after isiZulu and isiXhosa, and English the sixth. The newest official language is South African Sign Language (which has a number of regional dialects); this derives from UK, Irish and US sign languages. The others belong to the Southern Bantoid group of about 680 languages, within the Benue-Congo language group.[2] A characteristic of these languages, including the overarching family of Niger-Congo (1,554 languages), is that nouns fall into categories or classes rather than being denominated by gender. Persons are usually in a class which has common concord (like a pronoun) for all people without distinction. There are, as a general rule, some ten singular classes, some which may have plurals, usually between fifteen and nineteen in total.

It is often a characteristic of second- or third-language speakers of English whose mother tongue is a Bantu language that they mix up pronouns when referring to people. Because of the influence of the mother tongue, 'she' and 'he' are used interchangeably regardless of the actual sex of a person. In those languages most people are simply people, unless their sex needs to be noted. This linguistic quality supports and strengthens the common concept of *ubuntu*, human solidarity and mutual responsibility in community. This concept is often translated as 'I am because you are'.

A traditional Zulu wedding

[2] See https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroup/52/.

Within this concept the common good has a stronger grip within the perception of a person than individual rights. Historically all the cultures within this vast linguistic family have found a place for sexual diversity, as long as the common good of the increase and well-being of the family, clan and tribe was served. All understand that marriage, often arranged between families with varying input from the couple, and children are inevitable. This is the accepted social reality. Where people find gratification and emotional fulfilment is open to variation as long as it does not diminish the common good.

Gender Exceptions in African Culture

African societies are, for the most part, traditionally patriarchal (some, such as the Herero of Namibia are matrilineal: inheritance and status pass through the maternal family) and there are generally clearly distinct behaviours and dress associated with masculinity and femininity, with significant taboos in place. Once again, as long as duty and the common good are served, what happens in private is not a matter for public concern. However, standing out from gender expectations and duties, rejecting them out of a sense of self which is entirely separated from the culture, would appear destructive to the common good in traditional settings. Western individualism, which utters an 'I am' without reference to society, is alien to the sense of connected self in Africa.

Exceptions to gender conventions are to be found among the spiritual leaders and healers within communities. Blanket terms often employed for these persons are *sangoma* for the spiritually empowered and *inyanga* for the healer (both are gender neutral). The roles may sometimes reside in one person.

Sangomas are intermediaries between the living and ancestral communities. The notion of *ubuntu* embraces the participation of deceased ancestors as a reality. A *sangoma* usually has a special relationship with a particular departed ancestor who possesses the *sangoma* and communicates through him or her. In turn the *sangoma* will continue to display traits of this additional presence in the self even outside the particular environment of an altered state of consciousness. Where a person's characteristics do not follow the norm expected of male or female behaviour, the presence of an ancestral spirit of the other sex is acknowledged and honoured. If a female *sangoma*'s ancestral spirit is male, her reluctance to bear children or engage in intimacy with a man is accepted. Males possessed by female ancestors are treated likewise.

Communities of same-sex *sangomas* who are sexually intimate with each other are known. Nevertheless there are often powerful taboos at work, integrated into the identity of an individual, which make penetration of one man by another unlikely. It is perceived as an act of violence and humiliation in war. Women have more licence in their sexual behaviour with one another. In the Zulu culture the clothing of *sangomas*, which identifies them to society, derives from what is usual for women to wear, irrespective of the sex of the *sangoma*.

Inyanga do not have such a close relationship with the ancestors to allow this behavioural crossover between what is expected of women and men. However their knowledge and grasp of the traditions of healing allow them some licence to be 'different'.

Tensions between Tradition, Society and the State

Same-sex sexual activity and intimate same-sex community are well established in traditional African society. Homosexual orientation, in the Western understanding, is unknown and mostly unacceptable. The same may be said for the other identifiers used in the West to describe sexualities other than the sexual and emotional attraction between a man and a woman.[3] Within the South African context extreme pressure has been put on the traditional integration of non-binary persons by the history of colonialism, Christian mission, institutionalised racism and rapid social change and decay. All of these together bring about the perfect conditions for the rejection and misunderstanding of those who are non-binary.

Consistently with the concept of *ubuntu*, the Constitution of South Africa grants all persons an equal right in society which implies equal opportunities to contribute to the common good.

> The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.[4]

This principle has withstood being tested in court; and South Africa legalised same-sex marriage in 2006.[5]

[3] Studies in different African contexts address this complex relationship; please refer in particular to *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 7/3 (2005).

[4] *The Constitution of South Africa* (Pretoria: Government of South Africa, 1996), 2.9.3, available at https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/saconstitution-web-eng.pdf.

[5] Civil Union Act 17 of 2006, available at https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a17-061.pdf, accessed 29 May 2024.

In practice the breakdown of traditional systems—especially the dissolution of extended families by migrant labour practices that started under apartheid and have sadly been perpetuated by economic pressures since it ended—contradicts the ideals of both the constitution and *ubuntu*. Violence against women, non-binary persons and children is endemic in what is already a violent society. Our murder rate is 43.7 per 100,000 persons per year (the global average is 5.8 per 100,000).[6] The violence against non-binary persons, in particular, has resulted in a letter to the South African government from Human Rights Watch.[7]

Diversity in Schools

In the face of these tensions it is important for future generations to formulate an approach to sexual diversity that starts in schools. The school system itself in South Africa has complex varieties of ownership and responsibility. Broadly stated, there are three forms of school administration from pre-primary to secondary. There are entirely private schools, which are self-funded and form their own policies and personnel practices, always subject to the overarching legislation regarding education and validation of the curriculum. Then there are entirely state-owned schools and state schools on private property, which have an agreement with the government about subsidy, staffing and so forth. Some (very few) religious schools are entirely private. Most are state schools on private property, where closer coordination between state and school is necessary; this includes taking account of the laws that might govern how sexual diversity is to be approached.

For such laws have not yet been formulated. Faith-based schools accordingly need to be one step ahead so as to offer input from experience and best practice into the drafting of legislation, ensuring that religious ethical approaches are not ignored. It is only natural that Roman Catholic schools would look to guidelines as they are formulated at the level of the Dicastery for Culture and Education. This Dicastery absorbs the former Congregation for Catholic Education. The most recent texts it has produced have given guidelines in matters of sex education in schools and in other academic environments. These refer back to the call in *Gravissimum educationis* of Vatican II:

[6] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2023* (New York: United Nations, 2023), 65, 10 (2021 figures).
[7] See https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/19/letter-south-african-authorities-regarding-lgbti-murders-and-assaults, accessed 29 May 2024.

> Therefore children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy. Let them be given also, as they advance in years, a positive and prudent sexual education. (n. 1)

Church Guidance

To this latter end, two documents stand out. The first, E*ducational Guidance in Human Love* was issued on 1 November 1983. It does not touch on diversity other than to treat of homosexuality as unfulfilled or damaged heterosexuality:

> It will be the duty of the family and the teacher to seek first of all to identify the factors which drive towards homosexuality: to see if it is a question of physiological or psychological factors; if it be the result of a false education or of the lack of normal sexual evolution; if it comes from a contracted habit or from bad example; or from other factors. More particularly, in seeking the causes of this disorder, the family and the teacher will have to take account of the elements of judgement proposed by the ecclesiastical Magisterium, and be served by the contribution which various disciplines can offer.[8]

The complexities of intersex (whose bodies do not follow the usual pattern of either male or female) or transsexual (who experience a disconnect with the sex of their bodies) persons and identities do not figure.

There is some acknowledgement by the time we get to the Catechism (1994) that homosexual identity is not just a deviance from heterosexuality:

> Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained.[9]

The language of seeking a cause, implying the need for a cure, is somewhat modified yet sadly still present. And, just like *Educational Guidance*

[8] Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (1983), n. 102, citing Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona humana: Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics* (1975), n. 11.

[9] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2357.

in Human Love this paragraph cites *Persona humana*, n.8, which calls homosexuality 'intrinsically disordered'.

In the sphere of education a further document was published on 2 February 2019, *'Male and Female He Created Them'; Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*. Here a tendency which was present in *Familiaris consortio* of St John Paul II is articulated:

> There is a need to reaffirm the metaphysical roots of sexual difference, as an anthropological refutation of attempts to negate the male–female duality of human nature, from which the family is generated. The denial of this duality not only erases the vision of human beings as the fruit of an act of creation but creates the idea of the human person as a sort of abstraction who 'chooses for himself what his nature is to be'.[10]

There is a point of concern in that the family is only described in terms of the nuclear family: father, mother, children. The more pervasive human experience of family is that of the extended family, whether traditional family structures in non-Western societies or the 'blended family' growing increasingly widespread in the West. A greater point of concern is the notion found in n.11 of *Familiaris consortio*,

> As an incarnate spirit, that is a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love …. Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another … is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.

[10] Congregation for Catholic Education, *'Male and Female He Created Them': Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, n. 34.

The Theology of the Gendered Soul

Whatever issues may arise between John Paul II's Polish thought and mother tongue, the Latin official text and the less than supple official English translation, this passage is the seed from which the Theology of the Body developed. It also feeds into the theology of the gendered soul. We see that when the then Cardinal Ratzinger writes to bishops on 31 May 2004, as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: 'From the first moment of their creation, man and woman are distinct, and will remain so for all eternity'.[11]

This theological expression then informs two very current attempts at guidance in the face of gender diversity, specifically of transgender experience. The first is in the Doctrinal Note of the United States Catholic Bishops' Conference of 20 March 2023. The bishops state, 'The human person, body and soul, man or woman, has a fundamental order and finality whose integrity must be respected'.[12] The absolute differentiation of both body and soul into a male/female binary is confirmed in a footnote to the document:

> Persons affected by Disorders of Sexual Development do not fall outside the two categories of male and female, but they do exhibit ambiguous or abnormal indicators of sexual difference, so that the sex of their bodies is difficult to determine, though not impossible for modern medical and genetic techniques.[13]

This clarity of proposing binary gendered souls in binary gendered bodies is further expressed in the pastoral letter, 'On the Unity of the Body and Soul: Accompanying Those Experiencing Gender Dysphoria' by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, USA. In explaining the term 'transgender', the archbishop states, 'Biological or genetic sex is determined by chromosomes—XX for female and XY for male'.[14] In the section 'The Beauty and Truth of Creation' the archbishop states:

[11] Cardinal Ratzinger, 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World', n. 12.
[12] Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 'Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body', n. 7.
[13] 'Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body', n. 5 note 8, available at https://www.usccb.org/resources/Doctrinal%20Note%202023-03-20.pdf, accessed 25 April 2024.
[14] Paul S. Coakley, 'On the Unity of the Body and Soul: Accompanying Those Experiencing Gender Dysphoria', note 6, available at https://archokc.org/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley_Pastoral%20Letter_English_2023-2.pdf, accessed 25 April 2024.

> Jesus reaffirms for us that there are two sexes designed by God for each other. St John Paul II called the sexes 'two different incarnations'. That is, two distinct but related ways of being human. While only the body is sexed, each soul is adapted to a particular body, so there is a sense in which the body feminizes or masculinises the soul. And because the sexed body causes this effect in a sexless soul, the two always align.[15]

In a footnote a little before this statement, the archbishop states:

> The UN estimates 0.05% to 1.7% of persons are intersex, meaning their sex is not easily determinable from their sex characteristics …. These exceptions do not disprove the sex binary but are instead anomalous expressions of it. There are only two kinds of sex cells (sperm and eggs), and therefore only two sexes. In the rare cases where a person's sex appears ambiguous, science can be of great help in understanding and aiding the sexed body. The difficulties inherent in these situations in no way detract from the truth that all such persons are made in God's image and likeness and deeply loved.[16]

As much as such persons need to be loved, the archbishop's advice is that they be told that they are wrong, even sinful, in their perception of self.

These arguments are entirely undermined by biological reality, because each genetic component of the egg or sperm is already an amalgam of the maternal and paternal ancestors in the body which produced it. Moreover individuals whose bodies are ambiguous may arise from multiple variations of the sex chromosomes themselves. Some variations have little or no consequences in the formation of sex organs but are discovered because of other characteristics.

Within my own extended family, for example, Turner's syndrome is present, where there is only one of the sex chromosomes, the X (conceptions with only Y are not viable), resulting in a female body which cannot enter puberty. In the case of my cousin, her sense of self aligned with her body, puberty was medically induced and she embraced womanhood. Not all people with this genetic characteristic are equally fortunate in identifying with the femaleness of a body which would perpetually remain that of a girl child. The work of the researcher Alice Dreger points to the fact that 'nature does not draw a line'.[17] Nature does not draw a line; language and ideology do.

[15] Coakley, 'On the Unity of the Body and Soul', 3.
[16] Coakley, 'On the Unity of the Body and Soul', note 13.
[17] Alice Dreger, 'Is Anatomy Destiny?', TED talk, at https://www.ted.com/talks/alice_dreger_is_anatomy_destiny, accessed 27 April 2024.

Developing Maturity

Our psychological language for talking about sex and gender is relatively new and undergoing rapid changes. We have had the label *heterosexual* since 1868, when it was coined by the Austrian-born Hungarian journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny. In its original context it had a rather wide spread of meanings and included the 'laxity, license, and "unfetteredness" exhibited by normally sexed individuals … resulting from a "stronger drive" than one finds among onanists and homosexualists'.[18]

Other descriptions have emerged over time as psychology has heard people's accounts of themselves, and is still unfolding. What has been created in the years since Kertbeny coined the term *heterosexual* is an opportunity to begin to understand the spectrum of human desire, bonding and identity. With some researchers in the field in Africa there is a hesitation in using the LGBTQIA+ descriptions of sexuality, since they define as much as they describe and can constrict people in the same way as the man/woman binary.[19] *Ubuntu* looks at humanity before it applies gender categories.

Pope Francis, in a recent film documentary encounter with young people, remarked, 'I think we Christians haven't always had a mature catechism regarding sex'.[20] The theological approach that genders bodies and souls into a strict binary is boxing itself into an intractable position. One can understand that the Church is very careful not to be seen to promote any expression of sex outside of the marriage covenant and the good of procreation. But sex is not only about function and context; it touches identity. At the same time we, as pastors, have to encounter those whose lives, for one reason or another, are unable to fulfil this norm.

Contraception—which has advanced significantly since *Humanae vitae*, blurring distinctions between artificial and natural—and fertility technologies have make the link between sex and procreation extremely tenuous, leading to strain even between the experience of cisgender couples and the Church's statements. The societal freedom to seek means of articulating sexuality also sees a rise in the number of people who

[18] Jean-Claude Féray and Manfred Herzer, 'Homosexual Studies and Politics in the 19th Century: Karl Maria Kertbeny', translated by Glen W. Peppel, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 19/1 (1990), 36. See also Véronique Mottier, *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 37–38.

[19] See Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network, 'Stories of Vulnerability: Reclaiming Dignity and Building Solidarity with African Queer and Trans Communities', at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WBMKiTQHuk&t=85s, accessed 27 April 2024.

[20] Pope Francis, *The Pope: Answers*, directed by Jordi Évole and Màrius Sanchez (Disney and Hulu, 2023).

acknowledge that their capacity for love and intimacy is not bound to or described by cis relationships.

As that cat crosses the border between France and Germany and changes from *le chat* to *die Katze*, it remains cat, whether male or female. Once we realise our borders are artificial, we can be more attentive to the broader reality. Ultimately human beings are drawn to one another and seek intimacy from one another. And not all intimacy is the intimacy of sexual intercourse. The expanding list of sexual identities LGBTQIA+ includes that *A*: asexual, certainly desiring and needing intimacy, but not keyed to sexual intercourse as its primary expression.

Human beings are drawn to one another and seek intimacy from one another

Young people need support as they become aware of their sexuality and gender. They need safe spaces where their physical and emotional integrity are not violated by people of ill will. They need to overcome the feeling of condemnation which may be provoked by their diversity. We all need a sense of belonging. Young people will still have their vulnerability and need, whatever theological route the Church takes in the long run. This is a Galileo moment, and the science must be understood and taken seriously as we tentatively move forward.

We must also take note that each of us reflects that reality of God which both gives rise to and transcends male and female, man and woman. We are made in that image, alienated from our source by sin and restored through grace. If we, the Church, continue to be tone-deaf to the cry of everyone to belong, our refusal to hear will contribute to the suffering and even suicide of LGBTQIA+ people, especially young people, and to the violence committed against them by others.

In terms of education and schools, the necessary catechesis does not start with the diversity of sexuality. It starts with the basic principle of *ubuntu*: we belong for the sake each other. We underline the need for boundaries, for physical and mental integrity among all learners. We are all strengthened when we ensure that vulnerability is not exploited or abused. So we try to build responsibility for the common good in all things. We hope for a world where sorrow will never again roll over those on the spectrum of sexual diversity.

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JULIAN OF NORWICH, MARGERY KEMPE AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

Luke Penkett

BOTH JULIAN OF NORWICH (*c.* 1343–after 1416) and Margery Kempe (1373–after 1438) were recognised in their own day as having spiritual gifts that gave them some kind of religious standing. The Church's recognition of women who had holy vocations, such as Julian and Margery, gave them some support which allowed them to gain a rare foothold for their work—even within their patriarchal and misogynistic society—as the first female writer of a book in English (*Showings* and then, twenty years later, *Revelations of Divine Love*) and the first writer of an autobiography in English (*The Book of Margery Kempe*).

Entering Imaginatively into Scenes of Christ's Suffering

In the opening lines of both the Short Text and the Long Text of her *Revelations* (as I shall refer to them from now on), Julian of Norwich beseeches God for three 'graces', in the Short Text, or 'gifts', in the Long Text.[1] The first was 'to call to mind Christ's passion', the second 'physical sickness' and the third 'three wounds'.

Regarding the first, Julian adds that she desired 'a bodily sight' of Jesus and 'the compassion' of his Mother Mary:

> I desired a physical sight wherein I might have more knowledge of our Lord's, our Saviour's, bodily pains, and of the compassion of our Lady [Mary] and of all his true lovers who believed in [the truth of] his pains at that time and ever since (ST 1).

These are extraordinary requests, rendered all the more extraordinary by Julian explaining succinctly why she would so desire a 'bodily sight':

[1] The Short Text (ST) is found at BL MS Add. 37790 and the Long Text (LT) at BL MS Sloane 2499. All modern English translations are my own.

> It seemed to me that I had much awareness of Christ's passion but, nevertheless, I desired to have more, by the grace of God …
>
> … following the teaching of Holy Church regarding the representation of Christ's passion, as far as Man's mind may stretch (ST 1).

She desires this bodily sight in order, first, to feel more deeply the pains that Jesus suffered and, second, to have been with the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and the others who loved our Lord and remained with him, in order that she might 'have greater understanding of Christ's passion': so that she might perceive, both physically and spiritually, what he suffered, dying for her and for her fellow Christians, and that she herself could suffer along with Jesus as 'Christ's lovers' did.

It is the month of May in the year 1373 and, through the window from Julian's cell where she was 'anchored' to the church, Julian would have received Holy Communion. Indeed, she would have recently heard the prayers, readings and music for Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Outside her second window, this one to the world, Julian would also have heard the groans of those struck down by the plague, and the weeping of those whose loved ones were suffering and passing away. Against this background, it is not to be wondered at that Julian's thoughts were on the passion of Christ, and it was this contemporaneity and depth of physical suffering that led Julian to her own theological and doctrinal discoveries, especially prevalent in her Long Text, written some twenty years after reflecting on her Short Text.

Julian of Norwich, reredos panel by Ellen Woodward, 1922

The second request of Julian was to have 'physical sickness', wishing that it might be so severe that she would receive all the rites of holy Church, imagining that she might die, and, in dying, receive also 'all the dreads and tempests of fiends, and all manner of other sufferings, except for the passing of the soul out of her body', in order

that she might, when she in fact approached her death, pass speedily to God, for she desired to be 'soon' with God. The third gift that Julian desired consisted of three elements: contrition (sorrow for one's own sins), compassion (a deep feeling for others), and a yearning for God, as a mother yearns for her baby and as a baby yearns for its mother.

To read these passages, or to think along the same lines—as Julian's contemporaries did—adds to their extraordinariness. It had only been one or two centuries since Christians had begun their devotions—in England with the reading of the anonymous, early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*—first, to the humanity of Christ, and then, secondly, to the sacred heart of Jesus. Thirdly, with the advent of Julian, there came a fresh understanding of the *imago Dei*, of human beings as made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Julian referred first to the 'nature' of humanity and of God, moving towards a 'uniting' of the two. This included the presence of the *imago Dei* in women—and, also, the presence of the feminine in God.[2]

'God ... in the Secular Realm and in the Midst of Everyday Experience'[3]

What, then, of Margery Kempe, born in the same year that saw Julian's initial recording of her revelations? The opening of *The Book of Margery Kempe* mirrors the opening of Julian's *Revelations*. There is an all-pervading sense of suffering:

> When this creature was twenty years of age or more, she was married to an honourable burgess [of Lynn] and was pregnant within a short time, as nature would have it. And, after she had conceived, she was afflicted with severe attacks [of illness] until the child was born, and then, what with the labour she had in childbirth and the sickness she had beforehand, she despaired of her life, thinking that she might not live. (1.1)

But there are also distinct differences. First of all, *un*like Julian, Margery makes no request to see Jesus. Rather he appears one night while she is lying alone, 'in the likeness of a man … sitting upon her bedside':

> One time, as she lay alone and her keepers were far from her, our merciful Lord Christ Jesus, ever to be trusted, worshipped be his

[2] See Ryan Kade Wiens, 'The Doctrine of the *Imago Dei* in the Soteriology of Julian of Norwich' (MTS diss., University of Waterloo, 2008).
[3] Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', *Church History*, 65/2 (1996), 197–219, at 198.

> name, never forsaking his servant in time of need, appeared in the likeness of a man to his creature who had forsaken him, most seemly, beautiful, and amiable that ever might be seen with human eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside (1.1).

The scene could hardly be more homely, and in this intimate atmosphere Jesus speaks to Margery: 'looking upon her with such a blessed expression that she was strengthened in all her spirits, said these words to her: "Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?"' (1.1; compare 1.81) When he had asked Margery this question, at once testing but also, I feel, compassionate, Margery recorded:

> And, immediately, as he had said these words, she truly saw how the air opened as bright as any lightning, and he ascended into the air, not very hastily and quickly, but elegantly and gradually, so that she might well behold him in the air until it was closed again. (1.1)

Then Margery, the 'creature', notwithstanding, sought food and drink:

> … steadied in her wits and in her reason as well as ever she was before and beseeched her husband as soon as he came to her, that she might have the keys of the buttery to take her food and drink as she had done before (1.1).[4]

Remembering the countless times that Christ provides, or asks to be provided with, refreshment after the healing miracles, Margery's desire for food and drink comes as no surprise. Yet,

> … her maidservants and her keepers advised [her husband] not to hand over any keys to her, for, they said, she would only give away such goods as were there, for she knew not what she was saying [Luke 9:33]—as they believed.
>
> Nevertheless, her husband, always having tenderness and compassion for her, commanded that they should deliver the keys to her. And she took her food and drink as her bodily strength would allow. (1.1)

And then pride—human pride—entered in. Margery 'recognized her friends, and her household, and everyone else who came to her'. Why had they come? 'To see how our Lord Jesus Christ had wrought his grace in her' (1.1). Word, as they say, had spread.

[4] The modern English translations of passages from *The Book of Margery Kempe* are from my forthcoming version in the Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist, 2025).

Margery apparently did not retreat to say her prayers, or to spend any time alone to reflect on Jesus' words. It seems that everybody came, not only her friends, but also her household, her 'maidservants and keepers', as we have just read, and not only these but everyone else came to see the difference in her. And perhaps, just perhaps, for this reason we read a few lines later, 'she did not truly know the power of our Lord to draw [us to him]' (1.1).[5] Margery was to spend the rest of her life growing ever more fully aware of this power … but not yet.

The second chapter of *The Book* is completely taken up with Margery's pride, first of all shown in her choice of clothes and, second, in her reaction to her husband when he attempts to talk to her about that pride. She states that while she came of worthy stock, he had not and, really, he ought never to have married her. Margery then records her disastrous business ventures in brewing and milling, through which failures she realises that her pride and her sin have brought about divine punishment. Most of the folk in Bishop's Lynn (as King's Lynn was first named) then ignored Margery, not offering her any help, some saying she was cursed, others that God had taken open vengeance on her. But a few wise people, whose minds were more grounded in our Lord's love, said that it was the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ which was calling her from the pride and vanity of the wretched world.

Margery herself thought her business failures, the adversities coming on every side, were scourges of our Lord, chastising her for her sin. 'Then she asked of God mercy and forsook her pride, covetousness, and desire that she had for worldly honour, and did much bodily penance'. (1.2) And then we read a beautiful phrase that, for the first time in her autobiography presents Margery in the *imago Dei*: '[she] began to enter the way of everlasting life, as shall be related hereafter' (1.2). We read a similar, confirming, sentence in the third chapter, signifying her conversion to follow Christ: 'Then she was glad in her conscience when she believed that she was entering [upon] the way which would lead her to the place which she most desired' (1.3).

Margery was not celibate, nor was she in any kind of holy orders. She was an ordinary, middle-class, literate, married mother of fourteen children and made herself, *sui generis*, extraordinary.[6] Despite her apparent

[5] Compare LT 43.

[6] It is commonly believed that Margery was illiterate. In 1.47 Margery takes care to ensure that the steward and all those about her know she does not understand Latin, and it is this which has caused her to be described as illiterate. If she had understood Latin, she would be suspect, intruding upon a male

'ordinariness' as woman and layperson, she received the blessing of several important church figures (who believed that God had spoken to her and that she was, in effect, a wandering witness), including Archbishop Arundel and Philip of Repingdon, bishop of Lincoln, as well as more humble clerics, in addition to Julian of Norwich herself. Margery's calling and role were of her own seeking. Nevertheless, through her openness to Christ she became known as a mystic, a pilgrim and a visionary.

These two vivid openings, then, on the one hand of Julian's *Revelations*, on the other of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, immediately set before us two presentations of suffering. In the one, a desire to suffer with Christ, in the other, a suffering mother. In the one the God who suffers, in the other, an example of suffering humanity, a true *imago Dei*.

'In the Image of God He Created Them; Male and Female He Created Them' (Genesis 1:27)

Throughout her *Revelations* Julian writes about the *Mother*hood of Christ. She perceives both male and female attributes in God the Trinity and celebrates the beauty of Motherhood—an *imago Mariae*—in Christ. Christ is the perfect mother figure, engendering, drawing and nurturing the human soul. Indeed, how could God—the androgynous God, some might say—create females in God's image if there were not the feminine

The creation of Adam and Eve, from the Alba Bible, 1430

preserve. However, 2.2, 'Then she wrote letters to her son ...' puts us in no doubt that she could write. It was widely expected that women of Margery's class would be able to read the scriptures in Middle English by this time. (See John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* [London: Adam Islip, Felix Kingston and Robert Young, 1632], volume 1, 871 following.)

within God? In fact, God is not specifically male or female, but above and beyond gender, in order that all, both male and female, can find their place in God—in order that, in Julian's words, *all* might be well. It also follows that there is both male and female in Christ, which leads Julian on to the understanding of Jesus as our Mother:

> As truly as God is our Father, as truly is God our Mother. And that he showed throughout all [the revelations], namely, in these sweet words where he says, 'I it am'. That is to say, I it am, the power and the goodness of fatherhood. I it am, the wisdom and the kindness of motherhood. I it am, the light and the grace that is all blessed love.
>
> And thus, Jesus is our true mother in nature. (LT 59)

Both human genders can embrace the *imago Dei*. So, because there is a duality of male and female in God, both male and female characteristics are found in Godlike men and women.

Margery Steps 'through the Frame and into the Picture'[7]

The Book of Margery Kempe is full of examples where Margery speaks to individuals, and her word is taken by many hearers to be God's own. She took God to be her authority and the Church to be her home throughout a period when there was an increasing acceptance of God's mystical activity among ordinary people; Margery, despite frequent attempts to silence her, achieved, at times, a measure of respectability.[8] Christ tells Margery: 'You shall be devoured and gnawed at by the world's people like any rat gnaws at the stockfish' (1.5). But then he reassures her:

> Fear not, daughter, for you shall win the victory over all your enemies. I shall give you enough grace to answer every cleric in the love of God. I swear to you by my majesty that I shall never forsake you in good times nor in bad. I shall help you, and keep you, so that no devil in Hell, nor angel in Heaven, nor anyone on earth shall ever separate you from me, for devils in Hell cannot, nor angels in Heaven will not, nor anyone on earth shall not. (1.5)

Early on in the *Book*, Margery encounters Mary and, despite falling on her knees with much reverence, weeping and saying, 'I am not worthy, Lady, to serve you', she is reassured by the mother of Jesus:

[7] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, edited by Barry A. Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford U, 2016), xxv.
[8] See Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 192.

'follow me, your service pleases me well' (1.6). Shortly afterwards, Jesus tells her, 'I have ordained you to kneel before the Trinity to pray for all the world, for many hundreds of thousands of souls shall be saved by your prayers' (1.7).

There can be no better assurance of the *imago Dei* in Margery than that, after admitting her great fear of vainglory, she is reassured, this time, by Christ's words:

> 'Do not be afraid, daughter, I shall remove vainglory from you. For those who worship you, worship me; those who despise you, despise me [Luke 10:16], and I shall chastise them for doing so. I am in you, and you [are] in me.[9] And those who hear you, hear the voice of God.' (1.10)

Then, some time later, Jesus reaffirms this awareness of the *imago Dei*:

> 'Daughter, you are as sure of the love of God as God is God. Your soul is surer of the love of God than [you are] of your own body, for your soul shall depart from your body, but God shall never depart from your soul, for they are united together without end. Therefore, daughter, you have as great a reason to be merry as any lady in this world, and, if you knew, daughter, how much you please me when you willingly allow me to speak in you, you would never do otherwise, for this is a holy life and the time is very well spent. For, daughter, this life pleases me more than wearing the habergeon, or the hairshirt, or fasting on bread and water, for, if you said a thousand Pater Nosters every day, you would not please me so well as you do when you are in silence and allow me to speak in your soul.' (1.35)

Before Margery's first pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem (1413) and that to Santiago (1417) Jesus first comforts and then commands her:

> 'Daughter, I shall go with you into every region and provide for you; I shall lead you there and bring you back again in safety, and no English person shall die in the ship which you are in.[10] I shall protect you from all wicked people's power. And, daughter, I say to you, I wish you to wear white clothes and of no other colour, for you shall be arrayed after my wish.'[11]

[9] See 1.32, 34 and 35; John 6:57, 14:20, 15:4–5, 17:23; 1 John 4:12, 13.

[10] On reassurances, see 1.26, and 30. In the same way, Christ tells St Birgitta that he will provide for her, lead her, and bring her back. See 'The Life of Blessed Birgitta', in *Life and Selected Revelations*, edited by Marguerite Tjader Harris and translated by Albert Ryle Kezel (Mahwah: Paulist, 1990) n.68.

[11] As a sign of virginity, virtue or chastity: see Matthew 28:3. The Beguine Marie d'Oignies (1177–1213) also wore white; see the *Life* by Jacques of Vitry, n.11 (in Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of*

> 'Ah, dear Lord, if I go arrayed in another manner than that which other chaste women do, I am afraid that people will slander me. They will say I am a hypocrite and wonder about me.'
>
> 'Yes, daughter, the more wondering that you have for my love, the more you please me.' Then this creature dared not do otherwise than that which she was commanded in her soul. (1.15)

And, somewhat later, he repeats:

> 'Daughter, it is more pleasing to me that you suffer spite and scorn, shame and rebuke, wrong and distress, than if your head were struck off three times a day, every day, for seven years. And therefore, daughter, do not fear what anyone can say to you, but in my goodness, and in your sorrows, that you have suffered for it, you have great reason to rejoice, for, when you come home to Heaven, then every sorrow shall be turned into joy for you.' (1.54)

There are two final examples of the *imago Dei* in Margery that should be noticed, both spoken by Christ to Margery. The first concerns her tears and how these are controlled not by Margery but by God:

> 'And, although I sometimes withdraw the feeling of grace from you, either of speaking or of weeping, do not be afraid about it, for I am an hidden God (Isaiah 45:15) in you, in order that you should have no vanity, and so you should know well you may not have tears nor such conversations but when God wishes to send them to you, for they are the free gifts of God, separate from your merit, and he may give them to whom he wishes and do you no wrong … tears of compunction, devotion, and compassion are the highest and surest gifts that I give on earth.' (1.14)[12]

The second emphasizes the ever-present proximity of Christ to Margery:

> 'Wheresoever God is, Heaven is, and God is in your soul and many an angel is about your soul, to protect it, both night and day. For, when you go to church, I go with you; when you sit at your meal, I sit with you; when you go to your bed, I go with you; and, when you leave town, I leave with you.' (1.14)

Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies [Turnhout: Brepols, 2008]).

[12] Compare *Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by Windeatt, 100.

'Transformational Change which Reflects … a Corresponding Enlargement in Her Understanding of Her Revelations'[13]

Julian offers a fully Godlike, Christomorphic *imago Dei* to her female readers. She does nothing less than present a God who is both male and female; she emphasizes an important, radical and significant means of perceiving gender within the Trinity and she does this without stepping outside orthodox theology and doctrine.[14] Julian also addresses the human soul, its nature, formation and unity with God. Indeed, Julian writes: 'there is nothing between my God and me' (ST 4; compare LT 5). There is mutuality between God the Trinity and the human soul: the soul is the dwelling place for God and the human soul finds its dwelling place in God. God can and does create the human soul for this divine and human intimacy and Julian writes this for the benefit of her fellow Christians.

Furthermore, just as we cannot examine one part of the Trinity without referring to the Trinity as a whole, so we cannot perceive one part of the human soul without damaging the whole. Just as each member of the Trinity has its own distinctive person—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—Julian asserts that there are three Trinitarian gifts within the human soul: *life*, *love* and *light*, that is, the Father as prime mover, the Son as lover and the Holy Spirit as light or, in Julian's terms, the Creator, the Saviour and the Light. In other words, there is nothing less than an *imago Trinitatis* in the human soul. The work of the Holy Trinity is love and we humans were created to love and be loved. As the *imago Dei*, the human person is created to love. Just as we may resemble our parents, so humankind resembles the Holy Trinity. Just as God the Creator created humankind and revealed to us the identity of God, humankind may share some of their Creator's characteristics, and enables us to grow like God. Flawed, certainly, sinful, certainly, we still have the desire to be forgiven, to be healed and—ultimately—to be saved.

As the* imago Dei*, the human person is created to love

Opening Up to the imago Dei

It seems incredible that a woman who was walled up in her anchorage with but three windows to her cell should reshape the theology of the

[13] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, edited by Windeatt, xxvii.

[14] On the significance of the Trinity, see 1:78. See also Julian's contemporary Walter Hilton, *The Ladder of Perfection*, 1.43, 2.45 and 2.46 (translated by Leo Sherley-Price [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957]). Norwich Cathedral and the Merchants' Guild of Lynn are both dedicated to the Trinity.

imago Dei.[15] Yet it was this very isolation (isolation up to a point, since she received Holy Communion through one of the windows and inevitably conversed with visitors through the second) from the social structures of the family, the home and—to a point—the Church which liberated Julian from some, if not most, of their confining and constricting nature. It was this very isolation which facilitated for her, with her insights into the self, God and the unity between the two, a totally embodied experience of Christ opening her up to fresh and significant psychological and theological insights into the *imago Dei*.

Margery, on the other hand, basing her behaviour on the models of such respected Continental female mystics and visionaries as Marie d'Oignies (1177–1213), Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231), Birgitta of Sweden (*c.* 1303–1373), Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) and Dorothea of Montau (1347–1394), expressed the presence of the *imago Dei* through her words, both spoken *and* written, and actions—most notably, of course, her accounts of visions and her weeping. Her pilgrimages through England, and to Rome, the Holy Land and Santiago de Compostela, freed her from the shackles of the exclusively patriarchal and, at times, misogynistic communities, both religious and social, in England and led her to share God's words with people both at home and abroad.

The Church held that women were subordinate to men, that they were unfit to lead, and that they did not bear God's image apart from in their role as helpmeet.[16] In spite of this, it was through the Church that women first published in English, and, though Roman Catholicism does not recognise either woman as a saint, their work was published and read, and continues to instruct readers, today and throughout the world.

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[15] The third window was used to remove detritus.

[16] St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.7: '… the woman together with her husband is the *imago dei*, and that entire substance may be regarded as one image; but when the woman is referred separately to her nature as *helpmeet* then she is not the *imago Dei*; but regarding the man by himself, he is the *imago dei* as fully and completely as when the woman is joined with him in one'.

FINDING GOD IN THE SLOW LANE

Beth R. Crisp

PEOPLE LIVING WITH a hidden chronic illness are to be found everywhere—in workplaces, social groups and faith communities. Seeking to live our best lives with bodies that have limitations can be challenging. This includes how we live as people of faith. Like many who live with chronic illness, I struggle with fatigue: 'a feeling of both physical and mental tiredness. It is often described as exhaustion or a lack of energy, and can make everyday tasks seem impossible.'[1]

Readers probably know someone who has a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome, which can result in people becoming bed-ridden or unable to work or have much or any social life.[2] Yet fatigue is also an issue for many who are less debilitated. I write as someone who lives with a chronic illness, for whom fatigue is a common symptom, which creates limits rather than barriers to what I can do. While there are days when I do very little, and plenty of nights when I lie in bed needing eleven or twelve hours of rest, I have sufficient good days which, with some flexible working conditions, enable me to continue working in a university and engaging with the world outside my home. Perhaps the description that best typifies my physical capabilities is the statement that 'like most people with invisible illness or disabilities … I can do most things, but not all in one day'.[3] There follow a series of reflections on the spirituality of living in the liminal space somewhere between good health and a level of fatigue that that is completely debilitating.

[1] 'Fatigue and Arthritis', *Arthritis Australia*, at https://arthritisaustralia.com.au/managing-arthritis/living-with-arthritis/fatigue-and-arthritis/, accessed 21 May 2024.

[2] Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, also known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, is a particularly debilitating condition; see https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-cfs/, accessed 21 May 2024. Fatigue, however, is also associated with numerous other medical conditions.

[3] Julia Baird, *Bright Shining: How Grace Changes Everything* (Gadigal Country: HarperCollins, 2023), 147.

A Change of Pace

I have not always struggled with fatigue. Most of my life I have been someone who has always been busy doing things and seeking to make the most of the many opportunities which presented themselves. In my twenties I lived in an ecumenical community which had high expectations of its members in respect of attending daily worship, regular involvement in mission activities and participation in community events. There were many good times and I had some amazing opportunities. But ultimately, living in a community where discipleship equated with busyness was not sustainable and, like others, I stayed for a while and moved on. It has taken a long time to shake off the belief that Christian devotion requires me to be busy. As others have also realised, living with fatigue requires a rethink about busyness:

> I have been so stupidly, hungrily busy for so much of my life, partly because I like working hard, love being stretched and get a buzz from hyper-activity … and partly because I've never been great at allowing myself to just do nothing. My illness has forced me to rest … and now I understand that sometimes we need to sit for a little while to comprehend the immensity of the world we live in, and its beauty and fragility—as well as our own.[4]

When we constantly have a full diary, as soon as one activity has finished our minds mind may switch straight to what is coming next, with no time for appreciating the various aspects of our lives that we too often take for granted. Like others, I have found that living with a chronic illness provides a daily invitation to be thankful and savour the good things rather than take them for granted.[5] Perhaps it is this ability

[4] Baird, *Bright Shining*, 255.
[5] Baird, *Bright Shining*, 53.

to be thankful that has resulted in the suggestion that 'one of the most common assumptions about the chronically … ill remains: that you immediately possess a rare and precious wisdom'.[6] Whether or not it is wisdom, I have nevertheless found that living with fatigue requires a greater degree of intentionality than when I could readily take up most of the opportunities that emerged in my life.

It is consistent with being one 'who suffered chronic illness and whose vision included the insight that we can discover the purpose and meaning of our lives in both health and illness' that Ignatius encouraged intentional reflection each day through the process of the Examen.[7] This daily routine draws our attention to how we have spent the day and when we have experienced the presence of God, and prompts us to give thanks, express regret for any sinful acts and discern what God is calling us to in the day(s) ahead—remembering that God does not ask us to do what is not possible (Exx 43). What God may be asking of us, indeed, is that we rest and do not feel the compulsion to live at the same pace as either our peers or our former selves.[8]

Dealing with Poor Theology

It is difficult enough living with a chronic illness without being subject to judgments that presume I am to blame for my illness. Charlatans have for centuries exploited the sick with fraudulent promises of cures, but the emergence of the internet has enabled misguided, malicious and dangerous individuals to distribute their messages around the globe.[9] It is not hard to find seemingly authoritative claims that an illness is caused by a lack of faith and can be cured by renewing baptismal vows, often authored by someone with a title of 'Dr' who does not specify what kind of doctor he or she is.[10]

This is both poor science and poor theology. In fact, a Canadian study has found that people living with chronic pain or fatigue were

[6] Baird, *Bright Shining*, 136.

[7] Michael Hansen, *The Land of Walking Trees: Meditations for the Seriously Ill* (North Blackburn, Victoria: CollinsDove, 1993), dedication to St Ignatius of Loyola.

[8] Hansen, *Land of Walking Trees*, 22.

[9] See Ghulam Yaseen Veesar, Ather Akhlaq and Ahson Qavi Siddiqi, 'The Faces of Deceptive Healers: A Scoping Review of Titles and Traits Associated with Quacks across Regions', *National Journal of Health Sciences*, 8/4 (2023), 203–211.

[10] See, for example, 'Spiritual Causes of Autoimmune Diseases', *Be in Health*, at https://www.beinhealth.com/spiritual-causes-of-autoimmune-diseases/, accessed 21 May 2024.

more likely to pray and identify as being spiritual than were Canadians not experiencing these conditions.[11] However, such research has been unable to determine a direction of causality between prayer and fatigue. Nor do we know if people living with fatigue pray more because they are less busy doing other things, because they are more desperate for healing, or for any myriad of other reasons.

I am grateful to others, such as the English Jesuit Rob Marsh, who have shared their experiences of the ongoing battle of living with fatigue:

> I have a chronic illness and it makes it an enormous effort to not hate my body daily; to not experience my body as an obstacle to my hopes and dreams, the perpetrator of pain and awkwardness, betrayer of my simplest plans.[12]

Simplistic theologizing not only seeks to deny the lived experience of illness, but can suggest that it is not all right to ask the difficult questions which can arise such as: how does God see me? I'm not sure that God needs my body in a way that I would regard as perfect. Rather, as Rob Marsh has correctly identified:

> Flesh is vulnerable and dies. Yet God enters into our fleshly existence to do something for us that presumably could not be done any other way. God takes on sore feet and disappointment and loss; God takes on failure and incapacity and death. And saves the world.
>
> It's time to bring myself back into the story. God, it seems, doesn't hate bodies. What I call an obstacle, God uses to save the world.[13]

Likewise, the Australian Jesuit Michael Hansen, who also lives with chronic fatigue, found himself unable to continue to minister in the ways he had anticipated. However, his book *The Land of Walking Trees: Meditations for the Seriously Ill*, in which he grapples with the limitations that his illness has forced on him, Hansen powerfully demonstrates that God still has ways for him to minister to others.

[11] Marilyn Baetz and Rudy Bowen, 'Chronic Pain and Fatigue: Associations with Religion and Spirituality', *Pain Research and Management*, 13/5 (2008), 383–388, here 385.
[12] Rob Marsh, 'Hating Incarnation', *Thinking Faith* (11 December 2013), at https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/hating-incarnation.
[13] Marsh, 'Hating Incarnation'.

A Spiritual Life

The lived experience of people of faith often contrasts starkly with textbook descriptions of what ought to be. In particular, 'individuals do not simply "copy" institutional or religious prescriptions [but rather] have an active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own beliefs and practices'.[14] For people living with a chronic illness, who may constantly be making adaptations to maximise what they can do, this will affect their spiritual practices.

For many Christians, there are implicit, if not explicit, guidelines regarding how physically to pray; even Ignatius provides advice on this in the *Spiritual Exercises* (Exx 76). Recommended postures such as sitting, standing and kneeling may denote attitudes such as openness to God, or a desire to give praise or an expression of repentance. However, despite the exhortation that we should never stop praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17), guidelines for prayer tend not to acknowledge there may be times when you are lying flat on your back on a bed because that is all your fatigued body can manage. It has been suggested that praying in bed may aid a good night's sleep but this is not a recommended posture for 'deep and long prayer'.[15]

When you are so fatigued that lying flat is a necessity, chances are that the ability to engage in wordy prayer will also be a challenge, although prayers used repeatedly that have been memorised may be possible when not spoken aloud. As such, there are some days when I can do little more than recall the words of the Lord's Prayer, or my prayer is as simple as the words 'thank you'.

Another change in my spiritual life relates to participation in retreats. Ignatius identified the value of deliberately taking time out from busy lives to focus on our relationship with God (Exx 20). Hence, for members of many religious orders an annual retreat is routine. Over the last half century, as more opportunities emerged for members of the laity to make retreats, many, such as myself, have adopted the habit of including a retreat in our annual calendar.[16] As fatigue resulted in my

[14] Line Nyhagen, 'The Lived Religion Approach in the Sociology of Religion and Its Implications for Secular and Feminist Analyses of Religion', *Social Compass*, 64/4 (2017), 495–511, here 495.
[15] Sebastian Campos, '7 Postures of Prayer to Engage Your Mind, Body, and Soul with God', translated by Jennifer Dabovich, *Catholic Link*, at https://catholic-link.org/7-body-postures-praying-encountering-god/.
[16] For example, St Beuno's in the UK made a decision to offer retreats to individuals who were not members of religious orders in 1980. See https://www.beunos.com/about/our-history.

life becoming quieter and less cluttered, retreats seemed less relevant, and I found myself resenting taking more time out from engagement with the world. For a person living with fatigue, the challenge may not be to take time out to find God, but to engage with the wider world and experience the evidence of God's presence through relating to others. Being with others can also provide the opportunity to use what gifts I still have for their benefit rather than risk lapsing into feeling sorry for myself.

I have not ruled out the possibility that one day I might again participate in a spiritual retreat but this will require a realistic assessment that I would have sufficient physical energy to do this without risking a level of exhaustion from which it would takes days to recover. As David Fleming has noted in his contemporary reading of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

> … if we find ourselves too sleepy to pray or if illness results, we know that we have overstepped the bounds of suitable penance. People truly differ in their sleep needs, and we should always try to get enough that will enable us to work full-heartedly in God's service.[17]

Artificial Intelligence

Among my colleagues, there are a number of enthusiasts for Artificial intelligence (AI) functions, who extol the various uses they are making of such technologies. I found myself wondering if AI might be of assistance in the prayer life of someone struggling with fatigue. In fact it would appear there are a number of AI applications already in existence which Christians might utilise:

> Alexa can offer a grace before meals and prayers at bedtime, recite the Ten Commandments, describe Holy Communion, explain how to arrange funerals, and answer questions like 'Who is God?' and 'What do Christians believe?' Feedback by users—or worshippers—is positive. Such apps are being introduced with the best of intentions. The housebound and elderly may value them. Those in closed institutions such as prisons or the military might, too.[18]

[17] David L. Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* of *the Spiritual Exercises* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 75 (Exx 84).
[18] Andrew Totten, '"Renew a Right Spirit within Me": Chaplains and Military Morale on the Frontline and Online', in *A Persistent Fire: The Strategic Ethical Impact of World War I on the Global Profession of*

At a time when meeting in person was not possible, during the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented numbers of embodied individuals came together in virtual meeting houses to pray. Yet for many it was a compromise and inferior to meeting in person.[19] Similarly, one of the limitations of AI might be that it would leave Christians feeling separate from, rather than belonging to, a faith community.[20] A recent study asked a group of Romanian youth, for whom prayer played a significant part in most of their lives, whether they had ever thought of praying with AI. Hardly any reported using AI to assist them to pray and few expressed any interest in doing so in the future to the surprise of the study's author.[21]

Beyond Christianity, I discover there are Islamic prayer apps that, once you sign up, will send out several tweets a day in the form of supplications that are less than 140 characters in length, from the subscriber's Twitter (now X) account. For a higher cost these can be tailored to the subscriber's requirements, including being synchronized with their local prayer times. Furthermore, these prayers even continue after the death of the subscriber as long as his or her Twitter account continues to function.[22] While such apps have the potential to enhance someone's spiritual reputation, are these messages really prayers if the account holder spreads the message but does not actually engage with the tweets that are being distributed on his or her behalf?

While I can acknowledge that AI has strengths in rapidly gathering and sorting large amounts of data, and could be useful if I was looking for the text of a specific prayer or if I was seeking a prayer on a particular topic, I find myself with more questions than answers as to whether AI can assist my prayer life.[23] In particular, the fundamental nature of prayer is raised by the question *can AI write a prayer?* AI can produce many documents fulfilling the specifications requested, which may appear to be prayers in form. But are they prayers *per se* or does a

Arms, edited by Timothy S. Mallard and Nathan H. White (Washington, DC: National Defense U, 2019), 231–246, here 240.

[19] Daniel Bonilla and Emiliano Guaraldo, 'Wireless Mourning/Luto sin cables', *Survive and Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine*, 6/1 (2021).

[20] Totten, '"Renew a Right Spirit within Me"', 240.

[21] Liviu L. Vidican-Manci, 'Prayer and AI: The Impact on Orthodox Romanian Youth in a Confessional High School Context', *Religions*, 15/2 (2024), 181.

[22] Carl Öhman, Robert Gorwa and Luciano Floridi, 'Prayer-Bots and Religious Worship on Twitter: A Call for a Wider Research Agenda', *Minds and Machines*, 29 (2019), 331–338.

[23] Beth M. Sheppard, 'Theological Librarian vs. Machine: Taking on the Amazon Alexa Show (with Some Reflections on the Future of the Profession)', *Theological Librarianship*, 10/1 (2017), 8–23.

form of words only become a prayer when a person uses it to pray? If we understand prayer as relationship between an embodied human and a divine being, with prayer emerging from the heart and soul or lived experience of the prayer's author, then AI cannot pray as it is unable to form relationships.[24] Some people may, however, find AI a useful tool which assists them in gathering the ideas together that they wish to bring to prayer.

Finding New Ways of Engaging with God

A positive advantage of a quieter life has been an opportunity to become an accomplished sewist.[25] While I had always enjoyed making things, the decision to finish making a quilt started years earlier by my late aunt not only resulted in a product that gave delight but also the realisation that sewing was an activity which could fit around my varying energy levels. Like others before me, I discovered that sewing can provide a method for contributing to the various communities of which I am a member and at the same time form an identity unrelated to illness.[26] For example, it has been proposed that:

> Sewing offered a controllable, manageable activity in which they could engage in for short periods of time, with minimal energy required, which in turn supported feelings of calmness: 'It doesn't ask you for anything, it doesn't want anything, it's upfront, you know what you're getting before you start and, as long as you put a bit of effort in, then you can achieve anything'.[27]

I did not take up sewing with any expectation that it would enhance my relationship with God. However, while my attempts at contemplative prayer would often be aborted as they just left me feeling sleepy, for me sewing is an activity that encourages mindfulness by requiring concentration on the process.[28] Over time I have come to

[24] Vidican-Manci, 'Prayer and AI'.
[25] 'Sewist' is a term increasingly being adopted by people for whom sewing is part of their identity. For further discussion about this term see Jonathan Walford, 'Sewist or Sewer', *Fashion History Museum*, at https://www.fashionhistorymuseum.com/post/sewer-or-sewist, accessed 21 May 2024.
[26] Sumon Pincharoen and JoAnn G. Congdon, 'Spirituality and Health in Older Thai Persons in the United States', *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 25/1 (2003) 93–108, here 103; Enzo Gandolfo and Marty Grace, *It Keeps Me Sane: Women Crafting Wellbeing* (Carlton North, Victoria: Vulgar Press, 2009), here 44.
[27] Naomi Alice Clarke, 'Exploring the Role of Sewing as a Leisure Activity for Those Aged 40 Years and Under', *Textile*, 18/2 (2020), 118–144, here 126.
[28] Clarke, 'Exploring the Role of Sewing as a Leisure Activity', 134.

understand why many women have experienced the act of sewing as a time for meditation and working out solutions to problems, sometimes reflecting on religious texts as they sewed.[29]

For some sewists, using their skills to enhance Christian worship is a form of ministry and the most important contribution they can make.[30] I have made liturgical stoles for clergy, but for me this work is not more important than the other gifts I make for friends and family. When making something for a specific person, I am very aware of the person in all of the processes from design to cutting, pinning, stitching and finishing off an object and this can readily become a period of prayer, without my necessarily planning for prayer to occur. At other times I might make a gift without a specific person in mind, but the colour and texture of textiles can evoke people, places and things, which can in turn lead to prayer.[31]

In an unexpected way, sewing has given me new ways of understanding God that more traditional methods of faith development have struggled adequately to provide. I have written elsewhere of my struggles with low self-esteem and to accept the love of God and others.[32] Many of the fabrics I purchase are remnants or deadstock—fabrics that are not deemed suitable for their original purpose and are sold at a reduced price.[33] With some ingenuity, and often working with multiple contrasting remnants, I have in a very tangible way demonstrated how what is rejected can be utilised to create a thing of beauty. Hence, if I can make something beautiful from discarded fabrics, why would I question how God see my potential at the times when I am only too aware of my limitations.

[29] Kristin Emanuelsen and others, 'Sewing and Inuit Women's Health in the Canadian Arctic', *Social Science and Medicine*, 265 (2020); Bridget Long, '"Regular Progressive Work Occupies My Mind Best": Needlework as a Source of Entertainment, Consolation and Reflection', *Textile*, 14/2 (2016), 176–187, here 184.

[30] See Beth R. Crisp, 'Finding God in the Eye of a Needle', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 24/1 (2024), 64–76.

[31] Laura Jane Brubacher and others, '"Sewing Is Part of Our Tradition": A Case Study of Sewing as a Strategy for Arts-Based Inquiry in Health Research with Inuit Women', *Qualitative Health Research*, 31/14 (2021), 2602–2616.

[32] Beth R. Crisp, 'Ignatian Spirituality and the Building of Self-Esteem', *The Way*, 45/1 (January 2006), 66–78.

[33] Remnants are typically pieces of fabric that are left over after most of a bolt of fabric has been sold. Most remnants I see for sale are less than 2 metres of fabric, often much less. Deadstock is full or partial bolts of fabrics in excess of the needs of clothing manufacturers which are then sold to fabric retailers at a reduced price. Deadstock can also refer to fabrics manufacturers or sellers believe will not be purchased at the original price and are sold off cheaply with the aim of recouping some of their investment.

Angel, *by Gudrun Koch, 2005*

Another important lesson I have learnt from sewing is about dealing with imperfections. Sewists frequently make errors and need to determine whether the fault can remain or must be rectified. Hence, one of their most important tools is a seam ripper, which removes unwanted stitches in the process of creating a more desirable product.[34] Sometimes the result may not be exactly what was originally intended, but rather a compromise that can be lived with. As I reflect on my own life, I realise that while all too apparent to me, my imperfections may not be noticed by others. Perhaps even more importantly, the offers of grace and forgiveness given to me are an invitation to the abundant life that God promises, even to someone struggling with fatigue.

Learning to live with fatigue has been challenging, particularly in respect of my faith. In fact there have been several occasions in recent years when I have wondered if I could still call myself Christian. However, rather than worrying about how or where I might find God, I now understand that God finds me wherever I am, including in the midst of fatigue. As Michael Hansen has written:

> I wish I could say that all my prayers have been answered but all I can say is that healing has come in places I never expected. One thing I have come to believe is that our faith is more about openness of heart to take the journey, to keep moving forward, than it is about reaching any imagined destination.[35]

Pope Francis in writing a 'magisterium of fragility' also reminds us that there is one Church,

[34] The uses of a seam ripper are described by Elizabeth Farr in 'What is a Seam Ripper (Why Is It a Good Thing)?', *Elizabeth Made This*, at https://elizabethmadethis.com/what-is-a-seam-ripper/, accessed 21 May 2024.
[35] Hansen, *The Land of Walking Trees*, 3.

> … with Jesus Christ at the centre, where each person brings his or her own gifts and limitations. This awareness, founded on the fact that we are all part of the same vulnerable humanity assumed and sanctified by Christ, eliminates arbitrary distinctions and opens the door to the participation of each baptized member in the life of the Church.[36]

As with many people living with a chronic illness, there is much uncertainty, particularly because my health fluctuates day by day and week by week. However, as Pope Francis acknowledges, this does not in turn require a lack of certainty about who I am in relation to God. I may at times have been forced into the slow lane, but God cares no less for me than when I lived in the fast lane.

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[36] 'Message of the Holy Father Francis for the International Day for Persons with Disabilities', 3 December 2022.

A BODILY READING OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Mariano Ballester

THREE SPONTANEOUS RECOLLECTIONS come to me at the start of this 'bodily reading' of the *Spiritual Exercises*, that could also be considered a commentary on the fourth Addition. Although these three recollections are the testimonies of three masters of prayer, each with a distinct teaching and spiritual trajectory, all three coincide in their esteem for the bodily dimension of prayer.

The first recollection is of a Trappist monk, collapsed, mind and body, at the feet of a *pietà*. Thomas Merton tells the story in his first autobiographical book, *The Seven Storey Mountain.* It is eminently bodily and personally meaningful for him, with a strong impact which would add the remaining stimulus for his own future vocation as a Trappist:

> And I saw the monks. There was one, right there, by the door; he had knelt, or rather thrown himself down before a *pietà* in the cloister comer, and had buried his head in the huge sleeves of his cowl there at the feet of the dead Christ, the Christ Who lay in the arms of Mary, letting fall one arm and a pierced hand in the limpness of death.[1]

The second testimony had an equally serious influence on the spiritual life of someone who was later known as the priest Henri Caffarel, currently dedicated to teaching prayer at his retreat house in Chaussures: 'I remember that kneeling priest with his chest erect, his face in complete peace: at eighteen years old, it was for me the most eloquent discourses about silent prayer'.[2]

The third comes from a Japanese Jesuit, J. K. Kadowaki, whose spirituality is impregnated at once with the practice of Zen and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Baptized in the third year of university, he found that it was actually Zen that helped him to go deeper into Christianity:

[1] Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976 [1948]), 322.
[2] Henri Caffarel, *Le Corps et la prière* (Paris: Feu Nouveau, 1985), 1.

> I learned Christianity by studying the catechism Although necessary as an introduction to the faith, the catechism alone was inadequate to give me a deep understanding of it. It was through the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* that I obtained a deeper knowledge of the essence of Christianity and learned how to put it into practice with my own body. Later, when I started practising Zen, I discovered that the Exercises and a Zen *sesshin* greatly resemble one another.[3]

Faithful to this experience, Kadowaki has directed the Spiritual Exercises in an interesting way in Japan. The participants are prepared in advance, above all with an insistence on the correct bodily posture that must be practised continually during the Exercises.[4]

For us, this last testimony of a Jesuit from the Far East is especially significant, the better to understand a dimension of the Spiritual Exercises that is perhaps less well known in the West. Far from making knowledge of Christianity superficial, the bodily dimension of the Exercises led Kadowaki to deepen his faith and practise it 'with the body' as he showed us fully in his largely autobiographical work *Zen and the Bible.* I believe that his experience is confirmed and increased in value if we bring it together with the two preceding testimonies, from two masters of prayer of great authority and influence, taking into account that these testimonies come from the first years of their youth and that, precisely at the end of their lives, in the fullness of teaching and spiritual knowledge, these two undoubtedly opened themselves to the bodily dimension of prayer, discovered, or rather rediscovered, in contact with the grand traditions of Eastern spirituality.

Some Questions

It seems important that those desiring truly to enter into the dynamic of the praying Christian should ask themselves whether they are ignorant of this bodily dimension at the time of entering into prayer. If they are, it is not difficult to add themselves to the list of Christians who are intellectual or angelic, or in any case disembodied. The Christ of such individuals will be a Christ who thinks, discourses and handles a surprising dialectic in his conversations with the Pharisees, but not a Christ who walks, eats, sleeps, feels tired and dying of thirst at the well of Jacob, or asks for something to eat—leftover fish—after his resurrection, that is to

[3] J. K. Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible*, translated by Joan Rieck (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002 [1977]), vii.
[4] The experience has been published in a booklet written by Kadowaki in Japanese and translated by William Johnston, *The Ignatian Exercises and Zen: An Attempt at Synthesis* (Jersey City: PASE, 1974).

say, the Christ who is really made flesh. They would have to turn to St Ignatius of Antioch's words against the Docetans, who were committed to ridding the body of Christ of its reality and leaving mere appearance:

> Mary then did truly conceive a body which had God inhabiting it. And God the Word was truly born of the Virgin, having clothed Himself with a body of like passions with our own. He who forms all men in the womb, was Himself really in the womb, and made for Himself a body of the seed of the Virgin, but without any intercourse of man. He was carried in the womb, even as we are, for the usual period of time; and was really born, as we also are; and was in reality nourished with milk, and partook of common meat and drink, even as we do.[5]

It would be wrong not to be able to say in prayer: 'my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God' (Psalms 84). As for Eucharistic prayer, it would not be out of place in cases of allergy to the bodily dimension, to ponder seriously the words of Jesus: 'This is my body' (Matthew 26:26). Why did Christ say 'my body' and not 'my mind' or 'my spirit'? What precise mystery for our comprehension of the whole Christian message did Christ transmit with these words? Maybe the response that we can give to these questions brings us, like J. K. Kadowaki, to understand in what measure we live our Christian faith with the body.

Christ Communicated in the Exercises

When we help and accompany others in the experience of the Exercises, we are subtly transmitting the Christ we have found in prayer experience and lived in encounters with our brothers and sisters. Taking a panoramic glance at how much we Jesuits have said about the Exercises over the years, it is surprising how little there is about the bodily dimension.[6] This lack of interest in the bodily is a sign that seems important to me. When Paul VI asked this warning question to directors—'Are the Exercises in a slight decline?'—I believe that what made his question disturbing would have come from the excessive sophistication and intellectualisation of

[5] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, chapter 10, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, volume 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886).

[6] It is not that certain bodily readings of the Exercises do not exist, as for example in the experience of Kadowaki already indicated; the work of Penning De Vries, *Onsterse Yoga en Westerese Meditatie*; and the traditional commentaries on the Additions that obviously include the fourth, such as Casanovas, Calveras, Pudjades and Clemente Espinosa's *Psicología de las adiciones*. What we mean to underline is the enormous disproportion between the space given to other classes of commentaries and parallelisms and that dedicated to the study of the bodily dimension of reading of the Exercises.

the deep and integral experience proposed to us by St Ignatius.[7] In this case, a bodily reading of the Exercises would not be unhelpful.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, we passed quickly and vertiginously from the custom of praying almost exclusively in church and kneeling down to an explosion of gestures and bodily postures for prayer: in the most normal parish eucharistic celebrations people are used to the offertory procession, signs of peace and other gestures typical of the new liturgy, rhythmical songs and so on.[8] Furthermore, in special prayer groups it draws less and less attention when participants pray with arms raised, or bowing and prostrate before the sanctuary, or sitting on the ground as in Taizé, or when they find a special chapel in a retreat house with neither pews nor seats but just a carpet and the well-known low prayer stools popularised by Caffarel in the little work already cited.

It is not surprising, then, that anyone who has fully entered into these experiences feels strange or divided and limited if we present the Exercises in such a way that the body does not have full citizen's rights in the total experience of prayer. At the moment when we confront this richness of bodily expression with the Exercises, the question arises: could we not also enrich the prayer of the exercitant with a greater attention to the bodily dimension? And if the answer is yes, what concrete ways and means could be opened up and offered in this area?

The Bodily Dimension of the Exercises

I would say that there is no need to bend over backwards to discover something that already exists within the Exercises in their original charism. However in the later development of the spirituality and practice of the Exercises, it is easy to see that while we have amply explored the spiritual theology of the Ignatian experience, we have left in its primitive state what we could call the bodily dimension that appears throughout the dynamic proposed by St Ignatius. If we consider the Exercises symbolically as a form of commentary on the traditional prayer that begins them, the *Anima Christi*, it would have to be said that we have passed over, or left without any development, the second invocation that immediately follows the 'soul': 'Body of Christ, save me'. There is no doubt that St Ignatius dedicated a large space in his little book to the bodily dimension.

[7] In *Bibbia, teologia ed esercizi: III Corso Internazionale per Direttori* (Rome: CIS, 1971), 487–488. Naturally the Pope confirmed in his subsequent words the validity and contemporary relevance of the Exercises.
[8] The older faithful will still remember their hard knees as valued trophies of solid traditional asceticism.

The Additions 'for making the exercises better' (Exx 73), so often recommended by St Ignatius, are manifestly bodily (compare the sixth Annotation, Exx 6). A quick overview should be enough to convince us:

- The first two (Exx 73–74) are situated in the spatial-temporal dimension before and after sleep, alluding specifically to the daily physical routine of how to get up, go to sleep and dress.
- The third and fourth (Exx 75–76) are the most eminently bodily. I shall not dwell on them in this rapid overview, but this whole article could be seen as a commentary on these two Additions.
- In the fifth Addition St Ignatius alludes expressly to the spatial-temporal dimension: 'for a quarter of an hour, either seated or walking about' (Exx 77).
- The sixth and seventh Additions (Exx 78–79) are closely linked: St Ignatius says that the practice of the seventh seeks to achieve the attitude indicated in the preceding Addition, and what he recommends is something as bodily-sensual as 'depriv[ing] myself of all light' and 'closing the shutters and doors'.
- The eighth, 'I should not laugh' (Exx 80), and the ninth, 'I should restrain my sight' (Exx 81), are also manifestly bodily.
- As for penitence, which is the theme of the tenth and longest Addition, St Ignatius dedicates most of his comments to bodily or exterior penitence, the fruit of interior penance. He provides norms about eating, sleeping, pain and so on.[9]

Searching for Solid Answers

This brief overview will help to confirm the reality and validity of the bodily reading of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Within this perspective, we shall try to search for answers for today's exercitant: answers that, without being exclusive, do not elude the solidity and three-dimensionality of the body. It would be easy enough, but not much use, to appeal to answers that emphasize the freedom and flexibility in which the Exercises move, without adding any more. This type of answer is more of an evasion than

[9] To the bodily reading of the Additions we need to add the other complements introduced by St Ignatius in order to help exercitants in different aspects of their future life, such as the rules for eating (Exx 210–217) and the postures suggested for the three modes of praying (Exx 239, 250, 258, especially the 'Third Method', Exx 258), whose basis is as corporeal as breathing. See my article, 'Métodos orientales de control respiratorio y tercer modo de orar ignaciano', *Manresa*, 54 (1982), 167–173.

a help; above all it is a long way from the highly experienced and detailed process by which St Ignatius himself composed the *Spiritual Exercises*.[10]

St Ignatius was a true master and guide of prayer; he did not abandon exercitants by appealing to flexibility and freedom, but rather gave them abundant resources and solid suggestions so that freedom of choice was really possible. We would say that St Ignatius helped continually, with the bodily dimension of the Exercises, to avoid separating what God had united and to search in this way for an experience of unity between body and spirit as harmonious and complete as that expressed in the three testimonies at the start of these pages.

The answer offered here is just a suggestion and has all the pros and cons of an experiment, the simple impulse of someone with knowledge and experience in a certain field. However it is not an improvised answer. Its origin is found in the mists of time, when the first facts were written down of a wisdom that would later crystallize into the diverse classical yoga schools and similar modern techniques.[11] I consider these treasures of knowledge, that have passed down through history and across cultures, as treasures of humanity—of all times and all races, exclusively belonging neither to East nor West. The fact that, in recent years, these resources have spread more and more widely across the five continents thanks to modern techniques of dissemination I consider simply providential. In this respect the Federation of the Episcopal Conferences of Asia seems to have made a significant move when, at the end of its 1978 plenary assembly, dedicated to the theme of prayer, it made public this declaration:

> The Spirit is leading the churches of Asia to integrate into the treasury of our Christian heritage all that is best in our traditional ways of prayer and worship ….
>
> Asia … has a great deal to give to the Church: the prayer of immanence; the specific techniques of contemplation as found in Zen and Yoga; simplified prayer forms … a characteristic insistence on interiority, renunciation and the 'wholeness' of the human person, body-psyche-spirit.[12]

[10] On the genesis of the Exercises, Gonçalves de Câmara tells us in the *Autobiography* (n.99): 'he had not produced them all at one time, rather that some things which he used to observe in his soul and find useful for himself it seemed to him could also be useful for others, and so he used to put them in writing ….'

[11] The Upaniṣads, spiritual texts of the Indian tradition written in Sanskrit, have there origins in 800 BC and can be considered the precursors of the later distinct traditions of yoga.

[12] Federation of the Episcopal Conferences of Asia, *Prayer: The Life of the Church in Asia*, in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 42, 46.

I have offered the postures indicated below to exercitants, following an adaptation of the Weeks of the Exercises, as a way to live the different experiences of prayer each day more holistically, or at least some of them, at the choice of the exercitant. Exercitants were informed each day of the bodily symbolic dimension of each of the meditations, with the help of posters (the figures are reproduced here). It was recommended to reserve some of the daily prayer time for this type of integral experience. It is clear that, without departing from the strictest Ignatian line, the only thing that this experience proposes is to lengthen the list of prayer positions recommended by St Ignatius in the fourth Addition (Exx 76):

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

Guide for the Correct Use of the Positions

It is necessary to keep in mind some elementary rules for the correct use of the symbolic positions proposed:

- ***Relaxation.*** The position has to be relaxed, not forced. Lack of practice may make some of the postures more difficult to achieve at the beginning. It will help to let the muscles relax: become conscious of any areas of physical tension, relax them and release. Another easy way of relaxing could be to spend some brief initial moments attending gently to rhythmic breathing. In any case a position that is unsustainable should be avoided, or one that results in notable discomfort or strain.

- ***Mental Tuning.*** It is clear that the mind has also to be present in the prayer experience, since the opposite would fall into another extreme. The mental presence, however, should consist more in a slow tuning to the symbolism of the body than in reflective or discursive exercise. An easy way to achieve this mental tuning is to rest with the understanding on a brief phrase of scripture or a text from the Exercises, such as appears after each figure.

- ***Remaining.*** The rich symbolism of the posture will very often lead to a simple, silent openness to the presence of God. All that needs to be done in this case is to remain in silence. More than *doing* this will be *allowing myself to be transformed*, until 'I find what I am seeking'. In any case, it is always necessary to count on a tranquil time to get in touch unhurriedly with the symbolism of the corporeal gesture and wait in silence until the mind comes into harmony with it. The heart will send, little by little, its own message, enjoying and feeling the experience interiorly.

The First Week

The First Week is the stage of meditative openness to the great truths that are found in the Christian faith: the purpose of humanity, created in the image of God, rebelling against God's will and saved by the merits of Christ crucified. Meditation on these great truths, above all in the case of those who repeat the experience of the Exercises annually, can find new stimulation and enrichment by adopting some bodily postures attuned to the basic outlines of this first stage.

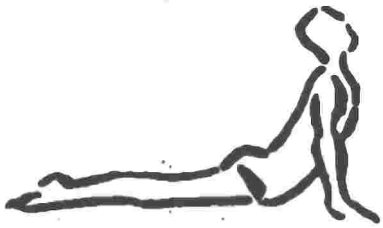
Balasana (The Child's Pose)

This is one of the postures of the greatest human and spiritual symbolism. It is the pose of maximum humility and supreme amazement. The man or woman folds up as small as possible to the point of nearly disappearing. This position can be compared to that of a foetus in the mother's womb. It is also a position of knowledge and attention to interiority, of openness to inspiration and humble listening. Begin on your knees, sitting on your heels, then bend yourself over little by little until you reach the ground. The arms are folded behind and are left to rest with the palms facing up.

Texts for mental tuning

'Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls' (Exx 23).

'O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up ….' (Psalms 139:1–2)



Bhujangasana (The Cobra)

This is the posture of a snake, the cobra. The position indicated in the picture can only be maintained for a few moments: the body is for the most part extended face down, with the legs completely relaxed. The hands are placed in such a way that the chest or the shoulders are supported on their backs. Little by little the upper part of the body is lifted, supporting itself on the hands, until the arms are at their maximum extension.

Texts for mental tuning

Texts from the meditation on sin (Exx 45–55).

'As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.' (Psalms 123:2)

The Gesture of Supplication

The traditional Western posture can be enriched by combining it with the gesture of open hands, more or less raised or left to rest humbly on the knees. At the beginning, a strong pain can sometimes be felt when sitting on the heels. This can be reduced or overcome with the help of a rolled blanket placed between the arches of the feet and the ground, or by using the familiar prayer stool.

Texts for mental tuning

The petition, according to the subject of the material (Exx 48). The Triple Colloquy (Exx 62).

The Second Week

This Week is the most eminently 'bodily', given that it centres on the incarnation of Christ. During this Week, the body acquires the radiance of a body redeemed, together with the soul, in Christ and with Christ. The positions will tend to integrate the great gesture of the incarnation through bodily symbolism. St Ignatius invites exercitants unequivocally to make their meditation bodily and incarnate through the compositions of place; directions for seeing people, listening to what they say, observing how they walk and work; encouragements to enter into the scene and serve them …. Only 'then' is it suggested that the exercitants move to a stage of more discursive meditation, to become conscious of the experience and be enriched by reflection (Exx 114). It is not uncommon in the Exercises that this rhythm is inverted and begins directly with 'reflecting', as though leaving impossible the possibility of a more incarnated, affective and less intellectual meditation.

Matsyasana (The Fish Pose)

Once kneeling, and helped by the elbows, the trunk begins to curve behind until it touches the ground with the highest part of the head. The arms can be placed as indicated in the picture, or crossed behind the shoulders, supporting the arched thorax. To finish the exercise, let the nape of the neck fall to the ground, raise the legs, turning them gently to one side and then the other, and wait a little in this position of rest. This is one of the most difficult postures and should not be done for the first time without experience. But it is also a position of profound experiential symbolism, a gesture of enormous openness and availability. The man or woman silently becomes open, turning the whole self into a 'Here I am!' with a simple symbolic gesture. The chest and the ribcage open to their maximum, as a gift and total offering of oneself to God.

Texts for mental tuning

'… that I may not be deaf to his call, but ready and diligent to accomplish his most holy will' (Exx 91).

'I have come to do your will' (Hebrews 10:7).

Savasana (The Corpse Pose)

The posture called 'corpse' is hinted at in one of the indications in the fourth Addition of St Ignatius denominated as 'lying face upward' (Exx 76). It is a position of supreme abandonment, of union with mother earth and of great relaxation. The muscles are to be completely released, abandoning them to the law of gravity. The weight of the body is felt and sometimes, too, the pulses of blood that flow from the heart to the extremities of the body. Pay attention to the rhythm of the body, including the gentle sound of the air that brushes against the glottis upon entering the throat. Once the body and mind are totally relaxed and silent, the meditation begins. This can be the posture in which the exercitant makes his or her offering at the call of Christ. At the end, it is no good getting up suddenly. Move your limbs little by little, lift your trunk until you are seated and only then should you stand up.

Texts for mental tuning

'Eternal Lord of all things …' (Exx 98); Meditation on the Incarnation (Exx 101–109); 'ask for an interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me' (Exx 104).

'[He] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.' (Philippians 2:7–8).

The Third Week

With the last two stages of the Exercises, the meditative assimilation of the paschal mystery begins. In the Third Week, the body tries to integrate itself into the experience of the passion. Exercitants must come close to understanding with their own bodies—as indicated to us by the testimony of Kadowaki—the body of the Servant and Lord of Sorrows,

as shown in the poems of Isaiah. They must understand that they have been redeemed along with the body of Christ and that the pain the body can receive, united to the body of Christ, has a precious redemptive value. To this end the positions of prostration and closeness to the earth, well known in yoga, are to be adopted. The posture of *savasana* can be employed, in this case with the arms loosely opened in a cross, the better to understand the crucifixion and death of Christ in the body. The position *balasana* (see the First Week) will also be a special help to understand the text of Isaiah 50:4–6 with the body.

The Fourth Week

The Fourth Week is impregnated with the joy of the resurrection and the desire for 'the things that are above' (Colossians 3:1). In it the risen and glorious body of Christ is contemplated. In his preamble to this last stage, St Ignatius refers with precision and respect to the body of Christ that 'remained separated from his soul but always united with his divinity' in the interval between death and resurrection; and further on he says that the risen Christ 'appeared in body and soul to his Blessed Mother' (Exx 219). The postures indicated here can suggest other variations to those practised. Above all there are positions of bodily elevation, static or dynamic, that is to say, accompanied by a slow ascending movement.

The Trapeze

This position of great symmetry is begun by joining the hands on the breast and elevating them very slowly until they are above the head.

Texts for mental tuning

The petition of the Fourth Week (Exx 233).

The Hallel Psalms (Psalms 146–150).

Talasana (The Palm Tree Pose)

This is a posture of great balance and stability. Open to the influence of heaven, the tree extends its branches as far as it can, orientating itself towards the sun and the light. The position imitates this symbolism, stretching and elevating the body to the maximum. The rhythm of a dynamic meditation could suggest different variants: opening the hands and bending slightly backwards, joining or not joining the open palms and so on, always as slowly as possible.

Texts for mental tuning

'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving' (Colossians 2:6–7).

The Perspectives of Prayer with the Body

Only a few suggestions have been given here for praying the Exercises through the symbolism of the body. I invite readers to experiment on their own account for a time before an experience of the Exercises. In a contrary movement to our ordinary meditation, the symbolism of these postures invites us to relish and sense interiorly the gesture expressed, with the help of very simple mental tuning.[13]

Certainly St Ignatius noticed the benefits of this integration. Only with great difficulty would we find another spiritual author of his time

[13] If more information is needed about the classical postures of Hatha-Yoga and its technical aspects, I refer to the abundant manuals that already exist; among them *The Way of Silence* and *Christian Yoga in Ten Lessons*, both by J. Déchanet, and both useful for accommodating the Western religious mentality.

with so many details and counsels about the use of the body and the spatial-temporal atmosphere favourable to prayer experience. No one enumerates as many bodily postures for prayer. But we know that his interest in achieving a harmony between body and spirit extended beyond the strict field of meditation. St Ignatius desired that everyday life bear witness to this harmonious unity of the human being (the Sanskrit word *yoga* means precisely *union*). This was affirmed by Pedro de Ribadeneira, Ignatius' first biographer, when he explained to us that Ignatius' insistence on bodily moderation, in eating, dressing, sleeping and so on, was to allow the interior person to 'shine and have effect on the outside, and thus the persons who deal and speak with us will draw benefit and praise the Lord simply by seeing us'.[14]

Mario Ballester SJ was a Spanish Jesuit who worked in Rome at the International College of Jesus for over fifty years in the area of prayer and meditation, and as a spiritual director. He published a number of successful books and founded the association for Deep Meditation and Self-Knowledge. He passed away in 2021.

translated by Philip Harrison SJ

[14] Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Treatise on the Governance of St Ignatius of Loyola*, translated by Joseph A. Munitiz (Oxford: Way Books, 2016), 27.

THE ODYSSEY OF AN EARLY ROMAN MARTYR

Jan Graffius

> For ourselves, too, we ask some share in the fellowship of your apostles and martyrs, with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, [Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia] and all the saints.

THESE WORDS FROM the first Eucharistic Prayer will be familiar to many of us (and when I listen to the litany, I am always cheered at the thought that those strong women of the early Church are equally remembered and honoured). The example of those who found and held to their faith in those first uncertain centuries of Christianity still has power to move us today. Early Christians gathered at the sites of martyrdom, and, when it was safe to do so, built their first churches over the graves of the martyrs. They wanted to be close to the bodies of those whose faith had helped establish Christianity, drawing strength and comfort from their witness and physical presence. Many early martyrs were placed in excavated catacombs outside the walls of Rome, and it was the custom for early Roman Christians to seek burial close to the resting places of the martyrs.

Christians wanted to bury their dead decently, to prevent further state-sponsored indignity being visited on the bones of those who had already suffered so much. This, perhaps, was one of the original impulses behind the development of the Christian cult of relic veneration. Most civilisations, including the Jewish faith, the ancient Mesopotamians, Greeks and Romans, regarded the dead human body as an unclean thing, to be rapidly interred; the memory of the deceased was celebrated, but the physical corpse was cleanly and decently put out of sight. But

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Eusebius, writing in the fourth century AD, quoted the account of a Christian witness to Polycarp's martyrdom in AD 167 or 177:

> … we later took up the bones, more valuable than precious stones, of more esteem than gold, and placed them in a fitting location. There, in so far as it is possible to do so, we shall meet together in joy and gladness (when the Lord permits) to celebrate the anniversary-day of the martyrdom: this in memory of those who suffered before us and for the preparation of those who are going to suffer.[1]

Christianity has always been a physical faith. The incarnation itself is the ultimate connection between God and human beings. In the Gospels and Acts we note that physical presence plays a frequent part in many miracles: the blind were cured by Christ's spittle and touch; Peter's shadow was believed to have healing qualities; Paul's handkerchief had the power to cure the sick. From the earliest times, the Church believed that this power to effect miracles was also present in the bones of those who died for Christ.

As centuries passed the existence of the Roman Christian catacombs faded into memory, until a startling discovery was made. In June 1578 some Roman labourers quarrying stone two miles outside the walls of Rome broke through into an ancient underground catacomb. The discovery of vast numbers of early Christian burials, carved martyr inscriptions and subterranean chapels caused a sensation.

> It is with wonder that we have seen and several times visited the cemetery of Priscilla, as soon as it was discovered and excavated. We can find no better words to describe its extent and its many corridors there than to call it a subterranean city. All Rome was filled with wonder, for it had no idea that in its neighbourhood there was a hidden city, filled with the tombs of the days of the persecutions of the Christians. That which we knew about before from written accounts and from the few cemeteries which were only partially opened out, we can now realise fully, and, filled with wonder, see with our own eyes the confirmation of the accounts of St Jerome and Prudentius.[2]

There were sound practical, political reasons why the Catholic Church should have been so enthused by the rediscovery of thousands

[1] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiae*, 4.15.43–44, translated in John Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-Parts', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 224/1 (2006), 5–28, here 13.

[2] Cesare Baronius, *Annales ecclesiastici*, volume 2, year 130, n.2, quoted in Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, volume 19, translated and edited by Ralph Francis Kerr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 268–269.

of ancient Christian graves literally beneath their feet. The Reformation was in full spate in Europe, and the Council of Trent had only recently concluded its examinations on the need for internal clarification and reform where necessary. An underground city full of martyrs was an extremely timely and welcome discovery to a Church which was on the back foot, so to speak.

But this does not altogether explain the outpouring of emotion and joy expressed in the quotes above. These emotions emanated not from cardinals and the state hierarchies, but from the ordinary people of Rome. Barriers were placed over the entrances to the catacombs to prevent the hordes from pressing in and damaging the fragile tombs. Processions of catacomb relics to be enshrined in the ancient Roman churches of San Stefano and San Lorenzo were attended by thousands of people singing, weeping, throwing flowers, dancing in the streets. There was a genuine, palpable sense of connection among the sixteenth-century Roman population with their ancient ancestors in faith.

And this sense of reconnection through physical artefacts is something I have also discovered in my own work caring for the hundreds of relics belonging to the British Jesuit province, which are kept at Stonyhurst College. Many of these relics demonstrate their ability to tell their story to succeeding generations, and I should like to share one example.

Stonyhurst College, on behalf of the British Province, cares for the bones of St Gordianus, a Roman judge and Christian convert, executed during the reign of Julian the Apostate. The medieval best-seller, the *Golden Legend*, related:

> … if so were that Gordian would not do sacrifice to the gods he should be beheaded, and so his head was smitten off and the body cast unto the hounds, which lay so by the space of seven days untouched. And at the last his servants took and stole it away, and with it the body of the blessed Epimachus, whom the said Julian had slain a little tofore. They buried it not far from the city of Rome, about a mile, and this was done about the year of our Lord three hundred and sixty.[3]

Gordianus was buried in the Cyriaca cemetery, close to the bones of St Laurence the early Christian martyr. By the time the *Golden Legend* was

[3] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, or, Lives of the Saints*, translated by William Caxton, edited by Frederick Startridge Ellis (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), volume 3, 178.

written around 900 years later, his burial place was lost, but Gordianus was still remembered as a martyr to pagan intolerance.

In 1667 excavations in the cemetery around San Lorenzo uncovered his grave. How the remains were identified is not known, but presumably there was some sort of inscription over his grave. The bones were presented to Fr Christopher Anderton, the Jesuit rector of the English College in Rome, on 14 May 1667, to be kept in trust for the Catholics of Lancashire 'until England's reconversion'. They were placed in the Sodality Chapel in St Omer College, the Jesuit school for English boys founded in 1593 in what is now northern France, and the direct ancestor of Stonyhurst College. The sodality was dedicated to bringing about the conversion of England, and Gordianus was hailed as a martyr executed by his own government, a powerful parallel with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century martyrs of England and Wales.

In 1773 the Jesuit order was suppressed and their possessions forfeited. A remarkable inventory was made at the time, describing the contents of the College, room by room, even including the baskets of dirty linen belonging to the pupils. The relics of Gordianus were listed, not in the Sodality Chapel but in the private room of Fr John Carroll, a Jesuit from Maryland, an alumnus and, later, a teacher at the college. It is not known what the relics were doing in his room; quite possibly Carroll felt an affinity with the martyr's defiance of state-sponsored religious intolerance, which was also the case in his native Maryland, where the practice of Catholicism was illegal. It is almost certainly due to Carroll's American status that Gordianus was not confiscated, as so many hundreds of college relics were at this time. Carroll ensured that the relics were safe, entrusting them to the Augustinian nuns in Bruges. Three years later he departed for his homeland and, following the American Revolution, became the first US Catholic archbishop and founder of Georgetown University.

Moving to the present day, Gordianus continues to inspire and surprise. Earlier this year his gilded reliquary was sent on loan to an exhibition in Washington DC on the Life and Legacy of Thomas More, told through artefacts from Stonyhurst College and the British Jesuit Province. The reliquary was included because of its links to St Omers College, where More's memory was kept alive from the sixteenth century onwards, and because of its association with John Carroll and the Catholic Church's struggle for freedom of worship in North America.

The box containing Gordianus' bones remained at Stonyhurst, but on removal from the reliquary the ancient ribbons closing the box were noted

The relics of St Gordianus

to have perished. Inside, carefully and lovingly wrapped in lambswool, pink silk and silver ribbon, were numerous ancient bones. The head was missing, confirming the likelihood that the bones belonged to someone who had been decapitated. Labels dated 1700 indicated that some of the bones had been placed in the marble altar at St Omers. The letters of authentication were intact and complete. It was a deeply moving moment; the first time in nearly 250 years that the bones had been seen. They were reunited with the reliquary casket on its return to Stonyhurst in March 2017, and solemnly replaced under the altar in the Sodality Chapel at the College, with which they have been associated since 1667.

A final footnote. In 1834, the Augustinian Sisters returned the relics of Gordianus to the College, which by then had relocated to Lancashire, and so his remains now lie in the north-west of England, as intended by Fr Anderton back in the seventeenth century. Gordianus is a long way from home, but his relics continue to provide occasion for the exploration of faith and discussion of contemporary issues of state intolerance, sadly all too evident in the world around us.

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