THE WAY

a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits

January 2025 *Volume 64, Number 1*

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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. A Special Issue is planned on 'Living the Spiritual Exercises', so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to Nicola Slee for allowing us to reprint her poem 'Christa, Returning', and to Edwina Sandys for permission to publish the accompanying illustration of her sculpture *Christa*. The article by Robert McChesney is adapted from his forthcoming book *The Soul Also Keeps the Score*, and is published by kind permission of Liturgical Press. Foreign-language quotations are translated by the article author unless otherwise noted. The scripture quotations herein are generally from the New Revised Standard Version Bible © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

ABBREVIATIONS

Autobiography	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

This issue of *The Way* is dedicated to the memory of Gerald O'Collins SJ (1931–2024).

A place of peace, prayer and beauty in North Wales

Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit poet

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FOREWORD

As we try to understand the human words in which the mystery of God is expressed, perhaps it is helpful to recall the advice of St Ignatius Loyola. He invites us, when we are interpreting another's words, to be more ready to justify than condemn a neighbour's statement (Exx 22). He went further by giving advice to Jesuits attending the Council of Trent that they should 'rely upon readiness to listen, keeping quiet so as to sense and appreciate the positions, emotions and desires of those speaking'.[1] Perhaps he was inspired by St Paul's exhortation that all human understanding be informed by love (1 Corinthians 13:2). The articles in this issue explore how we interpret human words about God, in the scriptures, in poetry and in prayer. Each author offers us a different way of allowing those words to be interpreted, not by our own lights, but by love itself.

Several of the authors explore how interpretations of scripture can yield new insight into familiar scriptural texts. Ruth Evans reinterprets the finding of Jesus in the Temple as a narrative about the adolescent tension between young freedom and a protective family. She reveals how it demonstrates the ongoing maturation of Jesus in his humanity. Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, Robert McChesney rereads the story of the Good Samaritan from the perspective of the injured man. By identifying with his reversal of fortune, readers are invited to recognise their humility and powerlessness before traumatic events rather than simply to admire moral heroism. McChesney draws out useful guidance for understanding St Ignatius Loyola's own traumatic past. Another reversal of fortune is examined by Luke Taylor, who reinterprets a paradoxical passage from the Book of Job. If the reader attends to the text as spoken drama then a bewildering array of interpretations can collapse into a coherent approach that presents Job as both a saint and a rebel.

Although scripture offers a privileged encounter with God, the same voice can be found speaking through a variety of other texts. Approaching a selection of gospel poems by the Australian Jesuit poet Peter Steele (1939–2021) as *lectio divina* reveals how poetic technique

[1] St Ignatius to members of the Society of Jesus in Trent, early 1546, *Personal Writings*, 164.

can open up the scintillating details of gospel narratives to our prayer. Gerard O'Collins (1931–2024) submitted this study just shortly before his death. He contributed eighteen articles to *The Way* over five decades, and was writing for us well into his ninety-third year. This issue is dedicated to his memory.

In an article reprinted from the online journal *Thinking Faith*, Teresa White describes the mystery and paradox of poetry considered as God's 'mother tongue'. She explores one of Gerard Manley Hopkins's finest poems, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', to understand how God sees the world. That gaze evokes a loving response that leads through suffering to new life—which is many people's experience of imaginative prayer. Iain Radvan presents such prayer as a strategy for reading the scriptures with the help of reader response criticism. This approach from literary theory offers a way of understanding how gaps in the gospel narratives leave a space for readers to imagine for themselves, thereby bringing themselves into relationship with Jesus.

According to the apophatic tradition of theology, language fails and must fall silent before the mystery of God. However Kirsty Clarke draws on this tradition alongside more modern feminist theology to argue that language about God needs to have a 'playful, open-ended, changeable, and experimental character'. Without this, we cannot say that it is really searching for God. And Elizabeth Hoare explores how language reaches towards the mystery of God through an unlikely trio of authors. She argues that Julian of Norwich, Mary Oliver and Elizabeth Goudge all exhibited a resolute attentiveness to their experience and acceptance of its limitations. They were also women of great faith and unhurried lives; as a consequence their writings convey something of the mystery of God.

In an intriguing analysis of the character of the priest Rodrigues in the novel *Silence* by Endo Shusaku. Ambrose Mong argues that a key moment of apostasy can also be understood as a moment of conversion. As we endeavour to let love interpret every word that we hear, let us hope that the presupposition of being more ready to justify than condemn might allow us to touch more deeply upon the mystery of God, whose word is being spoken in the heart of every human being.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

A PRIEST-POET'S *LECTIO DIVINA*

The Example of Peter Steele (1939–2012)

Gerald O'Collins

PETER STEELE, AN AUSTRALIAN JESUIT, spent his academic life as a student and then professor at the University of Melbourne. He belonged with Vincent Buckley, Christopher Wallace-Crabbe and Evan Jones, who created a golden age of poets in its department of English literature. Oxford University Press published his doctoral thesis on the Irish clergyman and satirist Jonathan Swift.[1] Overseas, Steele gave the Martin D'Arcy lectures at the University of Oxford, published as *The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self on Show.*[2] He was particularly attracted by centres of learning in the United States, and regularly went as a visiting professor to Georgetown University in Washington, DC or to Fordham University in New York.[3]

In 1984 when spending a year at Loyola University, Chicago, he met the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who in 1995 would win the Nobel Prize for Literature. They initiated a warm friendship and an exchange of substantial letters that lasted until Steele's death on 27 June 2012. Writing to a mutual friend, Margaret Manion, some months later, Heaney recalled that Steele, 'made a habit of calling in Dublin when he was on his way to Georgetown, and having him in your company was like putting your back to a great tree when the sap was rising'. The same letter spoke of homilies ('nonpareil, a braiding of faith and intellect') and essays that Steele shared with Heaney. What 'came through in the essays' about poetry was 'pure conviction about the seriousness of the art, extraordinary range of reference, wonderful level-toned expositions

[1] Peter Steele, *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).
[2] (Melbourne: Melbourne U, 1989).
[3] For more on Steele's life, see Gerald O'Collins, *Portraits: Popes, Family and Friends* (Redland Bay: Connor Court, 2019), 231–235.

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and illuminations'.[4] As for Steele's poetic works, Heaney acknowledged 'the unswervingly brilliant technique of the poems'.[5] Apropos of some gospel poems by Steele, Heaney assured him that 'those New Testament sonnets are wonderful'.[6]

In 2021 Sean Burke, the outgoing provost of Newman College (Steele's college within the University of Melbourne), gathered in a single volume 35 poems, already published and often republished by Steele during his lifetime: *Raining Angels*.[7] A poem on the third day of Genesis introduces the anthology. Then it takes readers from the birth of Jesus and through his ministry, concluding with the crucifixion, resurrection and pentecost. In the introduction to *Raining Angels,* Burke recalls that he talked with Steele about the collection and also proposed 'attaching a scriptural "clue" or footnote' to them.[8] The anthology witnesses unswervingly to Steele's personal attachment to Jesus.

These poems can be read and used as prayers—specifically by those doing the Second, Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, which draw, respectively, on the nativity and life of Jesus, his passion and crucifixion, and the resurrection. Could they also feed and even shape the habit of *lectio divina*? This prayerful and imaginative reading of the scriptures—above all the four Gospels—was developed by Origen (d.*c.*253), practised for centuries and firmly retrieved by the Second Vatican Council?[9]

Did Steele intend that his own experience of *lectio divina* could create vignettes, often in the form of sonnets, that would stimulate and guide a similar experience for others? He wanted to share with readers the personal religious narrative emerging from his 'ruminations' on the gospel stories. In *Braiding the Voices*, a collection of essays published only a few days before Steele's death from liver cancer, his reading of a poem attending to Christ's nativity ('Breathing Days') visualises the traditional ox (see Isaiah 1:3) and its literal rumination as evoking the spiritual 'rumination' of the monastic *lectio divina*. Those at prayer

[4] Seamus Heaney to Professor Margaret Manion IBVM, 13 October 2012, Newman College Archives, Melbourne, Australia.
[5] Seamus Heaney to Peter Steele, 12 June 1999.
[6] Seamus Heaney to Peter Steele, 18 January 2011.
[7] (Melbourne: Newman College, 2021).
[8] Steele, *Raining Angels*, 1 (subsequent references in the text).
[9] See Gerald O'Collins, 'Retrieving *lectio divina* at Vatican II and After', *The Way*, 60/4 (October 2021), 87–100; Gerald O'Collins, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*: *A Lived Experience* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2023), 145–53, 172–74.

chew over and savour the texts of the Bible. Steele thinks his religious poems to be a poetic form of that scriptural method of prayer.[10] We can understand the gospel poems of *Raining Angels* in this specific way.

Freedom

First, those who practise *lectio divina* do not merely 'transcribe' in their minds and hearts the texts they 'chew over'. They enjoy a *freedom* to reorganize and amplify the texts they select for rumination. Starting from a passage in one Gospel, they may look to material drawn from other Gospels. Christian painters and sculptors have done just this with the parables and miracles they found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Steele, likewise, asserts his right to reconstruct imaginatively and prayerfully the gospel stories by introducing material from different accounts and by suggesting the intentions of Jesus. We meet such freedom in *Raining Angels*.

In 'Lazarus at the Gate' (45) Steele ignores the rich man's five brothers who feature in Jesus' parable and apparently live in the same house (Luke 16:27–28). The poet inserts a couple of aged guests 'hobbling in their haste' to arrive at the dinner table. He had seen them in a print by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804) in a Besançon museum. Unlike the original parable, here it is not the rich man 'dressed in purple and fine linen' but his 'consort' who waits 'in purple' for the guests.

Lazarus and the Wicked Rich Man, ***by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, eighteenth century***

Steele's personal narrative makes room for remarkable freedom in 'Peter' (55). Verses from Matthew (26:69–75) are supplied to accompany the rhyming sonnet. But it first spends eight of its fourteen lines imagining the attractive figure

[10] Peter Steele, *Braiding the Voices: Essays in Poetry* (Melbourne: John Leonard, 2012), 273.

that Peter cut as a fisherman *before* he ever met and joined Jesus. Apropos of Matthew's account of Peter denying his Lord three times, the poet speaks of Peter being 'at bay', and signals the silent wretchedness into which his troubled conscience drove him after disowning Jesus. By then the poem has abruptly switched to John 21 and another early morning, 'when the boat was beached at cock-crow, and the baskets cried success' at the miraculous draught of fish.

Prayerfully attending to the final two chapters of John's Gospel, Steele had noticed that Peter joins the beloved disciple in visiting the empty tomb (John 20:2–10). Presumably Peter is present when Mary Magdalene announces to 'the disciples' that she had seen the risen Lord (20:18), and when Jesus himself appears twice to the disciples as a group (20:19–23, 24–29). On the first occasion we are told that the disciples—but not explicitly Peter—rejoice when they see the Lord. Likewise, when Jesus shares them with his 'peace', sends them on mission and gifts them with the Holy Spirit (20:19–23), Peter is seemingly present as one of the recipients. The next chapter names him as inviting six other disciples on an all-night fishing trip ('I am going fishing', 21:3) which ended at dawn with a huge catch and with Jesus rehabilitating Peter and making him the chief pastor of the flock (21:15–19).

Some readers may question this picture of Peter 'brood[ing] in silence, not to be reached/Wherever he had gone in wretchedness'. Steele's imagination and *lectio divina* led him to this possibility. He did something unusual by pondering on Peter's internal state during the period covered by John 20 and the first half of John 21. Steele's imaginative ability let him raise such questions.

It is likewise with a scene made for the poet's prayerful reading in 'Touch' (39): the raising of the son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11–16). This rhyming sonnet takes readers inside the mind of Jesus when he met a funeral procession near the gate of Nain and, quite spontaneously and unasked, restored to life a widow's only son. Jesus thought of his own mother and how she would react to his violent death. Steele picks up the words of old Simeon announcing, at the presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, that Mary's heart would be pierced by a sword (Luke 2:35). Jesus,

> Thought of his own mother, a widow too,
> And what the news of her son's death would be
> To her: accepted, but a piercing through.

Of course, according to John 19:25–27, Mary did not receive this 'news' from a distance. She was right there on Calvary to endure at first hand his death by crucifixion. Is the poet hinting that, when Jesus walked into Nain, he already realised that he would be killed but had no advance knowledge that his violent death would come by crucifixion? Did he imagine that his own widowed mother would be present at the execution?

Steele risks being reproached by biblical scholars for taking us inside what Jesus thought and even dreamed. While being 'a driven man, he blessed the call to roam'; after bringing the widow's son back to life, he 'dreamed that night, and afterwards, of home'. The human condition he had assumed requires believers, to be sure, to make room for his thoughts, feelings and dreams. A *lectio divina* prompts Steele into boldly imagining the shape taken by those thoughts, feelings and dreams. He invites his readers to engage imaginatively and even share Jesus' experience.

To engage imaginatively and even share Jesus' experience

Applying Five Senses to Reading the Gospels

What St Ignatius Loyola called 'the application of the five senses' to biblical themes such as the nativity of Christ overlaps with the practice of *lectio divina* (Exx 121–126). Here Ignatius invites retreatants to see, hear, smell, taste and touch what happened when Christ was born into this world at Bethlehem. Ignatius has just encouraged them, both within the structure of the Exercises and for the future, to read from the Gospels—obviously intending a prayerful and imaginative reading that would coincide with *lectio divina* (Exx 100). A little later he proposes such a 'prayer of the senses' for the flight into Egypt (Exx 131)—one of the subjects found in the Steele anthology as 'Flight' (17). Consciously applying the senses initiates prayer in a simple but effective way.

The spare titles of at least three of the poems in *Raining Angels*, 'Watch' (27), 'Touch' (39) and 'Taste' (51), embed us in the prayerful practices out of which they have grown: the exercise of the five senses and a biblical meditation that consciously applies those senses to the gospel stories. A 'seeing' and 'hearing' pervade the gospel poems gathered in *Raining Angels*. Taking up the account of Jesus preaching in Nazareth, Steele joins the Gospel of Luke in visually setting the scene—Jesus 'closing the scroll and sitting down to preach' ('Scroll', 19). The

poet imaginatively retells what the people have *heard* Jesus announce (from Isaiah 29:18–19):

> … the lines … in the old book when they claimed
> That every prison should be breached, the blind
> Drink at the blessed font of light, the maimed
> Walk tall, the poor be heard when they spoke their mind.

Ways in which *lectio divina* fed Steele's *visual* imagination abound in his sonnet 'Watch' (27). Inspired by a reference to the beautiful 'lilies of the field' (Matthew 6:28–29), he has added other flowers and plants to the list of what Jesus watched during his life at home in Galilee: anemones, ivy, the Rose of Jericho, tulips, chamomile, crown daisy, lotus and poppies. Descriptions accompany much of what Jesus watched: 'the crimson glow of anemones' and the 'glossy' ivy that climbed walls and trees:

> … crown daisy, fast to fade:
> And as for lotus, the eye could almost steal
> A heaven from the steady blue displayed.

Jesus would 'keep an eye on poppies and their close of scarlet when the evening gave the sign'. 'Originally no one cared what he could see'. It 'cost him nothing, unless you count the time'. Later, however, 'they' (his faceless enemies) 'learned how to watch him, carefully' (see Luke 6:6–11). By using the word 'watch' Steele sets alight diverse visionary possibilities for meditative praying—what Jesus could see and what his watchful critics saw him doing.

Deep emotional attachment to the person of the risen Jesus comes through Steele's refrain that blends seeing and hearing in 'Song to the Son of Man' (77): '*Show* us your hands and *say* it again'. Powers of feeling attend that prayerful retelling of Thomas the apostle being brought to faith. Any *lectio divina* of this story would be inconceivable without the inner, spiritual senses of seeing and hearing. The poet drives home this conclusion by appealing to what Jesus *shows* and *talks* about: 'Show us the wounds to match our own,/talk about healing when healing is over'.

When applying the other senses, Ignatius proposes that *smelling* and *tasting* run close together. In presenting Jesus' loving concern for the state of his people, 'Scroll' chooses a suitably repulsive example: 'He knew a maggot in their hearts, the one/that eats away at the long

hopes' (19). 'Breathing Days' appeals to our sense of smell when we incorporate the legendary ox in a prayerful telling of the nativity: 'dung offers its sweet reek/and the ox slobbers its achievement' (15).

Tasting embodies essential meaning for a poem ('Taste') that reflects Jesus' choice of bread and wine when instituting the Eucharist for his disciples: 'they'll know me best/as bread and wine delivered with the rest'.

> His mother's wisdom was to praise their food,
> That benediction from the hand of God,
> And so he found the coriander good
> And blessed the little broad beans in the pod.

Jesus could recite the names of 'almonds, pistachios, mulberries, new cheese', along with 'mustard and lamb, the husbandry of bees, and pomegranate gleaming to the bite'. The poem would be unimaginable without biting and tasting food (51).

Touching supplies the title for the poem ('Touch') that emerged from the poet's rumination on the widow's son at Nain. The sonnet begins by evoking a funeral procession that quickly followed death: 'Touching the bier with its cooling burden'. What was there to be seen and heard follows quickly: 'He bent quickly and called the young man from the dead/And gave him back to his mother' (39). While in that poem Jesus touches a universal symbol of death (the coffin), after his resurrection he is 'at ease,/liking the morning, *nestling* a crocus' when Mary Magdalene meets him risen from the dead ('Gardener', 73). He holds close to himself a fresh flower, a fragile yet beautiful sign that can be touched (though he cannot) and signifies new life.

Steele's prayerful reflections draw readers into the gospel stories by inviting them to appropriate these narratives, from the beginning (in Bethlehem) to the end (in a garden and at the first pentecost). The five senses of Ignatian prayer have engaged the imagination of this priest-poet. Through the gospel poems that he proceeded to create, our senses can do the same when we take up his poetic invitation.

The Composition of Place

What Ignatius calls 'the composition of place' belongs essentially to his instructions for prayer (for example, Exx 103). Before describing how an angelic messenger 'broke the spell/banality had spun' for the shepherds, followed by an army of angels 'raining like cats and dogs', Steele makes

use of Ignatius' scheme by meticulously setting the scene for prayer in 'Gloria':

> Glad that night of the metalled clubs when jackals
> cried on the hills and the dog snarled, they waited,
> shaggy under keffiyehs, the heavy cloaks rucked high for
> the wind, nibbling at olives,
> one of them tossing his pebbles, one of them flirting
> at reed pipes, all of them stinking of sheep,
> in the eyes of the law none of them worth a damn (13).

'Scroll' speaks not only to the setting of synagogue worship but also to people wearied by grinding flour at home or ploughing the fields ('His people, tired by the quern/Or the long slog at the plough', 19). Like most poems anthologized in *Raining Angels*, its composition of place for *lectio divina* remains short and to the point. It aims to place readers and those praying within the event and centred on Jesus.

'Gardener' opens, however, with an elaborate scenario, a vision of Christ the gardener (see John 20:15) wearing a 'faded shirt, scuffed leggings', and 'partly shadowed' by the hedges of 'long allees'. The garden for Chiswick House that Lord Burlington laid out in the eighteenth century creates a fanciful, alternative setting for the crucified and risen Jesus to appear to Mary Magdalene—in the afternoon rather than the morning of Easter Sunday. By summoning up the formal beauty of a classic English garden, Steele draws forth a deep feeling of serenity.

Lord Burlington's Gardens at Chiswick, ***by John Bowles, published*** **c.1840**

Three Characteristics of Steele's lectio divina

Steele's poetry, like all great poetry, operates in mysterious ways. Let me note three individual characteristics nourished by his gospel ruminations.

First, by lovingly naming them, he praises particular things created by God and revealing God. Acting in the spirit of 'show, don't tell', Steele's *lectio divina* remains alert to the divine revelation and to the exuberantly diverse realities through which it makes itself felt. The poem 'Genesis I: Third Day', elaborating the creation on the third day (Genesis 1:9–13), relishes the rich variety of plants: 'Huckleberry, frangipani, monkey puzzle—each is there for the having, given a warrant and a pinch of existence' (11). Steele takes a hint from all that created richness when he moves to Jesus' vision of the Galilean countryside. He goes far beyond the 'lilies of the field' to picture Christ contemplating a medley of flowers and plants in 'Watch' . All created things witness to the greatness and beauty of the Creator.

Irony colours the witness of Steele's *lectio divina*—a second, important characteristic. Dramatic irony famously appears in the Gospel of John when Caiaphas declares that one person should die rather than the whole people perish (John 11:50). The high priest did not grasp the full significance of his words, but readers of the Gospel can. Steele's ironical frame of mind became reinforced by his *lectio divina* and turns up not least in 'Hill', with the 'long business' of Jesus' crucifixion (65). At the fortress Antonia in Jerusalem, 'for the tenth time. Pilate tutored his wife/on reasons of state, and was not heard'. The case for Pilate and the imperial powers he represented returns in the closing lines. 'They'd had put their faith in Rome and peace on earth, the high ground theirs for ever'. But the prayerful reader knows this would not come about. When the Roman soldiers with their 'spear butts in play, worked at the crowd like navvies/to keep them out of *the way*', irony gleams through. What happened on Calvary proved a much longer business than any of them 'gauged it'. Despite these soldiers and their successors, thousands and then millions would join the 'way' (see for example Mark 10:52; Acts 9:2) that Jesus had 'marked' and walked.

Thirdly, the modern narrative ability of Steele's witness to his biblical ruminations provides a complement to the best gospel writing. 'Centurion' (41), 'Hill' (65) and 'Gardener' show his lavish abundance in telling the stories of, respectively, the Roman centurion's son being healed, the crucifixion and Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus.

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The poems gathered in *Raining Angels* may be readily defined as prayers inspired by the gospel stories. We can dive deeper and interpret them as *lectio divina*. They exemplify three distinctive characteristics of such biblical rumination: its freedom, its use of the five senses and its habit of setting the scene for prayer. To these characteristics we add three traits identified in Peter Steele's own poetic practice of *lectio divina*: the naming of particular works of creation, the use of irony and a vivid narrative ability.

Gerald O'Collins SJ taught fundamental and systematic theology for 33 years at the Gregorian University, Rome, and served as adjunct professor of the Australian Catholic University and research professor of the University of Divinity thereafter. He authored or co-authored over eighty books; among the most recent are *The Beauty of Jesus Christ* (2020), *Letters to Maev* (2023) and *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola* (Paulist Press). With the help of a young poet, Manfred Cain, at the time of his death in August 2024 he had just completed an edition of the correspondence between Peter Steele and the Nobel laureate in literature Seamus Heaney (1939–2013), which ran from 1984 to Steele's death in 2012.

FINDING HIM IN THE TEMPLE

Ruth Agnes Evans

> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour. (Luke 2:41–52).

THE FAMILY NARRATIVE has elements that we may recognise. The adolescent boy has gone off on his own, for his own reasons, without consulting his parents. His mother, hurt and bewildered by his behaviour, confronts him. We know, from Luke's and Matthew's infancy narratives, the painful history endured by these parents for the sake of their child. They have cared for their family as refugees (Matthew 2:14–23) and we may conclude that concerns to safeguard their child have shaped their existence. This is not their first anxious journey. Having endured a terrible search with her husband, the woman's anguish at the moment of reunion now comes out. He is a child and he has obligations to his family—indisputable facts which her reproach poignantly asserts.

Her astonishment reveals how extraordinary it is for him to break with the norms of their community. It would appear that throughout

The Way, 64/1 (January 2025), 19–28

his life he has been her observant son. The debate which emerges, at one level direct and ordinary, is in another way mysterious. The boy counters the natural authority with which his mother challenges him by citing another authority to which he owes his obedience. So is this a human conflict in the usual sense, or something more profound and troubling? The more we study the story, the more it opens up strange depths.

The husband is silent, allowing his wife to speak. This family is not dominated by its patriarch. Rather the husband gives priority to his wife, allowing a dialogue to emerge between her and the boy. But the husband's silence does not mean he is not involved. The woman reciprocates his respect by including a reference to his suffering first, paying implicit tribute to the care he has taken with the boy (Luke 2:48). At this point the boy harshly intervenes. He speaks of a Father, whose concerns take precedence over the concerns of his parents. He is talking about another kind of Father, a Father who owns him in another kind of way. His life is bound to that Father and by upholding their mysterious bond he hints at his destiny, and hers. The house of this Father, doing this Father's work, is his main concern, the place where he must be.

The Child and His Parents

To understand the parents in the story we should consider what it has meant to this woman and this man to keep the child safe. According to the Gospel of Luke, she conceived him mysteriously under the shadow of the Holy Spirit (1:35–38). Humanly speaking, she alone was present. The child was wholly hers. She conceived him into a world that was bound to misinterpret her pregnancy. Shielding the unborn child within her body, the teenage girl of no great social consequence stood alone.

She and her offspring could have disappeared among the forgotten miscreants of history, disposed as righteous neighbours thought fit. The arms of an unmarried girl defending her swelling womb were all, humanly speaking, that stood between the unborn child and the suspicions of society. At some point her betrothed mercifully stepped in, choosing to share the girl's tainted reputation in order to render her and her child acceptable and to give them a home (Matthew 1:24).

Twelve years later, the story of the finding in the Temple evokes the struggling lives of the woman, her husband and the boy. The man and woman stand together in a world where suspicion and violence have endangered their child, overshadowed by the burdens of survival, especially for those travelling far from home.

He was one more child in a world crowded with refugees. She bore him in a place that afforded no friendly inn to shelter him (Luke 2:7). In the cold stable it was her care, her loving hands, her milk, her swaddling clothes, with the supportive stepfather, which sheltered the baby from the outrageous apathy of others. She is not a passive woman; all her energies and instincts have been engaged. The threats of Herod, the trials of exile in Egypt: through it all this woman and her husband have shielded their son.

Christ among the Doctors, ***by Albrecht Dürer, 1497***

Refugees and travelling groups depend on each member of the family interacting and communicating as a member. And now the child has disregarded the caring norms of protection which are the fabric of social existence and which have forged the family unity. The story indicates the woman's apprehension concerning her boy's destiny. She knows from her conversation with an angel at his conception that he is more than he seems (Luke 1:32–35), and lethal violence has already been roused by his existence (Matthew 2:13–18). The prophecy of Simeon, when her son was a baby in her arms, has added to her anxieties. Simeon foresaw an approaching agony for her: her son being rejected, seemingly without her husband at her side.[1]

> This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too (Luke 2:34–35).

[1] The original Greek emphasizes the graphic nature of Mary's future injury and her defencelessness: 'a sword will be run through your own soul'.

These stories bring us into a sense of historical proximity to the woman, Mary of Nazareth, and her earthly solidarity with us. Our daily cares are not strange to her. On the contrary, she has a confidence in the place and norms of safety which she, with her husband, has fought to give this child. She does not assimilate the mysterious purposes of her child without painful effort.[2] Her inner and outer journeys involve a struggle, both intellectual and emotional. She strives to understand. Like every woman, she fears what the world could do to her child—and her fears have been aroused already. The child is standing before her now, in his youth and vulnerability.

If someone had attempted to envisage how Mary, Joseph and her child might communicate with one another, it is unlikely he or she could have come up with a dialogue like this. Mary stands before her son in her own right and, as her own person, questions him, as she questioned the angel (Luke 1:34), with forthright frankness. 'Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you'. She is not passive before the child. She asserts her authority, with that of his step-father—an authority to which we will be told he usually submits. And she vividly describes their suffering to him. The communication between the mother and her son is open, honest and receptive, suggesting that they have a good relationship and can tackle misunderstandings.

Before the mystery of her son's instruction, the woman is active, struggling and contemplative. We are told that his parents do not understand. Their intellectual and emotional near-collapse strikes a human note in the lives of a couple we think of as serenely immersed in the will of God. Their incomprehension and dismay as parents bring them into solidarity with us. They are not spared the struggles that we too face, as they try to find and safeguard Jesus in this world. Their response to the boy, notwithstanding their knowledge of his prefigured greatness (Matthew 1:20–25; 2:11–15), is rooted in concern for him as a vulnerable human being. Remember that the child does not confront his mother with words enshrined in scripture but with the mysterious living wisdom of a boy.

We are used to seeing Jesus from the perspective of his completed life, a life fulfilled by sacrifice. But that sacrifice can only be understood

[2] The starkly realistic story of the finding in the Temple stands in marked contrast to imaginative depictions of Mary's life and the infancy of Jesus in the apocryphal Gospels, for example the *Infancy Gospel of James*. See Margaret Baker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London and New York: T. and T. Clark, 2003), 257–258.

by remembering that his life unfolded, aided by his parents' shelter, step by step. In the early stages of his life his mother saw and interpreted the boy as he moved in time. He needed to be protected so that he could grow and live. He needed to be safeguarded, from childhood to adolescence to maturity; and his mother's life was invested in that safeguarding.

The Child and His God

The boy does not retract his behaviour, citing instead his authority for acting as he has acted. Far from showing the adolescent Jesus safely immersed in the experience of childhood, we see the boy already reaching towards his destiny. He is committed to that destiny in obedience to God. His human nature is not born a finished and accomplished thing. Like every human nature, but more so, it emerges strangely. By twelve years old, he has already established with his human mind the principle which informs his growth. As he declares, he is committed to his Father and to the concomitant obedience. Already he is the incipient leader of others. In this story he wins praise from his teachers, who realise they are in dialogue with a gifted child. But we also see that his destiny has opened him to pain.

The boy is at an age when the urgency, turmoil and challenge of human destiny emerge, in all their unresolved fear and passion. But there is no turmoil or conflict here in the usual sense. Jesus has not allowed his mother to suffer because he is searching for who he is in a confused way. He already knows who he is in relation to God and what God is asking of him. The dialogue with his mother is not a typical act of adolescent rebellion. The experience of human growth in no way distracts the child from his experience of eternal communion with his Father. The loyalty the boy gives here to God is simply the human expression of the love he has always shared with his Father. He is not deflected by his youth, nor the pain of his devoted parents. He is claiming an absolute right and obligation to be in the house of his Father, unmediated by the authority of parents who have done everything they can to teach him about God. He alone can interpret and realise his actual experience of God. He needs space for his God.[3] Then the story starts to make more sense.

What does the boy Jesus know? The story contradicts any theory that knowing awareness of himself did not break into his consciousness until a later point in adulthood. This child already knows who he is

[3] See Luke 5: 16.

and why he is on the earth. At twelve years old, the age of assuming manhood and responsibility, he owns that destiny. And Mary selected this incident to share—as teaching material—indicating its unique status among her memories of his childhood. Luke's narrative emphasizes the importance of her internal record.

The story does not fit into any familiar paradigm about childhood obedience, of which the boy is normally exemplary. On other occasions, we are told, he gives obedience to his parents. Nonetheless, we must understand from the story that the child has an overriding and experiential sense of obligation to God, whom he calls his Father. Moreover, he claims an absolute right to receive and act upon this relationship for himself. His sense of the needed balance between his human relationships and his overarching eternal obligation is not disordered or confused. He himself understands the balance that is implied, even if his parents in this story do not.

The scene shows the human isolation of the Son of God. Even before his mother, he stands, in a sense, a stranger. The infinite bond he shares with his Father, in this scene of its human manifestation, appears remote, cruelly demanding, incomprehensible. Even his blameless mother struggles to accept this behaviour. Majestically self-assured, the boy is also pitiably alone. The story hints at his immense awareness of invisible realities, foreshadowing the tension in his life between human experience and the divine will. And with absolute authority

Christ among the Doctors in the Temple, ***by Jusepe de Ribera, 1617–1618***

he binds his mother to that will. What reason can there be for him to abandon her, and so commit her to an agony of anxiety, unless his authority over her is of a different kind and on a different scale from the authority she exerts over him as his mother?

In a delicate touch, the voice of Mary indicates Joseph's paternal love and care for the child he has not fathered. But rather than appearing sensitively submissive on her point regarding his filial obligation to Joseph, the boy asserts the allegiance he owes to another Father.

The story, on its surface ordinary, points to a deep mystery and apparent contradictions within the life of the child which cannot be interpreted without profound reflection, of the kind his mother will bestow. How is it that he can be obediently immersed in the norms of the life that his parents have devoutly offered him and yet not bound by them? How can he be so young and yet so weighted with immutable obligations from beyond this world? How is it that a village boy can astound the doctors of the law with his wisdom? How is it that he can be subject to his parents and yet demand from them an absolute allegiance to his will?

The Child and His Temple

Women everywhere rely on the securities of home to safeguard their children. The story points to the importance of the human home, the place of refuge and of nurture. This is the place that stands in contrast to the place of sacrifice, the Temple. Home is the place where the woman takes her child so that he can live and grow. If there is any consolation in this story, it is that the confrontation with destiny is deferred. The woman is permitted to return home with her child and he obeys her. Nazareth, to outsiders a place of no consequence (John 1:46), is the place where she will shield him, the place of safety.

The woman is actively struggling to understand her son's mind, but she does not resist him. She is battling to understand him in a way that suggests she knows he must have answers that she has not penetrated. He declares that a paternal authority, not that of Joseph, possesses him, in a mystery which has relegated her maternal anxieties to a place on the periphery of his concerns. His treatment of her was intentional. In a painful exercise of autonomy over them, he has left them to find their way to him.[4]

[4] See the Song of Songs 3:1–4.

They stand in the Temple precincts: the place he declares belongs to his Father. And so Jesus signals to his mother that he will obey his fate. This has already been prophesied to her in the Temple, the place where they are facing each other. She is looking on him now, not as an infant, but as one who asserts his own obedience to the claim of God upon his person. It is the boy's first recorded statement about himself.[5] By claiming the Temple for his Father, the boy makes his own claim to the Temple.[6] This place, where he insists he must be present—and the soul of his mother also since he has drawn her there—does not exist as an ideal, protected space. If it did, why is she distressed? While, at this moment, the Temple is succouring them, the woman's terror for his welfare shows that he has risked himself and the interests of his family to go there. Having known her to be his refuge, he has abandoned her.

The Temple, the meeting place between God and man, is the place of destiny. It is the place where Jesus will teach the human race, and where he will be questioned and confronted. The child has not made a bid for freedom for its own sake. Nor has he rebelled against the constraints of his humanity. His words to his mother are not to be understood as an assertion that he has no human ties and responsibilities, but as an assertion that he must realise these duties within his obligation to God as he interprets it. The fact that he returns to his parents shows that he remains their child. Indeed, the obedience that binds Jesus utterly to God will lead him, ever more deeply, into the responsibilities and constraints of the human condition.

As Mary asserts, she has a human responsibility for this child. She is the human source of his human nature. Her heart, literally, has nourished his. Actively recipient, she consented to and sanctioned his conception. There is no natural father, only Mary. The measure of her sinless maternal authority over Jesus is the measure of his divine authority when he overrides her argument. There is no possible merely human reason to disregard her wishes. Even if a child had experienced an urge to act in such a way, it would have been fitting for him to consult with his mother first.

Sojourner Truth, a formerly enslaved woman, struggled to assert her identity in a world which had continuously trampled her.[7] Searching for

[5] See Hebrews 10: 7.

[6] See Luke 19: 45–46.

[7] Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in Swartekill, New York. In 1826, she escaped to freedom, accompanied by her daughter.

answers in the Christian tradition, she drew a sense of her own human dignity from the dignity she recognised in Mary. With extraordinary insight, she understood Mary's unique authority over her son.

> Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.[8]

The premonition that Jesus gives his mother of his fate confronts Mary's natural instinct. Her mandate from God, which has seen her family through many dangers, is to protect her child. How counter-intuitive his warning must be to her. You have to glimpse the depths of her agony to understand the measure of his authority over her.

Mary will reach out to cradle and embrace her child's lifeless form; and she will remember all of the earlier cradlings, journeys, struggles. She has cradled a newborn, protected a healthy toddler, held in her proud arms a growing boy. Her arms will stretch out to contain the perfect bloodstained form which incarnates her loss. Here in the Temple, we see the shadow of that pietà. Now she is looking forward. Bestowing immense love on her maturing child, she lives beneath the shadow of his destiny, a destiny at which he hints already. They are reunited in the Temple precincts, the place where Simeon has prophesied her doom. Then she is permitted to return with her son to her place of safety, but it is not a comforting reunion.

He who will abundantly create the best wine out of water at the request of his mother (John 2:1–10) will drain the dregs of sour wine raised to his parched lips (John 19:28–30). He who stripped himself of his godhead (Philippians 2:6–8), will be stripped by his executioners (Luke 23:34). His mother will watch his blood spilt like wine.

The Child and His People

The narrative points to the importance of the dialogue between the Church and the Jewish people and indicates one of the ways we can develop its meaning. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are portrayed as devout Jews who situate their understanding of and devotion to God within the faith practices of their time, in solidarity with their own community.

[8] This is an extract from a now-famous speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. Sojourner Truth, *And Ain't I a Woman?* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 3.

Moreover it is at twelve years old, the age for claiming adulthood according to Jewish wisdom, that the boy asserts himself. The story strongly emphasizes the boy's intellectual and emotional solidarity with other Jews. There is the flexible network of interacting friends and relatives with which he travels and with whom he belongs. There are the teachers in the Temple with whom he sits. There is the local Jewish community to which the family returns and within which the boy earns the highest praise.

The child leaves the safety of the traditional caravan, not out of rebellion but in order to unfold his growing wisdom in a dialogue with the leading teachers of his day. This story is unique for showing the humble and engaged way that the boy Jesus enters this dialogue, before it becomes overshadowed by conflict in his adult life. Exceptional as the dialogue is, it follows the natural order of things. It is the elders who are teaching the boy, emphasizing his need for the education they can give. It is from within this mutually respectful dialogue that his gifts and insights begin to be manifest. The teachers in the Temple take the child seriously, engage with him and reciprocate his esteem. The story marks out the child's future as a teacher within the Jewish community. Clearly he sees the wisdom that he is going to offer his people to be in a living continuity with the existing wisdom of his people.

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This abrasive story yields many wonderful insights! For our struggling selves, there is encouragement and consolation in seeing this family, so blessed by God, struggling amid the anxieties and troubles that afflict them in the world and to see that its members did not always understand one another. The story marks out Mary's persevering response of contemplation for our instruction. The story also highlights Jesus' own personal name for God. He thinks of God as his Father. The story is unique for its invitation to reflect upon the adolescence of the Son of God, for offering us a brief window on to a sacred period which is otherwise set apart in a shrouded silence.

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APOSTATE OR APOSTLE?

Apostasy as Conversion in Endo Shusaku, *Silence*

Ambrose Mong

BORN IN TOKYO, JAPAN on 27 March 1923, Endo Shusaku grew up in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. After his parents' divorce, Endo returned to Japan with his mother in 1933 and, through her influence and that of his aunt, was baptized as a Catholic in 1934 at the age of eleven. He described his Christian faith as ill-fitting clothing which shaped his literary work and was shaped by it.[1] Having graduated from Keio University with a bachelor's degree in French Literature in 1949, Endo travelled to France to read Catholic fiction at the University of Lyons. As a novelist, he explores the relationship between East and West from a Christian perspective. *Silence*, published in 1966, is his masterpiece. It was made into a film in 2016 directed by Martin Scorsese. This work faces the challenges of introducing Christian faith into a foreign culture. It also reflects on the themes of forgiveness for Christians who have forsaken their faith and a silent God who nevertheless supports believers in times of intense suffering and persecution.

The context of *Silence* is the persecution of Christian missionaries in seventeenth-century Japan. The protagonist is a Portuguese Jesuit, Sebastian Rodrigues. Through first-person narrative, the author delves into the inner turmoil of the priest as he struggles between his evangelizing zeal and his condescending attitude towards the Japanese to whom he is ministering. In fact, he wonders if the people whose souls he is trying to save really understand the teachings of the Church at all. Having been captured by the Japanese authorities, he recants his faith to prevent Japanese Christians from being tortured. After his apostasy, Rodrigues attempts to justify himself by reflecting on the life of Christ

[1] Endo Shusaku, 'Watakushi no bungaku', quoted in Van C. Gessel, *The Sting of Life: Four Contemporary Japanese Novelists* (New York: Columbia U, 1989), 20.

in relation to his own downfall and failed mission, claiming that he has renounced the Church as an institution, but not his faith.

Being stripped of his pride and colonial mentality, his humiliation and shame in the public renunciation of Christianity, paradoxically turns the priest from the 'Apostate Paul', as the Japanese call him, to be more like the apostle Peter. His belief is transformed into a more authentic faith in the suffering Jesus. The dramatization of the violent persecution of foreign missionaries and Japanese faithful is based on historical facts and modelled on real-life figures.

Jesuit Mission in Japan

St Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit missionary, arrived in Kagoshima in 1549 propagating the faith, and within fifty years about 300,000 Japanese were baptized. The Christian mission adopted a Western approach, politically and culturally, part of the European maritime expansion. Initially, the Japanese feudal lords (*daimyo*) wanted to have commercial ties with Western nations and, thus, tolerated their presence and allowed the entry of missionaries. However, the unification of Japan under a central government was accompanied by a growing suspicion of foreigners. The Tokugawa shogunate (1603 to 1867) sought to promote a strong nationalist spirit by unifying the various warring states politically. Christianity was perceived as interfering with Japanese internal affairs, disrupting and undermining the central authority of the ruling family.

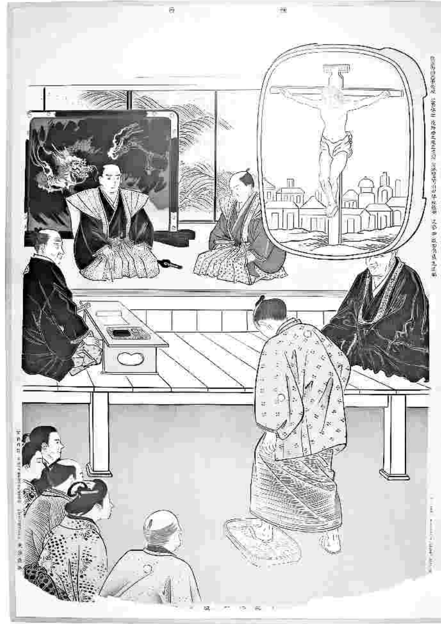
The Japanese authorities began to feel that Christianity was starting to make their subjects disloyal. It was formally banned in 1614, when Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu revoked the policies of toleration with the Edict of Expulsion, which set the stage for the persecution of Christians.

> This 'Statement on the Expulsion of the Bateren' [priests] … declares that the Christians seek to make Japan into 'their own possession'. Their religion teaches them to 'contravene governmental regulations, traduce Shinto, calumniate the True Law, destroy righteousness, corrupt goodness'—in short, to subvert the native Japanese, the Buddhist, and the Confucian foundations of the social order.[2]

More than 4,000 Japanese Christians were killed between 1597 and 1650 by mass crucifixion and later in the 'pit'—hung upside down in a

[2] Jurgis Elisonas, 'Christianity and the Daimyo', in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, volume 4, *Early Modern Japan*, edited by John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1991), 367.

pit filled with excrement, slowly bleeding to death through a tiny slit cut in the temple or forehead.



Fumie *ceremony, artist unknown, c.1870*

Foreign Christian missionaries, especially Portuguese and Spanish, who arrived in Japan in the middle of the sixteenth century, were expelled. It is significant to note that only Roman Catholic missionaries, such as the Jesuits, were expelled by the shogunate, but not other foreigners such as Dutch traders. Presumably, these merchants were keen only to trade and looked upon the Portuguese as rivals. When the crackdown began, Christians were asked to step on an embossed copper image of Jesus in a procedure known as *fumie*. Trampling on Christ's face was ritualised with a public denunciation of the Christian faith and became an annual event for Japanese Christians who had renounced their faith.[3] Those who refused were tortured and killed, some by the 'pit'; others were boiled alive in the hot springs of Mount Unzen Jigoku or crucified at sea.

Setting the novel within this historical context leads to multiple interpretations—is Rodrigues's apostasy a denunciation of faith or a perfection of Christian virtue?

The Story of Silence

Silence narrates the journey of Sebastian Rodrigues as he travels secretly to Japan in the mid-seventeenth century. He goes to the various islands to minister to the *kakure kirishitan* (hidden Christians) who are forced to conceal themselves because of brutal persecution. It is also Rodrigues's mission to search for Christovao Ferreira, his mentor and former Jesuit provincial, who is reported as missing. (Ferreira was, in

[3] See Christopher B. Wachal, 'Forbidden Ships to Chartered Tours: Endo, Apostasy, and Globalization' in *Approaching* Silence*: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel*, edited by Mark W. Dennis and Darren J. N. Middleton (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 99.

fact, a real historical figure in the early Jesuit mission to Japan.) Ferreira is believed to have apostatized under torture by the Japanese authorities when his letters stop abruptly. News of his apostasy is reported in Europe; it affects the morale of the mission as well as the local faithful who have gone into hiding.

With the help of the weak-willed Japanese fisherman Kichijiro, whom he encounters in Macao, Rodrigues and another Jesuit, Francisco Garrpe, arrive on one of the islands of Japan. Witnessing the cruel persecution and immense sufferings of the Japanese faithful, Rodrigues is angered by the silence of God. To comfort himself, he imagines a lovely blue-eyed face of Christ as he endures physical and mental anguish in a land which he finds hostile, foreboding and unforgiving. The inhospitableness of Japan arises from its harsh terrain as well as from the samurai and their leader, the notorious Inoue, the 'architect of Christian persecution' (36). The Buddhist bonzes are also hostile towards Christian missionaries.

Betrayed by Kichijiro for 300 pieces of silver and handed over to the authorities, Rodrigues meets his old mentor: in a poignant scene, Ferreira confirms that the rumours of his apostasy are true. His action, he explains, was motivated by compassion, not cowardice. It was love and mercy for the Japanese faithful who were being tortured and executed. Just by waving his hand to signal his apostasy, Ferreira had ensured that the captured Christians were spared. He believes this painful decision was an act of faith, hope and charity, which would be condemned by the Church but commended by Christ himself.

Shocked and disappointed by his teacher's betrayal, Rodrigues soon finds himself in the same predicament. Witnessing the sufferings of the *kakure kirishitan*, staring at the still image of Jesus placed by the authorities for him to trample, he sees only a dirty and stained portrait, not the blue-eyed face of Christ that he had imagined. In this confrontation, in which his imagination clashes with stark reality, Jesus speaks out, breaking the unbearable silence. Endo writes:

> The priest raises his foot. In it he feels a dull, heavy pain. This is no mere formality. He will now trample on what he has considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he has believed most pure, on what is filled with the ideals and the dreams of man. How his foot aches! And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: 'Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross.' (271)

Van C. Gessel points out that the voice from the *fumie*—'Trample!, Trample!'—is not a command, but an utterance filled with love and forgiveness. It is a voice that encourages the priest to step on the copper plate so that the suffering of others may be ended as well as his own. This voice is thus, 'a maternal one, not the stern voice of a judgmental Father but the merciful, accepting whisper of a deity willing to forgive'.[4]

Like Ferreira, after his apostasy Rodrigues is made to take on a Japanese identity and is kept under house arrest working for the Japanese authorities, until his death more than thirty years later.

The Changing Face of Christ

Endo explains: 'the most meaningful thing in the novel is the change in the hero's image of Christ'.[5] For him, the theme of the story is in the changing face of Jesus, and not the transformation of the protagonist. In Rodrigues's childhood,

> … the face of Christ had been for him the fulfillment of his every dream and ideal …. Even in its moments of terrible torture this face had never lost its beauty. Those soft, clear eyes which pierced to the very core of a man's being were now fixed upon him … When the vision of this face came before him, fear and trembling seemed to vanish like the tiny ripples that are quietly sucked up by the sand of the sea-shore. (170)

This beautiful vision of Christ eventually changes into something less consoling as Rodrigues experiences spiritual anguish and imprisonment. Witnessing Japanese Christians stepping on the *fumie*, he sees 'the face of Christ, wet with tears. When the gentle eyes looked straight into his, the priest was filled with shame.' (189)

As a child, Rodrigues viewed Jesus as a triumphant saviour, one who performs miracles, heals the sick and comforts sinners. Now, faced with torture and pain, he sees the suffering Christ and experiences profound sadness. The face that he tramples on when he apostatizes is no longer the blue-eyed Jesus of victorious Western Christianity, but 'the ugly face of Christ, crowned with thorns' (270). This transformation of the face of Christ from beautiful and consoling to hideous and battered suggests a

[4] Van C. Gessel, 'Hearing God in *Silence*: The Fiction of Endo Shusaku', *Christianity and Literature*, 48/2 (1999), 161.
[5] Endo Shusaku, 'Anguish of an Alien', *The Japan Christian Quarterly*, 40 (1974), 179–186, here 181.

more profound understanding of the Christian faith on the part of the priest. It is a more authentic faith, stripped of self-conceit and delusion.

Rodrigues has always been 'fascinated by the face of Christ just like a man fascinated by the face of his beloved' (47), because scripture makes no mention of it. Given his desire to see the face of Jesus, it is poignant that his captors demand that he steps on the *fumie*. Not only is he able to see the face of the suffering Christ, but he also hears his voice, saying 'Trample! Trample!' The irony is that Rodrigues fulfils his spiritual longing to see the face of Christ and hear him by stepping on Christ's image and publicly denouncing him.

The changing face of Christ in Rodrigues's vision, as he enters Japan, enduring hardship and imprisonment, is Endo's attempt to accommodate Christianity—a Western faith—to Japanese sensibilities. Endo stresses the humanity of Jesus, the suffering servant, because Japanese religious minds have 'little tolerance for any kind of transcendent being who judges humans harshly, then punishes them'.[6] For Endo, the Japanese prefer a maternal religion that is tolerant, acknowledging human weakness, rather than the strict paternalistic faith that Western Christianity sometimes presents. Thus, in his writings, Endo attempts to depict Christianity like a sympathetic mother rather than a harsh father. Endo's preference for a maternalistic Christianity was influenced by the Buddhist concept of mercy that forgives everything, even the sins of the apostate, which a Father God might not. His image of Christ has the 'maternal capacity to forgive the faults of traitors'.[7] This Christ is not a powerful person who performs miracles, but one who accompanies people in their sufferings and weeps with the weak and dying.

Apostasy is a serious sin in Catholic teaching, but Endo sees it as an entry into new form of faith, without Western trappings, accommodated to the local Japanese cultural imagination.[8] This transformation takes place when Rodrigues witnesses the torture of the Japanese Christians which eventually leads him to step on the *fumie*. While reflecting on his apostasy, he sees the face of Jesus telling him, 'I was not silent. I suffered beside you.' (297) Endo's understanding of the gospel shows us a Jesus who is in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, at odds with the rich

[6] Endo Shusaku, 'Preface to the American Edition', in *A Life of Jesus*, translated by Richard A. Schuchert (New York: Paulist, 1973), 1.
[7] Adelino Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shusaku Endo* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian U, 2009), 154–155.
[8] Wachal, 'Forbidden Ships to Chartered Tours', 102.

and powerful. He is a Christ who participates in human vulnerability and weakness. In *Silence*, Christianity appears as a failed religion just as Jesus is considered a failure—rejected, and killed by his own people. The faith, however, remains because it is through participation in human suffering that one can overcome human shortcomings.

Masculine and Feminine

The two faces of Christ imagined by Rodrigues symbolize two aspects of Christianity.[9] The masculine face of Jesus, 'filled with vigor and strength' (47), attracts Rodrigues before he apostatizes. This masculine or paternal side of Christianity, the Christ of Christendom, relates to European expansionism. When news of Ferreira's apostasy reaches Europe, it is not simply a failure of one individual priest, but 'a humiliating defeat for the faith itself and for the whole of Europe' (26). The 'European ego' has been damaged, and it is the responsibility of Rodrigues to restore that ego in Japan and to save souls.[10] But this kind of paternalistic attitude is detrimental to the whole missionary enterprise in the East. In reality, Rodrigues's zeal to evangelize the Japanese is a desire to satisfy his own ambition. The unnamed interpreter employed by his Japanese captors bluntly tells Rodrigues, 'Father, have you thought of the suffering you have inflicted on many peasants just because of your dream, just because you want to impose your selfish dream upon Japan' (218).

The feminine aspect is in the Jesus that suffers, 'the ugly face of Christ, crowned with thorns' that is exposed to the priest after he steps on the *fumie* (270). Rodrigues realises that these two aspects are found in the one Jesus. His experience in Japan affirms that if the faith is to flourish, the feminine side of Jesus must be fostered. This insight seems to narrow the gulf between Western Christianity and Japanese sensibilities as the suffering Jesus manages to take root in the Japanese 'swamp', as Endo calls it, in a way that a victorious Christ could not.

Clash of Eastern Culture and Western Creed

The dialogue between Rodrigues and the Japanese magistrate Inoue sets the stage for Endo to dramatize the conflict between Japanese culture and Western Christianity. Inoue refers to Japan as a 'swamp' that will

[9] Ho Koon-Ki T., '*Silence* and the Japanization of Christianity', *Japan Christian Quarterly*, 53/2 (September 1987), 74.
[10] Ho, '*Silence* and the Japanization of Christianity', 74.

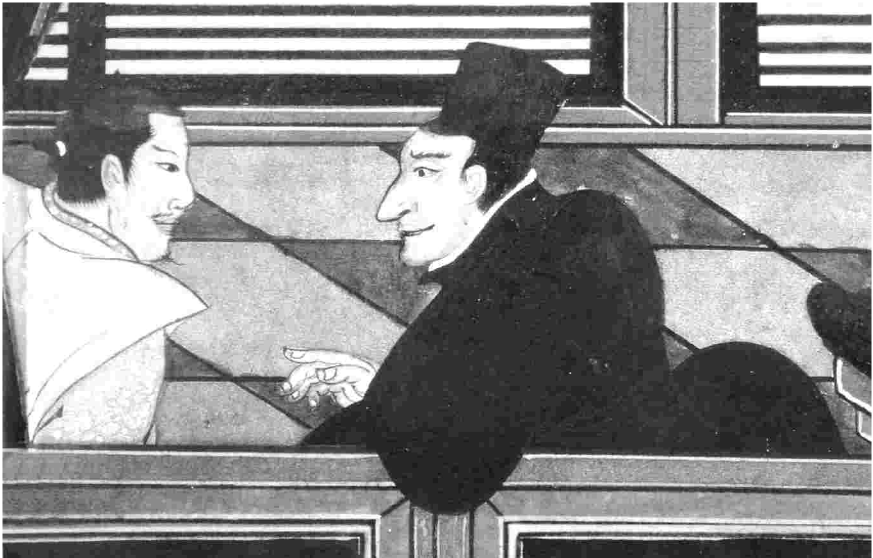
eventually destroy Christianity from within (292). Once the missionaries are gone, Japanese believers will distort the Christian faith, he asserts. There are still some Christian farmers remaining on the remote islands of Goto and Ikitsuki. But Inoue has no desire to pursue them because:

> If the root is cut, the sapling withers and the leaves die. The proof of this is that the God whom the peasants of Goto and Ikitsuki secretly serve has gradually changed so as to be no longer like the Christian God at all. (293–294)

Christovao Ferreira, the former Jesuit Provincial who has apostatized and collaborated with the Japanese authorities, has already rehearsed Inoue's argument.

> This country is a more terrible swamp than you can imagine. Whenever you plant a sapling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves grow yellow and wither. And we have planted the sapling of Christianity in this swamp ....
>
> What the Japanese of that time believed in was not our God. It was their own gods. For a long time we failed to realize this and firmly believed they had become Christians. (237–238)

The defeat of Ferreira strengthens Inoue's argument regarding the incompatibility between Christianity and the Japanese mindset. To



A Jesuit with a Japanese nobleman, artist unknown, c.1600

convince Rodrigues to apostatize, Ferreira claims that the success of the early Christian mission was in fact an illusion: 'From the beginning those same Japanese who confused "Deus" and "Dainichi" twisted and changed our God and began to create something different' (239).[11] God is lost in translation. Inoue, who had earlier been baptized for the sake of promotion, challenges Christianity's claim to universality and believes that eventually Japanese culture will overwhelm this Western import, syncretize and modify it. In fact, Rodrigues already has misgivings about the compatibility of Japanese culture and Christianity. In his letters, Rodrigues complains about the Japanese excessive adoration of icons and that 'the peasants sometimes seem to honor Mary rather than Christ' (98). At the same time, he realises that his presence poses a great danger to them and brings suffering upon them.

Self-Deception and Insecurity

The psychological pressure inflicted upon Rodrigues makes his act of apostasy understandable. Unlike the Japanese Christians in the pit, Rodrigues is not being tortured, and thus he sounds naïve, even hypocritical, when he says that the peasants who are suffering and dying will receive heavenly rewards. Ferreira accuses Rodrigues of self-deception, disguising his own insecurities with beautiful banalities; he has placed his interests above others, preoccupied with his own salvation, refusing to save the Japanese from suffering out of fear of betraying the Church. This indictment strikes deep into Rodrigues's pride—he is named by his former superior as a coward, afraid of self-abnegation. Ferreira continues,

> You dread to be the dregs of the Church, like me .... Yet I was the same as you. On that cold, black night I, too, was as you are now. And yet is your way of acting love? A priest ought to live in imitation of Christ. If Christ were here ... (268)[12]

Ferreira and Inoue tell Rodrigues that holding on to his religion is an illusion, an escapism, refusing to accept the reality of Japan. Religious faith, they suggest, is essentially a subjective experience; 'Christianity and

[11] Dainichi is a Buddhist deity. The word was initially used by missionaries, including Francis Xavier, as a translation for 'God' until they came to realise how misleading its Buddhist meaning was.

[12] See Dennis Washburn, 'Is Abjection a Virtue? *Silence* and the Trauma of Apostasy', in *Approaching* Silence, 209.

the Church' are not 'truths that transcend all countries and territories' (241). Rodrigues's tenacious clinging to his faith only endangers the lives of the Japanese faithful. To apostatize in such a situation, as Ferreira has done, is really an act of compassion and mercy. John Netland puts it this way:

> The command to apostatize comes not primarily as an invitation to escape suffering, but paradoxically as an appeal to his deepest Christian values. What is more Christ-like than to lay down one's life for others?[13]

Kenosis: *Self-emptying*

The sacrifice of Jesus is an expression of God's presence and love. Through the emptying of his life, *kenosis*, Jesus enables us to witness the depth of God's love. *Kenosis* is the self-emptying of someone's own will to align it with God's will. It is the expression of Jesus' humility, as he relinquishes all his powers of divinity (Philippians 2:6–8). Rodrigues, out of compassion for the Japanese Christians, also empties himself by stepping on the *fumie* against his will.

Salvation occurs when we are called upon to share in the likeness of God, becoming like Christ, a broken body as well as a glorified one. In the same way, Rodrigues strips away his sense of pride and self-sufficiency. His transformation occurs in the realisation that God shares in his agony and anguish. Rodrigues, the priest, imitates Christ, through his pain and sorrow in the act of apostasy, a manifestation of mercy for the Japanese people. John Netland writes, 'The apparent defeat of Christianity by the mudswamp of Japan ironically validates the very Kingdom it seeks to destroy. It is the moral authority of the suffering Christ that confirms Rodrigues' act.'[14] In *Silence*, we witness how the love of God is revealed in the suffering of human existence.

The love of God is revealed in the suffering of human existence

The Conversion of Rodrigues

At the beginning of the novel, Rodrigues is portrayed as a person anxious to prove his fidelity to the Jesuit mission; his motive is also to dispel

[13] John T. Netland, 'Encountering Christ in Shusaku Endo's Mudswamp of Japan', in John C. Hawley, *Christian Encounters with the Other* (New York: New York U, 1998), 172.
[14] Netland, 'Encountering Christ in Shusaku Endo's Mudswamp of Japan', 172.

the rumour of Ferreira's betrayal, or 'to offer himself as atonement for the appalling offense of his mentor's apostasy'.[15] His early letters reveal his desire for martyrdom and his spiritual pride as he reflects with fear and fascination on the dangers of his journey.

Rodrigues's desire for martyrdom is misplaced, however, because in the Catholic tradition one cannot deliberately seek martyrdom: it is thrust upon a person. Those who actively seek the road to martyrdom are not seeking it for the glory of God, but for their own glory. This is contrary to the motto of the Jesuits, *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*: 'for the greater glory of God'. Thus, Rodrigues's vision of martyrdom is misdirected and distorted. However, when he arrives in Japan, his view of martyrdom changes:

> I had long read about martyrdom in the lives of the saints—how the souls of the martyrs had gone home to Heaven, how they had been filled with glory in Paradise, how the angels had blown trumpets. This was the splendid martyrdom I had often seen in my dreams. But the martyrdom of the Japanese Christians I now describe to you was no such glorious thing. What a miserable and painful business it was! (103–104)

Another kind of martyrdom awaits Rodrigues—'the death of his very self as a Christian and as a moral person' (190).[16] According to Mark Bosco:

> Endo exposes the reader to the spiritual transformation of Rodrigues through his encounters with the cowardly Kichijiro who betrays him, through Inoue who exercises control over him, and through his former teacher, the apostate Fr Ferreira, who tries to convince him to apostatize by stepping on the image of Christ.[17]

Stepping on the *fumie* is not just a mere formality, even though one of the presiding officials urges Rodrigues, 'I'm not telling you to trample with sincerity and conviction …. Just putting your foot on the thing won't hurt your convictions.'[18] When Rodrigues performs 'the most painful act of love that has ever been performed' (269–270) by apostatizing, he

[15] Mark Bosco, 'Charting Endo's Catholic Literary Aesthetic', in *Approaching* Silence, 85.
[16] William T. Cavanaugh, 'The God of *Silence*', *Commonweal*, 125 (13 March 1998), 12.
[17] Bosco, 'Charting Endo's Catholic Literary Aesthetic', 85.
[18] The interpreter also attempts to convince Rodrigues, 'Only go through with the exterior form of trampling' (271).

realises that 'my lord is different from the God that is preached in the churches' (276).

No longer stained by Western arrogance, the priest finds the faith of the Japanese Catholics more edifying and purer than his own. As Bosco continues:

> … his faith must be stripped both of its Western cultural trappings and the personal vanity of his missionary zeal in order to recover a deeper, more orthodox understanding of Christian discipleship. As the Japanese state attempts to eliminate any trace of Christian presence, the priest is finally pushed to find that trace in the very presence of those persecuted and tortured.[19]

Silence illuminates how faith is more than a matter of personal belief, but affects the lives of others as well.

After his apostasy, the Portuguese Jesuit is given a Japanese name, Okada San'emon, and a Japanese wife, and he is affiliated to a Buddhist temple. But, deep inside, he has not abandoned his religious convictions. He is reported to be 'engaged in writing a disavowal of his religion' on several occasions, but the task never seems to be finished (300). Rodrigues must live his faith in silence, as demanded by his captors. His story can be summarised as,

> … a description of the transformation of the moral dispositions of an individual who, when placed in extreme circumstances, is forced to behave in ways contradictory to the very modes of thought and feeling that ground his self-conception and identity.[20]

Parallel to Peter

The reference to the cockcrow immediately after his apostasy suggests that Rodrigues would be like Peter, weeping bitterly after denying Jesus (Matthew 26:75), shedding tears of repentance and being reconciled to Christ eventually. Like Peter, the priest understands the teaching of Jesus more deeply after his denial. Experiencing remorse, Rodrigues is also able to forgive his own betrayer, Kichijiro, and is confident that God has forgiven him. 'The narrative ends with the affirmation of faith in these two unlikely characters: an apostate priest hearing the

[19] Bosco, 'Charting Endo's Catholic Literary Aesthetic', 85.
[20] Washburn, 'Is Abjection a Virtue?', 207.

***Adam Garfield as Rodrigues and Yosuke Kubozuka as Kichijiro in Martin Scorsese's 2016 film of* Silence**

confession of his betrayer, Kichijiro.'[21] This transformation of Rodrigues parallels the conversion we witness in Peter in the Gospel.

Although Rodrigues has lost his status in the Church as a priest, he has not lost his standing with Christ as a Christian. In fact, he continues to stand up for Christ after his public apostasy; like Peter, he falls and gets up. Thus, Rodrigues is more of an apostle than an apostate. It is significant to note that the Japanese word used by Endo for apostasy in the novel, is *korobu*, a word without religious connotation. It literally means 'to trip and fall', implying that the fallen person will get up again.[22]

Kichijiro had led Rodrigues to struggle with God's silence in the face of suffering:

> Why does his plaintive voice pierce my breast with all the pain of a sharp needle? Why has our Lord imposed this torture and this persecution on poor Japanese peasants? No, Kichijiro was trying to express something different, something even more sickening. The silence of God. (96)

But the act of trampling on Jesus' image reminds us of Jesus' presence, as we hear him telling Rodrigues, 'I was not silent. I suffered beside you.' Thus, the act of apostasy is, in fact, an affirmation of faith, of belief in

[21] Bosco, 'Charting Endo's Catholic Literary Aesthetic', 85.
[22] Van C. Gessel, '*Silence* on Opposite Shores: Critical Reactions to the Novel in Japan and the West', in *Approaching* Silence, 34.

the existence of God. Apostasy is not a sin in this context. What is sin then? Inside his prison cell, Rodrigues can hear the guards chattering, and observes:

> These guards … were indifferent to the fate of others …. Sin, he reflected, is not to steal and tell lies. Sin is for one man to walk brutally over the life of another and to be quite oblivious of the wounds he has left behind. (144)

We could argue that if Rodrigues had refused to apostatize, the peasants would be tortured to death and thus achieve martyrdom. This would foil the plan of the magistrate, Inoue, who fully understands the teaching drawn from Tertullian that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'. This refusal would give witness that God and not the magistrate is in control. The magistrate would then have no power over the life and death of his prisoners. The death of the three peasants in the pit could be seen in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ.[23] But the peasants themselves have already apostatized and thus Rodrigues's stepping on the *fumie* is an affirmation of faith in a forgiving God. Alive, the priest, like Peter, is able to obey Jesus' command to 'tend my sheep' (John 21:16).

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[23] William T. Cavanaugh, 'Absolute Moral Norms and Human Suffering: An Apocalyptic Reading of Endo's *Silence*', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 2/3 (1999), 114.

THE PATIENCE OF JOB?

Job 13:13–19 as Drama

Luke Taylor

THE BOOK OF JOB was probably written in the Babylonian exile or the following Persian period of Old Testament history, and the Israelites' experience of exile may in part explain the way it grapples with suffering.[1] By placing Job in the literary setting of a bygone patriarchal age, outside Israel in neighbouring Transjordan, the author or authors created a safe distance from which creatively to assimilate near Eastern literary treatments of innocent suffering to Hebrew tradition. There are a number of possible antecedents to Job, whether or not the they were known to its author(s): 'Man and His God', a fragmentary Babylonian work of the second millennium BC known as the 'Sumerian Job'; 'I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom' (*Ludlul bel nemeqi*), a fuller Babylonian source dating to the second half of the second century BC; and the 'Babylonian Theodicy', written around 1000 BC in dialogic form.[2]

Whatever their precise sources, and whatever the disputed process of redaction, the writer(s) of Job created a piece of dramatic poetry. Bookended by the folkloric prose frame story of the introduction and the majestic prose theophany of its conclusion, the central section is an *agon* in three acts, in which Job responds in turn to each of three interlocutors, with an additional poetic coda for Elihu.[3] A helpful analogue would be the three actors of fifth-century Sophoclean drama.[4] Like Sophocles, Job wrestles with weighty themes—especially that of divine

[1] Andrew R. Davis, 'Job', in *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*, edited by José Enrique Aguilar Chiu and others (Mahwah: Paulist, 2018), 426.

[2] Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 4th edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford U, 2018), 463–465; Davis, *Paulist Biblical Commentary*, 427. See also the *Jewish Study Bible*, edited by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford U, 2017), 2000–2098.

[3] Robert Alter, 'Truth and Poetry in the Book of Job', in *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev. edn (New York: Basic, 2011), 105–138, masterfully explicates the poetic power of the book.

[4] I here follow a lead suggested by John Milton, *Reason of Church Government*, in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, edited by William Kerrigan, John Rumrich and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 840, although Milton assimilates Job to epic and the Song of Songs to drama.

and human justice—taken up also by philosophers and theologians. We misunderstand Job, however, if we extract propositional statements from the back-and-forth of its dialogues, empty them of emotion and present them as theses. Like all drama, Job only works by an imaginative entering into of the experience of its protagonist, experience ideally overheard rather than read. Unfortunately, the nature of Job as drama is often obscured by its liturgical use. It has no regular place in Jewish lectionary, and appears only rarely in the Christian lectionary, where it is heavily excerpted—the law-court scene of the thirteenth chapter, to which we now turn, is never read at all.[5]

Hope or Despair?

After an unhelpful round of counsel from his three interlocutors—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—Job seeks a hearing directly from God (13:13–19). This passage contains a well-known crux at 13:15. The traditional consonantal received text (*ketiv*) of the Hebrew Bible yields a sense preferred by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) in English: 'See, he will kill me; I have no hope'. If one follows a marginal correction (*qeri*) also found in the later Masoretic Text, however, the Hebrew 'no' (*lō*) becomes 'in him' (*lô*), yielding the sense chosen by the North American Bible: 'Slay me though he might, I will wait for him'.[6]

Job*, by Jean Béraud, late nineteenth century*

Two interpretations of a homophone accordingly yield diametrically opposite readings: in one, Job expresses despair; in the other, hope. More than a

[5] Job appears in only two Sunday readings from Job (Year B: 5th and 12th Sundays ordinary time), and six weekday readings from Job (30 September to 5 October in 2024).

[6] See Davis, 'Job', 438; Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, volume 3, *The Writings* (New York and London: Norton, 2019), 498.

philological curiosity, this crux highlights a larger interpretative dilemma. Is Job a paragon of patience, whose righteousness is manifested in his expectation that God will in the end demonstrate God's justice? Or has he abandoned all hope of receiving anything but death from an unjust God? Rather than opting for one or other of these possibilities, I here trace the history of divergent interpretation, and suggest that recovering the performative orality of the text gives full voice to both Jobs, a possibility with important pastoral consequences.

The Septuagint, apparently working from a variant tradition, lacks any mention of hope or despair: ἐάν με χειρώσηται ὁ δυνάστης, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἦρκται ἦ μὴν λαλήσω καὶ ἐλέγξω ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ (even though the Mighty One begins to lay his hand on me I shall speak and reprove before him). The Vulgate, by contrast, lays the foundation for what will become the mainstream interpretative tradition in Western Christianity: *etiam si occiderit me in ipso sperabo verumtamen vias meas in conspectu eius arguam*. The Hebrew אֲיַחֵל *'ăyaḥêl*, literally 'I will wait', here becomes the Latin *sperabo*, 'I will hope', a significant inflection which makes Job a hero of theological hope, exercised up to and perhaps beyond the horizon of death.

Most European vernaculars continue to take their cue from the Vulgate: in Italian, *continuerò a sperare*, 'I will continue to hope' (*Nuova Riveduta*); in Spanish, *en Él esperaré*, 'I will continue to hope in him' (*La Biblia de las Américas*); and (in slightly more conversational) French, *je compterais sur lui* 'I will count on Him' (*La Bible du Semeur*). The NRSV's 'I have no hope' departs from the earlier tradition of English translations: the Calvinist 1599 Geneva Bible, the substantially Anglican 1611 Authorized Version, and the Catholic 1609–1610 Douay-Rheims put aside confessional differences to concur on Job's exemplary faith: 'I will trust in Him', reads each.[7]

Sparse biblical references outside the book of Job canonize this pious reading. Ezekiel 14:14 and 20 list Job alongside Noah and Daniel (not the prophet) as an exemplarily righteous figure. The key New Testament reference in James 5:11, 'you have heard of the endurance of Job', sets the tone for Christian interpretation thereafter. Job is exemplarily patient in the intertestamental work, 'The Testament of Job'. For Ambrose he is a 'good athlete who does not give way to pain

[7] Bible translations are easily available online through biblehub.com and biblegateway.com.

or refuse the hardships of the contest'; for Chrysostom he is an exemplar of patience.[8] Augustine compares him favourably to the Roman heroes such as Cato who fled adversity by suicide.[9]

For Gregory the Great, Job is at once a historical figure of exceptional virtue, a typological cipher of the coming Christ, and a mystic whose words contain hidden depths. Commenting on 13:15, he says that Job's exemplary patience is manifest as the complete loss of worldly goods fail to topple him from the 'erectness of his hope'.[10] Aquinas takes the same thought further. His gloss on 3:15 shows Job abnegating hope for temporal benefits from God precisely because he hopes for spiritual rewards after death.[11]

By contrast, modern criticism—beginning with the heightened philological sensitivity of humanist reformers—recognises an inverse Job: not hoping, but despairing; not pious, but blasphemous; not self-deprecating, but insisting upon his own innocence. Aquinas had conceded that Job's speech sometimes overstepped the mark, but viewed this as a venial sin, a sign of ordinary and understandable human weakness. Modern criticism regains a clearer vision of the raw agony, the bodily and emotional as well as spiritual anguish, and also the passionate and recurrent self-assertion, which leak from Job's outbursts like rain from storm clouds. 'Iob blaspheme Dieu' (Job blasphemes God) wrote Calvin.[12] Job, opines Ernest Renan, is 'arrogant, audacious, and almost blasphemous'.[13] Jean Daniélou sums up the modern inversion of the older tradition succinctly: 'nothing could be less patient than the true Job'.[14]

The Relational Reality of Drama and of Prayer

How are we to evaluate these divergent interpretations? A first step is to place 3:15 within its generic context as a court drama. Job announces

[8] St Ambrose, *The Prayer of Job and David*, chapter 2, in *Seven Exegetical Works*, translated by Michael McHugh (Washington, DC: Catholic U. of America, 1971), 331; *St John Chrysostom: Commentary on Job*, translated by Robert Charles Hill (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2006).

[9] St Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 1.23–24.

[10] St Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, translated by James Bliss (Oxford: John Henry Parker and J. Rivington, 1844), 3.11.47.

[11] St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, translated by Brian Mulladay (Lander: Aquinas Institute, 2016), 13.2.226.

[12] John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, translated by Rob Roy McGregor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2022), volume 2, 415.

[13] Ernest Renan, *The Book of Job*, translated by A. F. G. and W. M. T. (London: W. M. Thomson, 1893), xxxiv.

[14] Jean Daniélou, *The Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, translated by Felix Faber (London: Longmans Green, 1957), 116.

his desire to have his day in the divine court at the beginning of the chapter: 'I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God' (13:3). Where earlier he had doubted that any human being could stand before God (9:1–3), he now states with confidence: 'I have indeed prepared my case; I know that I shall be vindicated' (13:18). Sure that he will be acquitted, he asks for silence (13:13) from his comforters, whom he lambasts for taking on the role of God's defence lawyers: 'Will you show partiality toward him, will you plead the case for God?' (13:8). From God, imagined both as defendant and judge, he seeks certain safeguards: 'withdraw your hand far from me, and do not let dread of you terrify me' (13:21).

The law-court scene is a theologically shocking *novum*. Job here inverts the conventional biblical *rîb*, in which God brings a lawsuit against his unfaithful people for infractions of the covenant (Isaiah 3:13–14; Micah 6:1–2). Turning the expected pattern inside out, Job dares to take God to court. In fact, Job's confident assertion that his suffering is unjust challenges the entire dominant metanarrative undergirding the Deuteronomistic historians—from Joshua to Kings—whereby human suffering is understood as punishment for sin. Modern criticism had a surer sense than patristic commentary of the radicality of this innovation. By including Job in the Hebrew canon, biblical tradition lastingly relativises divine retribution as the interpretative master key to human experience.

We need to recover Job as oral performance. Doing so resolves in large part the interpretative dilemma we have traced. The homophone crux with which we began is only a dilemma between two incompatible readings when the text is fixed in writing. Heard rather than read, emerging from oral tradition and merging back into oral tradition, the ambiguity—'I have no hope'; 'I will hope in him'—is preserved intact. Both meanings may be heard, neither is discarded. And the same is true for the larger character of Job. Taken in the round, Job is *both* saint and rebel. His ragged, passionate speech cannot be finally contained in later, tidier theological categories, whether modern or premodern.

This reading of Job is pastorally useful. Understood as a theodicy, Job's law-court scene disappoints. God never responds during the poetic drama. And at the end of the book, Job is vindicated by God (42:7) only after he voluntarily withdraws his case (42:5). All the same, Job's mixture of bluster and bravery, near-blasphemous complaint and

heroic fidelity, meanwhile warrant believers in raising their own hurt and complaint—as well as their faith and hope—with God, even as pastoral ministers are warned lest their pious interventions resemble those of Job's discountenanced comforters. Understood as drama, that is dialogically, the text represents the relational reality of prayer, which seeks not so much an answer as an encounter.

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MIND THE GAP

Ignatian Contemplative Prayer and Reader Response Criticism

Iain Radvan

ONE OF THE GIFTS of the Ignatian tradition is what is known as imaginative contemplation. This is a well-known practice of prayer that draws the person praying into an encounter with Jesus in a gospel scene through the use of his or her imagination. Many people first learn to pray in this way through the Spiritual Exercises, and they report wonder at meeting Jesus in this personal and intimate way. Such an encounter with the Risen Jesus not only is personally rewarding, but also generates energy for mission, a renewal of service to God in daily life.

Imagination has been recognised as a key to humans' engagement with the transcendent in art and science as well as in spirituality.[1] How the faculty of imagination works in prayer has been well attested by such scholars as David Stanley and Mark Coleridge.[2] Stanley offers a compelling explanation for the way Jesus is present to the one contemplating the text of a Gospel in the Spiritual Exercises. What seems to have been less considered are the specifics of how Ignatius' instructions on praying contemplatively with the Gospels actually enable the exercitant to be open to meeting the living Lord. Ignatius did not invent this kind of prayer, but developed it out of a prayer exercise known in the Middle Ages as *lectio divina*.[3] This method starts with a reflective reading of a gospel passage and then leaves the one praying free to follow the lead his or her heart takes in the continuing encounter with God.

1 See Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999); J. Robert Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination* (London: U. of Missouri, 2003); Gerald Holton, 'On the Art of Scientific Imagination', *Daedalus*, 125/2 (1996), 183–208; *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*. edited by Amy Kind (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

2 See Mark Coleridge, 'The Necessary Angel: Imagination and the Bible', *Pacifica*, 1 (1988), 171–88; David M. Stanley, *'I Encountered God!' The Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of St John* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986).

3 Godfrey O'Donnell, 'Contemplation', *The Way Supplement*, 27 (1976), 27–34.

The Way, 64/1 (January 2025), 49–66

Literary Criticism

In 1991, Brendan Byrne argued that developments in literary criticism in the late twentieth century had given more room for the personal interpretations that Ignatius encourages in the Spiritual Exercises.[4] Traditionally both theologians and literary critics taught that there was only one correct interpretation of any text, but the writings of Paul Ricoeur and Umberto Eco, among others, challenged this view.[5] They proposed that rather than texts instructing the reader, the reader controls the meaning of the text, allowing for a plurality of interpretations.

Byrne argues for a balanced approach, that while the reader brings his or her own historical and cultural context through which to interpret the text, at the same time the text, especially scripture, retains its authority as something created in a particular context from which the reader cannot stray too far without leaving it altogether.

> The particularity and 'otherness' of biblical revelation remains a vital check against deriving interpretations that are simply the reading-in of our own world-view and values, to have them canonized with biblical authority and guarantee.[6]

Another point of contention among literary critics concerned the identity and role of the reader of a text.[7] I think the distinction that George Steiner makes is the most helpful for our purposes here. He differentiates between a 'critic' and a 'reader'. Robert Fowler summarises:

> The critic steps back from the text to strike a magisterial pose of critical, objectifying distance, whereas the reader tries to eliminate the difference between himself and the text to allow the merging of his being with that of the text.[8]

[4] Brendan Byrne, '"To See with the Eyes of the Imagination": Scripture in the Exercises and Recent Interpretation', *The Way Supplement*, 72 (1991), 15.

[5] Joel Green, 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition', in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, edited by James D. G. Dunn (Eerdmans, 2021), 972–973, 983; Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana U, 1984). Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian U, 1976).

[6] Byrne, '"To See with the Eyes of the Imagination"', 14–15. See also Green, 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition', 976.

[7] See Robert Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 25–40; Green, 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition', 980, 983; Philip Harner, *Relational Analysis of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1993); Edgar V. McKnight, *Post Modern Use of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 206–207.

[8] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 27; and see George Steiner, 'Critic/Reader', in *Real Voices on Reading*, edited by Philip Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 3–37.

Ignatius encourages the exercitant to take the latter role. But historical and literary criticism of texts is also important so that we can know more clearly what the text has to offer us. We need to hold these two positions in creative tension.

For a short period of time when modern exegetical methodology was first applied to scripture in the Roman Catholic Church (*Divino afflante spiritu*, 1943), those giving and receiving the Spiritual Exercises became concerned that Ignatius' invitation to apply the imagination went against the new, proper study of scripture.[9] But Brendan Byrne assures us that this interaction with scripture is legitimate:

> Particularly significant—and perhaps comforting for directors and retreatants alike—is the recognition of the reader's contribution to any valid interpretation and the need to approach the scriptures as primarily documents of imagination, symbol and religious persuasion. The Exercises are using scripture in the way that scripture itself teaches it ought to be used (2 Tim 3, 16–17). Moreover, the retreatant makes use of scripture in a personal and restricted way, wholly different from the procedure of the preacher or theologian. What the retreatant discovers in imaginative contemplation is primarily a message for his or her own personal conversion.[10]

Reader Response Criticism

We have now entered into the territory of reader response criticism. This approach has largely disappeared from literary discourse today since its heyday in the late twentieth century. Reader response criticism takes for its object the dynamic event of the act of reading. The reader is an active agent who creates a meaning of the text from his or her interaction with the it. Each written text is constructed in such a way as to evoke certain responses from the reader; each written text has a different impact on the reader; each reader will have a different response to the same text; subsequent readings of the same text by the same person will not be the same experience.[11]

The reader is an active agent who creates ... meaning

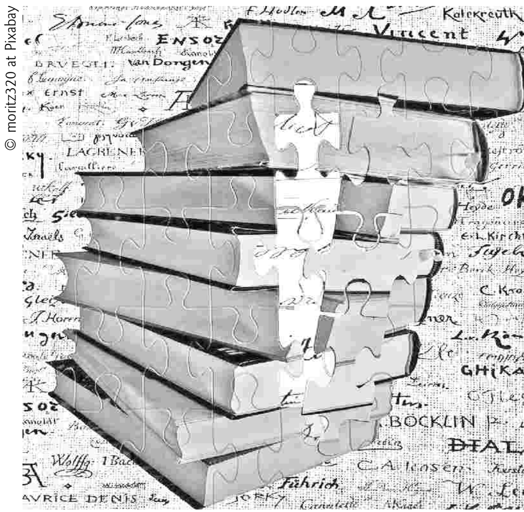
[9] See Joseph Fitzmyer, 'The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and Recent Gospel Study', *Woodstock Letters*, 91 (1962), 246–275 and Donatien Mollat, 'The Use of Scripture in the Exercises According to Modern Exegesis', in *The Word of God in the Spiritual Exercises* (Rome: CIS, 1979), 25–34.

[10] Byrne, '"To See with Eyes of the Imagination"', 15. Fitzmyer, *Spiritual Exercises*, 270–271.

[11] Sandra Schneiders and other critics tell us that every time we reread a text we change our relationship with it; this equally happens with our relationship with Jesus in reading the Gospels. Sandra Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2003), 12.

Reader response criticism analyses how a text works on the reader; it allows for different interpretations of a text depending on the background of the reader (gender, socio-economic standing, ethnic provenance, education level and so on). There are multiple approaches within the theory of reader response criticism: some focus on the text as it is being read; others focus on what the reader brings to the text that will influence which parts of it are more or less significant for that reader.[12] Here my approach draws from the analysis of reader response first presented by Wolfgang Iser in 1972.[13]

Reader response criticism has a muted voice today although some of its insights have been absorbed into other fields of cultural and political studies.[14] Patricia Harkin and James Sosnoski suggest that in literary studies these insights have been lost as academics return to an explanation of reading as an activity by which to absorb the intention of the author—the interpretative activity and context of the reader have been sidelined. Nonetheless, for my purpose of explaining how Ignatian contemplation works (as well as for biblical criticism in general), it still has much to offer that has not yet been explored.



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In his groundbreaking essay on the reading process, Iser explained that the key to the experience of reading lay in the 'gaps' that the author left in the text, in what the author did not write about the plot or characters.[15] A later book, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, went on to uncover the potential of a text to

[12] Green, 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition', 972–988; Brittany Melton and Thomas Heath, 'Reader Response Criticism and Recent Readers', in *The Biblical World*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022); Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 25.

[13] Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' (1972), in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post Structuralism*, edited by Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U, 1980), 50–69.

[14] See Patricia Harkin and James J. Sosnoski, 'Whatever Happened to Reader-Response Criticism?' in *Intertexts: Reading Paedagogy in College Writing Classrooms* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 97–115.

[15] Iser, 'Reading Process', 55.

change the person reading it.[16] He investigated how the aesthetic effect (*Wirkung*) of the literary text is conditioned by the empty spaces in the text which the reader's imagination would fill in and, in turn, how the reader responds to these acts of the imagination.

> With a literary text we can only picture things that are not there; the written part of a text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the texts, we should not be able to use our imagination.[17]

Compare, for instance how a film through its visual explicitness may narrow down the imaginative experience to one immutable impression and cut out the work and pleasure that comes to the reader of a book. Iser proposed that, in the act of reading, readers create a 'virtual text' in their heads. During this process, they allow themselves to be exposed to new experiences and ideas. Readers may then emerge from the text with a different mindset.

Other reader response critics see the reading experience as larger than that of the individual. Stanley Fish and Stephen Fowl argue that readers bring a particular perspective to bear on the text and have certain expectations based on their 'community of interpretation'.[18] A reader from a community of faith, for example, in reading scripture, might (unconsciously) exclude any meaning of the text that implied that creation was bad or that men and women could save themselves from the power of sin and its consequences.

Reader Response Criticism and Scripture

Reader response criticism has allowed for a newly holistic approach to scripture. Brendan Byrne calls it 'a sympathetic instrument for appreciating the emotive, imaginative, ritual elements of biblical revelation' in contrast to the historical-critical method 'that prefers to catalogue,

[16] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U, 1978), x: 'It is called aesthetic response because, although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus'.

[17] Iser, 'Reading Process', 58.

[18] Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard U, 1980); see Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); and Stephen Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009).

clarify and describe such experience, rather than submit in awe and veneration'.[19]

Reader response is particularly suited to the study of biblical texts as they all have as a key purpose to persuade readers to believe in the revelation of God and to change their behaviour accordingly.[20] The theologian Stephen Barton says 'the gospels are "faith documents" from start to finish, intended to mediate those experiences [of God in Jesus] to others as the basis for faith, repentance and new life'.[21] Moreover, as Robert Fowler notes, reader response criticism is also suited to biblical texts because 'in antiquity … all literature was reader oriented', shaped as it was by the dominance of oral culture.[22]

Fowler focused on the Gospel of Mark, noting that it is,

> … an especially reader-oriented narrative. Its primary aim is to persuade or somehow affect the reader … reader-response criticism is well suited to deal with a text that takes aim at the reader at every step.[23]

One of the techniques the author of Mark uses is that of the omnipresent narrator.

> By being omnipresent, the narrator … roams at will through time and space … moving freely in and out of the minds of his characters, Jesus included. With such freedom of movement, he can put the reader in the very midst of the action, creating a narrative of tremendous vividness and immediacy. We get caught up in the story to such an extent that we tend to visualise the action taking place now, before our eyes, in a direct, unmediated way.[24]

Similarly, the use of the present historical tense in verbs also brings the action into the reader's immediate purview. Through such rhetorical devices, the reader is drawn into creating a meaning of the narrative for his or her own situation.

[19] Byrne, '"To See with the Eyes of the Imagination"', 8. See also Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 22.
[20] See Green, 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition', 972; and David M. Stanley, 'Contemplation of the Gospels, Ignatius Loyola, and the Contemporary Christian', *Theological Studies*, 29 (1968), 427–428.
[21] Stephen C. Barton, *The Spirituality of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1992), 3; Patrick J. Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2011), 2.
[22] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 48.
[23] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 23.
[24] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 65.

> Meaning becomes a dynamic event in which we ourselves participate … no longer can the language of the Gospel be regarded as primarily referential or informative; it has become rhetorical, affective and powerful'.[25]

The Gospel of John

There have been only a few scholars who have applied reader response criticism to the Gospel of John as Robert Fowler has to Mark—either to sections of the Gospel or to the whole.[26] Most of these studies have centred on the construction of the text and how that affects the response of the reader. There is only one scholar I know of who has written about his personal response to a reading of the Gospel of John: Michael W. Newheart shares how his reading of the Gospel has evoked memories and issues from his own life, and how the message of the Gospel has taken him to a new self-understanding.[27]

Sandra Schneiders says that the point of this Gospel,

> … is to bring those who contemplate the Gospel into a union with Jesus which will plunge them into the depths of God's very life, the life Jesus shares with his Father. There is no question that the purpose of the Gospel is the mystical union of the disciples with Jesus in God through the Spirit.[28]

The encounter with Jesus in the Gospel of John is meant to change the life of the reader. John states his purpose for writing the Gospel explicitly in 20:31: 'so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name'.

For John the act of believing in Jesus means that all one's values and attitudes and goals are reorientated so that one lives as a child of God, filled with the Holy Spirit.[29] This is likewise the goal and dynamic of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises: exercitants are invited to re-evaluate their own perceptions of themselves, and of God, through their encounter

[25] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 3.
[26] The most notable being: R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *The Gospel of John as Literature*, edited by Mark W. G. Stibbe (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993)—Stibbe gives an overview of literary criticism applied to the Gospel of John in his introduction which includes reference to reader response criticism—and Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The Print's First Kiss* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988).
[27] Michael W. Newheart, *Word and Soul* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2001).
[28] Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 15.
[29] See Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels*, 6.

with Jesus in contemplative prayer. David Stanley emphasizes the incarnational character of both texts: only through historical events (those taking place in time and space) can a believer come into contact with the One who was and is now beyond time and space. This is the insight on which Ignatius bases the effectiveness of his method of contemplative prayer.[30]

John 5:1–18

To illustrate the insights that reader response criticism can offer into Ignatian contemplation, I have chosen John 5:1–18, the pericope of the healing of a crippled man. This is the third of the seven 'signs' from Jesus' life that contribute to the plot and drama of the whole Gospel.

Ignatian contemplation uses, for the most part, those passages from the Gospels that have dialogue and action; there are many powerful examples in the Gospel of John. Ignatius did not use any texts from the discourses of Jesus written by John in the *Spiritual Exercises*, nor did he suggest any from Jesus' healings for contemplation.[31] Nonetheless, most givers of the Exercises today will use both Johannine passages and gospel stories of healing as legitimate and effective portals through which exercitants may encounter Jesus.[32]

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Reader response criticism demonstrates how the narrative techniques of these texts bear on readers, draw them into the world of faith in Jesus and challenge

[30] Stanley, 'I Encountered God!', 26, 30.
[31] For a convincing explanation of Ignatius' omission of healing passages, see Robert Schmitt, 'The Christ-Experience and Relationship Fostered in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola'. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 6/5 (1974). For a full list of the gospel passages referred to in the Spiritual Exercises, see David Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. A Literal Translation and Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 198–241.
[32] See Timothy Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 54–55; Thomas O'Hara, *At Home with the Spirit: A Retreat in Daily Life* (Sydney: privately published, 1982), 18–22.

them to make a personal decision about Jesus as Saviour. By the time the reader of John has reached chapter 5 of the Gospel, when Jesus approaches the crippled man by the pool, he or she has already learnt a great deal about Jesus. In the Prologue (John 1:1–18) the narrator outlines the whole structure of the Gospel: a man comes into the world who is from God, and is indeed God Godself; he is rejected by many, but accepted by a few, and for those who believe there is a new identity, blessing, grace and truth. The reader is given the bigger picture through which to interpret and understand the events and the dialogues in all the subsequent scenes. What follows in the text is this drama seen up close.

At the beginning of chapter 5 readers have not yet been exposed to the hostility and conflict that Jesus' words and works will arouse during his ministry. They may have developed a liking for Jesus, or felt called to accept what has been presented about him, but now they also has to realise that not everyone appreciated Jesus and that some of his values are counter-cultural. Will readers continue to side with the narrator and with Jesus?

John 5:1–18 and the Use of Imagination

As we apply Iser's theory of reading to this passage we can see how the use of imagination is critical. There are gaps in the text that the reader who is engaging closely with the story needs to attend to using his or her own life experience.

At the start of the passage John indicates the occasion is a feast: he does not bother to describe the large crowds that would have assembled in Jerusalem—the reader has to do that. He describes very briefly the pool with five porticoes: since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in the generation following that of Jesus, few readers would know what it actually looked like and they would have to imagine it. John indicates a multitude of invalids and identifies one man in particular as having been ill for 38 years: but he does not specify what his illness was other than being physical—the reader can only guess. Then the man explains how he has been prevented from obtaining the healing that others have received at the pool because they get into the pool before him 'when the water is stirred up' (5:7).

Here there is a gap in the narration that later redactors felt they had to fill in for the reader—what 'stirred up' the water in the pool?

Most scholars today see 5:4, which gives the explanation of an angel stirring the water, as a later interpolation.[33] After Jesus has healed the man 'the Jews' appear on the scene (they may have included even some of the invalids, but they are not given any specific identity).[34] The scene then shifts without warning to the Temple (5:14), and readers may ask themselves why the healed man went there and why Jesus went there and how they met again. And then at 5:17 Jesus is speaking to 'the Jews' again, but it is not clear if he is still in the Temple or back at the pool.

At one level these 'missing' details are not important. They do not disturb the flow of the narration. All the necessary 'facts' are given and a reader can grasp the essential points about Jesus: he had some supernatural knowledge of the man's condition; he was able to heal the man with a command; his action aroused the hostility of a section of the Jewish community; and he identified himself with God in 'working' on the Sabbath. These points may be all that a reader does absorb at a first reading of this passage. With repeated readings, or a more reflective reading, when the reader already knows these salient points, it is the other 'missing' features of the passage that come into play and that engage the reader more in the story.

The work of the reader is then to supply what is missing from his or her own life experience, and it does not matter whether that reader is from the first century or the twenty-first. For example, the crowds of the feast may be like those gathering for a political protest or a music festival; the pool could be like that of a hotel or a public bath known to the reader; the long-term illness of the man could be imagined as something the reader has experienced first-hand such as cancer or paralysis, or even something more psychological such as depression. The 'gaps' left by the author of John in this passage function as doors through which the reader brings his or her own life experiences into the encounter with Jesus.

Once readers have brought their own lives into the story, they allow the story to have an impact on them. Iser says, 'As we read,

[33] See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 207; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), 191 note 4.

[34] I follow Francis Moloney in using quotation marks to indicate that 'the Jews' in the gospel text signify characters assigned the role of those hostile to Jesus. See Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5: 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 1 note 1.

there occurs an artificial division of our personality, because we take as a theme for ourselves something that we are not'.[35] In reading the Gospel of John the reader is drawn into the conflict between Jesus and his enemies; he or she is extended an invitation to follow Jesus and confronted with the power to heal and forgive that Jesus demonstrates, not in an academic way, but more viscerally, because the imagination used is more a faculty of the heart than of the mind. It is free-flowing, open to possibilities; it is intuitive and engages the senses; the rational mind is more constrained by facts and logic.[36]

Reader Response Criticism and Ignatian Contemplative Prayer

Reader response criticism has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of how biblical texts work as literature and how the reader interacts with the text. The reader response methodology that may be applied to any gospel passage, such as John 5:1–18, can be compared to the method of contemplative prayer used by St Ignatius.[37] In both, individuals are invited to open themselves to the text in order to discover for themselves who Jesus is and to allow the changes in their lives that will follow. Ignatius gives specific instructions on how the exercitant is to pray using his or her imagination to engage with the Gospel passages.[38]

Robert Egan has explained that the faculty of imagination for Ignatius was not just imitative or reproductive: the one praying would indeed reproduce something of the gospel passage, but this exercise would also bring forth unexpected additions and new details arising from the heart or psyche of the individual.[39] David Stanley writes:

[35] Iser, 'Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', 67.

[36] See Robert Egan, 'Jesus in the Heart's Imagination: Reflections on Ignatian Contemplation', *The Way Supplement*, 82 (1995), 63, 67; Philip Sheldrake, 'Imagination and Prayer', *The Way*, 24/2 (April 1984), 99; John Veltri, *Orientations* (Guelph: Loyola House, 1981), volume 2, B5, B11, B11a.

[37] The only two scholars of whom I am aware who write about the Spiritual Exercises as a whole with very similar terms of reference to reader response criticism without referring to it specifically are Roger Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), and David M. Stanley, *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1967).

[38] There are many texts written on the use of imagination in Ignatian contemplative prayer, among them: Egan, 'Jesus in the Heart's Imagination'; John English, *Spiritual Freedom*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Loyola, 1995); Godfrey O'Donnell, 'Contemplation'; Sheldrake, 'Imagination and Prayer'.

[39] Egan, 'Jesus in the Heart's Imagination'.

> The Ignatian contemplation aims at showing the exercitant how to integrate himself into the dialogue between God and man in his own era and culture … through the contemplation of some scene from the biblical narrative of salvation I can 'hear' what Jesus Christ says to me in my own existential situation; or I can 'see' what he intends to accomplish through me in my world of the twentieth century.[40]

When a person prays Ignatian contemplation, it is not just a matter of 'filling in the gaps' in the text, but also of connecting the text and his or her own life experiences, guided by the Holy Spirit.

It was Ignatius' intention with the Spiritual Exercises, through praying contemplatively as he instructed, that the exercitant experience a psychological and spiritual conversion.[41] Exercitants walk with the person of Jesus of Nazareth in their imagination, see what Jesus does and how his enemies react to him, hear what he teaches and what those who believe in him say, and experience a transformation. They begin to see and think and act less in the manner of their own habituated character and more like Jesus. They begin to see their own lives from the perspective of the One who loves unconditionally. The person who makes the Spiritual Exercises is generally someone already familiar with the Christian story of Jesus, though it is not presumed that he or she has read or studied the Bible closely.[42] During the Spiritual Exercises exercitants are provided with a copy of the Bible so as to be able to read various passages. St Ignatius selected some passages from the synoptic Gospels for the exercitants to pray with, and he included many other meditations and considerations.

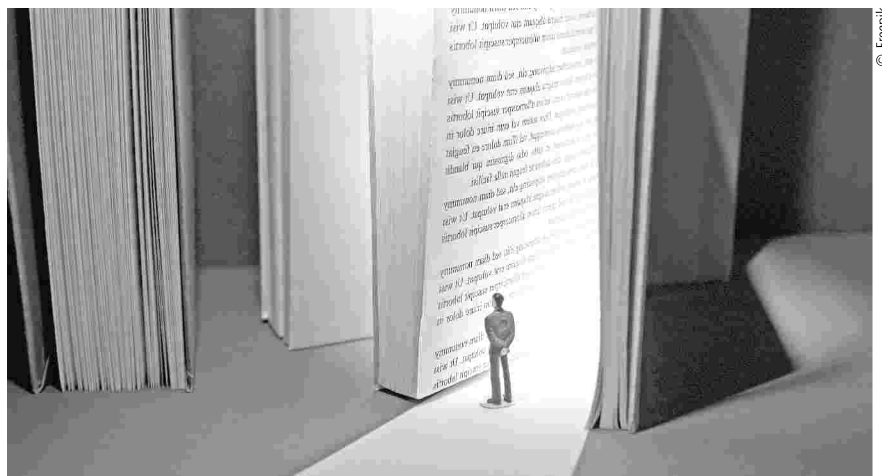
Ignatius introduces the method of contemplative prayer in the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises with the story of the annunciation and the nativity. These first prayer exercises are described in detail: once the one praying has grasped how the exercise works, for subsequent gospel passages Ignatius merely indicates the salient points. So for the birth of Jesus Ignatius writes that the one praying should,

[40] Stanley, *Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises*, 5–6.
[41] Fitzmyer, 'Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and Recent Gospel Study', at 253 and 264. See also Gilles Cusson, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises: A Method toward a Personal Experience of God as Accomplishing within Us His Plan of Salvation* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988), 81–93; Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*, 19, 49; Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 2; Brian McDermot, 'With Him, in Him: The Graces of the Spiritual Exercises', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 18/4 (1986), 1–2.
[42] Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*, xxi.

> … see in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem … whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills. Similarly, look at the place or cave of the Nativity: How big is it, or small?
>
> … see the persons; that is, to see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the infant Jesus after his birth. I will make myself a poor, little, and unworthy slave, gazing at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, just as if I were there. (Exx 112–114)

Ignatius directs the exercitants to return to this scene a second time, to revisit it, again with their full imagination using all five senses (Exx 121–125): to see what the persons do, to hear what they say, to smell and taste and 'using the sense of touch … so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk or sit' (Exx 125).[43]

Ignatius indicates how exercitants may fill in the 'gaps' not provided by the original gospel text with images and sensations from their own experience and imagination; and, more than that, he explicitly instructs exercitants to insert themselves into the story as participating characters. For the subsequent contemplations on different gospel scenes Ignatius merely reminds the exercitants to 'see', 'hear' and 'observe', but does not indicate what each will experience. The model is set: exercitants are to take the gospel text of the day and bring it to life with their imagination, even entering into it with their own person.



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[43] Ignatius instructs exercitants to return to the same prayer text so as to focus more on the highlights of the primary experience: 'repetition' (Exx 62, 118). See Veltri, *Orientations,* volume 2, B10.

Ignatian Contemplative Prayer and John 5:1–18

When an exercitant is given John 5:1–18, or drawn to pray with it by the Holy Spirit, before prayer he or she will first read it over, and then set it aside. In the period of prayer this person will recreate the scene in his or her imagination, being as faithful to the original as possible, but also open to what the unconscious self and the Holy Spirit will create in his or her mind.[44] Invited to 'see' and 'hear', the exercitant may reconstruct a 'feast' or public celebration of some kind, whether religious or not. The exercitant may imagine a pool of water and the invalids lying around it. He or she may draw on experience of public poverty and disability from visiting a developing country, or from somewhere closer to home where the poor gather.

The exercitant may feel drawn to come into the scene as a disciple of Jesus, or as a friend or relative of one of the sick people. He or she may feel drawn to be one of the invalids, perhaps even the one whom Jesus approaches. The exercitant is aware that the one whom Jesus addresses has been unwell for 38 years. He or she may identify with some problem that has been a burden in his or her life for a long time. In the first prayer period with this passage the exercitant may take a minor role on the edge of the action, and see and hear Jesus, and the man, and 'the Jews', at some distance.

On a second or third repetition (once any obstacles with the text have been negotiated—though this can be achieved even with the first reading) the exercitant may actually be present as a needy person whom Jesus approaches, and hear Jesus' question being addressed to him or her: 'Do you want to be healed?' If this exercitant can be true to him- or herself, and not slide over the issue out of fear, the person may consider what this means for him or her on many levels—physical, emotional and spiritual. The exercitant should perceive, however, that Jesus does not force himself on a person to heal them. There has to be some desire on the part of the one who is unwell.

At this point the contemplation might move in another direction with an entirely different setting—the home or workplace—and Jesus and the exercitant would continue to interact with some dialogue about what he or she does want in life. The exercitant may not return

[44] See George Aichele and others, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale U, 1995), 43; Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*, 44–45; Sheldrake, 'Imagination and Prayer', 96.

to the story as it continues in John 5. If and when he or she returns to the text, the person will know that the sick man made an excuse for being ill for so long, and that may provoke reflection on his or her own rationalisations.

In the text Jesus speaks words of command to the crippled man and he carries them out, demonstrating that he has been made well. In this exercitant's imagination Jesus may have words of command; he may have words of encouragement; he may be silent. Jesus cannot speak or be heard if the exercitant is not willing to hear him. This experience may take him or her to the end of the given passage where Jesus speaks of his relationship with God as his Father, and the exercitant may feel some wonder and express it to Jesus with awe.

There are other characters who come into the story, namely 'the Jews', who do not appreciate who Jesus is or what he is doing. If the exercitant has been observing Jesus and the sick man as a third party, he or she may identify with these men, or respond that Jesus' offered healing should not happen on the Sabbath, or that God has a reason why it cannot happen. There may be some personal, hidden, law of the Sabbath operating in the exercitant's life which becomes apparent during the prayer period, or upon subsequent repetitions of this prayer experience.

This exercitant may find the dialogue between Jesus and the man when he is in the Temple significant (5:14). Jesus may address the person regarding a particular issue and he or she will know of what he speaks. If it is a matter of sin (as Jesus indicated to the healed man), he or she may find the courage to confront it—or may not. This exercitant may realise that God has indeed blessed him or her with many good things and that the sin could cause them to be lost.

There are many factors that may influence how much the exercitant is able to enter into this story. Feeling hungry or cold can detract from concentration; the richness of his or her imaginative experience may be reduced by distraction from an irritating noise or underlying worries, or even because there is no correlation between the words and events of this passage and the exercitant's own life. Regardless of the prayer experience, Ignatius instructs the exercitant to end the period of prayer with a colloquy (Exx 54, 109): a person-to-person conversation with Jesus (as the exercitant knows him), about whatever came to light in that prayer period.

Bridging the Gap

In the act of reading, readers put their selves aside and allow ideas and imaginings foreign to them to take their place. Wolfgang Iser writes: 'In thinking the thoughts of another his own individuality temporarily recedes into the background, since it is supplanted by these alien thoughts, which now become the theme on which his attention is focussed'.[45] So, too, in the contemplative prayer of Ignatius, exercitants let go of some of what is familiar and allow themselves to be confronted with a new, challenging reality: that of the values and actions of Jesus.

Roger Haight speaks of a 'fusion of narratives': one must give the Christian story 'a voice to address one from outside the self … truly engaging the story of Jesus must allow God to interrupt things as usual'.[46] In both reader response criticism and Ignatian contemplative prayer the validity of the experience may be judged by observing the balance between the material presented by the text and what the respondent's imagination provides. Being too literal, or not having enough imagination, will render the experience of text or prayer one-dimensional and stolid; being over-imaginative takes the respondent too far away from what the author may have intended him or her to experience.[47]

For those who are cautious about the risks of using the imagination in reading and in prayer, Edgar McKnight offers the reassurance that the use of imagination by a reader is no less valid than the imagination that a scientist uses in constructing and explaining a hypothesis.[48] A healthy balance, however, is necessary between the factual details presented by the gospel text and the freedom of imagination in the one reading the text.[49] The guidance of a good spiritual director is invaluable here.[50]

What is the outcome of an experience of Ignatian contemplative prayer? Like that of reading a text it is meant to change the mind and, more importantly, the heart. The exercitant ought not to be quite the

[45] Iser, 'Reading Process', 67.
[46] Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*, 277.
[47] Egan, 'Jesus in the Heart's Imagination', 67; Iser, 'Reading Process', 50–51.
[48] McKnight, *Post Modern Use of the Bible*, 266; see also Sheldrake, 'Imagination and Prayer', 99.
[49] Egan, 'Jesus in the Heart's Imagination', 67.
[50] Byrne, '"To See with the Eyes of the Imagination"', 15–16; Fitzmyer, 'Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and Recent Gospel Study'.

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same person after the experience; else the experience could be deemed a waste of time. In this prayer the very encounter between the exercitant and Jesus in a gospel scene such as that of John 5:1–18 will stir up questions, attitudes and feelings; these can be brought to consciousness for the person to evaluate and retain—or let go.

The exercitant will have discovered something new about Jesus or about him- or herself and this awareness provides the freedom to change his or her values or actions. The call of the Gospels and of the believing community is always for people to transcend themselves and to be more like Jesus. In being loving and compassionate in Jesus' way, they are directed outwards on mission. Ignatius himself makes this a clear goal of the Exercises: they are not simply to increase the faith or goodness of the exercitant, but to move him or her to serve God in freedom under the direction of the Spirit (Exx 15, 20, 23, 53, 98, 147, 155).[51]

In exploring John 5:1–18 we have seen how helpful reader response criticism can be in appreciating how Ignatian contemplative prayer works with respect to the use of the imagination by the one praying. It has demonstrated how the 'gaps' in the gospel story allow the one praying

[51] Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers*, 86; Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, 97: 'Personal encounter with Jesus, new hope, overcoming of helplessness, healing, union with the Church, greater discernment, deeper peace, lightening of burdens, greater awareness of God, experience of Jesus as Saviour and of being loved by God, gradual transformation, more love to give others: the fruits of [this] prayer are many and rich' (97).

to engage with the characters and the events in the scene in a personal way. Both the text of John's Gospel and Ignatian contemplative prayer aim to bring a person into the presence of Jesus and move him or her to accept who Jesus is: 'The way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6). Sandra Schneiders points out that one's encounter with God in Jesus does not happen by going back in a time machine to ancient Palestine to meet the earthly Jesus, but in the engagement with the Gospel text itself: '*only* those things that "are written" in the Gospel, and as they are written in the Gospel, are necessary and sufficient for later disciples who will come to believe through their reading … of the text'.[52] Reader response criticism goes a long way to demonstrating how this actually comes about in Ignatian contemplative prayer.

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[52] Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe*, 10.

'WHEREOF ONE CANNOT SPEAK, THEREOF ONE MUST BE SILENT'

The Problems and Possibilities of Naming God

Kirsty Clarke

SO SAID THE PHILOSOPHER Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), which considered the relationship between thought, language and the world.[1] This text is a foundational document for the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy and culture in the twentieth century. Yet Wittgenstein was echoing a much earlier understanding of the limits of language seen in medieval Christian apophatic theology.

In exploring the attributes of God—and in particular the divine name—apophatic theology, both ancient and modern, argues that all our speech eventually collapses into silence.[2] Indeed, when it comes to naming God, at least, language reaches a breaking point, after which silence is our only realistic, and appropriate, response. From this vantage point, the 'God of the attributes'—who has a multiplicity of names—is ultimately nameless when confronted with our stammering and failing language.[3] Thus, it is not so much a question as to *how* God might be named, rather whether God *can* be named at all.

[1] For a discussion of Wittgenstein in a religious context see Dan R. Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story* (Blackwell: Oxford 1996), 37–42.
[2] For a rich examination of silence and language in the Christian tradition see Oliver Davies, 'Soundings: Towards a Theological Poetics of Silence', in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, edited by Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge Cambridge U, 2002), 201–223.
[3] 'The God of the attributes' is God as understood through attributes: 'the God of omnipotence, eternity, wisdom, immutability and unity—the God of … divine names' (Janet Martin Soskice, 'The Gift of the Name: Moses and the Burning Bush', in *Silence and the Word*, 61–76, here 61).

The Way, 64/1 (January 2025), 67–81

Apophatic Theology

Apophatic theology (also known as negative theology, or *via negativa*) has a long and rich tradition.[4] As opposed to cataphatic theology (affirmative theology, *via positiva*), in an apophatic approach 'God is thought of as ineffable or indescribable', with all that we can say needing to be unsaid, undone and denied.[5] As Beverly Lanzetta notes, 'If *cataphasis* expresses Divine Word, *apophasis* is Divine Silence'.[6] In the end, none of the divine names suffice and we are led into silence.

It is not that apophatic theology has nothing to say; rather, as Mark McIntosh acknowledges, the closer we come to God the more we realise how inadequate and faltering our words are as a means of expressing knowledge of, and communicating with, the divine.[7] Apophatic theology is what Denys Turner strikingly calls a 'speech about God which is the failure of speech' and Michael Sells terms the 'language of unsaying'.[8] Characterized by its continual process of naming and negation, apophatic theology strains theological language to its very limits.

On this understanding, God is primarily a mystery, utterly transcendent and beyond our comprehension and knowledge. We can only say what God is not. The ultimate otherness of God means we cannot describe God through the limited language available to us, and so we resort to metaphors and anthropomorphisms. We have no other recourse to the divine. Language, as a human construct, can only speak of humanity rather than God. As such, our words will always be inadequate and 'miss the mark'; it is not possible conclusively to name God because of their limitations. Thus, T. S. Eliot was right when he wrote in *Burnt Norton*:

We can only say what God is not

[4] However, the relationship between apophatic and mainstream theology has thus far received little attention. See Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, 'Introduction', in *Silence and the Word*, 1–11, at 4.

[5] Jeff Astley, *Exploring God-Talk: Using Language in Religion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 57. For some definitions and introductory overviews of apophatic theology see Andrew Louth, 'Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, edited by Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2012), 137–147, and Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theological Approaches* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 43–67. For a (somewhat unfair) critique of apophatic theology see Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002).

[6] Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 14.

[7] Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 124.

[8] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1995), 20; and Nelstrop, Magill and Onishi, *Christian Mysticism*, 15.

> … Words strain
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.[9]

Although silence is the final result of an apophatic methodology, the means by which this conclusion is reached often, perhaps ironically, involves an overabundance of language.[10] This perhaps indicates that the distinction between the cataphatic and apophatic is often too sharply constructed as a diametric opposition when in reality there are areas of overlap between the two approaches.[11]

Naming God

In their differing ways, figures such as St Gregory of Nyssa (*c.* 335–*c.* 394), St Augustine of Hippo (354–430), St Maximus the Confessor (*c.* 580–662), St Bonaventure (*c.* 1217–1274), St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Meister Eckhart (*c.* 1260–*c.* 1327) and St John of the Cross (1542–1591) all wrote about the unknowability of God, the inadequacy of words, and the paradoxical nature of the quest to discover the name of the God of the attributes, who remains elusively out of reach.[12] For all these writers, God is beyond being and beyond naming.

In the early Church, Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote a great deal about the transcendence and unknowability of the divine in works such as the *Life of Moses*, concluded that God 'cannot be accurately contained in a name'.[13] Augustine began his *Confessions*, which is regarded by Janet Martin Soskice as the most powerful Western mediation on the God of the attributes, by describing his search for God.[14] Yet, at the same time he admitted that he did not know what he was looking for. For Augustine, if we think we understand God then we have not understood at all.[15]

[9] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 12.
[10] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 124.
[11] See Kirsty Clarke, 'Words and Silence: On Reading *Revelations of Divine Love* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*', *The Way*, 58/2 (April 2019), 93–109.
[12] For an overview of these figures, and others not cited here, see John Macquarrie, *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (London: SCM, 2004).
[13] St Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, translated by Casimir McCambley (Brookline: Hellenic College, 1987), 53, cited in Mark S. Burrows, 'Naming the God beyond Names: Wisdom from the Tradition on the Old Problem of God-Language', *Modern Theology*, 9/1 (1993), 37–53, here 41.
[14] Soskice, 'Gift of the Name', 72–74.
[15] See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 108.

Even he, the most eloquent of orators, struggled to communicate the essence of the God beyond all names and attributes:

> Who then are you, my God? … Most high, utterly good, utterly powerful, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just, deeply hidden yet most intimately present, perfection of both beauty and strength, stable and incomprehensible, immutable and yet changing all things, never new, never old … you love without burning, you are jealous in a way that is free of anxiety.[16]

Likewise, Aquinas, although not generally considered an apophatic theologian, also embraced some apophatic characteristics in discussing theological language in *Summa theologiae*. Here he declared that we could know that God is and what God is not, but not *what* God is.[17] For Aquinas, this manifested itself in his understanding of analogous language and his notion of God as the 'nameless One'.[18] He was supremely aware of the limitations of our language and stated that this made it 'impossible to predicate *anything* univocally of God and creatures'.[19]

The Adoration of the Name of God*, by Martino Altomonte, early eighteenth century*

[16] St Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford U, 1992), 4–5. For a detailed discussion of St Augustine in the negative tradition see Turner, *Darkness of God*, 50–102.
[17] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.3; see Johnson, *She Who Is*, 7.
[18] Burrows, 'Naming the God beyond Names', 46. See also Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 20–21.
[19] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 13 a. 5 ad., cited in Burrows, 'Naming the God beyond Names', 43.

Pseudo-Dionysius

However, the project of naming (or not naming) the divine is especially associated with the work of the late fifth- or early sixth-century figure Pseudo-Dionysius, so it is to him that most attention will be paid here. Originally regarded as the same Dionysius the Areopagite of Acts 17:34, Pseudo-Dionysius is now believed to have been a cleverly constructed identity for a much later figure, most likely a Syrian monk.[20] It is certainly ironic that the leading theologian of the divine name is himself nameless, or at least suspended in a state of pseudonymity. Nevertheless, his work, with its complicated fusion of Christianity and Neoplatonism, exerted an enormous influence on both Eastern and Western Churches, and he is rightly regarded as the 'apostolic father' of apophatic theology.[21]

The Divine Names and *The Mystical Theology* are both dense and difficult texts, but they are foundational to the apophatic tradition. In *The Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius combines elements of both cataphatic and apophatic theology. Although he clearly regarded apophaticism as a superior theological discourse, he did not depreciate or ignore cataphatic theology.[22] Indeed, as Andrew Louth discusses, apophasis and cataphasis are complementary and both necessary to Pseudo-Dionysius' approach.[23] However, it is important to acknowledge that there are no simple distinctions between 'saying' and 'unsaying'. Instead, as Jeffrey Fisher states, 'Theological language works neither in the cataphatic nor in the apophatic, nor even in the conjunction of the two, but in the transcendence of the conjunction'.[24]

Pseudo-Dionysius systematically goes through the names of God revealed to us in the scriptures, starting with the 'Good' and ending

[20] Nelstrop, Magill and Onishi, *Christian Mysticism*, 43. On Pseudo-Dionysius see in particular Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981); Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989); Paul Rorem, 'The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius', in *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, edited by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 132–152; and Turner, *Darkness of God*, 11–19.

[21] See Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (Oxford: Oxford U, 1993), 214. Rorum provides a detailed and systematic overview of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.

[22] See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 203–204, and Jeffrey Fisher, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius', *The Journal of Religion*, 81/4 (2001), 529–548.

[23] Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 178.

[24] Fisher, 'Theology of Dis/similarity', 548.

with the 'One', in traditional Neoplatonic style.[25] By doing so he piles up as many descriptive words for God as he can in the hope that they will in some way 'stick', which is a particular characteristic of cataphatic theology—but can also be found in some elements of apophatic theology before the inevitable collapse of this abundance of language. For Pseudo-Dionysius, this process reveals a God who is *both* invisible and revealed.[26] God cannot simply be named and affirmed using these scriptural denominations as God is ultimately beyond all names, thoughts and conceptions; God is at the same time the God of every name *and* the nameless One. For as Pseudo-Dionysius states in *The Divine Names*: 'And so it is that as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is'.[27]

Through this understanding, Pseudo-Dionysius exposes the paradox at the heart of our naming of God: because of the inadequacy of our language, all the attributes that we apply to God are both true and untrue, known and unknown. Indeed, as Fisher demonstrates, for Pseudo-Dionysius the same things are both similar and dissimilar, although ultimately even the most similar of concepts collapse into dissimilarity.[28] Cataphatic theology can therefore only go so far, as it is vital that the affirmations of God are negated. However, in the ascent of our spiritual journey towards union with God even these negations have to be negated. In taking this step, Pseudo-Dionysius goes to the very limits of our language about God, and of apophatic theology itself, described by Thomas Hopko as 'a supreme apophaticism which passes even beyond the negations'.[29] The name of God importantly lies beyond *both* our 'assertions and denials'.[30] Our speech and thought fail us and we are left with the only appropriate response: silence.

[25] A vast array of names are discussed throughout this work: Good, Light, Beautiful, Love, Ecstasy, Zeal, Being, Life, Wisdom, Mind, Word, Truth, Faith, Power, Righteousness, Salvation, Redemption, Greatness, Smallness, Sameness, Difference, Similarity, Dissimilarity, Rest, Motion, Equality, Omnipotent, Ancient of Days, Eternity, Time, Peace, Being-itself, Life-itself, Power-itself, Holy of Holies, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods, Perfect and One. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1987), 47–131.

[26] See Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 134, and Thomas Hopko, 'Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition', in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, edited by Alvin F. Kimel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 144–162, here 154.

[27] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 1. 7, in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 56; see Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 137.

[28] Fisher, 'The Theology of Dis/similarity', 539.

[29] Hopko, 'Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition', 156.

[30] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, chapter 5, in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 133–141, here 141.

Understanding that the limits of language have been reached in *The Divine Names*, in *The Mystical Theology* Pseudo-Dionysius takes his apophaticism to its logical conclusion. Thus, he asks the question as to how we can even begin to relate to an utterly transcendent God: a God who is 'the Cause of all and surpassing of all, beyond all knowledge and names'. To be united with God we have to leave all our senses behind, including the constructs of our language, meaning that ultimately we are beyond thoughts and words of the divine. The higher we climb towards God the fewer words we can use, until we grind to a halt and come to rest in wordlessness.[31] In this, Pseudo-Dionysius and Wittgenstein profoundly echo each other across the centuries. Pseudo-Dionysius states:

> The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing .... my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and when it has passed up beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.[32]

Our union with God is infused in a silence *beyond* knowledge, but it is not an ignorant unknowing. Instead, it comes from the transcendence of knowledge and speech, which Turner calls an 'acquired ignorance'.[33] It is in this silence that we reach union with God, embraced in 'the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence'.[34] Therefore, for McIntosh,

> The crucial point is that the final stage of this journey is not the silence which is utterly null and void of meaning but the silence of embrace, unity with God who unspeakably comes forth from divine life in order to draw what is not divine into divinity.[35]

Ultimately, no words (in whatever quantity or combination) can accurately express and name God, and Pseudo-Dionysius even rejects the names of Father, Son and Spirit, although he displays no qualms in praying to the Trinity in the opening of *The Mystical Theology*. He

[31] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 186, 199–200.
[32] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, chapter 3, in, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 139.
[33] Turner, *Darkness of God*, 19. Pseudo-Dionysius describes this 'unknowing' as a 'union far beyond mind'. See Pseudo-Dionysius, 'Divine Names', 7.3, in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 109.
[34] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, chapter 1, in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 135.
[35] McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 55.

denies that we can name the divine at all, saying that God is 'the unutterable and unnameable Deity'.[36]

> For Dionysius, our final naming of God is no word at all but ecstatic silence. Dionysius evokes the image of Moses' ascending Mount Sinai into a 'cloud' that transcends all language and thought, a 'cloud of unknowing', in the language of a later writer in the Dionysian tradition.[37]

In the last words of *The Mystical Theology*, God 'is also beyond every denial'.[38] As Paul Rorem accurately sums up: 'Negation is negated, and the human mind, befuddled, falls silent. The treatise, the corpus, its author, and this commentary have nothing more to say. Only silence.'[39]

Feminist Theology

By contrast with apophaticism, feminist theology importantly argues that God can, and indeed should, be named in a variety of new and liberating ways. Rather than revelling in (or being reduced to) silence, feminist theologians are keen to speak of God, and in so doing unmask how silence itself has also been profoundly *silencing* within the dominant androcentric Christian tradition. Thus, for Mary Daly, naming God brings forth new words both for God and for women; it is an important act of self-naming and claiming of identity for women as, 'the liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of our name'.[40]

From this perspective, language is not to be transcended, but rather apprehended and used in positive and transformative ways in order to negate exclusivist theological positions which have marginalised women and women's relationship with God. Indeed, feminists are in the process of shaping new speech about God, which Daly has called 'naming towards God': an enterprise originating from women's own experiences of the divine.[41]

[36] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, chapter 1; Rorem, Pseudo-Dionysius, 212; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 1.8, in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 58.
[37] R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*, volume 1, *Distinguishing the Voices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 65.
[38] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, chapter 5.
[39] Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 213.
[40] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1973), 8.
[41] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 5.

Thus feminist theology shares the apophatic understanding of the importance of theological language and our 'right speech' about God. It critiques religious language for its patriarchal assumptions, however, arguing that such language reveals as much, if not more, about the men doing the naming than it does about God. Thomas Hopko is right to suggest that when feminist theologians argue that all the words and names applied to God need to be changed, 'unsaid', even eliminated, they are calling for an 'apophatic qualification' of religious language, 'because they consider all divine names and images to be metaphors derived from human experience'.[42]

Sophia, Logos of God, ***fourteenth-century mosaic, Apulia, Italy***

Although they are in agreement with apophaticism regarding the metaphorical, non-literal nature of our 'God-talk', feminist theologians challenge the way in which certain metaphors—such as calling God 'He' and 'Father'—have become controlling and dominating 'models' when, in reality, scripture provides a multiplicity of different names for God. These models have, over time, come to be regarded as natural and uncritically accepted; consequently, 'We no longer recognise the metaphorical nature of the language we are using about God .... This is dangerous because we cease to be critically aware of the limitations of our God-language.'[43] The diversity of ways in which God might be named has thus been reduced to one dominant image (of God as Father); an image which conveniently 'fits' with the male domination of theological discourse and church governance. As Nicola Slee has powerfully stated:

[42] Hopko, 'Apophatic Theology and the Naming of God in Eastern Orthodox Tradition', 144.
[43] Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 27.

> The way in which we speak about God has a profound, if mysterious, impact upon our understanding of and attitudes towards our own humanity and that of our neighbours, and shapes our behaviour in powerful and subtle ways …. When God is spoken of only in male terms … the implicit message to women is that masculinity is somehow more god-like, nearer to godliness, preferred in some way over against femininity, and that to be female is not to be capable of imaging the divine nature.[44]

The work of Sallie McFague is important here, with her argument that the model of God as 'Father' has become an irrelevant and 'dead' metaphor which has damaged women and marginalised other more positive and creative images of the divine.[45] Although male imagery should not be completely rejected, as Janet Martin Soskice's convincing challenge shows, it should be complemented by gender-neutral or female names and imagery, so as to mirror the myriad ways in which God is named and described in the scriptures.[46]

Many feminists have been critical of apophatic theology, seeing it as hierarchical, misogynistic and excluding of women through, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius' continual reference to the unnameable God as 'He'.[47] In a phrase beautifully echoing Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Grace Jantzen says: 'It may be that for many a Dionysius there was a Demaris, wholly ignored in her time and forgotten in ours'.[48] However, other feminist theologians such as Beverley Lanzetta, Catherine Keller and Elizabeth Johnson are embracing its potential, revealing a hitherto unexplored relationship between the two approaches.[49]

[44] Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 25.

[45] See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1983); and Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (London: SCM, 1987). Likewise, Mary Daly speaks of the death of God the Father, and the emergence of new, less idolatrous names for 'God'. See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 13–44.

[46] See the chapter 'Calling God "Father"', in Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2007), 66–84; Johnson, *She Who Is*, 33.

[47] For feminist discussions of apophatic theology see Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2013), 318–321; Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1995), 97–98; and Jennie S. Knight, *Feminist Mysticism and Images of God: A Practical Theology* (St Louis: Chalice, 2011), 93.

[48] Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 108.

[49] See Beverly Lanzetta, *The Other Side of Nothingness: Toward a Theology of Radical Openness* (Albany: SUNY, 2001), and Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*; Catherine Keller, 'The Apophasis of Gender: A Fourfold Unsaying of Feminist Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76/4 (2008), 905–933; Johnson, *She Who Is*. Although understanding the attraction of apophaticism, Elizabeth Pritchard argues that it may do more harm than good, with an unnameable God becoming a 'Teflon God', who is unable to take sides. See Elizabeth A. Pritchard, 'Feminist Theology and the Politics of Failure', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 15/2 (1999), 50–72.

Lanzetta posits another path between *via positiva* and *via negativa*: the *via feminina*—ripe for further theological exploration.

> A feminist reading of women's mystical theology, *via feminina* represents the contemplative paths and processes that break through and transform the historical denigration of women encoded in patriarchal cultures. As a new spiritual path with ancient roots in women's experience, it experiments with a particular type of mystical experience—the apophatic or negative—to find the tools women need to pull up the sources of misogyny imbedded in their souls.[50]

And Keller demonstrates that, although the apophatic turn can have its perils for feminist theology, it is clear that their relationship can be positive when it leads to 'the exposure of theological *idols*—the unsaying of divine attributes inasmuch as they mistake finite constructions such as gender for the infinite'.[51] Utilising negative theology has proved helpful in exposing the idolatry at the heart of much theological language with regard to the divine name. As Jennie Knight observes,

> Many feminist theologians have turned to the writings of the founder of the Christian mystical tradition and Negative Theology, Pseudo-Dionysius, to support their claims that any rigid belief in one image of the divine as comprehensible and adequate is idolatry.[52]

In *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson argues in favour of apophatic theology as useful to women seeking to voice new and liberative speech about God.[53] She employs especially the apophaticism of Aquinas and his understanding of the analogical nature of theological language.[54] Using the method of negation, Johnson celebrates the utter mystery of 'God', stating that even if we knew all the divine names, we would never reach a stable, definitive and unchanging understanding of God. As she writes,

> The reality of God is mystery beyond all imagining. So transcendent, so immanent is the holy mystery of God that we can never wrap our minds completely around this mystery and exhaust divine reality in words and concepts.[55]

[50] Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 13; and see 7–27 for an overview of this approach.
[51] Keller, 'Apophasis of Gender', .
[52] Knight, *Feminist Mysticism and Images of God*, 89.
[53] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 119–120.
[54] For this method in action see Johnson, *She Who Is*, 3–17 and 109–110.
[55] Johnson, *She Who Is*, 7.

There will always be an abundance of potential names and symbols of the divine. This multiplicity thus naturally 'gives birth' to female, as well as male, divine imagery.[56]

Likewise, Mary Daly stresses that part of the challenge in countering the male dominance of the divine name is to recognise the poverty of *all* words and symbols.[57] She writes of a new feminist *via negativa*, a *neo-negative way,* which importantly draws upon the medieval mystical tradition and exposes the false and idolatrous naming which has thus far taken place. For Daly, there is a possibility of a new language of transcendence, yet this is a language which is not encumbered with gender associations, but rather reveals 'our previously unknown being, which points our consciousness outward and inward toward as yet unknown Being, that some would call the hidden God'.[58]

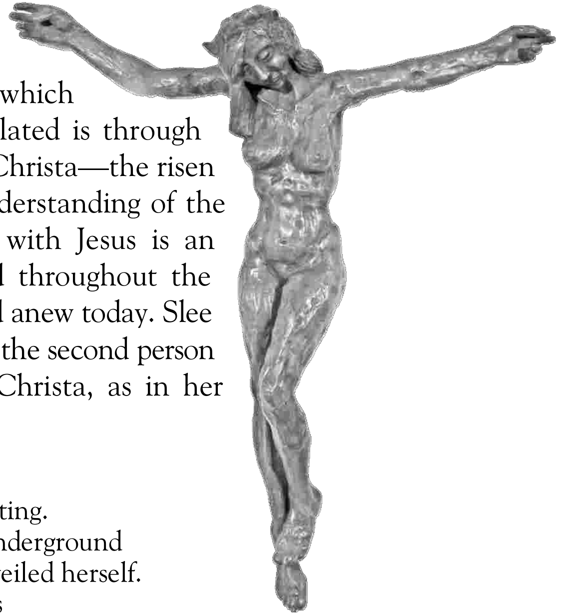
Feminist theology is a discourse that seeks to *speak out* of silence rather than embracing it, as apophaticism so often does.[59] This is an approach which, like the apophatic tradition of silence, strains theological language to its limits, but in different ways. Here, the multiplicity of divine names is celebrated and revealed: 'Mother', 'She', 'She Who Is', 'God/ess', 'the cosmic matrix' and 'Sophia' to name but a few. And as Nicola Slee has demonstrated, none of these ways of naming God is exclusive: we can use more than one at the same time; we can revel in their variety, using the ones that speak most strongly, while also searching for new proclamations.[60] God can be named in never-ending and creative ways. This importantly reinvigorates and opens up theological discourse rather than closing it down.

Even those theologians who do use the epistemological tools of apophaticism, such as Johnson and Lanzetta, ultimately seek to *name* God rather than to end their narratives in silence. Their work represents a movement from affirmation of the abundance of divine names, to negation and then back to a paradoxical and provisional affirmation of naming.[61] This way, the name of God does not stand still, and neither does our searching. Johnson's preferred name is 'She Who Is', a direct parallel

[56] Cited in Keller, 'Apophasis of Gender', 915–916.
[57] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 21.
[58] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 37–38.
[59] Keller, 'Apophasis of Gender', 911.
[60] Slee, *Faith and Feminism*, 34.
[61] Knight, *Feminist Mysticism and Images of God*, 90.

of Aquinas' 'He Who Is'. Johnson likewise speaks of the Trinity as 'Spirit-Sophia, Jesus-Sophia and Mother-Sophia'.[62]

Christa*, by Edwina Sandys, 1975*



A particularly powerful way in which language of the divine is being reformulated is through Nicola Slee's thesis of God as the Risen Christa—the risen Christ in the form of a woman. The understanding of the Christa and female imagery associated with Jesus is an ancient one, witnessed in scripture and throughout the Christian tradition, but is being discovered anew today. Slee invites us to conceive of and name Christ, the second person of the Trinity, specifically as the Risen Christa, as in her poem 'Christa, Returning'.

> You think she has left
> but she has not. She is resting.
> You think she has gone underground
> but she has not. She has veiled herself.
> You think she is powerless
> but she is gathering her power,
> drawing it back to herself from where it has been
> dispersed,
> scattered.
> You think she is not speaking
> only because you do not hear the language of her silence.
> You think she is alone
> but she has never been.
> You think she has lost all her names and seasons
> but there have always been those who have kept her ways.
> You think that the pattern is broken
> but see, she spins the chaos into waves and whorls
> you can't yet decipher. Keep looking.
> She has never left, though you couldn't find her:
> it is we who are returning.[63]

We have to find the ears to 'hear the language of her silence' because the Christa, and the many other names of the divine, have been speaking to us all the time. We just need to 'keep looking' and listening and learn to 'decipher'.

62 See Johnson, *She Who Is*, 76–104.

63 Nicola Slee, *Seeking the Risen Christa* (London: SPCK, 2011), 119. We are grateful for Nicola Slee's kind permission to reprint this poem in full.

Daisies and Bruises

For apophatic theology, the only alternative to the impossible task of naming God is to remain silent, even though, ironically, it uses many words to convince us of this necessity. However, theology is a public *discourse*, and as such, it needs to *speak* of God, even though God is ultimately unknowable and unnameable.[64] It is imperative that theologians speak of a language which has been transformed by grace in order to say something 'true' about God. As Dan Stiver notes: 'We cannot simply keep silent, as the negative theologians themselves evince'.[65] Even the apophatically inclined Augustine exclaimed in his *Confessions*, 'Allow me to speak'.[66] Our language, although limited, is God-given, and we are thus compelled to speak as Augustine recognised.[67] We have been given permission to speak, however inadequately, because God first speaks to us of God's name as 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:13–14).[68]

Both apophaticism and feminist theology have revealed the importance and limits of language. Words matter, and we have to be aware and take care of the words we use, particularly the names of God. This is powerfully expressed in Anne Sexton's poem 'Words', which observes that words can be both 'daisies and bruises', and,

> Words and eggs must be handled with care.
> Once broken they are impossible
> things to repair.[69]

We need to remember that precisely because God is mystery and beyond all names, our language should display a playful, open-ended, changeable and experimental character.[70] It is vital that language does not shut down the experience of the divine. Then, as feminist theology demonstrates, our language allows us to explore, with humility, new and varied names for God, even while acknowledging that no one name is ultimate or privileged over another. Grace Jantzen is therefore right when she says,

[64] 'Immanuel Kant rebuked those who entirely give up on language as a medium for expression by comparing them with a flying bird that imagines its flight would be easier in empty space. For humans, there is no alternative to the medium of language.' (Astley, *Exploring God-Talk*, 14.)

[65] Stiver, *Philosophy of Religious Language*, 191.

[66] Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.7.

[67] Cited in Burrows, 'Naming the God beyond Names', 42.

[68] See Soskice, 'Gift of the Name', 74.

[69] Anne Sexton, 'Words', in *The Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 464.

[70] Soulen, *Divine Name(s) and Holy Trinity*, 111.

> If the Word became flesh, if the divine became human, then God became one who used and is expressed in human language. The incarnation thus becomes a validation of language, and allows for confidence and experimentation in human expression.[71]

Ultimately, only in death will our quest to name God end, as then we will know God face-to-face.[72] This is the true end of the process of negation.

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[71] Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 289.
[72] Burrows, 'Naming the God beyond Names', 41–42.

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THE INVISIBLE MUGGED TRAVELLER

Encountering God as Hero or Casualty

Robert W. McChesney

SOME CALLED IT the 'Way of Blood', others the 'Bloody Path'.[1] The steep downhill road from Jerusalem to Jericho in first-century Palestine was notoriously dangerous for lone travellers. Loosely organized bands of ruthless highwaymen preyed upon the vulnerable with little fear of sanction. It provided an ideal foundation upon which Jesus could build a violent story about a mugged Jewish traveller (Luke 10:30–35). 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho', Jesus began, 'and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead' (Luke 10:30). *Lestes*, the Greek word for robber, 'connotes violent criminal'.[2]

Listeners would have nervously recalled their own anxiety when journeying along the precipitous switchbacks, descending more than three thousand feet over seventeen miles of isolated Judean desert that resembled a hilly moonscape. Each successive bend afforded an opportunity for ambush. Jesus' parable about a victim of violent crime drew upon such frightful village lore to highlight the precariousness of life, and in so doing offer a scathing period critique of religious elites.

> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (Luke 10:31–32)

This article is adapted from chapter 7 of Robert W. McChesney, *The Soul also Keeps the Score: A Trauma-Informed Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* (Collegeville: Liturgical, forthcoming May 2025). It is used by kind permission of Liturgical Press.

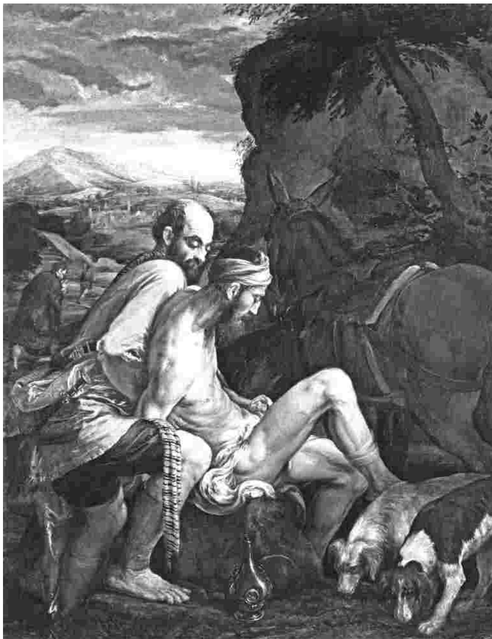
1 See St Jerome, *Epistolae*, 108.12.

2 *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford U, 2011), 123.

The 'Good Samaritan' Parable Reconsidered

Because the story is so familiar, it is difficult to hear the parable of the Good Samaritan afresh. In reconsidering it, I am drawing on modern scriptural and theological scholarship to bring the victimised traveller into the foreground of the story.

The interpretative key is that Luke joined an actual tale from Jesus' lips (10:30–35) to a framing narrative of his own composition (10:25–29 and 36–37), using a stylistic technique of the period that is common to all four evangelists. That is, he took an authentic Jesus-story about a victim of violent crime, which had circulated orally, and incorporated it into his own written narrative centred on two questions asked by a lawyer: first, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (10:25); second, 'And who is my neighbour?' (10:29). Both were issues of pressing pastoral concern to Luke's community, and help explain his editorial perspective and final composition. Together, Jesus' prior tale—and Luke's bookending of it—form the inspired, canonical text known to posterity as the parable of the Good Samaritan. But, according to scripture scholar Bernard Brandon Scott, it is crucial to understand that the Jesus-story 'originally circulated separately from the question about neighborliness'.[3]



The Good Samaritan, ***by Jacopo Bassano,*** **c.** ***1562***

Luke's creative artistry, for all its sublimity, has come at a considerable cost. An unanticipated outcome has been the submersion of the point of view of the battered traveller himself, bereft in the roadside ditch. The existential pathos, understood in the biblical sense as the cry of the poor, has grown fainter.

[3] Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 191.

The evangelist's tale obscures the precious assertion that human spiritual vulnerability can invite and mediate divine encounter and redemption.

The Australian scripture scholar Brendan Byrne echoes Scott on the pivotal point of compositional history: 'As originally told by Jesus (abstracted, that is, from the setting Luke has provided), the original parable draws the hearer into the perspective of the wounded, half-dead traveler'.[4] Many first-century travellers would have identified readily with the crime victim assaulted along the Bloody Path, whose 'restoration is the narrative's goal'.[5] What would the real-time reactions of the beaten and stripped traveller in the ditch have been as he watched religious leaders and scholars pass him by? Did he experience the metallic taste of paralyzing fear for his life, the breathlessness or racing heart of a panic attack, the degradation of shame—or the determination never to frequent the Temple again?

The point of the Jesus-story, according to Luke Timothy Johnson, is not a contrast between Jews and Samaritans but rather 'a contrast between those who were established … and those who were not'.[6] At stake, spiritually, is the clarity of a person's existential awareness of his or her vulnerability or even impotence, and how that very powerlessness can be a midwife to divine encounter. It is akin to completing the first step towards recovery in any Twelve Step addiction programme: *we admitted that we were powerless*.

Reversal of Fortune

Jesus' tale of the bloody traveller in the ditch strikingly exemplifies the important Lukan theme of *reversal of fortune* in favour of outsiders and the poor, which is directly expressed in Mary's Magnificat: 'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly' (Luke 1:52). 'Human security and complacency are challenged' by a 'great reversal' of religious expectations and social values.[7] Those rejected by conventional society and religion—personally, in the case of the mugged traveller—are all the more cherished by God.

4 Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God; A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2015), 100.
5 Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 193–194.
6 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 173.
7 Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 22.

> Those ordinarily deemed unworthy, lowly, marginal, or even outcast, are accepted by God …. Among them are the crippled, the lame, the blind and deaf, the sexually mutilated, lepers, and all those ritually excluded from full participation in the life of the people.[8]

Jesus issues a prophetic challenge to established religious interests, personified in the priest and Levite, who 'see' the bloodied traveller at roadside, but with such mistaken, self-serving understanding of the Torah that they are blind to the authentic mercy and compassion required by God.[9] They look but do not perceive (Mark 4:12), perhaps for reasons of narcissistic and exaggerated ritual purity. Jesus aims to challenge their misreading of the Torah through his presentation of a tragic human scene.

To encounter one's neighbour in a full Lukan sense, one must cultivate a spiritual capacity to notice what happens from the perspective of the mugged traveller, attentive to the voice of excluded others on the underside of history. This resonates for many marginalised casualties of violence today, some of whom find themselves estranged from institutions such as family or Church.[10]

Champion or Casualty?

The plot thickens, however, when we recognise that Luke's framing of the parable has resulted in a one-sided emphasis on the person of the Samaritan champion coming to the rescue. The hearer is challenged to identify with the Samaritan rather than the traveller. (Everyone loves hero-to-the-rescue stories.)

This is evident in contemporary catechetics and homiletics, as Sunday churchgoers can attest. Luke's compelling figure of the Good Samaritan has even entered the lexicon and iconography of Western culture. His composition draws the reader into the perspective of the neighbourly Samaritan who passes by, sees but also *notices*, with heartfelt mercy, the untreated wounds of the traveller in the ditch, and stops to

[8] Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 22.

[9] 'Your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27) is a precise citation from Leviticus 19:18: 'You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord'.

[10] A decorated and devout Marine first lieutenant, just returned from the battle of Fallujah in Iraq, once recounted to me his search for a welcoming Christian church in south-eastern Pennsylvania. On one Sunday in 2021 he and his middle-aged wife were stopped by greeters at the entrance to a non-denominational church. They summoned the pastor, who briefly sized the couple up and told the veteran he was not welcome because of his tattooed forearms and neck. 'We don't want any gang members here', he said icily.

assist him. The concluding injunction, 'go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37), is memorable, ethically compelling and arguably a foundation of Western values.

Later Christian interpreters, of course, would go even further, viewing the Samaritan as a saviour representing Christ. To 'do likewise' develops into a christology and spirituality of identification and encounter with God *in the Samaritan*. Early interpreters such as Irenaeus, Origen, Ambrose and Augustine set the pattern with allegorical interpretation of the Samaritan *as Christ,* healing the wounds caused by sin.[11] This reading has largely prevailed down the centuries.

However, two different perspectives are front and centre in the Jesus-story by contrast with the wider Lukan composition. According to Scott, 'The all-important question in this parable is that of point of view: from where do I hear the parable?'[12] It is Jesus' intention to draw the listener into identification with the character and point of view of the bloodied traveller. This is also the perspective of theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and his school of liberation theology, for whom the fundamental hermeneutical question is: who is the most important person in Luke's parable?[13] For Gutiérrez, the Church becomes 'Samaritan' by virtue of its identification with and service of Christ suffering and forgotten as roadside casualty.

Who is the most important person in Luke's parable?

The compelling force of Luke's masterful version has overshadowed Jesus' account. Treasure though it is, Luke's memorable telling shrouds the invitation to notice the point of view of the nearly dead man in the ditch. In the primal Jesus-story the hearer plays *casualty*; in Luke's composition the hearer plays *champion and hero*. The evangelist's edit has underplayed the criminal violence of the story, virtually cancelling it in the Christian spiritual, pastoral, interpretive, catechetical and homiletic traditions. A variety of interpretative issues are at stake, but the central spiritual question is clear enough: which perspective do the parable's hearers adopt in order to encounter God most profoundly—champion or casualty?

[11] *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III, Luke,* edited by Arthur A. Just Jr (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 177–181.

[12] Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 190.

[13] See Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'A Hermeneutic of Hope', *Center for Latin American Studies, Vanderbilt University: Occasional Paper 13* (September 2012), 9; 'Church Must Be Samaritan, Reaching Out to Others', *National Catholic Reporter* (28 February 2014), at https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/gutierrez-vatican-church-must-be-samaritan-reaching-out-others.

Charity or Solidarity?

Contemporary exegetes have pondered the conundrum at some length. Some argue that, like many parables, the Good Samaritan is a marvellous riddle best approached like a Zen koan. There is wisdom and spiritual profit in this. Nevertheless, greater theological clarity is available. When the point of view of the Jesus-story is recaptured, thereby restoring casualties of violence to the narrative foreground, Luke's theme of reversal of fortune shimmers more brightly. Here, 'the wall between *us* and *them* no longer exists'.[14] Here, would-be Samaritans-to-the-rescue discover a more profound way into Divinity in meaningful interpersonal *encounter* with survivor-neighbours.

It is the difference between charity and solidarity, the latter overcoming the dehumanising risk of viewing people on the societal or ecclesial margins as *objects* of religious duty. These might include, for example, the economically poor, racial minorities, those who are elderly, infirm, or mentally incapacitated, survivors of ecclesial sexual abuse, or those who identify as LGBTQ+. 'Solidarity differs from charity because it replaces unilateral doing for with the mutuality of being with'.[15] Samaritan neighbourliness is reframed as the human solidarity of sisters and brothers, an egalitarian recognition of voluntary reciprocity and encounter among and between children of God, each equal in dignity.

The Good Samaritan*, by Joseph Highmore, 1744*

The parable's riddle suggests that, 'my *place* in the world changes. To "go and do likewise" is to be a neighbor who courageously

[14] Bernard Brandon Scott, *Reimagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2001), 64, emphasis in original.

[15] Marcus Mescher, *The Ethics of Encounter: Christian Neighbor Love as a Practice of Solidarity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2020), 59.

and compassionately goes into the ditch in order to draw near to neighbors in need.'[16] To reclaim that gentleman's dignity after all these centuries, perhaps the parable should more aptly be called 'The Battered Traveller'. Pope Francis has exhorted the people of God to seek more profound encounter with Christ in those who suffer, to look directly into their eyes, and 'to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way'.[17] Christians can thereby 'recognize Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters'.[18] In this fashion, 'The Battered Traveller' becomes an ideal scriptural resource for Ignatian contemplation of Jesus' passion narrative, as presented in the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises. The stripped, beaten, invisible, mugged victim personifies and reveals the crucified Christ on Calvary.

EverySurvivor

Anyone startled by this reversal of perspective would do well to recall that both the original Jesus-story and Luke's wider Good Samaritan parable are meant to provoke just such a strong reaction, beginning with the account of a brutal crime perpetrated along the forlorn Bloody Path. 'The violence done to the travelling Judean is overt: he is stripped, beaten, left half dead. This is not a sentimental tale.'[19]

Nevertheless, over the centuries the parable has in fact been domesticated. Few homilists, religious educators, spiritual guides or pastoral counsellors display much interest in the raw story of violent crime at the heart of Jesus' tale. In so doing they appear aloof from the twenty-first-century context of their congregations. The trauma psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk points out that the majority of people in the United States, or their loved ones, will experience a violent crime at some point during their lifetimes, and that three million children are reported annually as victims of child abuse or neglect.[20] Crime rates vary in different parts of the world, some higher and some lower, but every datum in every statistic represents one human being,

[16] Mescher, *Ethics of Encounter*, 61 (emphasis in the original).
[17] Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n.85.
[18] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium,* n. 198.
[19] Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 175.
[20] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 20.

perhaps someone who has felt too ashamed to report the crime or tell his or her story.

The close contemporary reading of a cherished sacred text offers a striking example from New Testament studies of the challenge faced by casualties of violence today. As the mother of a murdered transgender man observes, 'When you're misgendered, it becomes a daily trauma of not being seen'.[21] Those who draw close enough to the bloodied ditch might hear a lament which echoes that of the central character in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man:*

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids, and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me.[22]

One scriptural commentator recently noted that the stricken traveller 'is simply a generic human being of the male sex …. The description of the victim is significant: naked and mute, the person is stripped of identity'.[23] Without distinguishing marks, passers-by lacked any clues to identify the battered traveller with a particular village, clan or even social class. Had he died, it might have been difficult to restore the anonymous corpse to the family for dignified, appropriate burial: ignominy upon invisibility upon injury.

Venerable Bede, an eighth-century doctor of the Church, viewed the parable's victim as *Adam*, a term used throughout the Hebrew scriptures as an allegorical representation of mankind to designate an individual human person or humanity in general.[24] In other words, the focal point of the Jesus-story is an *everyman* figure, a battered crime victim who more properly can be designated *EverySurvivor.* The very absence of distinctive features, voice, clothing or personality, leaves *EverySurvivor* to find his or her identity precisely *as* battered and

[21] Kathy Lynch, referring to her transgender son, Aaron. At the age of 26, he was shot and killed by police during a psychotic episode, 'the culmination of his years of mental health struggles' according to his mother. Tom Jackman, 'After Years of Turmoil, A Fatal Night: Fairfax Officers Were Called to Help a Transgender Man in Crisis. One Killed Him', *Washington Post* (14 June 2024), 1.

[22] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1995 [1952]), 3. The novel won the 1953 National Book Award for fiction.

[23] M. Dennis Hamm, 'Luke', *Paulist Biblical Commentary* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2018), 1066.

[24] See James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 4.

invisible. The Christian heritage suggests that those with eyes to see can encounter a hidden God in *EverySurvivor*—the God who is presented in the passion narrative.

Luke's parable here displays a further facet of artistic and mystical genius. His shocking theme of reversal of fortune underlines Jesus' unpalatable challenge to his followers to see themselves, not first as heroes to the rescue, but as humble and powerless. 'It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant' (Matthew 20:26). To do so may require 'perspective-taking'. Psychologists associate this trait with empathy, requiring the ability to consider a situation from a viewpoint other than one's customary frame of reference.[25]

Seekers and persons of faith, therefore, are invited to imagine themselves at roadside, bloodied or bewildered of conscience, there to encounter the Kingdom of God. For most, this does not come naturally. For survivors of past traumatic injury, it can even be risky; in so doing they may well trigger unwanted memories and associated symptoms. Hence, they must be ready to choose this perspective.[26] But they can take heart from the original Jesus-story, which clearly promises that recognition of one's existential vulnerability can elicit a heartfelt experience of the goodness and mercy of God.

Today, the roadsides remain strewn with those frantically awaiting first-responder solidarity and assistance. *EverySurvivors* know the numbing grief of invisibility, stigma or isolation—within their families, their marriages and communities, among their (former) friends, or even in the most well-intentioned of popular and religious discourse. For example, those who have experienced suicidal ideation, or perhaps even attempted suicide, lament that they have never heard a homily or any public catechetical guidance about what is, in fact, a very common affliction. If they feel left out of the Church's proclamation of the gospel, that is because they are. But recognition is 'the threshold of ethics … the

[25] The capacity to modify perspective is considered by developmental psychology to be a key to cognitive development. Social psychological research has demonstrated the benefits of viewing a situation or concept from a different frame of reference—including increased altruism, decreased stereotyping, and an ability to establish stronger social bonds with others.

[26] It may be prudent for this special-needs population, therefore, to consult with a spiritual guide or sponsor before praying in such fashion. And spiritual and pastoral caregivers who wish to serve the survivors of violence better, as well as ecclesial leaders and influencers, may have homework to do regarding the sometimes subtle symptoms and triggers of spiritual injury trauma.

beginning of the moral life', according to the Boston College theologian James F. Keenan.[27] The following illustration puts a familiar name and face on the phenomenon of invisibility and demonstrates the distressing risks of exclusion of the casualty's point of view as well as the healing benefits of inclusion at the table.

The Cannonball Moment

To celebrate the 500th anniversary of Íñigo de Loyola's battlefield wound at Pamplona in May 1521, the worldwide Society of Jesus launched an intensive spiritual renewal campaign as part of a broader 'Ignatian Year' celebration, whose motto was 'To See All Things New in Christ'. Social media, artistic, publishing and spiritual initiatives employed the meme of 'cannonball moments': 'Today, we invite you to contemplate "cannonball moments" in your own lives—when God invites you to something more, even in tough times'.[28]

There were short YouTube videos, in various languages, featuring individuals from around the world talking about the 'cannonball moment that changed my life'.[29] A book from Loyola Press highlighted stories of 'those big moments of conversion that are reflective of Ignatius' own life story' as an invitation to others to consider their own faith journeys.[30] Jesuit high-school drama clubs re-enacted the battle of Pamplona, highlighting the moment when Ignatius was injured. Jocular memes popped up on the internet, featuring cartoonish images of Ignatius with slogans such as 'Cannonized before He Was Canonized' or 'I used to be a sinner like you, then I took a cannonball to the knee'.

Unfortunately, the 'cannonball moments' campaign strongly alienated certain military veterans, including the otherwise sympathetic retired US Marine Colonel Robert Seamus Macpherson. A 30-year veteran of two tours in Vietnam as well as service in Beirut, Somalia and Iraq, he had healed from post-traumatic stress disorder with psychiatric help and medications received through the Veterans Administration. But, in the

[27] James F. Keenan, 'The Great Religious Failure: Not Recognizing a Person in Need', *America* (17 June 2024).

[28] 'Celebrating Cannonball Day', at https://www.jesuits.org/stories/celebrating-cannonball-day, accessed 27 November 2024.

[29] See for example 'Cannonball: St Ignatius of Loyola—From Proud Courtier to Companion of Jesus', at https://www.www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSpLXpOwkaI&list=PL_p9nnEsh4B3XTg2LFkRlFLwX2n-v5oHs&index=2, accessed 27 November 2024.

[30] Eric A. Clayton, *Cannonball Moments: Telling Your Story, Deepening Your Faith* (Chicago: Loyola, 2022), 3.

end, Macpherson noted, 'it was the Spiritual Exercises which saved my sanity'.[31] Despite having a profound identification with Íñigo as a military man exposed to live fire, he found himself bewildered and angered by the 'cannonball moments' meme: bewildered because it made invisible the bitter experience of so many courageous and patriotic veterans, and angered because the motif is potentially triggering for survivors of battlefield violence.

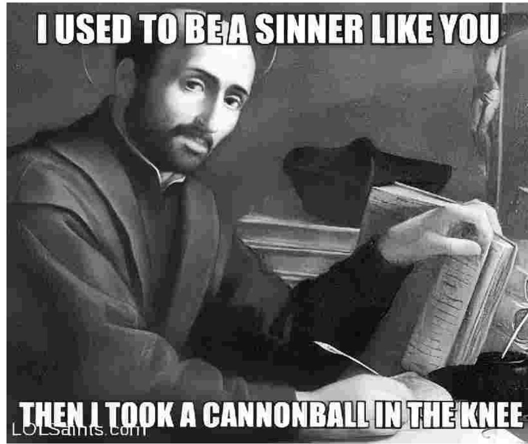


image from LOLSaints.com

> *The phrase 'cannonball moment' trivializes the pieces of metal shredding your body when all you hear over the sounds of bombs, artillery, and bullets are men screaming in pain. The Jesuits are using the horrors of war to promote their own agenda. Unfortunately for anyone who has been victimized by war and battle, the naïveté of their promotion sets them apart from the people they are trying to reach. Their promotion of this theme demonstrates how far out of touch they are with the veterans. Because if you survive the holocaust of war, there are many people you respected and loved who did not. The meme is trivial and an assault on their memory and sacrifice(s).*
>
> *Let me give you my take on the cannonball moments motif I keep seeing on Ignatian websites and social media. It makes me ask if people who are this far from reality have lost the core of the meaning of the Spiritual Exercises. I mean, after Jesus' crucifixion, would any of the apostles have referred to their own 'crucifixion moment'? Please!*

For some survivors of violence, the cannonball moment meme risks sparking past horrific memories, leading to belligerent, unfocused rage, panic attacks, and other destructive personal and social symptoms. Had he been consulted, Colonel Macpherson would have explained that triggers can be subtle and difficult to predict. According to the trauma counsellor Lisa López Levers, they may include,

[31] All citations are from private correspondence and conversations with the author, and are quoted with permission.

> … the anniversary of the traumatic event, smells, loud noises, excessive stress, extreme guilt, feeling left out, work or school stress, relationship breakup, traffic, financial problems, being overly tired, sexual harassment, hearing others argue, being judged or criticized, spending too much time alone, and intimacy.[32]

Certain battlefield veterans such as Macpherson—who has made and reveres the Spiritual Exercises—may experience the chosen meme as trauma-uninformed and exclusionary: veterans are precisely 'left out' of consideration. Ecclesial leaders and social-media influencers of the future should be more attentive to the science-based conclusions of diagnostic research by bringing the casualties' voices and profiles back from the periphery. More intentional trauma-informed care, for example, would challenge the global Ignatian network to accompany the casualties of violence more closely and listen more attentively to their unique voices as a potential source of revelation, in keeping with the Jesus-story.

Pamplona Reconsidered

History can never determine how many husbands, brothers, and fathers were among the dead and wounded at Pamplona's 1521 artillery duel.[33] Given the new generation of deadly, rapid-firing cannons employed by the French, 'cannonball moment' casualties could be gruesome. They fired solid iron balls rather than the stone shot that had formerly been used in Europe. The balls 'crushed battlements, careened wildly and sprayed shards of stone in all directions'.[34]

Íñigo, of course, was no ordinary casualty of war. He was the leader who had galvanized the Spanish to fight, and to keep fighting until he went down, when they capitulated to the French. In a gallant display of their own, the French did Íñigo the rare honour of carrying their heroic enemy on a well-appointed conveyance back to the family's small Loyola Castle in Azpeitia.[35] Surely Íñigo suffered greatly, but one can imagine the fanfare *en route*, not to mention family acclaim back home upon his arrival.

[32] Lisa López Levers, *Trauma Counseling: Theories and Interventions for Managing Trauma, Stress, Crisis, and Disaster*, 2nd edn (New York: Springer, 2023), 410.

[33] See Jacob F. Field, 'Battle of Pamplona', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Pamplona.

[34] Phil Klay, 'Can the Trauma of War Lead to Growth, Despite the Scars? ', *New York Times* (6 July 2020).

[35] Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, edited by Barton T. Geger (Chestnut Hill: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2020), 111 note 5.

Hagiographic lore surrounding Íñigo's so-called 'cannonball moment' has become part of the popular twenty-first-century Ignatian landscape. Yet the hero's questionable judgment proved fatal for other combatants, and surely occasioned severe distress for their families back home. Today, most soldiers would rush to assist a fallen buddy, but Íñigo is silent about fellow casualties, many of whom would have survived had he acted differently.

Don Íñigo's undoubted heroism at Pamplona can now be respectfully reframed through a wider twenty-first-century lens of research into military moral-injury trauma and fresh theological and scriptural insights. 'The study of trauma and the rise of trauma studies have had a necessary impact on Christian theology.'[36] Recall those severely wounded Spanish casualties on the Pamplona battlefield or inside the fortress, bloodied and immobilised—who had voted unanimously to surrender to the French. Some, tragically, would die. Is it too late to honour their memory by letting today's casualties of violence, people such as Colonel Macpherson, have a seat at the table? The Ignatian heritage and Christian spirituality, more broadly, have long displayed a remarkable capacity for reinvention and reformulation. Now, amidst an epoch of surpassing violence, those unvarnished voices may attract devotees whom heroes cannot.

Witnessing—not even participating in—the bloodletting and occasional horror of battlefield combat, the killing of innocent civilians or the loss of a comrade's life, can result in spiritual, even religious, injury, as Colonel Macpherson can attest. The symptoms are well documented in the research-based literature on military moral-injury trauma, including,

> … having anger at God; stopping attendance at religious services; experiencing emptiness or meaninglessness; feeling God has failed … and being angry or cynical towards clergy. Counseling professionals who are trauma-informed understand that these are 'normal' responses to 'abnormal' events.[37]

Colonel Macpherson's testimony greatly enriches the Christian approach to such injury precisely by including the voice and perspective

[36] Shelly Rambo, 'How Christian Theology and Practice Are Being Shaped by Trauma Studies', *The Christian Century* (1 November 2019).
[37] Levers, *Trauma Counseling*, 410.

of *EverySurvivor* of violence, as represented by the original Jesus-story of the Battered Traveller and Jesus' passion itself. If Macpherson is angry and denounces, he does so like novelist Ellison's central character: 'I denounce because though implicated and partially responsible, I have been hurt to the point of abysmal pain, hurt to the point of invisibility'.[38]

Moral myopia, tragically, permits the traumatic after-effects of violence to perdure—endlessly and intergenerationally. The concept of the 'cannonball moment' shows what happens when persons, organizations or Churches fail, often innocently enough, to recognise the full implications of a matter—or even a meme. The divine lens of Jesus' story about the Battered Traveller offers us a trauma-informed shift in point of view for noticing and supporting soul-wounded survivors of violence. Drawing on the work of Gustavo Guttiérrez, Marcus Mescher writes, 'As with the Samaritan, it is a movement out of one's way and into the ditch to draw near to another in need ….' For conversion, in this view, 'demands an intentional change of place'.[39] Greg Boyle, founding director of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, puts it simply: 'All Jesus asks is, "*where are you standing?*"'[40]

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[38] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 579–580.
[39] Mescher, *Ethics of Encounter*, 60.
[40] Greg Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart* (New York: Free Press/Simon and Schuster, 2011). Homeboy Industries is a project that creates jobs for former gang members.

THE ART OF PAYING ATTENTION

Elizabeth A. Hoare

> There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him or not to recognize him …. Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the heavenly and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.[1]

DURING THE PANDEMIC LOCKDOWNS the whole world had to come to terms with restricted lives, their scope severely limited by the need to prevent the spread of infection. For many people the restrictions were almost unbearable, while for others life-changing discoveries were to be made, sometimes from the simplest of activities: learning to identify birdsong, baking sourdough, building connections online. I have long been interested in writers whose worlds seem very small and restricted according to modern Western expectations. What is it about them that enabled them to live well and communicate wisdom to the world? What follows is a reflection on the practice of paying attention which arose in part from participation in the Ignatian Enrichment Course run from the London Jesuit Centre.

At my primary school in the 1960s, we were frequently ordered to 'attend'. This attending was not about turning up. Rather, it involved looking closely and listening carefully to what was in front of us. The need to pay attention is present throughout life, whether driving a car, using machinery, looking after children, reading a map or asking for directions. The list could go on, yet we are told that there has never been a more distracted age than ours. This situation is most acute in the post-industrial Western world, obsessed with social media and 'amusing itself to death' with one distraction after another.[2]

1 Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 106.
2 See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985).

The Way, 64/1 (January 2025), 97–108

For some of us, the lockdowns forced us to slow down, occupy curtailed spaces and get used to limits. Once the restrictions eased, however, most of those with any means could not wait to get on a plane again, go out, party and forget. We seem doomed to be always restlessly looking for the next experience. Even the disasters already visited upon us by climate change have not, for the most part, led us to give up, or even modestly curtail, our quest for distraction. The Christian Church in the developed West seems afflicted by the same frenetic behaviour, desperately searching for the magic formula that will arrest its decline. Strategies, targets and numbers seem more prominent than paying attention to God in prayer and waiting for the Spirit to lead us.

Three female writers have helped me to understand what is involved in learning to pay attention. None of them got out much by today's standards, yet they wrote with sharp insight and wisdom about the complex world around them and the way humans behave in that world. The three are an anchoress from the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich; a poet from the twentieth century, Mary Oliver; and a novelist, also from last century, Elizabeth Goudge. What, if anything, did they have in common? Above all, they observed closely what was going on around them. Second, they lived unhurried lives. Third, they had faith in something larger and more mysterious than themselves and they all prayed to this divine presence.[3] Fourth, they tried to convey through the written word what they had learnt through paying attention to mystery and transcendence.

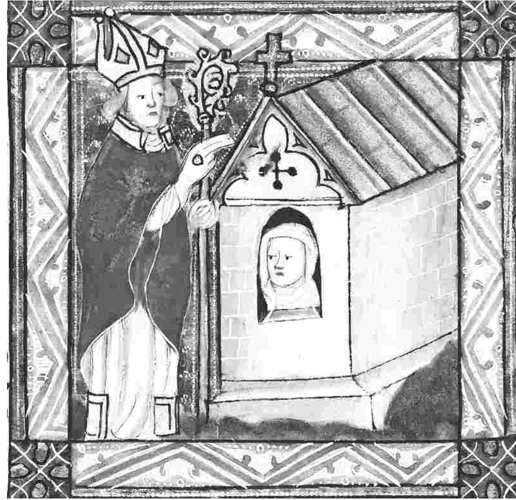
Julian of Norwich (1342–c. 1416)

The worlds of each of my three women were contained ones, and none more so than Julian, who was an anchoress. We know very little about the person of Julian, except that as a young woman she became seriously ill and was expected to die. She received fifteen 'showings', or visions, on the night of 13 May 1373, however, and was restored to health. The rest of her life flowed out of her meditations on this experience.

Julian became an anchoress—a hermit—and was walled up in a cell that adjoined her parish church in Norwich. She wrote down the meaning of the showings in what is called the Short Text, but for the next twenty years she continued to meditate on them, and in around 1393 she

[3] All three speak of a God of love and revealed in Jesus, though all have been misunderstood as to their supposedly unorthodox views.

produced the Long Text. Although Julian claimed to be ignorant, her writings are rooted in the New Testament theology of Paul and discuss sin, grace and redemption with insight and a deftness of touch.



An anchoress is enclosed by a bishop, early fifteenth century

Shut off from the bustle of an important city, Julian could be said to have lived a limited life, but she devoted herself to paying attention to her experience—in this case, the experience of a profound touch from God in the visions she received. As well as noting details in the visions themselves such as 'the red blood trickling down from under the crown of thorns, hot and fresh and very plentiful, as though it were the moment of his passion when the crown of thorns was thrust on to his blessed head', she recounts how at the moment of seeing them she felt her heart fill with 'the greatest joy'.[4]

In her mind's eye she saw Mary, 'a meek and simple maid, young—a little more than a child' and at the same time she saw a spiritual vision of God's love which she attempted to describe as,

> … everything that we find good and comforting. He is our clothing, wrapping us for love, embracing and enclosing us for tender love, so that he can never leave us, being himself everything that is good for us as I understand it.[5]

In the same vision she saw her famous image of a thing the size of a hazelnut, 'as round as a ball'.[6] Questioning and wondering what this image could mean led her to pay close attention to its properties in the light of her understanding of God's love. It is fascinating to observe her

[4] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, translated by Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1966), 45–46.

[5] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 46–47.

[6] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 47.

questioning herself and receiving answers in her own mind. Focused on her vision and her mind's understanding she concluded that there were three properties to notice: first that God made it; second that God loves it, third that God cares for it. Even at this point she acknowledges that there is more, because until we are totally at one with God we cannot have complete rest or true happiness.

This led her to conclude the chapter not in despair, but in hope and simplicity of faith, saying:

> God, of your goodness, give me yourself; you are enough for me, and anything less that I could ask for would not do you full honour. And if I ask for anything that is less I shall always lack something, but in you alone I have everything.[7]

Julian saw the soul as a city, maybe like Norwich, the city with which she was most familiar.

> And then our Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the middle of my heart. I saw the soul as large as if it were an endless world and as if it were a holy kingdom; and from the properties I saw in it I understood that it is a glorious city. In the centre of that city sits our Lord Jesus, God and man …. It seems to me that in all eternity Jesus will never leave the position which he takes in our soul; for in us is his most familiar home and his everlasting dwelling.[8]

Walled up in her cell in medieval Norwich, Julian might seem far removed from the challenges facing the human race today. She lived at a difficult and distressing period of history, however, when the future looked bleak from every angle. The fourteenth century in Europe was dominated by the Black Death, from which a third to half of the population died. There were famine, strife and war. Fear dominated people's lives. Julian's words spoke comfort into this situation, especially the way she developed the idea of Jesus as mother, both as the second person of the Trinity and through his salvific action on the cross in bringing people to new birth. Her *Revelations of Divine Love* brought comfort and hope to her contemporaries and has continued to nourish people down to the present.

The monastic virtue of stability, which she exemplifies with its emphasis on staying put, going to one's cell and committing oneself to

[7] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 48.
[8] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 153.

stay there without a time limit, continues to speak directly to our own culture. This is a counter-cultural challenge on every level. We too can find 'hermit moments' in our day. Times when we remember to pay attention—standing in the queue at the supermarket, looking out of the window in between jobs, pausing before each meal. We can create a space deep within, a 'cell' where we can pay attention.

Mary Oliver (1935–2019)

Oliver was a US poet who wrote about looking at things. Her vocation as a poet emerged from a lifelong passion for long walks in nature. She never left home without a notebook and pen. She preferred to let her work speak for itself and remained a very private person who gave few interviews. It is known that she did not have a happy childhood, though she found an affinity with nature from an early age, spending a lot of time outdoors. She explained in a rare interview how she found connections with nature before human beings, simply because it was 'there'. The interviewer commented:

> There is an austerity, a quiet determination to her thought that brings to mind an earlier century. The discipline of her writing life might seem more natural in a time before every living room was plugged into the perpetual tide of images and ideas, when an individual cultivated the solitude and curiosity of the inner life.[9]

As a young writer Oliver lived a life of intense isolation. She did not join other poets in workshops or succumb to the lure of poetic fashion. She did not seek out any other career and believed that living simply was essential to prevent her mind from becoming cluttered and her spiritual vision dulled. Her 'school' was simply reading the great poets, especially Walt Whitman and the Romantics, along with the shoreline of Provincetown, Massachusetts, and the surrounding woods. In 'Sometimes' she wrote:

> Instructions for living a life:
> *Pay attention.*
> *Be astonished.*
> *Tell about it.*[10]

[9] Steve Ratiner, 'Poet Mary Oliver: a Solitary Walk', *Christian Science Monitor* (9 December 1992).
[10] Mary Oliver, 'Sometimes', in *Red Bird Poems* (Boston: Beacon, 2008), 37.

And elsewhere she observed:

> Ten times a day something happened to me like this—some strengthening throb of amazement—some good sweet empathetic ping and swell. This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.[11]

Out of the commitment to paying attention came a deep sense of gratitude which frequently recurs in her poetry. Oliver described giving close attention to her subject followed by a deeper focus. This enabled her to become present to the moment.

We are not all called to be poets, but our lives would be richer for learning how to pay attention to the present and giving thanks for those moments of grace. As Ignatius recognised in an earlier age, gratitude arises out of paying attention. In 'Drifting' Oliver noted moments when transcendence broke in to the ordinary:

> I was enjoying everything: the rain, the path
> wherever it was taking me, the earth roots
> beginning to stir.
> I didn't intend to start thinking about God,
> it just happened.[12]

Doing the next thing and the next, she finds meaning in midst of the ordinariness of life. Mary Oliver's poems celebrate habit not as a straitjacket, but as liberation. Humble tasks become a sacramental gesture, made holy by divine presence. In 'Beans' she surveys her vegetable plot and notices: 'I have thought sometimes that something—I can't name it—watches as I walk the rows, accepting the gift of their lives to assist mine'.[13]

In Oliver's poetry wonder is grounded in an acute sense of life's mysteries—many of them beautiful, others incalculably dark. The *Harvard Review* described her work as an antidote to 'inattention and the baroque conventions of our social and professional lives. She is a poet of wisdom and generosity whose vision allows us to look intimately at a world not of our making.'[14]

[11] Mary Oliver, 'Low Tide: What the Sea Gives to the Human Soul', *The Amicus Journal*, 18/4 (Winter 1997).
[12] Mary Oliver, 'Drifting', in *Blue Horses* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 53.
[13] Mary Oliver, 'Beans', in *Why I Wake Early: New Poems* (Boston: Beacon, 2004), 10.
[14] Suzanne Matson, review of Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems*, *Harvard Review*, 4 (Spring, 1993), 164.

Elizabeth Goudge (1900–1984)

Elizabeth Goudge grew up in a vicarage, was an only child and never married or left home, nor did she have a career, but she wrote stories which contain deep insight into what it means to be human and to relate to others. Some of her many novels were written for children, but she also wrote historical and contemporary fiction for adults. In addition, she wrote devotional books, including a life of Jesus and a life of St Francis of Assisi, besides numerous magazine articles. All her writing displays complex human insight as well as beautiful descriptions of the natural world.

She lived in three cathedral cities, owing to her father's calling as a priest-theologian, beginning with the cathedral close at Wells until she was eleven. Each city later became the location of a novel, place being fundamental to Goudge's style. She was educated at home by a governess; an avid reader, like her academic father, she claimed she read 'by suction'.[15] Goudge's parents were a huge influence on her own life and attitudes. She was very close to her father, though her deferential nature led her to claim, rather like Julian of Norwich, that she was not at all clever. Goudge's mother endured much pain from a cycling accident, resulting in a restricted life; she became increasingly confined indoors.

After Wells, the family moved to Ely and then to Christ Church, Oxford. One might think Oxford would have been an exciting place for a young woman to spread her wings, but for someone as shy as Elizabeth Goudge, it proved terrifying. There were moments of joy, even so, such as the times when she could escape to the cloisters of Magdalen College where she found ease and contentment in her special place.

Goudge entered womanhood shortly after the end of the First World War and—as she herself commented—being no great beauty, nor blessed with a set of outgoing social skills, her marriage prospects were bleak.[16] She was just one of what was known as 'Britain's problem of two million superfluous women'.[17] The period following the war was one of questioning where Church and faith were concerned, and the zeitgeist was pessimistic. Goudge's Anglican upbringing gave her a firm grasp of grace, however, which suffuses her writing. Her novels explore sin and

[15] Elizabeth Goudge, *The Joy of the Snow* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1974), 134.
[16] Goudge, *Joy of the Snow*, 189.
[17] The phrase used by Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of the *Daily Mail*. The issue is explored in Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out* (New York: Viking, 2008), see especially 23.

redemption in imaginative and creative ways, and she held fast to a God whose generous love was all-inclusive, especially for those on the margins.

Many of her books are infused with myth, magic and other worlds beyond our own. They certainly contrast with the often dystopian novels of today, although the popularity of magical realism might lead some readers to be more open to the mystical element in Goudge's work than formerly. It is the insights into human nature and an awareness of transcendence that stand out as key components of her writing. In some of her books, not a great deal happens, but the thoughts and conversations of her characters reveal people struggling to make sense of complex issues and circumstances. *The Scent of Water* (1963), for example, has as its central character a middle-aged woman, Mary, who leaves her city life behind to live in the country after inheriting a house she had visited in her childhood. Slowly, Mary comes to understand herself and her new neighbours, and a story of redemptive grace is beautifully revealed.

Goudge may not have travelled far or possessed a diary full of social engagements, but her acute powers of observation helped her write about characters of depth and complexity and landscapes vivid with detail. Goudge explored the true nature of freedom in a number of her novels, including, for example, *The Bird in the Tree* (1940), the

Elizabeth Goudge, photographer and date unknown

first in the so-called Eliot trilogy. Freedom did not consist of cutting loose the ties that bind us, but learning to accept ourselves and others with all our gifts and limitations. Her insistence that people should grow into happiness and contentment where they are, rather than leaving to search for it somewhere else, echoes the monastic virtue of stability.

She believed in fidelity in relationships, however hard that proved to be, and she believed that brokenness in human beings could be healed.[18] Goudge was no stranger to brokenness herself, enduring a number of mental collapses in the course of her life. She described melancholia as 'the skeleton in our family cupboard', and for her some of the stress that led to collapse was brought on by the painful shyness which made her feel inadequate in the social settings required of her.[19] Two of the main characters in her novel *The Dean's Watch* (1960) were afflicted with shyness that found healing and redemption through kindness.

Goudge herself preferred a quiet existence. Solitude, though not without its pain, can be hugely creative, as Julian's and Oliver's lives also show. It can lead to a heightened awareness and a joy in simple things. Goudge's writing conveys the joy and beauty of the natural world, as Oliver's poetry does, but it was wrought out of struggling through the darkness of mental illness. She noted that, on the one hand, she had a deep awareness of 'the joys of childhood that have not changed .... the joy in birds and beasts, flowers and stars, water, winds and sunshine'. But there were other joys that were different, calling for 'a greater delicacy of imagination and bringing deeper powers of the soul into play [than] the imaginative escapes of childhood'. These joys she called the 'memory and the foretaste of the hidden things'.[20]

Goudge wrote of a childhood theophany and commented that she was sure most children had an awareness of God in early childhood. She was especially adept at presenting children in an unsentimental manner, surely drawing on her own memories and self-knowledge for this. J. K. Rowling claims that. growing up, Goudge's book *The Little White Horse* (1946) was her favourite and became an influence on her own storytelling.[21]

[18] These are themes explored in the Eliot trilogy: *The Bird in the Tree* (1940), *The Herb of Grace* (1948) and *The Heart of the Family* (1953).
[19] Goudge, *Joy of the Snow*, 102.
[20] Elizabeth Goudge, preface to *A Child's Garden of Verses*, quoted in Christine Rawlins, *Beyond the Snow: The Life and Faith of Elizabeth Goudge* (Bloomington: Westbow, 2015), 50, 52.
[21] Rawlins, *Beyond the Snow*, 294.

Goudge had a journey to make to discover faith in a God whom she could love, and wished to communicate this God in her novels. Many of the characters in her books are shown as having to let go of a cold and distant God to learn for themselves the mystery that could reconcile the loving character of the divine with the darkness and suffering in the world. This is close to Julian's message.

Reflections

The Anglican pathologist and priest Martin Israel, wrote 'God stands perpetually at the door of my soul and knocks so that he may enter. I am either not available to heed the knocking or else too much involved with the outer world to take notice.'[22] Perpetual distraction does not lead to contentment within ourselves, which we need to be free to pay attention to God's presence in our ordinary everyday lives. But we do not have to abandon the callings to which we have already responded and become poets, novelists or hermits in order to learn to be present and attentive. Paying attention is something we are all called to do: it simply requires the readiness to embrace what is in front of us.

The readiness to embrace what is in front of us

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, 'O that you had paid attention to my commandments!' (48:18). 'Commandments' here stands for God's total vision for humanity, God's covenant with human beings. Paying attention to God's commandments is what makes the difference between peaceful human flourishing and destructive ways of living. Comparing this plea from the Lord with Psalm 1, where the ones who are blessed are those 'whose delight is in the law of the Lord, on his law they meditate day and night' we are shown what leads to stability, contentment and fruitfulness.

Julian of Norwich, Mary Oliver and Elizabeth Goudge all learnt to drink from the small pool that they found for themselves and, in so doing, were able to discover God's gracious presence. They did not promote themselves as special, but their gift of paying attention may help us to unite our outer and inner worlds to find depth and meaning even amid the ordinary and everyday. A cell, a walk in the woods, a simple domesticity: these were the worlds of the three women discussed here. They found there the mystery of things by paying attention to what

[22] Martin Israel, *Living Alone: The Spiritual Dimension* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 15.

was before them. Recognising the pull of distractions, the stresses that we endure through our chosen and unchosen ways of living, they invite us to pause and to pay attention.

These three women might appear to have had much more time than we do: an anchoress, a dreaming poet (who actually boasted about doing nothing except looking) and a spinster who wrote novels to support herself. In fact, they had the same number of hours in a day as we do; it was how they chose to use them that made the difference. We find ourselves struggling with time as the great enemy, trying to slow down sufficiently to be able to pay attention; yet time itself is God's gift to us. We fight to save time and 'beat the clock', but when we have time on our hands, we do not know what to do with it and end up 'filling in time' or even 'killing' it.

Each of these women made time to observe, think, reflect, create and give pleasure and sustenance to countless others. Living at a slower pace gave them—as it could give us—a richer inner life, with more opportunity for deep encounters with others, with nature and with God. There is no doubt that slowing down leads to mental clarity, creativity, wiser decision-making, more relaxed encounters, deeper friendships, safer travelling and a better digestion.

A word we hear seldom now, but which will be familiar to readers of the King James Bible, is *behold*. It is an arresting word. It is commanding us to stop and look: look long and carefully.[23] Writing to the Ephesian Christians, the apostle Paul said: 'I pray that … with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you … and … the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe' (1:17–19). 'The eyes of your heart' implies seeing at depth, not just living on the surface as so many people do. The eyes of the heart are the deepest part of us, directing the way our lives are orientated. Paying attention is what this inmost chamber of our being needs to live deeply and attentively, aware of the mystery of the invisible that lies within and around us everywhere.

All three writers perceived this mystery and remind us that what matters is right here in front of us. Responding to the question, 'What does it mean to observe?', Robin Daniels wrote:

[23] Maggie Ross regards *behold* as perhaps the most vital word in the Bible. See her *Writing the Icon of the Heart: In Silence Beholding* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011).

> To be in the presence of, simply and humbly, without motive or manipulation, without the movement of thought, without trying to get something, anything, and not trying to change who or what you are seeing. Just watch, clearly and closely, with charity and all due reverence.[24]

Daniels also writes: 'Our humility, our not-abject smallness, is our salvation: it prompts us to be ever on the alert for the divine presence, the prime source of our affirmation—in my soul, in my home, in my beloved, in my neighbour'.[25] Acknowledging our 'humility and our not-abject smallness' are suggestive of the Ignatian insight that we will only reach a place of consolation to the extent that we accept our limitations.

Elizabeth A. Hoare is an ordained Anglican and has recently moved back to North Yorkshire having taught spiritual formation at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford for sixteen years. She is currently working as a member of the spirituality team at St Bede's Pastoral Centre in York. Like the Venerable Bede, one of her historical heroes, her 'chief delight has always been in study, teaching and writing'.[26]

[24] Robin Daniels, *The Virgin Eye* (Rickmansworth: Instant Apostle, 2016), 116.
[25] Daniels, *Virgin Eye*, 29.
[26] Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, translated by Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1990), 329.

'A DAYSPRING TO THE DIMNESS OF US'

Teresa White

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY French preacher Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet says that in scripture we listen to God speaking *sa langue naturelle*: he sees scripture as God's natural language.[1] I like that, like the picture of unhurried, relaxed communication it conveys. And I agree. God does indeed speak to us through sacred scripture, for in a special way, the words of scripture lead us to into God's world. But it is also true that God has many other ways of touching us through the power of words, and I have come to believe that in poetry God speaks to us in what I sometimes think of as God's 'mother tongue', the language of paradox and mystery.

Poetry calls us to be more than usually attentive to words and the underlying thoughts they express; it invites the reader to be inwardly reflective, to contemplate profound realities. Poets seem to have a sixth sense, an innate gift, which somehow opens a door pointing towards the momentary but not illusory experience of (as Francis Thompson so beautifully put it in his poem, 'The Kingdom of God') knowing the unknowable, viewing the invisible, touching the intangible, clutching the inapprehensible.[2] Poetry, with its special characteristics, including rhythm, imagery and sometimes rhyme, is far more than a collection of memorable soundbites. It conveys a concentrated awareness of the here, the now, the fragile, the fleeting. Using words alone to communicate its message, poetry creates its own inward landscape and atmosphere, and through it the soul is expanded and reminded of its spiritual cravings and needs. At its core is the quest for wisdom of heart and mind.

[1] Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, 'Sermon sur la Providence' (1656), in *Sur la brièveté de la vie et autres sermons* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 28.
[2] Francis Thompson, 'The Kingdom of God', in *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford U, 1969 [1937]), 349–350.

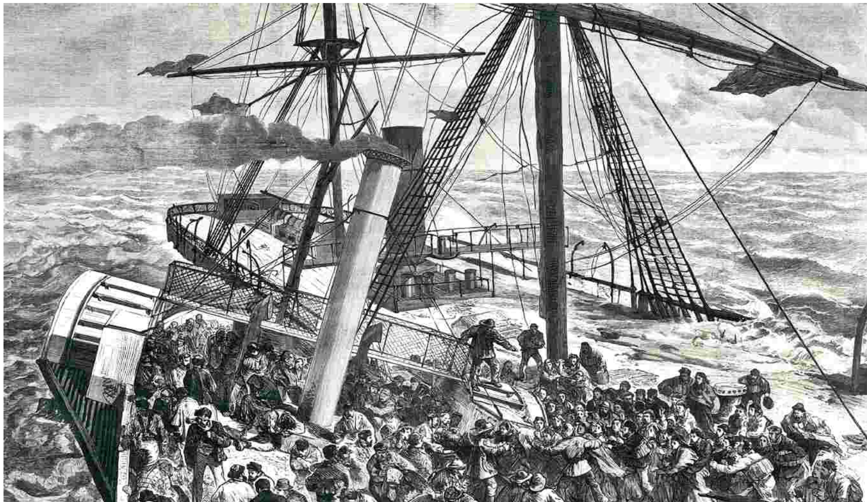
The Way, 64/1 (January 2025), 109–112

Through poetry, I believe we can, in some sense, begin to see the world with God's eyes. Recently, the truth of this was brought home to me quite forcibly when, during Holy Week, I found myself prompted to reread Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.[3] I had come fresh to the poem after an interval of many years and reflecting on it later, I realised that God had spoken to me vividly through this poem. Pondering it in the context of Holy Week as we lived it this year, in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, I found it unspeakably moving. The account of the wreck itself moved me to tears: 57 men, women and children, German emigrants seeking a better life in America, were lost.

In spite of the fact that the Deutschland foundered in the winter of 1875, while I, in 2020, looking out of my window under lockdown conditions, was surrounded by evidence of spring (there was a profusion of cherry blossom, bluebells and camellias in the little park opposite our house in Poplar), it all seemed so real to me: 'the hurtle of hell', the snows, the freezing water, the helplessness. I felt I could hear the tall nun who 'rears herself to divine/Ears', calling out loudly and often, 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly'. We know she did this because survivors later said that her words were audible above the shouts of terror and the turbulence of the fierce storm.

The names of the five Franciscan nuns mentioned in the poem are inscribed on the gravestone in St Patrick's Catholic cemetery in Leytonstone, east London, where four of them—the body of one was not recovered—were buried: Barbara Hultenschmidt, Henrica Fassbender (not found), Norberta Reinkober, Aurea Badziura, Brigitta Damhorst. It is not known which of these names belonged to the gaunt woman, six feet tall, whose words inspired Hopkins to write this beautiful poem. From contemporary newspaper reports, we do know that she was the superior of the little group, and that she encouraged the other nuns in their last moments, inviting them to clasp hands, and thus they died together. We may not know her name, but because of this poem, her words of faith in the face of certain death will never be forgotten. The poet says of this woman, 'Ah! There was a heart right!/There was single eye!' And I thought, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8).

[3] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 119.



Survivors being rescued from the Deutschland, 1875

The disaster happened on 6 December, the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. Hopkins does not pass over this coincidence—he treats it, rather, as a sign of God’s providence. Mary, he says, gave birth to the Word of God, and that tall, unnamed nun also brought forth God’s Word: she ‘heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright’. And because it seems that many humans respond more readily, more fully, to the providence of God when it is dispensed through the hands of a mother, one of the most popular depictions of Mary in Christian art is as the compassionate Mother of Mercy, sheltering people under her outspread cloak. Thinking of Mary, the poet speaks of ‘lovely-felicitous Providence’, of its ‘feathery delicacy’, of its tenderness and patience. He equates providence with ‘a mercy that outrides/The all of water’. But providence is also ‘Ground of being, and granite of it’, and God is ‘throned behind/Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides’.

The overarching theme of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ is the profound mystery of the providence of God. In the first lines of the poem, ‘Thou mastering me/God! giver of breath and bread’, the poet bows before this eternal mystery, seeing belief in providence as the intuitive human response to God’s infinite beauty and love, to God’s power and the terror it can inspire. In simple terms, providence means recognising that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, there is a creative, saving purpose in everything that happens, to us and to our world, our universe.

But it remains a mystery that we can never fully grasp, only accept in faith and trust: 'His mystery must be instressed, stressed;/For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand'.

The notion of providence is appealing. It communicates a caring presence, expressed through a compassionate 'humanness', which we interpret as God's loving engagement with the whole of creation. At its simplest, to be provident means to bless, to shelter, to heal, to provide what is needed. In our time, we are living amid global terrorism, conflict and ecological degradation, and for thousands of people in different parts of the world, crushing poverty and unjust structures. And we are deeply aware that the pandemic has brought even more fears and threats into our troubled lives.

Against this background, there could hardly be a more comforting message than encouragement to trust in the providence of God, to place all that happens to us in God's hands. We do not understand God's ways—Hopkins addresses God as 'lightning and love'—but through providence we believe that the destructive forces within us and in our world can never break the bond that connects us with the everlasting love of God. St Paul's words give expression to what seems to be a human instinct to trust in God in darkness, in isolation, even in death:

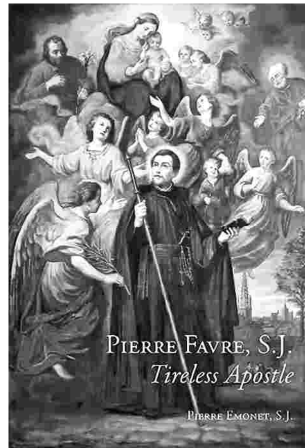
> I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 38–39, JB)

As I came to the end of the poem, vulnerable to its beauty, having wrestled with its obscurities and been borne along by its swiftness, I found I could respond to its message: we need to experience the depths of darkness and suffering if we are to come to resurrection. This revelation is memorably expressed in the last stanza: 'Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us'. The coronavirus pandemic, too, will end. New life follows death.

Teresa White fcJ belongs to the Faithful Companions of Jesus. A former teacher, she spent many years in the ministry of spirituality at Katherine House, a retreat and conference centre run by her congregation in Salford.

RECENT BOOKS

Pierre Emonet, *Pierre Favre, SJ: Tireless Apostle*, translated by Jerry Ryan, edited by Thomas M. McCoog (Philadelphia: St Joseph's UP, 2023). 978 0 9161 0107 7, pp. x + 168, $40.00.



When I became a Jesuit, in the late 1970s, it was clearly understood that the Society of Jesus had a single founder, Ignatius of Loyola. Since then, in perhaps more egalitarian times, it has often been suggested that the six others who studied alongside him in Paris and took vows there as a group in 1534 have equal claim to be considered as founders of the order. For anyone wanting to take inspiration from those who first followed what the Jesuit *Constitutions* call 'this pathway to God', this outlook itself can be problematic. First, it is difficult to remember the names and particular contributions of seven different individuals. More fundamentally, at least two of that original company, Simão Rodriguez and Nicolás Bobadilla, later became awkward characters, challenging Ignatius' authority and presenting a rather different ideal of what the life of a 'good' Jesuit should look like.

A compromise view might suggest three names as 'founders', those of Ignatius himself, Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre (frequently referred to, particularly in the United States, as Peter Faber). This proposal has the advantage that all three are exemplary individuals, and between them illustrate quite diverse yet valid aspects of this way of life. Ignatius, the source of the original inspiration, held the rapidly expanding congregation together from three small rooms in Rome, while working on *Constitutions* to codify its charism. Francis Xavier, the quintessential missionary, travelled to far distant lands scarcely known just a generation earlier, eager to spread the word of God. And the third, and least known, of this group, Favre, described by an early biography in English as 'the quiet companion', travelled ceaselessly on foot back and forth across Europe on a series of missions, maintaining a love for all his fellow Christians as the Reformation broke apart the unity of Christendom, and was recognised by Ignatius himself as the best giver of the Spiritual Exercises that he knew.

Pierre Favre SJ: Tireless Apostle, by Pierre Emonet, translated by Jerry Ryan from a French original published in 2017, succinctly tells the story of this attractive figure in 130 pages. It is timely since it is only just over a decade since Pope Francis, early in his pontificate, personally chose to canonize Pierre, setting aside the usual criteria of two miracles before this process can proceed.

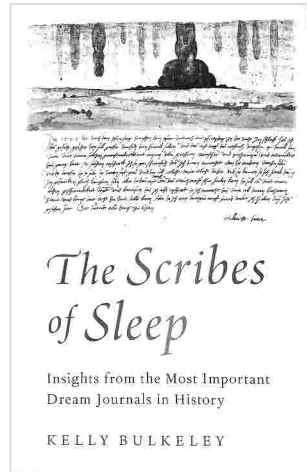
At a time when many early entrants to the Jesuits were men of noble birth, Favre came from a family of shepherds in an obscure hamlet in the duchy of Savoy, just south of Lake Geneva. In a diary he kept, known as the *Memoriale*, he spoke of his own desire for learning from an early age, and his parents arranged for him to go first to a local village school, then to a college ten miles from his home, and lastly to the University of Paris, where he arrived at the age of nineteen. One of his room-mates there was Francis Xavier, and a little later they were joined by Ignatius Loyola, twice their age but anxious to get assistance from the others with his belated studies. Ignatius, in turn, helped Favre overcome the scruples that held him back, which led to the younger man being ordained priest in 1534, the first of the (by then) seven companions to be so. After an abortive plan to minister in the Holy Land, the group moved to Rome, put themselves at the service of the Pope, and in 1540 the Society of Jesus was officially recognised.

Favre at that point only had six years left to live, but they were years packed with journeys and missions. The first half of this book traces these travels, from Italy to Germany, Germany to Switzerland, Switzerland to Spain, from Spain back to Germany, Germany to Portugal, and from Portugal back through Spain to Italy. It was there, in Rome, on his way to the Council of Trent, that he succumbed to a violent episode of the fever from which he had suffered repeatedly, probably exacerbated by exhaustion, and died, aged only forty.

The second part of Emonet's work takes a topical rather than a chronological approach. He presents Favre as a maser of discernment; as a foundational figure in the nascent Jesuit order; as a conciliatory church reformer; and as a modest yet intensely loyal friend. The overall picture that emerges is compellingly inviting, of one who never sought the limelight, yet whose prayer encompassed not simply the angels of the many towns and cities he visited, but also 'King Henry VIII of England, Martin Luther, the Grand Turk (Suleiman the Magnificent)', as well as Pope Paul III and the Holy Roman Emperor. The book goes a long way towards explaining why, long after his friends Loyola and Xavier were canonized, as one of his earliest acts as Pope, Francis fast-tracked Favre to sainthood.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Kelly Bulkeley, *The Scribes of Sleep: Insights from the Most Important Dream Journals in History* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2023). 978 0 1976 0960 6, pp.264, £19.99.



This is a very readable and interesting volume which, despite its apparently narrow focus, has much to say about the human experience and how we as individuals relate to the world around us. The author has a background in psychology and religion, with a specialism in the subject of dreaming. Those with a particular interest in psychology and psychoanalysis might find much of interest in it, but since, as the author writes, 'dreaming is universal, dream recall is nearly universal, and dream-sharing is widespread' (3), the book has a much wider possible audience.

The place of dreams in religious experience and spirituality is apparent from scripture and the lives of the saints. Although none of the figures who are used as case studies in this book are saints, there are evident parallels between the lives of those who have written these dream journals, and the lives of more famous mystics and religious figures such as Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross or Ignatius of Loyola. One of the main purposes of this book is to bring together insights from the study of dreams and that of religious and spiritual experience. It helps readers to understand dreams as a facet of their consciousness and understand better how their dreams relate to their intuition.

In the first part of the book, the author sets out some general remarks about dreaming and dream journals, acknowledging that there is a gap between the dreams themselves and what gets recorded. He goes on to explain his choice of the dream journals he will go on to analyse. These are drawn from a variety of historical periods and diverse cultures. The biographical vignettes about each of these, while short, are worth reading in themselves, since the 'dream journalists' chosen are interesting figures. Bulkeley briefly notes the difficulties of translation and cultural transmission in analysing dreams, but perhaps this point is worthy of more attention, particularly since he is examining dream journals from such diverse cultures and languages.

As the author explains, in recent times, studies of dreams have used digital methods to examine the occurrence of particular themes, words and phrases found in collections of dream narratives held in dream databases. (This, incidentally, means that it is possible to examine the dataset used by the author if desired). Bulkeley does not look at these methods uncritically,

but explains the various pitfalls and merits pertaining to them. In the following section, he looks at some of the main analytical frameworks that have historically been used to analyse dreams, drawing on Freud, Jung and cultural psychological approaches among others.

The author notes that although 'A dream journal is more like a poetry notebook than a newspaper report, more of an emotional collage than a factual documentary' (102), dream journals show the 'emotional contours of our lives' (103). He argues that it is possible for a third party, not acquainted with the person's biography, to look at a dream journal and deduce what may be intrinsically meaningful. In other words, dream analysis is not something confined purely to a discussion between a patient and his or her psychoanalyst or therapist. In fact, people might make a better sense of their dreams if they understand the broader dream landscape.

In the last section of the book, the author draws on ideas from religious studies to establish a framework for how dreams fit within broader religious or spiritual experience. A dream journal is not simply an introspective exercise, Bulkeley claims. Dreams can reflect on social, rather than just personal, concerns, and dreams can highlight 'hidden social conflicts' (142–143), for example. He observes a connection between people who choose to record their dreams and those who have deeper religious and spiritual insight (151). Writers of dream journals tend to have 'a high degree of trust in their own reason, experience and intuition' (157), and dreams, for some, are therefore part of a path towards spiritual growth and insight which can (and does) lead them to take positive action within the world or society in which they live and reshape their own lives and personal relationships in good ways.

Although dreams can be similar in some ways to mystical experiences such as visions, Bulkeley argues that they are different, in that dreamers tend not to have experiences of simply being 'at one' with the Divine, but rather tend to be present in their dream and able to act in the dream world. Moreover, dreams are often lively and full of complex symbolism. The dreamers discussed here are united by a drive to describe their dreams to others, suggesting a desire to communicate something which might otherwise be seen as ineffable.

Bulkeley argues that the people who wrote the dream journals examined in his study tended towards a pluralistic world-view (whether or not they subscribed to a particular religion, though most were religious in some way or other), and to have a tendency towards individualism, or to be 'free spirited', as he puts it—that is, to struggle against some of the 'norms' of the society or culture in which they were living. He also states that they tended towards a pluralist worldview (173–182), but 'pluralism in this context should not be treated as a personal fantasy world however—delving into the unconscious does not mean losing sense of social reality' (180).

The author concludes:

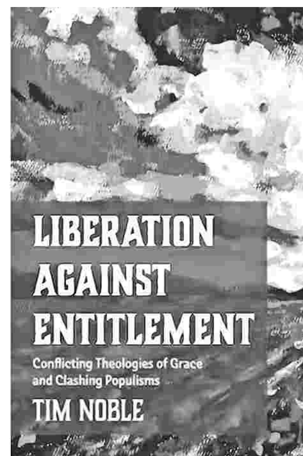
> Over time, they cultivate an emergent nocturnal awareness, a kind of night vision of the soul that enables them to see within the dynamic darkness of sleep and move with purpose and intentionality through the manifold dimensions of their unconscious mind and through whatever other worlds and realms of reality they discover in the process … [their journals enable] them to see beyond the daunting limits of the present to envision new possibilities ahead and better paths forward for themselves and others. (185)

Even if a reader does not fully agree with everything Bulkeley argues, or perhaps even his methodological approach, this study is thought-provoking. Perhaps the most important point that Bulkeley makes is that writing a dream journal and reflecting on one's dreams over time encourages people to integrate this aspect of their experience with their life. This seems to be in keeping with the spiritual insights of St Ignatius of Loyola, whose daydreams and time spent mulling over spiritual movements were such an important part of discerning his life's course.

Dreams are an important and frequently neglected facet of human experience. They should be integrated into our faith and spirituality rather than ignored or, even worse, suppressed. It may not be that dreams tell us something in a straightforward way, but reflecting upon them is more than simply introspection, it helps us to be more fully human.

Elizabeth Harrison

Tim Noble, *Liberation against Entitlement: Conflicting Theologies of Grace and Clashing Populism* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2022). 97 8 1666 7130 0, pp.272, £33.00.



Of the seven chapters in this excellent book, the fifth and sixth constitute the core of its argument, devoted to a presentation of the thought of Pope Francis. The author repeatedly refers to the image of a polyhedron, favoured by Francis for speaking of the complexity of social order. Quoting the Pope's *Fratelli tutti* he explains that a polyhedron 'can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching, and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amidst disagreements and reservations' (206). This image is intended to free us from a too narrow view and instead challenge us to

consider the many facets of social reality and the corresponding multiplicity of perspectives from which those facets can be regarded.

Tim Noble's book itself presents something of a polyhedron, and the title already provides a hint of the complexity addressed: clashing populisms, conflicting theologies and the polarisation of entitlement and liberation. The question raised in the introduction is how their faith can give Christians hope and courage 'to work for the restoration of wholeness against a backdrop of division and exclusion' (2). The division and exclusion in question is not only that signalled by the words in the title; extensive accounts of the social and political situations in Brazil and Czechia, both environments familiar to the author, illustrate the conflicts and polarisations that evoke the longing for reconciliation and wholeness.

Wholeness may be evoked by the notion of the people, connoting some coherence and unity, and that is surely intended when the theological concept of the People of God is used. However, sources in political philosophy (specifically Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau) make us aware that the notion of *people* can be variously constructed. Populisms of different kinds construct their preferred notion of the people, and whether of right-wing or left-wing provenance, they invariably shape an identity by excluding some people who do not belong. Noble interprets the conflicts he finds in both Brazil and Czechia as clashing populisms. He identifies in both cases a 'struggle between a form of right-wing populism, heavily nationalist and exclusivist, and forms of left or centre-left populism, which are more socially (though not necessarily ethnically) inclusive' (52).

To this layer of political analysis, he adds a theological reading in terms of competing theologies of grace. Considering theology as primarily talk about God, Noble argues that conflicting theologies reflect differing views of who God is, and how God deals with creation: 'Is God at our service, or are we at God's service?' (51). Entitlement theologies consider God to be bound by God's promises to deliver to believers the graces and favours they consider themselves entitled to receive because of their allegiance. Inevitably such thinking in terms of entitlement grounds an exclusivity such that the people united in the nation, or ethnic group or Church, understand themselves as divided from others, whether foreigners, or migrants, or members of some minority groups.

The alternative theology of grace is inclusive and rejects the filters of exclusion. In this way it can ground a political engagement on behalf of the other, pursuing the inclusion of those who otherwise are marginalised because of social status, race, gender, nationality or sexual orientation. Hence it is a liberating theology, and a theology of liberation. Deliverance is on offer not only for those whose neglected interests are being advocated,

but also for the advocates themselves who are liberated from the constricting mindsets of entitlement.

Having mapped the problems of social division and the associated theologies of entitlement, Noble comments on the writings of Pope Francis as delivering precisely the kind of theology of liberation that is required. Chapter 5, 'A Liberating Theology of Service', takes the Pope's 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* and unpacks its relevance to the problems of social division. Noble offers a helpful elaboration on the four principles, which many readers find difficult to understand. Seeing them as theological criteria for reading events, the author shows how they can guide discernment of how to respond and engage politically.

'Time is superior to space' is read in terms of a polarity between fullness and limit, and prompts an attitude of patient waiting that might help one avoid being caught up in an intemperate reaction or social movement. 'Unity prevails over conflict' is glossed with another phrase from the exhortation, 'reconciled diversity', pointing to unity that can sustain the conflict. 'The reality is more important than the idea' suggests the priority of praxis over theory, and the necessity to attend to experience and not simply invoke doctrine in the manner of slogans. 'The whole is greater than the part' invokes the common good as a staple element of Catholic social teaching, but Noble also reads it in terms of a tension between the universal and the particular (for example, Catholic and Roman). This tension must be sustained, and not dissolved by opting for one pole in preference to the other.

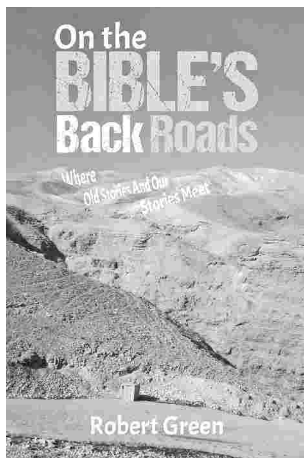
Noble goes on to show how these four criteria can ground a critique of a theology of entitlement that inevitably takes the wrong side in the various disjunctions. At the same time, they illustrate what a theology of grace can offer. The following chapter, '*Fratelli tutti*: The Grace-Filled Path to Liberation', elaborates the theology of grace that Pope Francis presented in his 2020 encyclical. Following on from *Laudato si'* (2015), on care for our common home, this letter addressed the vision of a social order that would be commensurate with the dignity of every person, and the implications this vision has for engagement in politics, and specifically in conflict with representatives of opposing visions. Francis stresses community as opposed to individualism, care for the other as opposed to self-interest, commitment to dialogue as opposed to domination, search for the truth as opposed to relativism.

The vision of a theology of liberating grace requires openness to the gift of God's Spirit and so the final chapter addresses the required transformation with a commentary on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. This allows for an integration of the various facets of the polyhedron, returning to the themes of discernment relying on gifts of wisdom and understanding, liberation

worked by the Spirit as the giver of life, and the rejection of entitlement that reduces the Spirit to a cashier. The declared aim of the book to explore how their faith can provide hope and courage for Christians to work to overcome divisions and strive politically for unity in diversity is well achieved.

Patrick Riordan SJ

Robert Green, *On the Bible's Back Roads: Where Old Stories and Our Stories Meet* (London: Austin Macauley, 2024). 978 1 3984 5589 4, pp.172, £8.99.



The great thing about this book is that readers will, if they are diligent, get to know the Old Testament really quite well, and from an angle rather different from that to which they may be accustomed. The title is intriguing, of course, and carries the important and useful reminder that the Bible is presented to us as a story, or set of stories, and that the story (or stories) may be expected to touch on our lives, especially perhaps in Advent or Lent. To that end the text invites very attentive reading, in its journey through some of the more obscure, and, it must be said, fascinatingly flawed, biblical characters. It will be an enormous help in learning 'how the Bible works'.

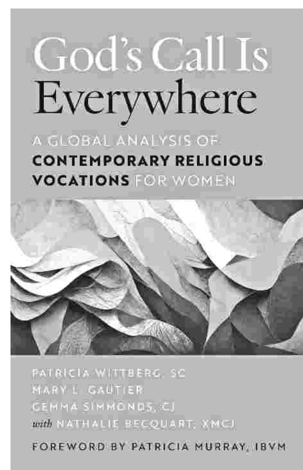
One example of Robert Green's careful reading is the story from Genesis 19 of the destruction of Sodom, which he correctly identifies as punishment for xenophobia rather than for (homo)sexual misbehaviour, as is frequently supposed. The biblical stories are retold for our time, and each reflection is followed by a useful angled question to help the stories come alive. In particular, the reader is reminded of what you might call the 'attentiveness of God', especially to the poor and vulnerable.

This is all managed without the heavy language into which biblical study can too often lapse; the language is on the whole admirably accessible. I am thinking particularly of the all-too-brief material about Melchisedek in the Old Testament, which left so much freedom to the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Letter to the Hebrews. There is a splendid rehabilitation of Balaam against the rather negative verdict of 2 Peter and the Letter of Jude, as well as an admirable account of the precision skills of Bezalel and Oholiab (and you must look them up if you have forgotten who they are). You may also relish the treatment of Rahab: was she really a prostitute or just an early instance of Airbnb?

Robert Green includes some very helpful autobiographical revelations. 'Telling our own story' can be an excellent thing to do when we grapple with scripture. The stories that Green revisits come from both the Old and New Testaments; and he does very well to show how closely they belong together. Many of the interpretations that he covers will not be new to the reader; but it is always salutary to revisit a biblical text that you thought you knew quite well. At the end of each brief reflection (and it must be said that these are all quite brief), there is a sensible thought for prayer and a helpful question to ponder. On almost every page there is a fresh insight; and—you cannot get away from it—the developing discovery that the Bible has a voice which enables it to speak to the most unlikely people. It also never fails to remind us of the difficulties of being a disciple.

Nicholas King SJ

God's Call Is Everywhere: A Global Analysis of Contemporary Religious Vocations for Women, edited by Patricia Wittburg and others (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2023). 978 0 8146 6913 6, pp.248, £21.99.



This book, recommended in the foreword as essential reading for all members of women's religious institutes, provides sociological data regarding vocations in the context of the widespread decline in the number of women entering religious congregations today. In chapter 2, numerous tables and figures (the small-scale format of these can be challenging to access) indicate what is attracting younger women to religious life, and suggest some of the hindrances. Throughout the book verbatim comments from newer members are recorded. In addition, theological insights and thoughtful reflection on contemporary religious life are offered by those responsible for formation and vocation promotion.

The contributors include seven members of different religious congregations, and two laywomen—a sociologist from the USA, and a vocation director from Ireland.[1] All of these strongly believe that religious should not allow

[1] Chapter 5, 'New Vocations and Vocational Exploration in Britain and Ireland', refers briefly to the experience of Anglican nuns, but the main emphasis of the book is vocations to Roman Catholic religious congregations.

limited numbers to lead to loss of confidence in their way of life. God is continuing to call women to the radical following of Christ that is embodied in the religious life, but religious institutes need to develop a fresh approach to that life in response to changes in the wider society of our times. In every age, as 'each founder's charism responded to a specific time, place and need' (77), consecrated religious life has been the seedbed of evangelical innovation, recognising the need for a change of attitudes and lifestyles in a changing world.

Many of the enquirers and newer members from different parts of the world had taken part in a discernment retreat or live-in experience with their institute before formal entry to the novitiate. Typically, with little or no encouragement from family and friends, they entered religious life in their late twenties or mid-thirties, often after several years of professional work and having benefited from a variety of life experiences—some had been married, many had volunteered in charity, parish or mission work or participated in social justice initiatives. Today's candidates, often articulate, mature and independent-minded, may present a challenge to communities where the majority of the members are aged seventy or above and very few if any younger members have joined them over many years. This situation can be demanding on both sides, since a 'natural shift of attitudes, practices and cultural assumptions may not have taken place gradually over time' (136).

All the new entrants whose views are represented in this book see themselves as responding to a call from God. In an increasingly secularised world, they were attracted to religious life above all by a strong desire for prayer and spiritual growth. They see their role as witnessing to the values of the Reign of God: the growth of free and integrated persons, hospitality to the stranger, outreach to the poor, openness across national and international boundaries, and the proper use and care of creation.

For all the newer members, 'the ideal of community emerges strongly as one of the major attractions to a religious vocation, even where in reality it proves difficult to live up to' (67). These women make it clear that they want to live with others who share their values, while admitting that they can often find community life challenging, due to 'intercultural gaps—in age, class and ethnicity' (69). Very few want to live alone or in a small community of two or three. Most say they would prefer medium-sized communities of four to seven, or larger groups of eight or more, with members of different ages, from different cultures and engaged in different ministries.

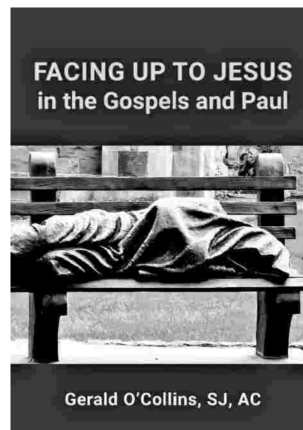
Religious today find themselves in the midst of a crisis of recruitment—worldwide, since the millennium, the number of religious sisters has decreased by nine per cent—and, with an ageing membership, they have been forced to close many of their traditional establishments. Some of the newer members

voice concern about the 'invisibility' of the life, and in this context, would like to review the practice of wearing a habit. They do not see this as denoting 'a higher status within the Church, just a distinctive one' (134). After all, if religious 'are almost invisible in church structure … and if people don't see that there is this life, they are not going to be attracted by it' (83). Would wearing a recognisable form of religious dress enable the wider public to become more aware of who religious women are and what they do? This question of visibility is not easily resolved, but some think it needs to be addressed seriously because it 'impacts not only approaches to vocations promotion but also how the future of religious life is envisaged' (133).

Through their canonical vows, religious undertake a lifelong dedication to God that excludes any other primary life commitment. Their way of life is based on a faith response to the call of God, and they live in communities that are intentionally God-centred. In the conclusion, the book asserts: 'Religious life is one of the most precious gifts which the Spirit has given to the Church' (210). If this is true, it is incumbent on religious institutes today, through mutual dialogue with enquirers and new entrants, to explore how 'the spiritual hungers of new generations and new cultures are calling them to change and adaptation' (210).

Teresa White fcJ

Gerald O'Collins, *Facing up to Jesus in the Gospels and Paul* (Dublin: Messenger, 2023). 978 1 9228 1583 5, pp.272, £20.00.



Could the recent developments in New Testament Studies contribute to the life of the contemporary believer and the Church? In *Facing Up to Jesus,* the Jesuit theologian Gerald O'Collins presents a helpful selection of his journal essays that introduce some of the current debates in biblical scholarship and offer christological insights into them. This anthology brings together biblical passages that invites the reader to reconsider critical questions regarding the significance of Jesus' life and message, their Pauline reception and the theological consequences of embracing the paschal mystery.

In the first section, O'Collins presents us with seven essays that discuss translation choices in certain gospel passages and their theological implications. In the first chapter, the author discusses the translation of *teleios* ('being

made perfect') in Matthew 5 and 19. This is followed by *polloi* ('many') in Matthew 22:14 and its eschatological implications; the so called 'parable of the child' in Mark 9:36–37 and its spiritual and sociological significance; and the dynamics of trembling (*tromos*), bewilderment (*ekstasis*) and fear (*ephobounto*) for the women at the tomb in Mark 16:1–8 (O'Collins suggests that silence is the natural reaction to becoming aware of the paschal mystery). Next, he offers a potent defence of the virginal conception of Christ in response to recent studies based on the apocryphal Gospel of Judas. He goes on to discuss the importance of the verb 'to have faith' (*pisteuein*) in the Gospel of John, concluding that the verbalisation of faith plays an instrumental role in articulating Johannine christology. Lastly, O'Collins turns to the third announcement of Christ's resurrection in John 21:14, highlighting the significance of verbs *ephanerōthē* and *egertheis* in expressing the fullness of Christ's involvement in the redemptive process.

In the next section O'Collins presents us with five essays that discuss current debates in Pauline hermeneutics and translation. First, he introduces the so-called Angelic Christology debate of Philippians 2:6–11, refuting Paul Holloway's claim that the early Pauline community thought of Christ as a 'special' angel. O'Collins then revisits this debate by addressing the limits of Holloway's historical critical exegesis and re-emphasizing the spiritual-theological heart of the christic hymn in Philippians 2. He goes on to explore how the models of collaboration between Paul and his co-workers could form a biblical framework for Curial reform. Then he discusses Hebrews 12:2 and the theological problem of translating *tēs pisteōs* as 'our faith' (as subjective genitive) rather than 'the faith of Christ' (as an objective genitive). O'Collins ends the section by offering a more general discussion of how to translate the Letter to the Hebrews, with a focus on how translation choices of the priestly and sacrificial language of this Epistle respect or distort the original meaning of the sacred author.

The third part of *Facing Up to Jesus* presents us with three essays on critical issues in contemporary christology. It looks first at the postmodern attempts to categorise Jesus' teachings as philosophy and poetry; O'Collins argues that Jesus' connection with reality, his profound relationship with God (the Father) and his deep rootedness in the human condition do not allow his teachings to be reduced to these categories. The next chapter explores the relationship between the Christian faith and freedom. To do so, O'Collins offers us a historical defence of the resurrection followed by an understanding of Easter faith in which the mystery of God's redeeming presence could only be received via the conscious embrace of Divine love in the person of Christ. O'Collins concludes by reconsidering Aquinas' cumulative approach to the resurrection, exploring in particular how this

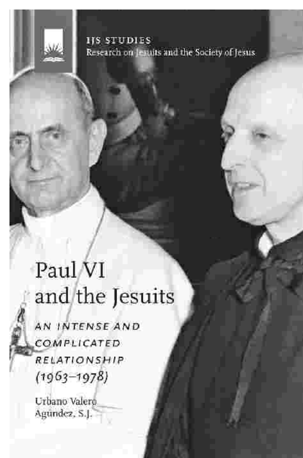
provides a means to open theological reflection beyond the realm of biblical historical criticism. He reflects on the paschal mystery in a multifocal way, which allows the believer to grasp more readily the complexity, depth and significance of the historicity of the resurrection of the Son of God.

As a collection of essays on contemporary christological debates, *Facing Up to Jesus* successfully achieves a wide and meaningful exploration of many critical issues for theologians in our century. However, O'Collins's greatest achievement in this book is to explore these complex technical questions in a very accessible way. Hence, for those well versed in theology and biblical scholarship, the book is a very helpful synthesis; but for the non-specialist (such as members of a bible study or *lectio divina* group) this book is an interesting context for enhancing a basic understanding of Jesus from the scriptures through theological reflection. In conclusion, *Facing Up to Jesus* is an interesting book for those in search of a deeper understanding of the Easter faith and its articulation with our contemporary reality.

Carlos Chuquihuara SJ

Urbano Valero Agúndez, *Paul VI and the Jesuits: An Intense and Complicated Relationship (1963–1978)* (Chestnut Hill: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2022). 978 1 9476 1716 2, pp.266, $34.95.

Is this a book for a niche readership? Its narrative of avoidable mistakes and misunderstandings arising between well-intentioned parties in close proximity, sharing the common aim of the good of the Roman Catholic Church, may well be instructive for a general reader.



The book recounts (in some detail and with supporting documents) a period of fraught relations between the Jesuits and Pope St Paul VI. The difficulties became acute during the Jesuit 32nd General Congregation, held in Rome from December 1974 to March 1975. Notwithstanding the degree to which these difficulties were then resolved, they had a longer effect.

Understanding the difficulties needs knowledge of Jesuit history and practice. Relevant points are concisely explained by the author, Urbano Valero. His credibility is unimpeachable. He served as provincial of Castile

and then of Spain. While Spanish Provincial he attended the 32nd General Congregation. Later he spent 25 years in the Jesuit headquarters in Rome, gathering then much of the material for this book, originally published in Spanish in 2019.

The tension between the Jesuits and Pope St Paul VI centred on the differing ways in which Jesuits express their commitment as Jesuits. How these differences arose is clearly explained, and how they became matter for discussion: about whether, unless these differences were maintained, the Jesuits would not be what their founder, St Ignatius, intended—in short, whether these differences, usually known as 'grades', are a substantial element of Jesuit identity.

The 'grades' were declared to be substantial by a General Congregation in 1923; additionally implying that to change them would likely require a pope's permission. The General Congregation of 1974 was influenced by more recent events: the Second Vatican Council and the 31st General Congregation of 1965–1966. The 31st General Congregation had had to address Jesuit change and renewal. Preparatory to meeting, it had received 2,021 petitions asking for different changes.

The 'grades', featured prominently in those petitions. Two sessions of that Congregation discussed the 'grades' as apparently at odds with the orientation of the recent Council. However, the Congregation left the question unresolved. It recommended the newly elected Jesuit superior general, Pedro Arrupe, should establish a commission of Jesuit experts to study the question. This he did. The intention was that the matter be resolved at the next General Congregation. In January 1975, the 32nd General Congregation began discussion of the 'grades'. It was a mistake to do so, and it evoked bitter responses from the Pope and officials in the Vatican.

A review doesn't allow a detailed explanation of what provoked the anger. Clearly, the Pope and officials misconstrued votes taken in the General Congregation, even though it was explained to them that the votes were indicative only. The votes in no way pointed to infidelity to or disrespect for the Pope. The votes were taken to establish how serious the delegates thought the matter of 'grades' and whether, if the majority thought it serious, papal permission should be sought to undertake full and determinative debate. However, these votes were taken after repeated indications of the Pope's opposition to any substantial changes in Jesuit identity and, it became clear, of any discussion of the matter of 'grades'.

Moreover, before the discussion had begun Fr Arrupe had had a meeting with the Secretary of State, Cardinal Villot. The outcomes of that meeting and of a subsequent one, in both of which the Pope's opposition

to any change in 'grades' was clearly stated, were not shared with the General Congregation. Although Fr Arrupe's intention was probably the preservation of the freedom of the General Congregation, the book's author, while a great admirer of Fr Arrupe, considers his silence to have lacked prudence and to have been an unfortunate and serious error.

Fr Arrupe is one of two figures who overshadow these events, the other being Pope St Paul VI. The book's author admires them both. The Pope is praised for his admiration of and concern for the Jesuits. His sincerity in his dealings with the Jesuits is underlined. Nevertheless, he may have put too much trust in the Jesuits and to have been excessively demanding of them. He could be 'tenacious' in maintaining his views in debatable matters. He was anxious, as were some Vatican officials, that, because of the foolish and hostile utterances of some Jesuits, the papacy was losing Jesuit support. The likely influence this would have had on other Catholic religious, if it had been true, was probably exaggerated by them.

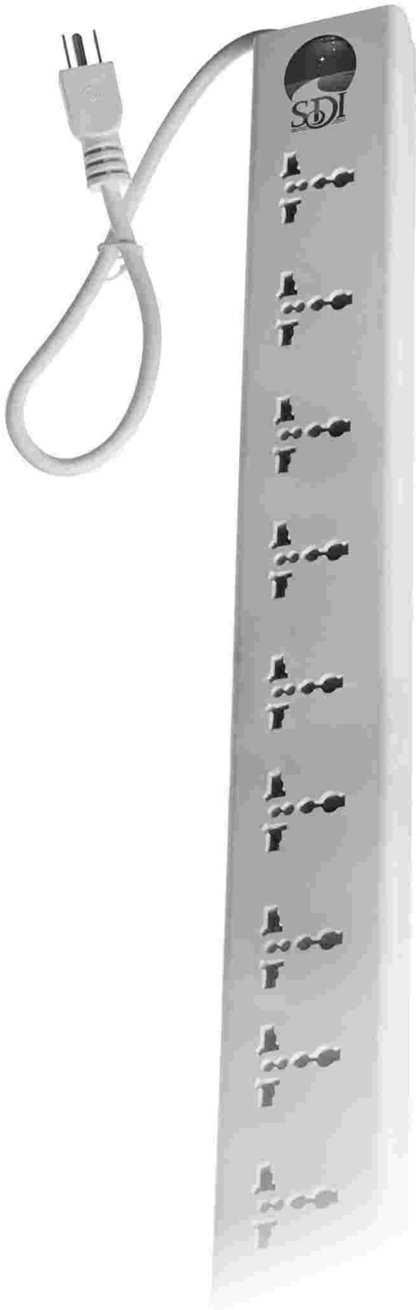
Fr Arrupe's attitude through these events appears nothing less than heroic. Fr Valero describes him as an admirable spiritual leader of the 32nd General Congregation, but as seeming to lack confidence in the practical handling of the situation that arose with the Vatican. In the years preceding 1974, Fr Arrupe's leadership had been constantly undermined by reports to the Vatican about the negative effects on the Jesuits caused by the previous General Congregation—mostly from discontented Spanish Jesuits. The public serenity Fr Arrupe sustained throughout the period the book covers, while he endured intense personal suffering, alone should ensure his canonization.

The negative reports haunted the Jesuits for some years. The reports were included in documents provided as material for the meetings of cardinals before the two conclaves of 1978 following Pope St Paul VI's death. The documents were intended to show the Jesuits as a 'problem' for the Church. The organizer of the meetings was Cardinal Villot in his role as Camerlengo (chamberlain). The material clearly influenced the attitude to the Jesuits of the two succeeding popes, John Paul I and St John Paul II.

Cardinal Villot was not the only person influencing minds and hearts. Jesuit readers will wonder what the author intended by referring to the 'occult influence' of Paolo Dezza, a delegate to the 32nd General Congregation and for many years the personal confessor of Pope St Paul VI. The book offers a lesson for every reader. In matters of greater moment, sincere, candid and sustained communication has no substitute.

Gero McLoughlin SJ

Spiritual companions connect here.



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