THE WAY

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ECOLOGIES OF HOPE

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Book Reviews

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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 grateful to the editors of *Manresa* for permission to translate the article by José A. García. 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

FOREWORD

JESUS INVITES HIS DISCIPLES to contemplate nature rather than the cares of the world (Matthew 6:26–34). He directs their attention to the birds flying through the air and the lilies growing in the fields. Then he tells them 'strive first for the kingdom of God' . His invitation to turn lovingly towards nature runs like a thread through all the articles in this issue, as does the response of commitment to the Kingdom. There are many ways of discussing ecology that arouse anxiety or even despair. Here we consider ecologies giving rise to a hope that, through our participation in the Kingdom of God, we can find ways of confronting the present environmental crisis.

José A. García quotes St Ignatius' autobiography where he says, 'the greatest consolation that he received was to look at the heavens and the stars' (*Autobiography*, n. 11). Even before writing the *Spiritual Exercises*, St Ignatius had realised that spiritual consolation is felt when we assume our role as creatures in God's creation, in harmony with other human beings and with nature as well as with God. Greg Kennedy explores this creaturehood through the practice of spiritual direction. Over the decades we have become better at listening to individual narratives, but we still need to hear the collective narratives of communities and even of the land itself. The hidden wisdom it holds can teach us much about how to respond to the environmental crisis and, in its silent communion with us, perhaps the land can offer us spiritual direction too.

Another consoling relationship with the land is exemplified in the culturally sensitive work of Oscar Momanyi, who reminds us that we can still take steps to restore our relationship with nature, even in an area of the world that has borne the most brutal impact of climate change. He has been involved in a number of initiatives in East Africa that have eased conflict and planted the seeds of environmental ethics among local people. Those with such direct practical experience are discovering that stewardship of the natural world goes hand in hand with care for communities. For Ania Grobicki, who has worked for forty years in the area of environment and climate, the experience of the Spiritual Exercises found its greatest expression in becoming a

co-worker with Christ and others in helping to restore the integrity of life on earth.

The US theologian and philosopher John B. Cobb (1925–2024) died on Boxing Day 2024. Robert Doud, who knew and worked with him, shares his interest in process theology. Here he explores how Cobb's view of spiritual discernment is orientated towards the building up of the Kingdom of God and an 'ecological civilisation' which takes as its core aim sustainability and respect for the environment. And László Zsolnai, who works for the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice in Oxford, explains the economics that might underpin such a civilisation according to Pope Francis. He acknowledges that sustainable development has to be intrinsic to economic policy, and that the financial aims of the economic system must be subtended to the values of human community. He also describes the 'Economy of Francesco' project which has begun to turn this vision into reality.

Jaime Tatay shows us that even when the desert is the result of our own spiritual aridity or of ecological degradation there is still hope that it can be a place of encounter with God. If we turn to nature and seek out the Kingdom, then perhaps the long-awaited new creation will come one step closer. And E. Edward Kinerk explores how, from the submicroscopic level of quantum particles to the supermacroscopic level of the known universe, the best perspective from which to view nature is through an expanded vision of the Kingdom of God. The retired Anglican bishop John Stroyan explores how the principle of 'cruciformity'—through which our lives and everything in creation take on the shape the cross—can inform the renewal of the Church. It is not by resting in comfort, but by uniting ourselves to the suffering of Christ that we can be renewed. Observing how Jesus rests in 'a deserted place' (Mark 6:31) in order to restore himself amidst the pressures of his ministry, Pope Francis has said: 'We need an "ecology of the heart", that is made up of rest, contemplation and compassion'.[1] Let us pray that we continue to heed his call to conversion—including ecological conversion—by placing our contemplation of nature at the heart of our work for the Kingdom of God.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

[1] Pope Francis, angelus, St Peter's Square, 18 July 2021.

GLIMPSES OF EDEN

A Quest for Ecological Conversion in East Africa

Oscar Momanyi

SHORTLY BEFORE the 26th Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Hannah Malcolm wrote a thought-provoking article in *The Tablet* entitled 'Good Grief'. It was a lamentation for a world that may well be past saving. Malcolm wrote about the growing reports of grief, anxiety and traumatic stress that have arisen from the existential threat of climate breakdown and ecological destruction. She argued that the human family needs to use the biblical notion of lamentation to mourn what is going on without falling into despair, and to resolve to live humbly in the current ecological crisis as they try to find solutions: 'It is in lament that we might finally start to speak honestly about the destruction before us'.[1] We need to develop habits of the heart that will enable us to mourn the destruction of the planet and map out a spiritual path—one that comes out of our converted hearts moved by 'good grief' and that can help us to restore the Earth. Our spiritual resources have a lot to offer in this regard.

The publication by Pope Francis of his encyclical *Laudato si'* in 2015 increased the impetus for communities to work on implementing initiatives promoting 'care for our common home'. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis noted that we are faced not with two separate crises—one environmental and the other social—but rather with one complex crisis which is both environmental and social. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature. To that end, Pope Francis invites all people of good will to participate in an 'ecological

[1] Hannah Malcolm, 'Good Grief: How to Live in a Collapsing World', *The Tablet*, 275/9424 (21 October 2021), 5.

conversion', a spiritual way of being that can enable us to see and tackle the ecological crisis with a renewed spiritual attitude that includes Malcolm's 'good grief'.[2]

Today, much still needs to be done to realise the Pope's vision. *Laudate Deum,* an update and extension to *Laudato si'*, which Pope Francis published in October 2023, demonstrates this. Nevertheless, action is being taken, often driven by spirituality, that goes unreported or unshared. I argue that there is an urgent need to communicate more success stories shaped by the spirituality of *Laudato si'*. As a result of such stories, people will find more hope and enthusiasm as they face the reality of the climate catastrophe in the awareness that we all confront these problems together, as a human family. That enthusiasm will help us to be imaginative and creative in the quest to alleviate them.

I would like to reflect on my own experience of working to promote the care of our common home in East Africa and witnessing others doing so. In recent years the region has experienced drought and flooding on a scale never seen before; but there is, nevertheless, still hope that we can avert such situations in the future.[3] People of good will, spurred by Malcolm's 'good grief' for the earth and by their faith and spirituality, are capable of bringing healing to the ecological catastrophe we face. I have witnessed ecological conversion taking place in my heart and the hearts of others as we worked together. This conversion is nonetheless an ongoing, even a lifetime, task. Hence, there is a need for continual reflection on what we are doing as a human family in order to develop new impetus and insights that can remotivate us to protect our common home.

My guiding thread is the spirituality of St Ignatius which is outlined in his *Spiritual Exercises*. It is a world-affirming spirituality that seeks to find God in all things; God's presence can be gleaned from all human experiences. This connects well with the integral ecology and spirituality that Pope Francis envisions in *Laudato si'*, in which everything is interconnected: our relations to one another, the environment and God belong to the same movement.

I have lived in different social contexts in East Africa while collaborating with others in the care of our common home. I will reflect

[2] Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, nn. 216–221.

[3] See, for example, Sara Kapan, 'Climate Change Caused Catastrophic East Africa Drought, Scientists Say', *The Washington Post* (27 April 2023).

on these initiatives and endeavour to show how spirituality, including Ignatian spirituality, is embedded in them. A deeper appreciation of the spirituality underlying these enterprises will help popularise such initiatives and make them a priority for the Church in East Africa and other parts of the world.

Climate Change and Conflict in the Bahr el Ghazal

Let me take the example of the Bahr el Ghazal region of South Sudan. This country usually gets negative publicity in the mainstream media that focuses on violence and deprivation: the news from there is generally about civil war or the dire situation in refugee camps. But that is just one story, and it is dangerous to have only a single story, since every narrative has another side that needs to be acknowledged. The 'single story'—as described by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—deprives South Sudan and other African countries of good narratives that remain untold.[4]

A few years ago, I worked in the town of Wau, which is in the west of the Bahr el Ghazal. Bahr el Ghazal can loosely be translated from Arabic as 'sea of gazelles', reflecting the abundance of the region's wildlife. Situated on the fringes of the Jur and Agok rivers, which form

View of the River Jur, Bahr el Ghazal

[4] 'The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.' Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'The Danger of a Single Story', *TedGlobal* (July 2009), at https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript, accessed 2 March 2025.

part of the greater Nile river basin, Wau is covered by green vegetation, especially during the rainy season. Even though the region experiences high temperatures throughout the year, it is rich in trees, most of them mango trees. The forests around the town contribute immensely to its breathtaking views. In addition, tropical grass flourishes during the rainy season and grows to a height of up to two metres. The fauna is equally interesting: there are birds, such as partridges and kingfishers, various species of lizard, different types of insects, hedgehogs and several species of snake, among others.

The local people in Wau are the Balanda, the Luo (commonly known as the Jur) and the Dinka. While the Balanda are mainly agricultural folk, the Jur and the Dinka are nomadic cattle-keepers who have made their living out of animal husbandry for thousands of years. They graze their cattle along the Agok and Jur rivers throughout the year. For many years, the Dinka and Jur nomadic herdsmen and the Balanda farmers have lived together in harmony and kept their ways of life. However, in the twenty-first century, the reality of global warming has started to take a toll on the Bahr el Ghazal. This has caused a lot of ethnic tension among these communities.

With the increasing temperatures there is evident pressure on the land around Wau and the Bahr el Ghazal in general. The major source of energy is wood from the forests. On a normal day, one can see many charcoal-burners emerging from the forests near Wau, carrying loads of charcoal to sell in the main market, Souk Jou. The beautiful forests of Wau and other parts of the Bahr el Ghazal are in danger from excessive charcoal production. Moreover, incidents of cattle-keepers grazing their animals on the crops of the agriculturalists are also on the increase. The tension between the cattle keepers and the agriculturalists over land has sometimes led to deadly interethnic clashes.

The cattle themselves occasionally put too much pressure on the land and overgrazing leaves it bare. The topsoil is blown away when the mighty yearly winds (*hubbub*) arrive from the north. To make matters worse, during the dry season many farmers burn their land to fertilise it. This burning sometimes creates forest fires that destroy the flora, as well as numerous homes and property. The Sahara Desert, which is not too far away, seems to be moving closer and closer to beautiful Wau because of deforestation and improper land use.

The conflict between herders and farmers in the Bahr el Ghazal is both ecological and social: there is a need to address it in order to

achieve lasting peace. Tackling environmental degradation and educating the people on ways of sharing natural resources can go a long way to help resolve the conflicts that keep erupting almost yearly.

Spirituality and Education

Some spiritual aspects of the customs of the Dinka, Jur and Balanda can help heal the ecological crisis. For instance, totems connect human beings with nature in the cosmologies of all three cultures. These are revered animals, plants and even rocks especially associated with the clans of many ethnic groups in certain parts of Africa. Totems are considered to be inhabited by ancestral spirits and have taboos associated with them.[5] In Dinka, Jur and Balanda cosmologies one does not harm totems.

Totemism can be one way of helping to protect the animals and plants of the Bahr el Ghazal from being indiscriminately destroyed. The totemic worldview is one of reverence and protection of creation. People in such a context believe that hunting, harming or eating one's totem could bring misfortune, and hence the members of these communities are required to protect their totems from any danger.[6] This inherent custom of deep cosmic reverence for creation and respect for life seems to be disappearing with the coming of modernisation in the Bahr el Ghazal and elsewhere in Africa.

The Dinka, Jur and Balanda peoples can be re-educated about the culture of reverence for their own totems and those of others as a way to protect the environment and to practise a general care and valuing of creation. The inhabitants of the Bahr el Ghazal should not allow modernisation to drive out sacred customs, which have an embedded spirituality. Other places in Africa may need help to rediscover such cosmic values embedded in their own cultures.

On another level, formal education in ecology can also offer a way out of the ecological crisis. At the Jesuit Loyola Secondary School in Wau, Jesuits are trying to educate their students about environmental ethics. They cover such practical issues as the importance of planting trees, keeping the environment clean, the value of keeping a modest number of cattle that can be sustained by the land and the dangers of burning fallow land. The general education the students receive puts

[5] See Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013), 37.

[6] For more details about totems among the Dinka and totemism in general in the Bahr el Ghazal see Ibrahim Bedri, 'More Notes on Padang Dinka', *Sudan Notes and Records* (1948). Also see Francis Mading Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wiston, 1972).

them in a position to make intelligent choices about the environment. Most of them show a sense of responsibility and love for it after graduating from school. Moreover, the school is dependent on solar energy, a fact that motivates the students to begin reflecting on sustainable energy alternatives.

Using Ignatian spirituality as a tool that can help the conversion of hearts, Jesuits encourage students to practise ecological and cosmic awareness in their general educational life. These young men and women are part of the hope for saving the Bahr el Ghazal from further degradation. They are ambassadors for the care for our common home now and in the future. The Jesuits realised that such environmental education could also benefit the community around the school. Several times in the past few years, the school has organized environmental sensitisation activities which have been well attended by adults from the community.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

In addition to the environmental work at the Loyola Secondary School, the Multi-Education Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS), which is situated in the town of Rumbek in the Lakes State of the greater Bahr el Ghazal, educates the local Dinka people about environmental issues and promotes 'climate-smart agriculture', which focuses on increased productivity, enhanced resilience and reduced carbon emissions.[7]

The Dinka of Rumbek keep cattle, just as the Dinka of Wau do. In the small village of Akol Jal, Jesuits have set up a farm on which local people learn proper animal and crop husbandry alongside the use of alternative sources of energy rather than relying exclusively on wood. Climate-smart agriculture is the main driving force here. Most of the beneficiaries of this project are women, who learn how to create kitchen gardens, a skill that is practical and easy to implement in their homesteads.[8] They also learn how to keep climate-resilient crops that show high productivity.

[7] 'Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) is a set of farming methods designed to increase the resilience and productivity of land affected by climate change …. Climate Smart Agriculture isn't a solution to climate change. But it is a solution to many of the secondary and tertiary problems caused by climate shocks.' 'Climate Smart Agriculture: Back to Basics to Fight Climate Change and Hunger', *Concern WorldWide*, at https://www.concern.org.uk/story/what-is-climate-smart-agriculture, accessed 2 March 2025. And see Leslie Lipper and others, 'Climate-Smart Agriculture for Food Security', *Nature Climate Change*, 4 (December 2014), 1068.

[8] For details about the benefits of kitchen gardening see Shakur Pasha and others, 'Kitchen Gardening', *Just Agriculture*, 3/6 (February 2023).

Both MAJIS and the Jesuit Ecological Centre (JEC) in Rumbek emphasize the use of solar energy. The JEC trains local people in how to install and use solar energy in their households. The use of biogas is also encouraged by both organizations as an alternative source of energy. The production of biogas is possible in the Bahr el Ghazal, because of the availability of cattle excrement from the numerous herds found in the area.

Green Fuel

Another inspirational story is that of Archbishop Paul Pitia Yugusuk of the Central Equatoria internal province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan. Archbishop Yugusuk is focusing on the development of biodiesel stoves using water hyacinth from the banks of the Nile in Juba and along other stretches of the river's course. The invasive growth of water hyacinth is a problem on the Nile; it tends to clog parts of the river, obstructing transport and killing various sorts of aquatic life. Harvesting water hyacinth to produce biodiesel solves some of these problems and at the same time helps the residents of Juba and other areas along the Nile, who struggle to get the energy they need for cooking. This in turn will save forests from being destroyed to produce charcoal.

Water hyacinth growing in the River Pibor in South Sudan

Archbishop Yugusuk saw an opportunity and so began this green fuel initiative. He had to learn what to do from a similar project on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya.[9] His project, which is still in its inception, will require considerable initial capital, but

[9] Fred Ouko, 'Kenyan Entrepreneur Turns Water Hyacinth Weed into Cooking Fuel', *Reuters* (21 July 2021), at https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyan-entrepreneur-turns-water-hyacinth-weed-into-cooking-fuel-2021-07-27/, accessed 1 October 2023.

its long-term positive impact on the environment inspires Archbishop Yugusuk to continue working for its realisation. He is an example of a man moved by his spirituality and faith to seek to make a difference for his community.

Social Justice: The Jesuit Hakimani Centre

Moving away from South Sudan, the Jesuit Hakimani Centre is a centre for social concern for the Jesuits in East Africa, based in Nairobi, Kenya. The centre focuses on a faith that does justice guided by the spirituality of St Ignatius. Hakimani is a combination of two Swahili words, *haki* and *amani*: *haki* means justice and *amani* means peace. The Jesuit Hakimani Centre had its humble origins in the early 1990s in Kangemi, one of Nairobi's highly populated residential areas, where the Jesuits ran the St Joseph the Worker parish. It was officially launched as a centre for social justice in 2001. I had a privileged chance to work at the centre and to witness and participate first-hand in the work it does in the care of our planet.

Over the years the centre has carried out some stimulating ecological projects, all inspired by Pope Francis's call for ecological conversion as outlined in *Laudato si'*. Two of them, inspirational in terms of their success, offer encouragement to the ecological activities of the Church in East Africa and elsewhere.

Smart Water Governance

The first project was the Climate Smart Water Governance initiative, a flagship effort for climate resilience.[10] It focused on two arid and semi-arid counties in Kenya, Kilifi and Garissa, which are traversed by the Tana river. The major challenges faced in the two counties included the overuse of water by upstream counties for agriculture and the diminishing water quality owing to pollution. Additionally, the lack of proper legal frameworks to guide the sharing of water resources and conservation of water catchment areas, and the poor management of water catchment areas, were problems needing significant attention. There are persistent conflicts over water resources in both the upstream and downstream counties, especially during the annual dry season and

[10] This project was funded by the British government's Department for International Development under the Deepening Democracy Programme for accountable government. See 'Climate Smart Water Governance: Executive Summary' (11 September 2019), *Scofield*, at https://scofieldassociates.co.ke/climate-smart-water-governance/, accessed 2 March 2025.

times of drought. Sharing of water resources during dry seasons will help farmers and herders live harmoniously.

For three years, beginning in 2017, the Jesuit Hakimani Centre worked with local communities and the county governments of Kilifi and Garissa to improve access to clean and reliable water. One measure of success was the change in attitudes among the locals to their use of water. Instances of sustainable use and the sharing of scarce water resources in both upstream and downstream communities were cited by the beneficiaries. The centre also trained people in about 400 households across the two counties about the sustainable use of water. The project focused on how water scarcity affects women and children more than men, and how women can be empowered to be at the forefront in helping to improve water accessibility.

The other area of success was in advocacy. The centre was able to shape water policies debated at the county assemblies of the two counties by crafting a policy paper and policy briefs that guided the debates on water issues. Working with the members of the county assemblies the Jesuit Hakimani Centre helped these men and women pass legislation geared towards protecting water catchment areas and the sustainable use and sharing of water resources. The policy paper was titled the *Intercounty Shared Water Ecosystem Policy*.[11] It attempted to formulate a framework with the aim of responding to climate change in the utilisation, management, governance and conservation of shared water ecosystems in the Tana and Athi river basins. This project is an inspiration for other organizations and people of good will to begin such initiatives in other endangered water basins in East Africa.

Food Sovereignty

The second success story is the Jesuit Hakimani Centre's Food Sovereignty for Marginal Communities project.[12] Through this project, the centre worked for ten years (2013–2023) to bolster the productive capacity of agriculture in the impoverished counties of Kitui, Kajiado and Isiolo in Kenya. They have taken an approach to food security which aims at influencing government policies and practices to reflect community

[11] *Intercounty Shared Water Ecosystem Policy* (Nairobi: Jesuit Hakimani Centre, 2020).

[12] The project was funded by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), seeking to empower marginal communities who face food insecurity. Sovereignty here implies the ability of these communities to produce food independently for themselves rather than rely on handouts.

voices and needs. The project focused on supporting smallholder farmers to practise more resilient and climate-adapted forms of farming similar to the ones advocated by the Jesuits in Rumbek; it too promotes the methods of climate-smart agriculture.

Over the years, the Jesuit Hakimani Centre has been a strong advocate for food sovereignty in the three counties and has also sought to facilitate community contributions to policy dialogue and to enable a ripple effect of community-owned initiatives. Finally, in light of the Ignatian way of reviewing the experience we encounter, the centre has endeavoured to evaluate the success of its own interventions in improving food security at the household level.

In practical terms, the project prioritised kitchen gardening as a way to improve food security in these communities: 'a kitchen garden can supply up to half of all non-staple food needs'.[13] It has challenged rural households that predominantly practise nomadic animal husbandry to engage in kitchen gardening as well. Communities in Kitui, Kajiado and Isiolo are subject to erratic rainfall and frequent droughts that have affected their livestock-keeping. The practice of kitchen gardening has the potential to feed them all year round.

[13] 'From Plot to Plate—a "Kitchen Garden" Story', *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, at https://www.fao.org/gender/insights/insights-detail/From-plot-to-plate-a-kitchen-garden-story/en, accessed 4 March 2025.

Ecologically Friendly Spirituality: Mwangaza

Moving on to another success story, Mwangaza Jesuit Spirituality Centre, situated on forty acres of land on the outskirts of the city of Nairobi, is a vibrant retreat house run by the Jesuits in East Africa. *Mwangaza* is a Swahili word meaning light, hence the centre is a symbol of light. The beauty of the place makes it a natural setting for retreats, a place where people seek inner light. Many species of plants and animals are found at Mwangaza, and the centre tries to champion an ecologically friendly spirituality.

Apart from offering traditional retreats, Mwangaza has among its programmes several intentional activities that aim at promoting care for our common home. The annual *Laudato si'* workshop is facilitated by Mwangaza in collaboration with a group of young men and women who are inspired by the spirituality of St Ignatius. They are known as the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, and they seek to disseminate the message of environmental protection to all parts of Africa.[14] It is particularly inspiring that their agenda is set by youth and run by youth—a beacon of hope for Africa.

In addition to these workshops, over the years Mwangaza has also offered several Saturday Days of Prayer or Days of Recollection based on the themes in *Laudato si'*, which are popular with local people. Over seventy people have participated in each event, which highlights how important environmental issues are for the Christians in Nairobi. All the retreats provided at Mwangaza endeavour to link spirituality to ecological issues and encourage retreatants to reflect on their contribution to the care of our common home.

In March 2022, Mwangaza was host to the African hub of the International Ignatian Ecospiritual Conference, which was organized by the Australian Jesuits.[15] The conference, which was partly a retreat, ran for five days. It highlighted that ecological collaboration at the continental level is possible and can bring meaningful change through dialogue and sharing of ideas. Conversations with people from different continents about what they are doing enriched the participants with ways to be ecologically literate. We can learn from other people far away from us and implement what we have learnt in our own contexts.

[14] See: https://www.cynesa.org/, accessed 4 March 2025.
[15] See https://jesuit.org.au/international-ignatian-ecospiritual-conference-iiec2022/, accessed 4 March 2025.

For example the conference introduced the idea of *Laudato si'* clubs, which have been formed, often in schools and colleges, all over the world. This is something that the Mwangaza centre could explore.

As a result of Mwangaza's ecological awareness programmes, the Jesuits have teamed up with the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa to promote paper recycling, which is not yet an established industry in Kenya. The practice of burning waste paper, which increases carbon in the atmosphere, is rampant because there is no other better way to dispose of it. The sisters have a project for collecting waste paper to process and turn into bricks for construction.[16] These are then sold as a source of income for an orphanage run by the sisters. Such creative initiatives need to be encouraged.

Apart from its regular spirituality programmes, Mwangaza is also taking practical steps such as using solar power and engaging in sustainable farming. The solar project reduces both the cost of electricity to the centre and its carbon dioxide emissions. The farm produces vegetables and fruit for most of the year, using manure from the animals as compost. Mwangaza also raises bees, and their chicken farm produces meat, eggs, and manure for fertilizer. The farm provides a beautiful ecosystem in which people can pray with nature. Underlying the spirituality of ecological sustainability at Mwangaza is the fact that caring for the environment goes side by side with caring for spiritual lives. How people pray reflects the way they care for the environment. What motivates the ecological work at Mwangaza is St Ignatius' Contemplation to Attain Divine Love (Exx 231–237); one of the days of prayer on care for our common home was dedicated to the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.

How people pray reflects the way they care for the environment

Two Inspiring Examples

I would like to conclude by highlighting the contribution of two people who are influenced by their spirituality and faith to care for the environment in a particularly dedicated and focused way. They embody the witness outlined in *Laudato si'* and *Laudate Deum*; I hope they will inspire others to emulate their simple yet edifying and effective ways of caring for the earth.

[16] For details of this paper recycling technology see Tefy Raoelivololona, Mamiharijaona Ramaroson and Chrysostome Raminosoa, 'Paper Recycling for the Making of Constructions Materials'. *MATEC Web of Conferences*, 307/01041 (2020).

James Strzok

Using his knowledge of geology, Jesuit Father James Strzok embarked on an experiment with geothermal power at Mwangaza. He discovered that the heat from extinct volcanoes is trapped beneath the well that supplies water to the centre, and this heat keeps the water at about thirty degrees Celsius all year round.[17] He went on to set up a geothermal system in the well, which heats the Mwangaza chapel during the cold season of July to August.

Strzok also pioneered the use of hydraform interlocking building blocks in the construction of the Ocer Campion Jesuit College in Gulu, Uganda, in 2006 after the end of the war between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Koni. There was great need for cheap and ecologically sustainable building materials in war-ravaged northern Uganda during the period of reconstruction. These building blocks are manufactured mainly from subsurface soil that is pressed hydraulically into blocks that interlock on all sides.[18] Hydraform blocks need less energy to produce than other local building bricks, which were made by baking them in wood fires, leading to deforestation in the area. 'Ocer' means 'resurrected' in the Acholi language; it is possible to see how this creative use of a natural resource helped to resurrect the hope of the people of northern Uganda in a school that is a symbol of hope.[19]

Vincent Soreng

The Jesuit brother Vincent Soreng, originally from Ranchi in India, has been an icon among the Jesuits of East Africa for over fifty years. Trained in agronomy by his novice master in Ranchi, he has spent his entire life caring for the environment. He received recognition from Pope Francis in 2016 for his dedication to ecological work.[20] One example among his many contributions to caring for the environment during an illustrious career will suffice here.

[17] James Strzok, 'Ready to Change the World? Start Here! What Are Jesuits Doing in East Africa?' *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, 3 (2016), 585.

[18] Strzok, 'Ready to Change the World?', 584. And see https://www.hydraform.com/about-us/, accessed 4 March 2025.

[19] The original Campion College was located in Prairie du Chien in the state of Wisconsin in the USA, and it was closed in 1975. Thirty years later, the alumni of Campion College, Prairie du Chien, raised money to build a new (resurrected or 'Ocer') Campion Jesuit College in Gulu.

[20] See 'East Africa—Br Vincent Soreng Honoured by Pope Francis for the Care of our Common Home', *Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat*, at https://www.sjesjesuits.global/2019/04/19/east-africa-br-vincent-soreng-honoured-by-pope-francis-for-the-care-of-our-common-home/, accessed 4 March 2025.

The city of Dodoma in central Tanzania is situated in a semi-arid area. When the Jesuits embarked on building St Peter Claver High School there in 2007, Soreng was part of the initial team sent to Dodoma to start the school. Upon his arrival, he pioneered a campaign of planting trees and promoting ecologically sustainable ways of growing crops. Together with Strzok, he began a project to purify used water for farming. All the water from the school buildings was channelled to a biodigester which purified it, and this water was used for irrigating the trees around the school. The two also encouraged the use of biogas from animal waste produced on the school farm for cooking. In the end, the two Jesuits set up an ecologically sustainable farm that turned a little desert into an oasis. The whole area of the school is now covered by a variety of trees and other plants.

Throughout Soreng's career as a Jesuit, he has always been fascinated by the earth and care for the environment. As a tribal Indian, a close connection with the earth is something that comes naturally to him. Soreng feels happy with what he has achieved in his life. In his mid-eighties he feels that he has completed his mission and is content with what God has given him. He says this with a big smile! He is happy above all because he has worked to make other people happy in their lives through his ecological activities.

He is glad that he has been accepted into every community he has been to, and that many people helped him in his work of caring for our common home. He has immense gratitude for what God has done in his life for the environment as a gift: his life is the embodiment of *Laudato si'*. He once proclaimed: 'I do not preach, I do not teach, I work', but his simple ordinary life is itself an example of preaching and teaching. Living and working in simplicity for the care of our common home is a powerful testimony to the people of God, just as St Francis of Assisi would affirm.

Reason to Hope

All the above initiatives and testimonies give us reason to hope that the message of Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* is viable and can continue to spread in big and small ways in East Africa and throughout the world. Through such interventions, the environmental catastrophes that we witness in our region—droughts, floods, landslides, locust infestations—can be mitigated.

The Contemplation to Attain Love continues to call us to be grateful for who we are and what we have received in the gift of creation, and to be good custodians of these gifts. There are many other ecological initiatives taking place all over East Africa and elsewhere that should inspire us all to continue to care for the beautiful world God has given us.

The need for networking among faith communities is key to the agenda for ecological care. Here I have brought together some success stories and examples of collaboration and networking that can be tried in other contexts—but more needs to be done. The inaugural African Climate Summit took place in Nairobi in 2023.[21] The resolutions from the summit are ambitious and they raise the question: will Africa be a leading voice for climate justice and the care for our common home in the future? Given the real-life experiences I have described and other activities taking place across the continent, I can confidently answer the question in the affirmative.

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[21] See https://africaclimatesummit.org/, accessed 4 March 2025.

THE ECONOMICS OF POPE FRANCIS

László Zsolnai

IT IS CUSTOMARY to refer to economics as the 'dismal science' because of its pessimistic view of humanity and the future.[1] But it doesn't have to be that way. Economics can also be an angelic science if it serves the real needs of people and supports the preservation of the created world. This is what Pope Francis calls on us to appreciate.

Our planet is in danger. The worsening environmental and societal situation, including climate change, loss of biodiversity, the collapse of ecosystems, mass migrations, social unrest and war, create an existential risk for the survival of humanity. We need new economic thinking and practices which serve both human well-being and ecological regeneration. The economics of Pope Francis can give us hope in this endeavour.

St Francis of Assisi

Pope Francis chose St Francis of Assisi as the role model for his papacy. It is worth studying the relationship of St Francis to the economy because his views are echoed in the economic conceptions of the Pope. It is well known that St Francis had a hostile attitude towards money, material possessions and the market. His ideal was a simple, property-free, peaceful community life.[2] Today, this attitude may seem like a kind of anti-economics, but it is worth recalling that for most of humanity's existence economic activities were organized without the operation of the market.[3]

The economic historian and anthropologist Karl Polányi introduced the idea of the fundamental difference between a 'formal' and a

[1] This expression was originally coined by Thomas Carlyle in 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 40 (1849), 670–679.

[2] See László Zsolnai, 'Franciscan Spirituality and Economics', *Religions*, 9/10 (2018).

[3] See John Gowdy, 'Hunter-Gatherers and the Mythology of the Market', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hunters and Gatherers*, edited by Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1999), 391–398.

'substantive' approach to the economy.[4] The formal understanding starts from the assumption of the scarcity of resources and sees the aim of the economy as achieving monetary profit. By contrast, the substantive understanding reflects the basic fact that humans—like all other living beings—cannot survive without the sustaining power of the natural environment. In a substantive sense the economy is a process that serves to satisfy the material needs of human communities, in which money does not necessarily play a decisive role.[5] The views of St Francis of Assisi are in line with this substantive understanding: economic activities are ordered to satisfy the material needs of human communities in harmony with nature.

St Francis represented and promoted material poverty. He did this so that he could live a God-centred life that created an opportunity for spiritual growth and development. The extent of his asceticism can be criticized, but it remains true that a simple lifestyle contributes to human happiness and flourishing; modern psychological research shows that the pursuit of material goods and a materialistic value orientation do not make people really happy but instead undermine their well-being.[6] The psychologist Tim Kasser writes:

> Numerous studies document that the more people prioritize materialistic goals, the lower their personal well-being and the more likely they are to engage in manipulative, competitive, and ecologically degrading behaviors.[7]

These findings have been replicated in many settings using a variety of subjects from North America, Europe and Asia.

St Francis's proposed way of life can be considered rational in advocating the reduction of material desires to the minimum possible. Minimising material consumption is associated with many advantages for the individual, the community and the natural world.[8] St Francis supported the idea of self-sufficient communities. A community

[4] Karl Polányi, *The Livelihood of Man* (New York: Academic, 1977), 19 and following.
[5] Karl Polányi, 'The Economy as Instituted Process', in *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polányi*, edited by George Dalton (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 139–174, at 145–146.
[6] Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, Ma: Bradford, 2002), 2–3.
[7] Tim Kasser, 'Materialistic Value Orientation', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Spirituality and Business*, edited by Luk Bouckaert and László Zsolnai (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 204–211.
[8] See László Zsolnai, 'Frugality and the Intrinsic Value of Nature', in *Integral Ecology and Sustainable Business*, edited by Ove Jakobsen and László Zsolnai (Bradford: Emerald, 2017), 67–76.

economy engages in substantive, non-monetary activities, the main goal of which is to ensure sufficient material sustenance for community members. Community economies primarily use local resources and strive for self-sufficiency, especially in the areas of energy production and food supply. They practise ecological sustainability and show respect for the capacity of the natural environment to support human populations.[9]

The characteristics of the community economy can be contrasted with those of the private enterprise. As I have written elsewhere:

> The ultimate goal … of private enterprise is profit making and the basic strategy to realize this goal is enclosure, that is, to make common resources private as much as possible. The organizing principle of private enterprise is market exchange and its typical governing form is hierarchy. The type of rationality employed is efficiency, which requires the production of maximal cash flow in the economic process. Ownership is typically private and the criterion of success is the wealth created for individuals.
>
> In contrast, the ultimate goal of community economy is substantive value creation—that is, generating value without reference to market prices. The basic strategy is sharing resources, and the organizing principle is reciprocity among members. The governing form is participation and collective decision-making. The type of rationality that is employed is sufficiency, which implies producing not the maximum but 'enough' output for the community. Ownership is typically shared, and the criterion of success is the well-being of all parties.[10]

The human economy is embedded in the ecological system of nature. According to the ecological ethics of St Francis, we should approach

[9] See Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1996); and Tamas Veress, 'Principles and Models of Community Economies', in *Value Creation for a Sustainable World: Innovating for Ecological Regeneration and Human Flourishing*, edited by László Zsolnai, Thomas Walker and Paul Shrivastava (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 239–262.
[10] Zsolnai, 'Franciscan Spirituality and Economics'.

natural beings with compassion and love, and our economy should reflect this attitude.

Buddhist Economics

It is worth mentioning the similarity between the economics of St Francis of Assisi and of Pope Francis, and Buddhist economics. Buddhist economics was first described by the British economist E. F. Schumacher. He argued that the prescription of 'right livelihood' in Buddhist teachings implies that a Buddhist approach to economics must be imbued with two main characteristics, namely simplicity and non-violence.[11]

Simplicity is a form of self-restraint that involves a low level of material consumption, leading to a simple life and openness of the mind to spiritual goods.[12] It is important to be moderate and contented in material terms, as excessive consumption causes harm and suffering to oneself, others and the natural environment.[13] Non-violence is fundamentally important in Buddhist economics.[14] It means refraining from harming sentient beings that can suffer, whether human or non-human, and the natural environment.[15] Buddhism does not accept humans' superiority over other living and non-living beings.[16] It presupposes compassionate behaviour, which can fundamentally influence how economic activity is carried out.

The Economic Views of Pope Francis

Beginning with one of his first apostolic exhortations, *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis has sharply criticized the economic practices that deify money and pursue growth.[17] He has urged a radical rethinking of

[11] Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Abacus, 1971), 47.
[12] See Peter Daniels, 'Reducing Society's Metabolism', in *Business within Limits. Deep Ecology and Buddhist Economics*, edited by László Zsolnai and Knut Johansson Ims (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 103–149; and Luk Bouckaert, Hendrik Opdebeeck and László Zsolnai, 'Frugality', in *Palgrave Handbook of Spirituality and Business*, 269–276.
[13] Sulak Sivaraksa, 'Economic Aspects of Social and Environmental Violence from a Buddhist Perspective', *Buddhist–Christian Studies*, 22/1 (2002), 47–60, at 60.
[14] See Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*; Daniels, 'Reducing Society's Metabolism'.
[15] See P. A. Payutto, *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Market Place* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1994).
[16] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2000), 150–151.
[17] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 55.

capitalism and modern business. According to the Pope, how the economy works today is deeply antagonistic to life because it pushes millions of people into poverty and destroys nature.[18] In the eyes of many, the words of Pope Francis may seem exaggerated, but calm, scientific analysis shows that the functioning of our contemporary economy is inherently intertwined with—often merciless—violence against human beings and nature.[19]

In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis calls on people to undergo an ecological conversion. The encyclical urges us all to feel personal responsibility for the fate of the Earth, the well-being of our fellow human beings and the life chances of future generations. The encyclical marks a turning point in Christian thinking about nature and its relationship with the economy and business activities. In this encyclical, Pope Francis announces new views that have profound implications for economic theory and practice. The key ideas expressed there are practising moderation and recognising the intrinsic value of nature.

Practising moderation and recognising the intrinsic value of nature

The Importance of Moderation

The encyclical strongly criticizes the dominant 'use and throw away' culture of modern Western societies, which 'generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary' (*Laudato si'*, n. 123). It urges us to strive towards 'modifying consumption, developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling, protecting certain species and planning a diversified agriculture and the rotation of crops' (n. 180).

Pope Francis is worried because 'we have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends' (n. 203). Quoting Benedict XVI, he encourages us to develop 'more sober lifestyles while reducing their energy consumption and improving … efficiency' (n. 193).[20] He is convinced that 'a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development' (n. 191). Happiness requires 'knowing how to limit some needs' (n. 223). He concludes:

[18] See Andrea Tornielli and Giacomo Galeazzi, *This Economy Kills: Pope Francis on Capitalism and Social Justice*, translated by Demetrio S. Yocum (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2015).
[19] László Zsolnai, 'Business and Violence', in *New Frontiers in Conflict Management and Peace Economics: With a Focus on Human Security*, edited by Madhumita Chatterji and Partha Gangopadhyay (Bradford: Emerald, 2021), 133–140, at 140.
[20] See Benedicy XVI, message for the 2010 World Day of Peace, n. 9.

> Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that 'less is more' …. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. (n. 222)

Ecological economics has revealed that the level of consumption in modern Western societies has a negative impact on natural ecosystems and reduces the chances of future generations living a decent life.[21] Western humanity currently functions in a state of overconsumption, and a significant reduction would be needed to return to a sustainable level of functioning. The ecological footprint data for most developed Western economies show that the latter's use of natural resources exceeds the fair and sustainable share of the earth's ecological goods and services by orders of magnitude—in many cases, by 200–500 per cent.[22]

Increasing resource efficiency alone will not solve ecological overuse because it induces—all other factors being unchanged—greater supply, lower prices and an increase in consumption. Herman Daly, one of the greatest figures in ecological economics, argued for the priority of frugality over efficiency.[23] According to Daly, our main task is to achieve sustainable development—to reduce the scale of the economy relative to ecosystems and change the present uneconomic growth paradigm, which increases social costs more than benefits and thus 'makes us poorer, not richer'. Frugality requires reconciling and balancing material and spiritual values in the economy and our personal lives.[24] It leads to 'small-scale, locally adaptive and culturally diverse forms of economic organization'.[25]

The US economist Thomas Princen expresses this in terms of the contrast between 'efficiency' and 'sufficiency', arguing that we should

[21] Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon), 215. Ecological economics as a distinct discipline emerged in the late 1980s, with the establishment of the International Society for Ecological Economics and the journal *Ecological Economics*. See Inge Røpke, 'The Early History of Modern Ecological Economics', *Ecological Economics*, 50/3–4 (October 2004), 293–314.
[22] See https://data.footprintnetwork.org/#/, accessed 25 February 2025.
[23] See Herman E. Daly, 'Frugality First', in *Frugality: Rebalancing Material and Spiritual Values in Economic Life*, edited by Luk Bouckaert, Hendrik Opdebeeck and László Zsolnai (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 207–226.
[24] Daly, *Beyond Growth*, 166, 222.
[25] László Zsolnai, 'Green Business or Community Economy?' *International Journal of Social Economics*, 29/8(2002), 652–662, here 661.

move away from the formal view of the economy, which favours profit maximisation and efficiency, and give space to sufficiency: 'a sense of "enoughness" and "too muchness", a quality where concern for excess is paramount in the life of an individual, an organization, or a nation'.[26]

The Intrinsic Value of Nature

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis calls on us to recognise the value of nature and to express our love for it. Natural beings and ecosystems,

> … have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system (n. 140).

The encyclical emphasizes:

> Environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces. (n. 190)[27]

Contemporary environmental ethics supports Pope Francis's position. The starting principle of environmental ethics is that all living things have intrinsic value, regardless of their usefulness to humans. Living

[26] Thomas Princen, *The Logic of Sufficiency* (Boston: MIT, 2005), 18; and see 55 following.
[27] Quoting Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 470.

things are valuable in and for themselves and cannot be mere means for the realisation of human projects.[28]

Today's mainstream economic thinking and practices do not recognise the intrinsic value of nature but advocate the assessment of what it provides on the basis of market prices. The economic value of a natural entity depends on the (real or calculated) willingness of market participants to pay for it. However, John Gowdy, a professor of ecological economics at Rensselaer University, has shown that monetary price is not an adequate approach to determining the value of natural entities. It is not possible to assess the total value of natural entities using market mechanisms.[29]

Juan Martinez-Allier and his colleagues from the Autonomous University of Barcelona have shown that economic, ecological and social values are incommensurable and, therefore, there is no algorithmic solution to complex environmental problems. Decisions related to the natural environment require qualitative considerations and the application of wisdom capable of weighing all aspects of complex decision-making.[30]

Pope Francis recalls that Jesus 'invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air' (n.226). The US ecologist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson approached such contemplation with the help of modern science:

> … extraordinary advances have been made in our knowledge of what sort of thing the environment is, what sort of thing an organism is …. These advances have come out of cybernetics, systems theory, information theory, and related sciences.[31]

According to Bateson, we can rebuild love and gratitude for communities of living organisms through close connection with them. Personal and active engagement with the world of nature and art—which goes beyond the rational—can lead to this. Poetry, painting, dance, music, humour,

[28] See Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 161 following; László Zsolnai, 'Environmental Ethics for Business Sustainability', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 38/11 (2011), 892–899.

[29] See John Gowdy and Carl N. McDaniel 'One World, One Experiment: Addressing the Biodiversity–Economics Conflict', *Ecological Economics*, 15/3 (1995), 181–192.

[30] See Juan Martinez-Allier, Giuseppe Munda and John O'Neill, 'Weak Comparability of Values as a Foundation for Ecological Economics', *Ecological Economics*, 26/3 (1998), 277–286; Juan Martinez-Allier and Roldan Muradian, *Handbook of Ecological Economics* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015).

[31] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 2000 [1972]), 315.

metaphors, religion and the study of nature provide an opportunity to experience the wisdom that has accumulated over millions of years of evolution.[32]

Fraternity and Social Friendship

In 2020, on the feast of St Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis published the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, using St Francis's own words to describe our universal brotherhood and sisterhood. His 2019 meeting with Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi served as an inspiration for this encyclical, which calls for human fraternity and social solidarity, and is a plea to reject war. It focuses on contemporary social and economic problems and proposes fraternity as a guiding principle for a new world where all countries are part of a larger human family.

Pope Francis cites the parable of the Good Samaritan as an 'ever new' call from Jesus to 'rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond' (*Fratelli tutti*, n.66). The parable invites us to contemplate the inner struggle between our own security and the personal sacrifices required by charity. It 'speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love' (n.68). Pope Francis adds, 'We should not expect everything from those who govern us …. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes.' (n.77) 'All of us have a responsibility for the wounded.' (n.79)

Fratelli tutti states that universal brotherhood is possible, but requires 'a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end' (n.180). Pope Francis says: 'Social friendship and universal fraternity necessarily call for an acknowledgement of the worth of every human person, always and everywhere' (n.106). He emphasizes that individualism 'does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal' (n.105), and that what is needed is a 'universal love' which promotes the dignity of every human being (n.106).

Fratelli tutti accepts the right to property, but states that this right 'can only be considered a secondary natural right' when compared with human dignity (n.120). Moreover Pope Francis attempts to reorientate this right as a responsibility for the care of the whole planet. This suggests a positive meaning of the right to property: owners should

[32] See Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 146–147.

care for and cultivate their property in such a way that it can contribute to the good of all. The encyclical argues that the right to private property should be accompanied by the prior principle of 'subordination of all private property to the universal destination of the earth's goods, and thus the right of all to their use' (n.123).

The encyclical warns against selfishness in the economy, as well as financial speculation which 'continues to wreak havoc' (n.168). For Pope Francis, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that not everything can be resolved by market capitalism and that human dignity must be put back at the centre. He criticizes isolationism, nationalism, a global economy that promotes individual interests, limitless consumption, wastefulness, the lack of concern for the environment and the throwaway culture. This vision of the economy is in line with the new thinking in business ethics that promotes working models in which economic value creation is subordinated to enhancing human well-being and planetary sustainability.[33]

The Economy of Francesco

One of Pope Francis's latest initiatives is the Economy of Francesco project.[34] Once again inspired by St Francis of Assisi, the project aims to build a new economy based on friendship with nature and promoting peace. The task is to transform today's violent and destructive economy into one that serves life in every respect.

The Economy of Francesco is supported by world-renowned economists, including Stefano Zamagni, professor at the University of Bologna; Luigino Bruni, professor at the LUMSA University in Rome and

[33] See Paul Shrivastava and László Zsolnai, 'Wellbeing-Oriented Organizations: Connecting Human Flourishing with Ecological Regeneration', *Business Ethics, the Environment, and Responsibility*, 31/2 (2022), 386–397; and *Value Creation for a Sustainable World: Innovating for Ecological Regeneration and Human Flourishing*, edited by László Zsolnai, Thomas Walker, Paul Shrivastava (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

[34] See *The Economy of Francesco*, at https://francescoeconomy.org/, accessed 29 February 2025.

Sophia University; Helen Alford, dean of the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) and president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences; Kate Raworth, a researcher at the University of Oxford; and Vandana Shiva, director of the Navdanya Science, Technology and Ecology Research Foundation in India. It aims to capture the imagination of young generations, calling for the participation of economists, business entrepreneurs and social change-makers under the age of 35 in joint thinking and action aimed at building a new economy.

The initiative of Pope Francis is connected with the civil economy paradigm, which follows an ancient Italian tradition of seeing the market as a place centred on civil virtues. The ideal of the civil economy integrates three basic principles of social order: the principle of the exchange of equivalents, the principle of redistribution and the principle of reciprocity. The concerted outcome of these three principles represented by the market, the state and civil society can produce efficiency, equity and public happiness in a modern society.[35]

The first world meeting of the Economy of Francesco initiative took place in September 2022 in Assisi, with the participation of Pope Francis and the bishop of Assisi, Domenico Sorrentino. Young Christian and non-Christian professionals and social activists from more than a hundred countries gathered there.[36] The work was carried out in twelve thematic groups focusing on the key problems with today's economies: agriculture and justice; life and lifestyle; vocation and profit; work and care; management and gift; finance and humanity: policies for happiness; business and peace; women and the economy; energy and poverty; business in transition; and CO_2 and inequality.[37]

The Business Ethics Center of the Corvinus University of Budapest organized a workshop at the Assisi meeting entitled 'New Business Models for Human Flourishing and Ecological Regeneration'.[38] The workshop discussed the deep existential challenges facing humanity today (climate crisis, the radical decline of biodiversity, collapse of ecosystems, and drastic increases in social inequalities and migration), and presented

[35] See Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, *Civil Economy: Another Idea of the Market*, translated by N. Michael Brennan (New York: Columbia U. 2016); first published in Italian in 2004.
[36] 'Assisi 2022: The Global Event', *The Economy of Francesco*, at https://francescoeconomy.org/assisi2022/, accessed 1 March 2025.
[37] See https://francescoeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EN-PROGRAM-1.pdf.
[38] See László Zsolnai, 'The Economy of Francesco Workshop', *Business Ethics Center*, at https://www.businessethicscenter.com/the-economy-of-francesco-workshop/, accessed 1 March 2025.

innovative business and social models that simultaneously support human well-being and ecological regeneration. The Economy of Francesco initiative continues in many other forms worldwide. These projects include the Economy of Francesco Academy, the Economy of Francesco School, the Economy of Francesco Thematic Villages, and the Economy of Francesco Hubs.[39]

Children of God

Sustainable development cannot be reconciled with today's ecologically insensitive business practices that evade their own social responsibility. Earth conservation and social progress require the creation of progressive economic organizations that respect nature, take into account the interests of future generations, and benefit all members of society.

Social and technological innovation plays a decisive role in the desirable transformation of the economy. Environmentally sensitive and ecologically regenerative business solutions can be developed in close cooperation with local communities and non-governmental organizations, where the main goal is not to obtain the greatest possible profit but to promote socio-economic well-being. Democratic social participation can facilitate the creation of new types of community-orientated economic activity.[40] We need to develop an ecological awareness that carefully and effectively translates into action the belief that we are all children of God and leads to the sharing of the wealth of the Earth with non-human beings.

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[39] See *The Economy of Francesco*, at https://francescoeconomy.org/.
[40] See *Progressive Business Models: Creating Sustainable and Pro-social Enterprise*, edited by Eleanor O'Higgins and László Zsolnai (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

LISTENING TO THE LAND FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Greg Kennedy

EARLIER THIS YEAR some friends took me to see *Fairview*. The piece won playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury a Pulitzer Prize in 2019. It opens with the Frasiers, a middle-class Black family in the United States, preparing to celebrate the birthday of their grandmother. Fun and frustration, the two rivers of most normal families, flood into the lead-up to the party. So far the play flows like a light, unremarkable comedy.

A darker mood soon takes over. The second act begins with the disembodied voices of unseen interlocutors engaged in a conversation that grows increasingly uncomfortable. Although not violent, the talk is clearly racist in its ignorance, adhesion to stereotypes and uncritical assumptions. Even more disturbing, the invisible white speakers seem to consider themselves intelligent, witty and harmless. As their banter slips in and out of debate, the Black characters enter the stage again and replay in perfect detail the entire first act, this time in complete silence. During this pantomime, the voices, from their distant viewpoint of omnipotence, begin to comment on the action observed and deride the voiceless characters. By this time, I was squirming in my seat.

Even greater theatrical upheavals occur in the third act. The racist voices now become white bodies who essentially colonise the play. Taking the parts of four members of the extended Frasier family, the new arrivals act out their supposedly innocuous stereotypes and end up making them come true. Thanks to these interlopers, the third act careens towards disaster in the shape of drugs, teenage pregnancy, infidelity and other topoi thrust on the Black community by racist expectations. Finally, Keisha, the youngest Frasier, can stand the insanity no longer and literally stops the play. Breaking the fourth wall, she asks the white members of the audience to come down to the stage and cede their seats to the Black actors. After centuries of Blacks entertaining and serving Whites, she calls for a reversal, a change of perspective, a fair view that brings more equality to the situation.

Shy by temperament, I hesitated about descending to the stage. Not so my friend: unabashedly spontaneous, she was the very first person in

the entire theatre to spring up and start pushing through the tight aisle of seats. The first legs she had to get around were mine. So up I stood as well and followed her. Then other folk got the guts to get up and move. Keisha's closing monologue was delivered midway up the house directed down towards us sitting on the stage floor and set furniture.

While the driving metaphor of the production was visual, as its title, *Fairview*, suggests, its use of silence and pernicious speech makes it equally a powerful statement on audition. For all their talk, the white actors never once properly hear their fellow characters. The second act, conducted without a sound coming from the protagonists, is painful to watch. Their movements, their interactions, their lives obviously do not matter at all to the jocular but dangerous speakers offstage. Rendered voiceless, they are spoken for, without consultation, without understanding, without right. From that moment on in the play, true listening does not happen until Keisha steps out of the racist madness and demands it.

The above could read like a monstrous spoiler. However, rather than ruin a play, my intention is to reveal a parallel under our very feet. While the Frasiers suffer from blind racism, the Earth suffers from deaf humanity. The land conducts her daily life but we, from our distanced place of power, fail to hear her.[1] Most of us, perhaps all of us in some ways, would not know where to start really listening to the land. The gap between her life and ours seems so wide as to render her inaudible. So we dub over her activities, mostly mysterious to us, with expressions of our own prejudices, fears and presumptions of knowledge. As a result, we—the land as well as all its actors—are pitching towards a theatrical, planetary car crash.

Silent Spring

Back in 1962, Rachel Carson alerted us to the immense danger of silencing the natural world. In *Silent Spring*, the book that launched the environmental movement in the United States, Carson revealed how our world-view, and its toxic products, speak deafening untruths over the otherwise eloquent Earth. As in the play, the perpetuation of our assumptions about the land and our mastery over it lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of catastrophe. We unfairly let our voices dominate the scene,

[1] Given the limitations and anthropocentric nature of the English language, I have concluded that best, albeit imperfect, way to avoid objectifying the land is to use the pronouns *she* and *her*, in harmony with many cultures that call Earth mother.

then wonder why we feel so alienated and alone. Today, according to a study by Cornell University, there are three billion fewer birds in North America than when Carson raised the alarm about vanishing avian song.[2] The more this eerie silence confronts us, the more we fear it and the more compulsively we fill it with our own noisy, falsely soothing prattle.

As a spiritual director, I consider myself a professional listener. Primarily, what I do is open space for people to speak safely and deeply about what matters most to them. My attention, compassion and careful questions allow for that speaking space to exist. Silence is a crucial component of spiritual direction. But silence comes in many forms, which we could, albeit crudely, divide into spacious and pinched silences. The pinched variety stings and swells up from hurts, betrayals, resistance, fears, anger and resentments. This kind of silence intentionally says nothing because it results from a severance in the lines of communication. Spacious silence, by contrast, strengthens communication. It is articulate and expressive. It advances the conversation, born, as it is, from trust, empathy, understanding and goodwill. Spacious silence can only arise inside someone who is empowered to speak. It can never be imposed.

The silence englobing the Earth these days sounds categorically pinched. The World Wildlife Fund estimates: 'Over the past 50 years (1970–2020), the average size of monitored wildlife populations has shrunk by 73%'—basically in my lifetime.[3] As what biologists call the Sixth Extinction speeds forward, both our opportunity and our capacity for listening to the natural world shrink backwards. Like all

Listening

Marden Creek,
what would it take
to wash my hands clean
of all that humans have stolen?

You slow right down,
then you rage
a few days
after rains
in your thoughtful way.

You have something
to tell me, I'm certain,
but I dropped my cell phone
in your waters under the bridge;
now all I can do is listen
many languages away.
Listen.

[2] Kenneth V. Rosenberg and others, 'Decline of the North American Avifauna', *Science*, 366/6461 (2019), 120–124.

[3] World Wildlife Fund, *Living Planet Report 2024: A System in Peril* (Gland: WWF, 2024), 7. And see Yinon M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips and Ron Miloa, 'The Biomass Distribution on Earth', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115/25 (2018).

skills, listening needs practice. And like all practices, especially when it comes to languages, immersion experiences are vital for maintaining fluency. Without exposure to the voices of healthy land and species, we simply lose our listening comprehension or never develop it in the first place. Now that the majority of the world inhabits urban centres, where larger and larger generations begin and end their lives, skilful listening to the land becomes ever rarer.

Active Listening

At the very same time, listening in general seems to be enjoying an efflorescence of popularity today. It was during my attendance at *Fairview* that I learnt of a recent addition to the theatre world: active listeners. During and following the performance, the active listener was available in a private room should any audience member have felt triggered by the abuse portrayed. According to a theatre website,

> An Active Listener provides an affirming, welcoming space for participants to talk through any thoughts or emotions that may come up due to the content or nature of the event. Our Active Listener is not a mental health professional but they can provide an open ear and will have mental health resources on hand should you require further support.[4]

Workplaces, events, schools and many other public spaces now provide active listeners.

In many societies, we enjoy greater openness and capacity for listening than in the past. Thanks to equity, diversity and inclusion strategies in our institutions, we have a greater sensitivity to perspectives and needs other than our own. Along with this, education has begun taking into fuller consideration neural diversity in the way it structures the classroom and delivers curricula. In general, the postmodern emphasis on the narrative structure of human existence allows for a wider welcome to difference and uniqueness. Most of us, after all, like to listen to stories. As we try to grope our way out of the dark of colonialism, the recognition that everyone has a worthy autobiography to share helps us pay proper attention to the many and widely varied narrators around us.

The variety of voices, previously suppressed but now able to share their viewpoints on reality, vastly enriches the truths we inhabit.

[4] Various productions at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto, https://www.passemuraille.ca/.

Meanwhile, however, dualities and divisions seem to grow more deeply entrenched with every defensive exchange. In October 2023, the Pew Research Center released statistics regarding how United States citizens feel about their current political climate.

> An overwhelming 84% majority of adults say political debate has become less respectful over the last several years, while only 4% say it has become more respectful. Similarly, 78% say political debate has become less fact-based over the last several years, while only 5% say it has become more fact-based.[5]

It goes without saying that listening cannot survive in an environment devoid of respect for others and for facts. Moreover, we are about as likely to hear clearly in the echo-chambers of our algorithm-heavy news feeds and social media sites as we are on the hard shoulder of a major road during peak traffic.

My fear is that the recent gains in attending to each other with all the necessary appreciation and protection of difference might be what some arborists call a 'stress crop' in times of drought or sickness. This names the phenomenon of abundant seed or nut production in trees that sense their end is nigh. As a last-ditch effort to ensure offspring, they throw all their waning energy into producing seeds. Soon afterwards they themselves die. Could it be that, as we strain with heroic but fated effort to be present to shorter, individual stories, the collective chronicle of human communities and the Earth goes unheard? According to the International Energy Agency global fossil fuel investment increased by 5 per cent in 2023.[6] Are we really listening?

Spiritual Direction

If we cannot listen to the land, of which we are made, how will we listen to other Earthlings? The art and practice of spiritual direction can assist us. In spiritual direction, people speak of the essential: their relationships with other humans and with the divine; their deepest hopes; their search for meaning; the aches of their souls and the joys of their spirits. If done well, spiritual direction does not offer advice, or solve problems, or patch

[5] 'Americans' Feelings about Politics, Polarization and the Tone of Political Discourse', *Pew Research Center*, at https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-feelings-about-politics-polarization-and-the-tone-of-political-discourse/, accessed 13 February 2025.

[6] Data from 'World Energy Investment 2024 Datafile', *International Energy Authority*, at https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-product/world-energy-investment-2024-datafile, accessed 13 February 2025.

people up so they can make it a little longer in this thorn-and-thistle world. It provides no answers. At best it deploys questions just wide enough to give directees sufficient pause to hear voices different from the ones that echo repetitively and unconstructively in their throbbing heads.

To that extent, the term 'direction' is quite misleading. Rather than telling you where to go, a good spiritual director invites you to take a good look at where you are, then asks what it is like to be there and whether you really want to stay. For that reason, some prefer to call it spiritual accompaniment, which is much closer to the French and Spanish equivalents. In English, however, the more authoritative word 'direction' has stuck to the discipline, which often results in misunderstanding but, for present purposes, it is not completely infelicitous.

Given the urgency of our global ecological situation, we actually do need some definite, unequivocal direction provided by the land. *Do this* and *Don't do that* are statements necessary as for us to hear from the ecosystems suffering drastic diminishment a result of our resource extraction. Under the real shadow of human extermination on this planet from biological collapse or nuclear war, we proud, wayward masters and possessors need unambiguous directives from Mother Nature. Otherwise we are quite likely to push and bully ourselves out of existence.

In many ways, the land is much less silent than when Rachel Carson was sounding her warnings in the 1960s. Industrial agriculture—which, since 1945, has basically waged a continuing world war on whatever looks hostile to yields—counts as collateral damage its many casualties in soil, water, air and life at large. First the organic movement and now, even more, regenerative agriculture have reconsidered the Earth as an ally rather than an enemy of our food production. After decades of farming that strip-mined the land, regenerative agriculture is learning from natural systems, such as forests and native prairies, how to produce and harvest in a way that actually increases the vitality of soil rather than degrades it. Likewise, dams that have long held a

Listen Land Direction

Listen,
i don't know about you
but for me
that's why i listen

Land,
shook the hand
of my feet
the very first time i walked—
we've been talking ever since

Directions…
i'm bad with them
i always get turned around;
that's how i come to see
the bigger picture.

chokehold on rivers are coming down, while natural wetlands are finding renewed value and protection as inexpensive, effective and beautiful flood-control measures around developed areas. Here are examples of intelligently heeding the innate wisdom of the land. Listening to the land on these wide, economic levels exemplifies the cardinal virtue of prudence. Quite simply, do it now or you will pay for it later.

When it comes to spiritual direction, on a more personal level, another virtue plays a bigger role than prudence. This virtue is vulnerability. Without it nothing happens between the spiritual director and the directee. In its absence the talk falls flat, sounds forced or skirts around the pain in awkward, jerky movements. It is here that the land has most to offer us at the current time. For, as important as instruction can be in spiritual direction when the directee lacks knowledge of a certain technique in prayer or meditation, the most significant growth of spirit occurs when a wounded heart shows itself pierced. When we go to the land, therefore, for guidance, we must be sure to bring our grief, together with our yearning. These two energies—grief and desire—move us into our fullest, widest selves. Only if we hold and speak them honestly, will we move anywhere towards beauty, truth and goodness.

Richard Wagamese, one of Canada's foremost Indigenous authors, admired for his literary bravery and integrity, effectively speaks of the land as a spiritual director. He writes of how loss and longing are at the root of his spiritual connection with the land. Reading this, I feel the land listening with compassion as it holds the spacious silence that encourages a bleeding soul to speak:

> For a long time our people have called this country home. This is where we fit, where we belong, and it is from here that our teachings sprang. We are who we are because of this land ….
>
> In truth, we're not angry. We're sad. [Settlers] need to know this. They need to know that for us, for tribal people who carry the memories of drums on distant hills, the land itself haunts us. It reminds us of what we have lost every time we look upon it. It reminds us how far away from those tribal fires we have moved, of how incredibly things have changed, how with every fibre of our beings we seek a return to the things that kept us vital, dynamic, spiritual, and alive forever. They need to know that every land claim, treaty negotiation, blockade, and court case is born out of that desire. They are born out of a spiritual hunger, not a physical greed. They are actions created by a profound sadness and longing for the flames of those old tribal fires. For a sense of who we are. For an image of ourselves cast in the light of traditional fires. They need to

> know that they are actions taken to ensure that we will not need to grieve the loss of another part of ourselves.
>
> If they can understand this, they can understand us, because everyone has lost someone or something they miss with a longing that is deep and blue and cold. So it is with us, and we need to tell them that.[7]

And those of us who are settlers must not only listen to this grievous longing, but also speak our own. The land cannot direct us if we cannot sit vulnerably with her, reaching courageously into that deep, blue, cold hunger for a vibrant, peaceful home. To pretend we do not feel its absence is to parade ourselves in public as prisoners of a war we refuse to recognise we have lost. Joanna Macy, who has spent her life tapping into the constructive energy of planetary lamentation, reminds us,

> *Apatheia* is a Greek word that means, literally, nonsuffering. Given its etymology, apathy is the inability or refusal to experience pain. What is the pain we feel—and desperately try not to feel—in this planet-time? It is of another order altogether than what the ancient Greeks could have known; it pertains not just to privations of wealth, health, reputation, or loved ones, but also to losses so vast we can hardly name them. It is pain for the world.[8]

I seek spiritual direction, not so much to placate my pain as to sound its true depth. My spiritual director walks with me into that valley of death, keeping faith in life's strength when I cannot, when fear of my insignificance and powerlessness overwhelms me.

The Land that Listens

Land, as spiritual director, does just that, as well. When I go to her with my heartache, desolation and loneliness, all occasioned by bearing weighty witness to her abuse, she sits with me and listens. The land I know listens to me, at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario, where I have lived and worked for eight years. Marden Creek listens. My favourite tree, a three-trunked cedar that I call Trinity, listens. The slope above what's called Sleepy Hollow on Ignatius Farm—where, one day, I hope to see a natural cemetery established—listens.

[7] Richard Wagamese, *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* (London: Penguin, 2002), 213, 222–223.

[8] Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (Gabriola Island: New Society, 1998), 26.

Marden Creek at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre, Guelph, Ontario

These are very specific places, just as trained spiritual directors are very specific people. Whatever holiness happens in spiritual direction only does so because of personal relationship. Whether the director is a human being or a certain hill, the essential element is that the director is present and particular. To this extent, whoever seeks direction from the land does well to find a real living river, meadow, garden, park or plant to speak out their vulnerability, preferably daily. Of course, our own bodies are the closest pieces of Earth we will ever have around. Without that personal connection, we might gather all kinds of intriguing, biological information, but that spiritual hunger mentioned by Wagamese will go unsated.

To speak to the land as a spiritual director takes a leap of faith. In fact, all speech arising from vulnerability faces the same risk. In order to speak truly, from a place of pain and powerlessness, the speaker must trust, at least on some implicit level, that he or she will be heard. I open up to my spiritual director because I know through experience that he listens to me attentively. Were I to risk myself and encounter indifference, distraction or derision, I would promptly stop talking and think twice about making another appointment. My trust in his capacity to listen is as important in our working alliance as his actual capacity.

The same holds for the land, only the gap to be leapt over here looks much wider. We long ago ceased to believe that the land has ears to hear us, so conditioned have we been by centuries of colonial superiority complex. More recently, the divide has been deepened by shame. From the

?

ticks and mosquitoes make me question
my pertinence to forest

i want to belong wild in my nakedness
but it's clear how soft i am

hiking through a hunger i wonder
at all the support the systems i dislike
provide me

the guest i can't help being
contradicts the host i've always wanted
to become

the woods are not my home
yet i can't live without them

Industrial Revolution to the post-war era of prosperity we had a sense of ourselves as possessors of nature; in the Anthropocene, the geological age of devastation we have now brought about, there are many who judge humans as nature's grand perverters. Our abominable behaviour at the party of life, shouting down all the other species in our inebriated aggression, seems to have stripped us of the right to remain here at all, let alone express how we feel about it.

Both the possessor and the perverter narratives sound equally dangerous to me—and equally false. The reason that people on retreat at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre find healing by opening themselves to the land is because the land truly wants to hear them. The land desires to listen. Odd as it may sound, the land might even receive something very nourishing from listening to our sorrow and hope. Our leap of faith in going to the land for direction is to believe this to the point of speaking. Spiritual directors, as opposed to psychoanalysts, make very little money. At the centre, we rely on directors who actually donate their time to accompany people on retreats, sometimes for forty consecutive days. Why would they do that? Because it is astoundingly enriching to listen to someone authentically explore their inner world. Giving ear to a person sincerely engaging with their faith and doubt only increases my own faith. As a spiritual director, I become party to—and even partner in—surprising quests for truth and freedom. I cannot help but think that the land receives a similar blessing in gratitude and experienced certainty, in the goodness of being, whenever we let our hearts talk to her with our accumulated defences, shames and suspicions courageously laid down.

All this pushes us towards a question we must all face. Do I believe that the land really listens to me: that she actually urges my vulnerability to unburden itself; that she will not judge, reject or refuse me attention when I bring to her my guilt and fear, sadness, confusion and anger at

the systemic idiocy in which, trapped, I live? All this might sound like silly anthropomorphism, like immature personification of that which has suffered so long from our human projections and impositions. Perhaps: but if we do not believe that the land is listening to us, we will never begin to speak to her, far less seek direction from her. No one begins to listen until they have some assurance that they are also being, and have been, heard.

Spiritual direction, as I know it, takes place only where this three-way trust prevails: trust between two listeners with faith in the goodness at work in both of them. When my directee's faith in the goodness active in her flags, my job is to hold it up for her. Assailed by desolation, grief, shame and self-criticism, every one of us struggles to believe in our essential goodness or, in biblical terms, our status as children and, therefore, heirs of God. The land as spiritual director helps me affirm my belongingness to the Earth, and helps me disavow the cancerous lie, multiplying in my fear, that I do not belong here and that the world would be better of without me or, collectively, without us. Of course, the world would certainly be better off without me flying, driving, cruising and consuming all over the place. A crucial part of spiritual direction involves investigating the consequences of one's behaviour for self and others. That said, no decent spiritual director, no matter how disturbing her directee's acts are, would lose hope that some sort of healing is possible. That is to see the person as the person was created: by nature good. In short, Mother Earth cannot disown her children. The land loves us. That is why she listens. Consequently, that is why we can listen to her.

And listen we must. Not so much because our lives depend on it, but, more meaningfully, because our love depends on it. Another reason that spiritual directors discover such richness in their work, is due to the expansion of love involved. I challenge you to dislike anyone who sincerely, humbly lets you in on their vulnerability and most treasured longings. The spontaneous response to such a privilege is gratitude and love. So too with the land. In addition to listening to her for the direction she can give us, we also need to listen to her as if we were her spiritual directors. Here again comes another required leap of faith. Do we believe we have the ability to hear out the land as she tells of her pain, abuse, rejection, desires, fears and hopes? Are we convinced we have the sensitivity to be present to her in that way? There comes a time in every spiritual director's career when she has to face her own sense of inadequacy sitting across from a directee she takes to be much holier, nobler, more

generous and more prayerful than herself. But when she remembers that spiritual direction is not about providing answers, the anxiety passes. As a person who listens, trusting of the goodness active in the other and in the relationship between them, she releases her preoccupations about herself and returns to her task: giving the other spacious silence to speak. If we believe this, and we get down low enough to the ground, we might be amazed by how much the heart of the land has to say.

Increasing attention in the practice of spiritual direction is now being placed on power. Although the discipline eschews any sort of guru-ism, it has become acutely aware that in any spiritual direction relationship, by virtue of its one-sided nature, an imbalance of power exists. Directors, who typically reveal little about themselves so as not to get in the way, enjoy more power in the specific context than does the directee. This power, however, is to be used for liberation. It is to empower the directee to trust him- or herself and the sometimes frightening process of discovery. Imagining ourselves in the position of spiritual director of the land actually opposes the master-mentality that has plagued industrialised humanity for too many destructive years. If we thought of ourselves as spiritual directors to the land, we would automatically give up our exalted stances as engineers, analysts and mechanics. Our listening to the land would empower her to speak herself into new paths of being. I have not the slightest doubt that she has her own desires and dreams. The direction I can give is the silent spaciousness for her to explore them.

Usually we go to see a therapist when something in our lives is amiss—not so with spiritual direction. Even a saint benefits from it. Granted that it is not about fixing, but about listening, everybody, including the great, beautiful body of the land, can grow through it. The land needs it from us, just as we need it from the land. The ethical code for spiritual directors states that every director should also receive direction. This keeps us all honest, hopeful and real.

For all these many words about spirituality, land and creation, very little has been mentioned about God, or sacrament, or religion in general. That was deliberate on my part. Although spiritual direction as currently practised arose out of the Christian tradition, its genius lies in its transcendence of creeds and institutions. Even St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order which has specialised in developing the art of spiritual direction, insisted of the primacy of the direct relationship between God and directee. A good spiritual director gets out

Ignatius Farm

constantly turning over
she's a light sleeper
deep in dreams

what rises to the surface,
besides the restless stones,
is the verdure of her promise

more than conscious
of her blessings
she is quick to share

in her slow, well-seasoned way
her pan emits few flashes
but flares instead a steady sunset
glow

no hand that reaches out to her
returns untouched;
many come to her for healing ...
she's the cleanest dirt we know.

of the way, he advised. On a planet where not only the biosphere but also religious sensibility and affiliation are undergoing drastic change, spiritual direction provides a salutary means of engaging deeply with the sacred. Based in personal, indisputable experience, it fosters intimacy, investigation, curiosity, discernment and hope. Time and again, I have seen wounds accrued in collisions with institutional religion heal as people wander through the uncharted landscapes of a faith they only discover as they go along. Spiritual direction has much to give to the ecological conversion necessary for us to begin listening to the land. Likewise, it has much to offer a world depleted by the extraction of belief without the lived reality in which beliefs must be grounded. True listening does not rest satisfied with hearsay. It presses gently to the source beneath the syllables.

Rather than attempt a summation, I will let prophecy have the last word, ending with a passage from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. It speaks of new life happening outside the sanctuary, outside the confines where faith and life once held sway. We used to believe in the power of our churches and in the power of our industry. We used to take up space rather than open it up. We used to dominate the planetary conversation rather than listen. All this has hurt the Earth no less than it has hurt us Earthlings spiritually. Now the waters, both figuratively and literally, thanks to climate change, are rising by the thousand cubits. It looks, feels and, indeed, is overwhelming. We cannot wade our way out or across. The waters menace, but they can also save. Some mysterious shift happens in this passage that pivots around the axis of mortality. When we listen to that finality, which is the land speaking to our spirit, the waters do not recede, of course, but their nature changes. Deep attention to our mortality, paradoxically, can heal us of

our fear of destruction. Land as spiritual director invites us into that faith. Land as spiritual directee listens for our own trust in the empowering truth. The German poet Friedrich Hölderlin wrote: 'But where danger threatens/That which saves from it also grows'.[9] Of course that fact, both settling and unsettling, is also embodied in the Christian symbol of the cross. Let's listen to Ezekiel:

> Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east …. Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, 'Mortal, have you seen this?' Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. He said to me, 'This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.' (Ezekiel 47: 1–12)

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[9] Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Patmos', in *Poems and Fragments*, translated by Michael Hamburger (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan, 1966), 463.

RESTORING THE INTEGRITY OF LIFE IN JESUS

The Spiritual Exercises and Climate Change

Ania Grobicki

OUR WORLD IS SUFFERING, from the impacts of climate change and from the socio-ecological crises that are interlinked with them. Record-breaking global heatwaves, floods, droughts, water scarcity and wildfires, migration, conflict and war, rampant consumerism, pollution and waste are affecting millions of people and destroying our fragile biosphere. Over the last forty years, I have dedicated myself to working worldwide on issues of water, pollution, environmental degradation and climate. Hence my recent experience of the Spiritual Exercises, at St Beuno's in north Wales, has been imbued with a sense of the disorder in our Earth's system dynamics, and of my own helplessness in the face of the suffering of people and God's creation. I found myself praying to Jesus through the words of the Easter liturgy, to restore the integrity of life on Earth: 'With the old order destroyed, a universe cast down is renewed, and integrity of life is restored to us in Christ'.

For the last 12,000 years, the Earth has been in a geological period known as the Holocene, characterized by extraordinarily stable global temperatures and climate patterns which enabled the human species to establish agriculture and to flourish. Just 2,000 years ago, Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6). With these words, he inaugurated a new understanding of ourselves as human beings in relation to our Creator God and to God's creation: 'I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (14:20). Over time, this resulted in an outpouring of human creativity.

More recently, through unprecedented technological progress, a new paradigm of exponential resource use, unrestrained economic inequality and ecological destruction have developed. It has been argued that, because of our disordered actions, humans have caused the Earth to leave the Holocene epoch and move into a new one, which has been

called the Anthropocene.[1] Through large-scale agriculture, urbanisation and industrialisation, human beings have altered the balance of our two interconnected planetary cycles, the carbon cycle and the water cycle, resulting in enormous damage to the fragile biosphere itself. As Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* so beautifully expresses it: 'We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Genesis 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters'.[2] Our technocratic paradigm, as set out in *Laudato si'*, has affected the integrity of the entire planet.

We are already well into the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration (2020–2030), as a contribution to which the Roman Catholic Church launched the *Laudato si'* Action Platform in May 2021.[3] I have found myself asking: could a deeper spiritual understanding of the carbon cycle, the water cycle and the biosphere help to energize further efforts at ecological restoration, balance and transformation? Could the Spiritual Exercises provide a framework, helping to guide people towards an interior process of ecological conversion? I shall endeavour to show here how the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises helped me personally towards ecological conversion. Through God's grace, week by week, I sense that I was transformed in a mysterious way towards a more spiritual understanding of our great planetary systems, and of my responsibility to co-labour with others and with Christ to help restore the integrity of life on Earth. This effort continues now in the 'Fifth Week', and this paper is one of its fruits.

A more spiritual understanding of our great planetary systems

The First Week: The Carbon Cycle and Our Own Contributions to Climate Change

During the First Week, I was continually reminded in my prayers how increasing carbon levels in the atmosphere are heating up the Earth (with an average global temperature that is currently 1.2 degrees Celsius above that of the pre-industrial era) and of the terrible suffering that this global heating brings to many people and to the fragile biosphere.

[1] See Martin J. Head and others, 'The Proposed Anthropocene Epoch', *Journal of Quarternary Science*, 37/7 (2022), 1181–1187. The formal declaration of the Anthropocene Epoch was rejected in 2024 by the International Union of Geological Sciences; see IUGS, 'The Anthropocene', available at https://www.iugs.org/_files/ugd/f1fc07_40d1a7ed58de458c9f8f24de5e739663.pdf.

[2] Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 2.

[3] See https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/, accessed 11 February 2025. Nearly 800 'action plans' have already been uploaded to the site by individuals and groups from all over the world.

The imbalance in the carbon cycle between carbon emissions and carbon uptake is the cause. Foremost among the human activities responsible for this rapid change is extracting coal, oil and gas (the 'fossil fuels') from beneath the soil, where they have lain dormant for millions of years, and burning them to release their carbon into the atmosphere. In numbers, an all-time record of nearly ten gigatons of carbon were released into the atmosphere in 2023.

The fossil fuel supply chain is often brutal. I remembered how, as a young woman graduate in 1982, I joined one of the large international oil companies as a chemical engineer, and then left my job after just one year, shocked and traumatized by what I had experienced. This was in apartheid South Africa, where I witnessed first-hand how the company was responsible for air and water pollution, and flouted the oil sanctions that had been put in place. Although I then changed my life, completing a PhD researching environmental technologies, I still deeply regret my own role in all the carbon emissions I have caused over the past forty years; and I regret that I have not personally done more to prevent climate catastrophe. During the First Week, I felt crushed by my sins in contributing to the injustice and inequality in the world, especially climate injustice.

Developed countries have benefited most from fossil-fuel-led industrialisation, followed by the BRICS countries including China and India.[4] The majority of carbon emissions (75 per cent) currently comes from the energy sector (electricity generation, heat and transport). Agriculture and forestry contribute a further 20 per cent and industry approximately 5 per cent.[5] Many of the poorer countries have miniscule carbon emissions by comparison with developed countries, with the majority of their populations not yet sharing in the economic development paradigm that is causing climate change.

The lack of climate justice—a double injustice on top of inequality—lies in the fact that the people in poorer countries are suffering, and will suffer much more, from the higher temperatures and the climate losses and damages that we are all facing. The poor cannot afford to spend their way into climate adaptation and resilience. A poor household cannot invest in an air conditioner when a heatwave hits, and many

[4] BRICS is an economic bloc comprising ten countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

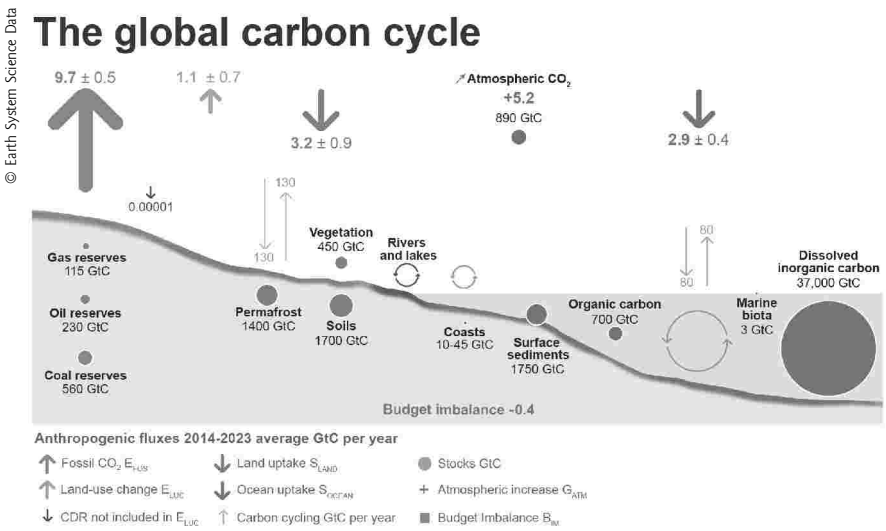
[5] See https://ourworldindata.org/emissions-by-sector, accessed 11 February 2025.

day-labourers and smallholder farmers have no option but to work outside even in life-threatening heat.

Restoring the Carbon Cycle

Carbon atoms are the basis of life itself: in chemistry 'organic' means 'containing carbon'. One of our greatest partners in the restoration and rebalancing of the carbon cycle is the tree. God has designed trees to use solar energy to grow and develop through chlorophyll metabolism, with carbon atoms as their building blocks, exhaling oxygen. This creation is infinitely more sophisticated than our fumbling human efforts at utilising solar energy to warm things and to generate electricity. Through millions of years, a period many times longer than human history, trees and other green chlorophyll-containing creatures have been co-creating Earth's atmosphere, taking in carbon and giving out oxygen. They supported the equilibrium of the carbon cycle in the Holocene epoch, our Garden of Eden, the perfect environment for human flourishing. Yet we have sinned, and lost this garden forever.

Our human bodies are also made up of organic molecules containing carbon; however our metabolism is entirely different to that of trees. During my prayers, I would start by focusing on my own breath. We take in air that is laden with oxygen molecules, bringing us energy and life force. With every breath, I take in and feast upon oxygen which some tree or green living thing has made. Then, when we exhale, our breath is laden with carbon dioxide. With every exhalation, I add to the



burden of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.[6] But through the endless dance of our breath, taking in oxygen, giving out carbon, there is symbiosis at a deep level between ourselves, trees and plants. This is the dance of life, our life with God, this life that God has given us.

This thought should give us pause before we destroy or pave over greenery, let alone before we sacrifice an individual mature tree—which may represent decades or even centuries of producing oxygen for our benefit, while transforming carbon into leaves, flowers, fruit, wood and bark, sending its roots deep into the soil and supporting an entire ecosystem of bacteria, fungi, insects, animals and birds. Can any one of us claim to do as much to support nature? Yet, as we know, many forests are still being lost for financial gain. I have caused trees to be chopped down in my own garden.

Another of our great partners in the task of restoring the carbon cycle is the ocean. In recent years, the ocean has been absorbing up to 30 per cent of all the carbon and much of the heat emitted by human activity in a given year. Hence carbon levels in the atmosphere are lower and global average temperatures are correspondingly cooler than it would have been without this buffering by the ocean.[7] However, this comes at a cost, as the dissolved carbon dioxide creates carbonic acid and makes the ocean more acidic, destroying the shells of sea creatures. Sea temperatures now are higher than they have ever been, contributing to more hurricane activity and killing off many of the coral reefs, which are the fish nurseries of the oceans. How long, O Lord, will we continue to sacrifice the abundance of life in the ocean through our blindness? How long will we (including myself) continue to eat fish, as the oceans are gradually emptied of life?

The Second Week: The Water Cycle and the Ministry of Healing

In the Second Week, I was reminded of how God has granted me healing and forgiveness, through opening the way for me to work with water in the environment over many years: to help people, communities and countries to access water, to clean up and treat water, to conserve wetlands, and to help protect people from the risks associated with floods, droughts and water scarcity.

[6] Trees and green plants also take in oxygen and release carbon dioxide when they respire, but through photosynthesis they consume much more carbon dioxide than they release.

[7] See 'ORCHESTRA: BGS Research—Ocean Regulation of Climate through Heat and Carbon Sequestration and Transports (ORCHESTRA)', *British Geological Survey*, at https://www.bgs.ac.uk/geology-projects/orchestra/, accessed 11 February 2025.

Water is a unique, multifaceted and irreplaceable substance, which permeates our entire existence. Water enables and maintains the integrity of life on earth. Where there is no water, there is no life. Water is also a sacramental symbol and has a deep spiritual value. At baptism, water signifies cleansing and new life. In the eucharist, water added to the wine represents the water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus, hence his divinity and humanity. The blessing of water to create holy water for ceremonial use has a long history in the Church. Scripture contains many references to the use of water, such as Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. There are also watery spiritual metaphors:

> On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'. Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive …. (John 7:37–39)

Doing the Spiritual Exercises in the period after Easter, one of the most moving moments for me came when the priest prayed the eucharistic prayer: 'Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall'. Linking the Holy Spirit with the dew which rests so gently over God's creation at dawn is a very beautiful image. As every schoolchild learns when studying the water cycle, water exists as vapour in the atmosphere, forming clouds, rain, hail and snow, and also condensing as dew at night if the temperature drops sufficiently.

Water also exists as surface water in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans; as ice and snow in the great ice caps of the Arctic and Antarctic and as glaciers and snowpack in the mountains, as underground water in aquifers, as moisture in the soil; finally, water constitutes most of the body of every living creature. Adult humans are about 60 per cent water by weight, rising to around 75 per cent in children. Water is the bloodstream of our planet, and the major constituent of our own bloodstream as well.

As the world warms, two major changes are happening to our water cycle, the way in which water circulates between the Earth's surface and the atmosphere. One is a physical planetary mechanism over which we have little control, the other is a human phenomenon which we can potentially change. First, because of higher global temperatures, the water cycle is speeding up. Evaporation is more rapid and rainfall events are

harsher, with higher volumes of rain falling in a shorter time. Glaciers and ice caps are melting. Sudden hailstorms are causing significant damage, as are wildfires taking place in dried-out woodlands. Both floods and droughts are becoming more sudden, frequent and severe. Until we can bring average global temperatures down again—a far-off dream—these phenomena will increase and there is little that we can do about it. The water cycle will continue to speed up relentlessly, creating untold human suffering. There is already less of the gentle dewfall.

Secondly, through human activity the continents are drying out and losing their precious freshwater resources, which are flowing into the salty oceans and evaporating into the atmosphere. As river basins are stripped of their protective forests and wetlands, the land dries out and local microclimates, together with their localised water cycles, are disrupted. Wetlands and forests are two sides of the same coin where water vapour is concerned. While trees transpire water, pulling it up from the soil through their roots and releasing it through their leaves, wetlands allow evaporation from the water surface (while transpiration also takes place from the reeds and other vegetation in and around wetlands).

On a large scale, enormous forests and wetlands such as the Amazon and the Congo basins release huge volumes of water into the atmosphere (termed 'atmospheric rivers') which are carried long distances on the wings of the wind. For instance, through this process the Amazon basin irrigates much of the farmland of the USA's Midwest. Yet now the Amazon basin and, further south, the Pantanal basin, are being dried out, turning to savannah and farmland. Over thousands of years, humans have steadily been drying out land (think of the Romans and other early civilisations, stripping the Mediterranean basin of its trees, and draining swamps).

This process is now gathering speed owing to the warming climate and higher human populations. Many groundwater aquifers, however large (the Ogallala Aquifer in Texas, the aquifers underlying the Indo-Gangetic plain) have been drained and are not being replenished. The fact that mountain glaciers and snowpack are melting fast and vanishing at a rapid rate also threatens the lives and livelihoods of billions of people downstream, who rely upon this water storage. Consider the great 'water towers' of the Himalayas, the Alps and the Andes. As the Earth warms up, much of our fresh water storage supply is being lost.

Like forests, inland bodies of water serve a protective function in the landscape, buffering temperatures between day and night, summer

and winter, and providing atmospheric moisture. Yet so many of these freshwater bodies—wetlands, ponds, lakes and rivers—are being lost, drained, ploughed under and built upon, diverted and modified. In fact, we are destroying all types of wetlands at a higher rate even than forests. The largest examples of this type of tragedy are the Aral Sea in Asia, and Lake Chad in Africa, both shrunken to just 10 per cent of their surface area in the 1960s. Agriculture currently accounts for 70 per cent of all water use, on average, in addition to changing the land itself and draining wetlands.

As cities grow, whole catchment areas are being paved and drained, preventing rain from soaking into the soil and causing the water to run off much faster into the sea, thereby contributing to increasing droughts as well as downstream flooding. Fresh water needs to be managed everywhere with great reverence and care, preserving and restoring the ecosystems and aquifers through which we receive our water. How can we restore the integrity of life, O Lord? In order to have hope, we need to keep taking inspiration from the streams of 'living water' that you have promised to us.

Many people's hearts and eyes are being opened to the suffering caused by climate change: to the floods, droughts, food shortages, wildfires and many other climate-driven disasters we are now witnessing. In 2022, floods in Pakistan affected 33 million people, with an estimated 9 million people being driven below the poverty line according to the World Bank.[8] The sheer human scale of such climate disasters can be distressing for those watching from afar, and traumatizing and frightening for those on the front line.

At the annual climate negotiations, where I and many others have been disturbed by the ongoing influence of the fossil-fuel-rich states, there is also evidence of righteous anger, of desire for change, and of a great deal of reflection and dialogue. Many thousands of people, especially young people, are being drawn into humanitarian work and into climate adaptation, restoration and resilience-building. These and countless others need to be nurtured through mental health support, spiritual guidance and discernment to find their pathways to ministry, within

[8] See 'Pakistan: Flood Damages and Economic Losses over USD 30 Billion and Reconstruction Needs over USD 16 billion—New Assessment', *World Bank Group* (28 October 2022), at https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/28/pakistan-flood-damages-and-economic-losses-over-usd-30-billion-and-reconstruction-needs-over-usd-16-billion-new-assessme, accessed 11 February 2025.

Pakistan's national pavilion at COP27, bearing a grim warning

the new and harsh climate realities and the planetary destruction that surrounds us.

The Third Week: The Passion and the Biosphere

My experience of the Third Week was grounded in a fear of spending long periods of time meditating and praying on the passion of Christ. My first insight came once again through the liturgy, through the eucharistic prayer, when Jesus says to his (still oblivious) disciples: 'Take, eat, this is my body'. In my journal for day one of the Third Week, I wrote:

> *The very air we breathe, every animal, every plant, every insect that dies for us; every tree that is cut down to serve us; this planet and all its resources are Christ's mystical body. All the waters of streams, underground springs, rivers and oceans are his mystical blood.*

I felt steeped in the sense that Jesus continues to suffer the crucifixion, continually, even now, because the Earth is being crucified. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). But now that we understand what we are doing, now that our eyes have been opened to the destruction around us, how can we continue to crucify Christ and his mystical body?

On day three of the Third Week, I walked up to the top of a nearby hill where there is a nature reserve, with a view across the landscape of

north Wales. As it was a weekday, I was alone with the wind and the birdsong. I sat at a wooden picnic bench, laid my head and arms down on the rough weathered surface of the picnic table, whose wood was warmed by the sun, and prayed. As an echo of the sacrifice of Jesus, I remembered the sacrifice of the tree that had died to create that table.

Many months later I relived this moment, when listening to indigenous people from the Amazon testifying about the 'passion in the Amazon', the deforestation, and the violence done to their communities. They said, 'There is no crucifixion without deforestation!'[9] They drew a connection between the sacrifice of Jesus, the martyrdom of the cut wood, and the martyrdom of the crucified, suffering indigenous people. They identify themselves with the forest, their home.

The Amazon basin has been identified as one of the planetary tipping points, where an enormous ecosystem is being turned from a carbon sink into a carbon source by deforestation.[10] Similarly, the huge Pantanal wetland further south is drying up and burning, with the accompanying destruction of wildlife. We are causing an extinction of species on the planet on the largest scale since that at the end of the Cretaceous period, 66 million years ago. The entire biosphere and our own species are under attack—from ourselves. We are replaying the crucifixion every day. Christ is suffering with us and for us every day, and especially with all those poor and marginalised people who are unjustly affected by the worst of the climate-related disasters—floods, landslides, drought, wildfires, hurricanes and heat waves.

We are replaying the crucifixion every day

The Fourth Week: The Resurrection and Restoring Earth Systems

And then Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Jesus in the garden. The impossible became possible: 'Integrity of life is restored to us in Christ'. As God's creative love and energy sparked a transformation in the apostles, a restoration of their faith and hope, so the glory and joy of the resurrection are mirrored each day in the glory of our natural world, which is daily restored. The joy was mirrored in me; the streams of living water flowing from the heart of Jesus (John 7:38) flowed through me.

[9] International Symposium 2024 on the Spiritual Exercises and Ecological Conversion, Manresa, 11–15 June 2024. The testimony of the Amazonian people was made on 14 June 2024, facilitated by Fernando Lopez.

[10] See David Armstrong McKay and others, 'Exceeding 1.5°C Global Warming Could Trigger Multiple Climate Tipping Points', *Science*, 377/6611 (2022).

In the Fourth Week, the Contemplation to Attain Love reveals a deeper understanding of our cooperation with God in creation: it is an integrated vision which works to restore balance on Earth. What can be the role of individual people of faith in helping to restore the integrity of the carbon cycle and the water cycle, and to reverse the destruction of the biosphere? First, perhaps, this involves helping to build individual awareness of the contribution that we each make to carbon emissions, and how to reduce it. Many people are still cynical, unconcerned or simply unconvinced about the global need to end the fossil-fuelled economy. Yet to start reducing the carbon in the atmosphere, we each need to think and pray more deeply about our lives as carbon-based creatures.

The contribution of our breath is miniscule compared to our other carbon emissions. However, at an individual level, a breath prayer based on the carbon cycle might be a good place to begin! Then, we can begin to contemplate how much carbon we really need to emit daily in order to meet our food, transport, shelter and work needs, and the extent to which we personally each continue to support the use of fossil fuels and the destruction of nature through our way of life and through our work.

Enacting broad changes in personal habits, behaviours, circumstances and lifestyle choices can be difficult and slow. Making a garden—growing trees, flowers and vegetables—can be slow. Changing systems of transport, energy, food production, resource extraction and the associated subsidies, changing policies and institutions and re-orientating the whole carbon-based development model are even slower. We need to be patient with ourselves and others during this transition time. A spiritual transformation needs to happen for each of us to become truly aware of our carbon contribution, the changes in our lives that we can realistically make, and the actions that we can support.

According to Project Drawdown, a comprehensive guide to climate mitigation efforts, the top five actions to remove carbon are (in order of ranking): to improve refrigeration and the handling of refrigerant chemicals; to build wind turbines; to reduce food waste; to adopt a plant-rich diet; and to conserve tropical forests.[11] One hundred climate mitigation solutions are contained in the book *Drawdown*, which is a useful and hopeful overview of what is possible. Many of these mitigation

[11] *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*, edited by Paul Hawken (New York: Penguin, 2017), 164–165, 1–4, 43–43, 38–40, 114–116. And see https://drawdown.org, accessed 11 February 2025.

efforts to reduce carbon emissions are helpful for restoring the water cycle too.

Let us consider just one of these top five actions in more detail: reducing food waste. Over 30 per cent of all food worldwide is currently wasted (along the whole supply chain from production to the final consumer), contributing over one gigaton of carbon each year to the atmosphere, and representing around 170 trillion litres of water use. Successful food-waste reduction of 50 per cent by 2050 could avoid around 20 gigatons of carbon emitted over the next 25 years, and save all this wasted water. Schemes to reduce food waste include improving food storage and transport; reducing post-harvest losses in developing countries; and reducing waste at consumer level in developed countries. One initiative called 'Feeding the 5,000' organizes large public events in several developed cities, each time providing 5,000 people with a free lunch using ingredients that would otherwise have been thrown away.[12]

As a global Church, what could our role be in healing and restoring the balance of the carbon cycle and the water cycle? The Church is already putting its authority and resources into mitigation and restoration efforts, and this could go further. All church buildings could become carbon-free buildings. All church vehicles could be electric. Active and committed people working together with the Church could get involved with helping to reduce food waste in every single parish. All church land could be cared for, planted with trees and wild flowers, with streams and ponds recreated or restored. The Church could consider divesting financially from fossil fuels, investing its money instead in land restoration, river restoration, and wetland, forest and marine conservation, as well as supporting indigenous communities, who are in many places the best stewards of our ecosystems.

The Church could encourage more spiritual conversations around these issues. Through Ignatian spirituality, perhaps many more people could experience an ecological conversion, and discern their role in the great transformations needed. As we too are part of Christ's mystical body, it is becoming clear that ecological conversion, rebalancing the carbon and water cycles and restoring the biosphere are becoming our core responsibilities. Perhaps through spiritual conversations, we can reach towards a deeper awareness and listening, discerning together the

[12] This initiative was begun by the campaigner Tristram Stuart; see https://feedbackglobal.org/campaigns/feeding-the-5000/, accessed 11 February 2025.

role of the Spirit in this great transformation, re-minding each other how to live more sustainably with nature. We can choose to co-labour with Christ, to discern prayerfully, individually and together, what we can do to help heal and renew these great earth systems of creation, the biosphere, the carbon cycle and the water cycle, and to help restore the integrity of life on earth.

These may all seem to be daunting, impossible, overwhelming tasks, given the speed and destructiveness of the climatic changes that are upon us already, and the intransigence of the fossil-fuel systems upon which we still rely. Perhaps we will simply need to let our faith grow in the surprising generosity of God to save us, and find a deeper hope.

> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, 'Then who can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible'. (Matthew 19:25–26)

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ECOLOGY AND IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

José A. García

I SHALL START WITH an anecdote. Two or three years ago, in the light of the growing interest of the Church and many Christian groups in the relationship between spirituality and ecology, I heard a friend comment, *Just wait until some Jesuit comes out and says: Ignatius already knew all about this*. He was referring, of course, to the over-eager desire that some Jesuits display to turn the saint into a 'know-it-all', even about issues that he would never have thought about. I certainly would not want to be that Jesuit now ….

I think, however, that another way of exploring the relationship between ecology and Ignatian spirituality exists, one that goes beyond such unreasonable presumption. It consists in analysing whether, in the essence of that spirituality—at its core—there exists a vision of the world that can inspire us today in a deeper understanding of creation, and a greater care for our common home, the planet Earth. This is not only a vision but also a spiritual process through which our understanding is incarnated in our life and introduced into the public square. If taken positively, this would not imply the unwarranted imposition of the present on to the past (imposing ecology, as it is understood today, on Ignatius of Loyola), but rather the introduction of the past (Ignatius of Loyola) into the current problem that affects all of us, in order to see what possibilities it offers to gather us around him and mobilise us.

An example of this approach is given by Sylvia Robert, a French theologian, in an article about the vow of chastity in Ignatian spirituality, the tradition to which she herself belongs.[1] The author knows very well that the only observation on the theme which appears in the Jesuit *Constitutions* presupposes what today we cannot take for granted, and

This article first appeared as 'Ecología y espiritualidad ignaciana', *Manresa*, 87/3 (2015), 317–326. An earlier version of some sections was published under the same title in *The Way*, 57/3 (July 2018).

[1] See Sylvie Robert, '¿"Imitar la pureza evangélica"?', *Manresa*, 87/3 (2015).

is given in a language that challenges us: 'What pertains to the vow of chastity requires no interpretation' (*Constitutions*, VI.1.1[547]). She goes on to ask, 'Does this mean—to ask the next question—that Ignatian religious life lacks resources in its tradition to think about and live chastity?' Her answer is no. It is only that such resources have to be found at deeper levels of this spirituality, where the way we relate to ourselves, others, nature and God is forged, because it is there, at those levels, where the problem of chastity fundamentally comes into play. And Ignatius has a lot to say about these. One can wonder whether those contributions that help us to be chaste, deprived of this background orientation, can generate a true apostolic chastity on their own.

In any case, we are going to find something similar in studying the relationship between Ignatian spirituality and ecology, except that in this case the link between the two is really much closer than in the previous example. In order to begin, we have to affirm the following: *The care of the earth is so important for the present and future of humanity that all the humanist traditions, scientific and religious, that have something to contribute to this care should do so. Ignatian spirituality certainly does.* From this conviction arises the question that we were asking ourselves before: does Ignatian spirituality have something interesting of its own to say about a greater care for the common home, in synergy with the ecological movements of the moment? We believe that it does. The objective of these pages is to show it.

St Ignatius and His Sacramental Vision of the Universe

People can have a 'flat vision' or a 'sacramental vision' of the universe. The flat vision sees things, analyses them scientifically, relates them to one another, admires the wonders it discovers and so on, but it stops there. It does not transcend them with questions about their ultimate origin, their purpose, their meaning. The sacramental vision, by contrast, accepts the data given by the flat and scientific vision of reality, but does not limit itself to that. It penetrates towards the ultimate foundation until it discovers the entire universe and all the realities that compose it to be born of God, the primordial love from which they originate.

Ignatius belongs clearly to this second class of people, and we have much and very early testimony to this. The *Autobiography* says, for example, that upon finding himself sick in Loyola, 'the greatest consolation he used to receive was to look at the sky and the stars, which he did often and for a long time, because with this he used to feel in

The Creation of the Sun, Moon and Stars *by Master Bertram of Minden, from the Grabow Altarpiece, 1379–1383*

himself a great impetus towards serving Our Lord' (n.11). Here is a first clear example of the sacramental view of the universe. The heavens are not just the heavens; the stars are not just the stars. Transcending them and present in them at the same time, Ignatius discovered the greatness of the love of God, source of the consolation that he experienced.

First creation and then incarnation will be the two pillars of Ignatian spirituality, as they appear in the *Spiritual Exercises* and as we shall see later: the two pillars that support the sacramental vision of the world in which Ignatius lived. Since everything is created, everything is a sacrament of the Creator. Since God made the world, the world is the habitat of God and the *common home of humanity*, for which reason human beings owe it the greatest respect. No one is authorised to possess it or mistreat it out of self-interest.

However, in my view, the place where the sacramental conception of the world is manifested most fully is in the last contemplation of the Exercises, the Contemplation to Attain Love. We can note that this is not just one more Ignatian contemplation, but the spiritual way in which Ignatius wants to return the exercitant to daily life. That is to say, it is a whole spirituality for life, a spirituality that gathers in synthesis the spirit of the Exercises to be lived interiorly through our presence in the world. From there comes its central and special importance.

Now, according to this contemplation, and as we will see in what follows, the entire universe is gift, a grace that descends, a presence that inhabits everything and works in everything for our benefit. So it is that in the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola himself, the entire world and everything in it are sacraments of a loving and ever greater God. Things are not there for us to use arbitrarily. They have a vocation received

from God that human beings cannot twist to their own benefit. That is, I believe, a first and central contribution of the Christian and Ignatian tradition to the care of the Earth. Let's look at it a little more closely.

From the Beginning to the End of the Exercises

As is well known, the Exercises begin with the Principle and Foundation and finish with the Contemplation to Attain Love. These are the spirit and foundation of Ignatian spirituality, the firm rock upon which to found human liberty and the horizon of the same liberty, which is God. The four Weeks mark the process by which an exercitant becomes like Christ, without which we cannot receive the liberty that God offers as gift (Principle and Foundation), still less articulate it in the world as our own way of collaborating with the dream of God for the world (Contemplation to Attain Love).

Throughout this spiritual process the call to turn towards God and towards the human community is, in general, well known to us. What is not so clear, however, is that we have interiorised with equal intelligence and affect what touches our *ecological conversion,* that is to say, our relation with *las cosas*, 'the things'—an expression very dear to St Ignatius which, precisely on account of its extreme abstraction, serves to refer to everything that is neither God nor the human creature that stands before God. This relation with 'things' is less well explored, running the risk of an exaggerated anthropomorphism that loses sight of our condition as inhabitants of planet Earth, the worldly matrix of all the rest of our relations.

So, what do the beginning and end of the Exercises, which seem to embrace the whole linear process as a grand *inclusio*, say about this? What do they say about 'things', about our common home and the necessity of our conversion to it. Let's see.

The 'things' are more than things. They are creatures and gifts made out God's love for humanity. The Principle and Foundation affirms that not only human beings but 'the other things on the face of the earth', all of them, are created by God (Exx 23), which its to say that they ultimately come from God's originating love:

> For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? (Wisdom 11:24–25)

For its part, the Contemplation to Attain Love adds to this that *all reality, everything, is the locus for an encounter with God, the divine medium where God is revealed and waits for us.* This is a God who manifests Godself, according to Ignatius, in four metaphors:[2]

1. *Giving reality and giving Godself through it*: human beings can give without giving themselves, but God cannot. God self-communicates in what God gives.
2. *Inhabiting 'things'* so that we can always meet God in them, unlike the mythical gods who make forays among humanity only to return to their own Mount Olympus.
3. *Working in things for us*: 'My Father is still working, and I also am working' says Jesus (John 5:17). The Holy Sprit is always active in creation, works in it in order to open us to its mysterious vocation to participate (once liberated from the slavery to which we are subjected against our will) in the glorious liberty of the sons of God (see Romans 8:19–22).
4. *Descending into things*: this descent is for us salvific *kenosis,* a love which descends to our own level and inundates us with water and light: 'As the rays of light descend from the sun descend, as the rivers from their springs … etc'. as Ignatius would say (Exx 237).

Ever since his spiritual experiences in Loyola and Manresa, the world had become a great theophany for St Ignatius. God manifested Godself within it and through it God wanted to be found, adored, loved and served. This was his new mysticism, which would transform him from a hermit into the (future) Jesuit. From then on, the passion of Ignatius did not focus on fasting, penance and prayer, but on loving and serving God, loving and serving God's world. Later, when he was writing the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, he would ask each one of its members something that is valid for all, because it defines the most important horizon of his spirituality:

> They should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things, removing from themselves as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him, in conformity with his holy and divine will (*Constitutions*, III.1.26[288]).

[2] See Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Kenneth Baker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 275–276.

Does an *inspirational principle* not exist here in this triple relation with God, with others and with the earth, in which the life of humanity resides? Once situated within this cosmological vision, can we separate God from what God loves so much: the common home that has been given to us? Can we respond to God's love without expressing it in care for the habitat of all living beings? Definitely not. When we relate ourselves horizontally with things—says Ignatius—it is precisely to find and love *in them* the Source and Giver; to be *horizontal mystics*, contemplatives in action. When we relate ourselves vertically with God, it is precisely to discover and love *in God the world and its things*; to be active in contemplation.

In this Ignatian vision of the world as a reality filled with God, and God as someone who gives us the world and gives Godself in it, there is one thing to note: men and women, nature, the cosmos, historical events and so on are not an *occasion* from which we rise to God, as if they were a spiritual springboard. No. We do not find God *through* them, but *in* them. How then, if the Earth is a gift of God and the locus in which God gives Godself to us, can we become uninterested in it? This is not only for reasons of human survival (although it is that too), but strictly for theological—that is, sacred—reasons.

In fact, many traditions converge in the ecological movement, each one with its own emphasis. Ours is this: 'things' are creatures; they are gifts of God, not our own property. They are not for our free use. On coming close to them, the first thing that we have to do is to *take a step back*—'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground' (Exodus 3:5)—because they are from God; they do not belong to us. Only after this step back can we *take a step forward*, when we have already become brothers and sisters of the things of creation in the Franciscan sense.

This is what Ignatius meant with the *tantum quantum* of the Principle and Foundation and with the 'love and service of the divine majesty *in all things*' in the Contemplation to Attain Love. Have we not all experienced how, without taking that first step back out of respect, reverence and gratitude, our relationship with things can so easily become perverted, or change to one of domination, exploitation and self-seeking?

Ignatian spirituality has at its core this cosmological vision, according to which God and the world are not the same thing, nor can they be thought of in pantheistic terms, ancient or modern, but at the same time neither are they two disconnected realities set in a false dualism. On this point, Ignatius distances himself from both extremes.

The Creation of the World, *by Melchior Bocksberger, 1575*

He seems closer to Paul when he proclaimed at the Areopagus in Athens that everything is in God; from God everything receives life, breath and all there is besides (Acts 17: 24–29). In technical terms, this Pauline (and also Ignatian) vision is usually given the name *panentheism,* a Greek term whose literal meaning is 'all (is) in God': 'in him we live and move and have our being'. We move in ourselves, we exist in ourselves, we have our being in ourselves, certainly, with the autonomy that belongs to all creatures—but rooted in God. This is what the theologians call 'theonomous autonomy'.

The Threat to a Life Coherent with this Vision

This vision is threatened both by atavistic tendencies that have their origin in the interior depths of the human being and by a technocratic, instrumental consumerist culture that both objectifies and reinforces such tendencies. St Ignatius alludes in the Principle and Foundation to three of these tendencies as great impediments to the conversion of the human being, and his or her alliance with God and God's project for creation. There are three instincts which are good in themselves but can very easily mutate into the obsessions around which we build our lives:

- the good instinct *to live* that mutates into an obsession with life: 'not to seek health rather than sickness … a long life rather than a short one';
- the good instinct *to possess* that mutates into an obsession with accumulation: 'not to seek … wealth rather than poverty';
- the good instinct *to value* that mutates into an obsession with prestige: 'not to want … honor rather than dishonor' (Exx 23).

When any one of these obsessions, or all three, govern our life, how unfortunate are those who live at our side, and the creation that surrounds us! They turn into three insatiable idols to which everything, people and things, must be sacrificed. There is no longer any step backwards—for reverence or anything else. The contemplative view of reality collapses and with it the encounter with God. Hence the importance of the famous 'Ignatian indifference', that does not consist—it is important to note this to avoid misunderstanding—in it being all the same to me whether I am healthy or sick, loved or hated and so on, but in my desire always being orientated towards God and the Kingdom. The passion will obtain what no asceticism can achieve: that these three obsessions, these unhealthy fixations of desire, will not mark the horizon of our choices.

When St Ignatius broaches the theme of sin in the First Week, the meditations advance like this:

1. sin is the fruit of the misuse of human liberty: 'the sin of the angels … not wanting to better themselves by using their freedom' (Exx 50);
2. sin is hideous and evil in itself, and has aesthetic and ethical dimensions which affect anyone who commits it—and also the human species: 'the enormous corruption it brought to the human race' (Exx 51); 'looking at the foulness and evil which every mortal sin would contain in itself' (Exx 57);
3. an exclamation of amazement:

   > I reflect on all creatures and wonder how they have allowed me to live and have preserved me in life … the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the elements; the fruits, birds, fishes, and animals … the earth: How is it that it has not opened up and swallowed me? (Exx 60);

4. the last and gravest step of sin is an action 'against the Infinite Goodness' (Exx 52).

It seems clear that, for St Ignatius, the sin of humanity has to do directly with God; it affects God in that which constitutes the infinite goodness of God's being, which is Love. But this is only so because beforehand humanity has (if the term can be used) wounded what God has created: the rest of the human race, other creatures and the Earth. Thus sin reaches the heart of God through the 'foulness and evil' that

it generates in a world which is otherwise loved and dreamed into being by the God of infinite goodness.

St Ignatius, as we have seen, admired how the material elements of the cosmos did not rebel against humanity, even though the devastating effects of sin impede their vocation in the service of humanity and of God. Does not the Pauline message resound here? All creation experiences frustration at the sin of humanity, and hopes that one day it will be freed from bondage to participate in the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:20–22). In the process of the First Week of the Exercises, then, there is a powerful theological argument supporting our 'ecological conversion'.

Brothers and Sisters of Creation

In the Second Week, St Ignatius connects us with the Trinity that looks at the world and decides upon the incarnation of the Son, and later with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. What does this founding event of Christianity mean for the Christian experience of ecology?

- It means that one Person of the Trinity has become human like us and in so doing has become the brother not just of the individual human being, but also of the cosmic elements of which this world is made and with the common home (εἰκός, *eoikos*) that humanity inhabits.
- It means that the incarnation of Christ has made creation holy and given it a vocation to be brother and sister to the Son and put itself at the service of the Kingdom that he inaugurates.
- It means that humanity can no longer arbitrarily appropriate creation, but must receive it as gift and become brother and sister to it according to the plan of God.

Another important insight of St Ignatius comes in the meditation on the Two Standards. The heart of humanity is an ambiguous place where two proposals for salvation are present. One announces itself as apparently a path to life but actually leads to death; the other, of following Jesus (and hence of self-denial), seems to be a pathway of death but actually leads to life. The first is false but seems true; that is why it is so attractive. The second is life but does not seem so. Only those who enter into this way, following Jesus, know that it leads to the 'true life' (Exx 139).

Up to this point, everything is normal, pure Christian doctrine. The originality of the Ignatian interpretation is that for St Ignatius the first proposal of 'the enemy of human nature' is, for the most part, the greed for riches, whether material or spiritual. From there the sinner will make the leap to vain worldly honour, and thence to swelling pride and all the vices (Exx 42).

One wonders why it should be precisely like this, that the first step towards evil is greed for riches and not one of the other capital sins. It is true that the text introduces the qualification '*ut in pluribus*' (as it happens, 'for the most part'), but the statement stands, albeit nuanced. The enemy knows that the most attractive proposal, and that which appears to offer the greatest potential for salvation, is the one that connects directly with the deep-seated human tendency towards hoarding. If they manage to accumulate many goods, whether material, intellectual or spiritual, human beings are tempted into believing that they can say farewell to insecurities and fears because total security has arrived, and with it salvation. We know this is not true, but the proposal coincides very well with the mistakes our own hearts make. How else can we explain why it has so many adherents throughout our world? There is no need to dwell too much upon how this 'anthropological deception' affects the issue of ecology. Greed, ambition for prestige and pride are exercised not only against humanity, but also against the Earth.

Some Conclusions

I would like to finish this article by bringing forward certain conclusions derived from what has been said. The ecological potential of Ignatian spirituality is very real but it must be made more explicit, because the moment in which we are living demands it.

In the first place, we must ensure that the concentration on humanity's relationship with God and with Jesus Christ, typical of the Spiritual Exercises, does not obfuscate that other relationship with created things and with our common home which is also present in the Exercises, albeit under-explored. The danger of such a concentration, which in its negative aspect supposes a kind of amputation from creation, is not imagined but real. We will therefore have to strengthen the ecological dimension of the Exercises more, both in our own spiritual life and in the ministry of the Exercises.

To strengthen the ecological dimension of the Exercises more

Secondly, the ecological conversion which, if it is to be real, must manifest itself in the care of the Earth is not optional for those who wish to follow Jesus in the way of St Ignatius. It is at the heart of that way and affects us all, whether we are activists in the ecological movement or not.

Thirdly, in any case, but even more so if we are ecological activists, the challenge is that this involvement should be, in itself, spiritual. That is to say it must be an 'ecology of the Spirit', rooted in God the Father, the creator of the universe, in the Son who pitched his tent among us, and in the Spirit who inspires the construction of a new heaven and a new earth. Scientific and technical assessments will be essential, but not sufficient. We need to live it out of a spirituality that sustains and encourages our long-term motivations and converts our ecological praxis into the proclamation of the good news of the gospel of God for the Earth.

Fourthly, Ignatius is very realistic about what we have called the 'atavistic tendencies' of the human being that directly affect the plundering of the Earth. Jesus was even more so when he said that whoever tries to save his life by greed for riches, idolatry and accumulation will lose it (Luke 12:12–16). But it turns out that, in addition to losing his or her life, that person also distorts and destroys the vocation of things and people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable—a vocation planted in them by God. Our task is personally and publicly to reveal this 'manufacturing defect' as the first step to preventing it from expanding and widening its ramifications.

Finally, there remains an issue which is very difficult to raise, but also unavoidable. Can the Christian-Ignatian emphasis and motivation for concern about the environment form an explicit part of the ecological debate, alongside other humanist or scientific emphases and traditions? Should it? One might think so, but the when and the how are very complex and must be carefully thought through.

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translated by Philip Harrison SJ

THE SPIRITUALITY OF JOHN COBB

Robert E. Doud

JOHN B. COBB JR, who died on Boxing Day 2024, was a professor of theology at the Claremont School of Theology and at the School of Religion at the Claremont Graduate University. He was an important figure in the promotion of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and the theological school known as *process theology*. Cobb was also revered as a preacher and as an activist in social and ecological movements, and he was an instigator and organizer of several ongoing international seminars and institutes. As someone interested in bringing together a Whiteheadian view of reality with Ignatian spirituality, I am also enthusiastic about broadening the readership of Cobb's work. With Cobb, we shall consider here aspects of discernment that involve piety, prayer, art, poetry and ecology.

Cobb and Whitehead

As Whitehead did before him, Cobb seeks to guide Western philosophy between the Scylla and Charybdis of dualism and mechanism. Dualism divides body and soul into separate realms, making distinct substances of each of them. Mechanism makes of the body a machine that operates by physical laws governing the connection of its separate parts.[1] Process philosophy is the philosophy of *organism*; it sees the body as already spiritual and charged with moral and aesthetic values.

A process take on human nature views us not as substantial beings who preserve our original identities through life, but rather as a serial flow of transformative events that build upon one another, while absorbing multiple influences and constantly undergoing change. Viewed

[1] See Charles Birch and John B. Cobb Jr, *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1981), especially chapter 4.

instantaneously and microscopically, there is no enduring basis of identity that remains the same through our lifetimes. We are creatures of becoming, and not of substance or static being.

Whitehead's ultimate metaphysical principle is *creativity*, an energy that drives reality forward and crystallizes instantaneously into a myriad infinitesimal instances that he called *actual entities*.[2] Each actual entity contains data that comprise its own distinct universe, composed of previous actual entities that enter the constitution of the newly forming actual entity by a process that is called *prehension*. At the core of each, as it forms, is a decision that directs the process of self-formation and self-determination.[3] Perhaps the most important notion in Whitehead's cosmological scheme from the point of view of spirituality and discernment of spirits is that of the *lure* of God.[4] The lure is a set of possibilities offered by God to each actual entity in the universe in the brief moment of its existence. This lure instigates the very existence of the actual entity, and provides an ideal package for the optimal realisation of that actual entity. No two actual entities are provided by God with exactly the same supply of potentials.

While creativity, as the ultimate principle, is also the principle of novelty in Whitehead, and while each actual entity is an instance or creature of creativity, it is the lure that instigates and explains the arrival of novelty in the universe, and of the moment-by-moment flow of life for human beings. God's originating supply of eternal forms or pure potentials for each actual entity is called the *ideal aim* or *initial aim* for that entity. The initial aim evolves into the *subjective aim*, which is the newly self-forming entity's revision of that initial aim, which then becomes the final aim for its own self-realisation.

If we introduce the discussion of discernment of spirits, we must take into account the conversion or transformation process by which the initial aim evolves into the subjective aim. It is here that human freedom comes into play and shapes the self-formation of the actual

[2] See John B. Cobb Jr, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead,* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 211–212. 'Creativity is the actuality of every actual entity … it is that in virtue of which they have concreteness'. And, 'Creativity will always take new forms, but it will always continue to be unchangingly creative'.

[3] See Robert E. Doud, 'Ignatian Spirituality and Whitehead', *The Way*, 48/3 (July 2009), 47–60, especially 49.

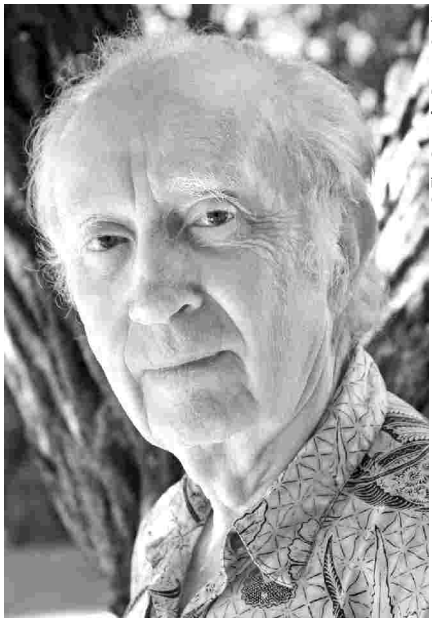
[4] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978 [1929]), 85: 'The subjective aim is not primarily intellectual; it is the lure for feeling. This lure for feeling is the germ of mind.'

entity as an atom of decision-making. Spirituality, in the Whiteheadian perspective, cannot be a matter of preserving an original state of unsullied perfection; rather, it is one of tracing and guiding our own development and self-improvement through multifarious alterations. Whitehead's ultimate metaphysical principle is *creativity*; likewise Cobb writes about *creative transformation*.

Other Influences

While Cobb's deepest, conscious and most direct influences are derived from and rooted in Whitehead, as a proud product of the Chicago Divinity School, he was also influenced by the philosopher and psychologist John Dewey (1859–1952).[5] Whitehead was a metaphysician and cosmologist; Dewey was a pragmatist and educational theorist. The key features in Dewey's philosophy are his experimentalism, interactionism and instrumentalism. His focus is on learning and personal growth through experience—through interaction with our social and cultural surroundings—with every experience seen as a means to growth and improvement, anticipating further moments of experience. Thus, Cobb's work reflects ideas and sensibilities that remind us as much of Dewey as they do of Whitehead.

Another influence on the young Cobb was Henry Nelson Weiman (1884–1975), who was also a luminary of the Chicago Divinity School. Himself influenced by Dewey, Weiman is noted for his theocentric naturalism and empirical theology. He had studied Bergson, and early on saw the compatibility between Darwin's theory of evolution and Christian thought. In *The Source of Human Good* (1946), Weiman coined the terms and phrases *creative event*,



John B. Cobb Jr in 2013

[5] See Schubert M. Ogden, 'Present Prospects for Empirical Theology', in *The Future of Empirical Theology*, edited by Bernard E. Meland (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1969), 88.

creative interchange and *intercommunication*. These ideas resonate with Whitehead's principle of creativity, as well as with the title of Bergson's magisterial book *Creative Evolution*, and with Cobb's focal idea of *creative transformation*

Cobb is influenced in his approach to the Bible by Rudolf Bultmann, who distinguished some parts of the New Testament as historical, and other parts as mythological.[6] Bultmann treated the New Testament text as a historical document of the first century, and at the same time probed the text for its existential relevance for today's believing Christian; he developed techniques for demythologizing the New Testament. This process both he and Cobb deemed necessary if the Bible were to speak meaningfully to Christians of the twentieth century.

No consideration of Cobb's contribution would be complete without his account of the complementarity between Christianity and Buddhism.[7] For him what is most striking about Buddhism is its aura of tranquillity and peace of mind. The value of compassion in relation to all creatures is also attractive, and seems to be similar to the Christian value of love. There are several schools of Buddhist thought and practice, and all seem to get along compatibly with one another. Indeed, one might wonder if someone could be both a Christian and a Buddhist without compromising allegiance to either religion.

Spirituality, Discernment and Prayer

Cobb's article 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective' remains a superb introduction to the subject of spirituality and to the process perspectives of Whitehead and others.[8] Cobb has authored, co-authored or contributed to dozens of other publications, but this article may be viewed as having a place at the central core of his lifelong project in philosophy, theology and spirituality.

[6] John B. Cobb Jr, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 70: 'Christian existentialists such as Rudolf Bultmann have closely associated God with an openness to the future'.

[7] John B. Cobb Jr, 'Response to Tanaka', in *John Cobb's Theology in Process*, edited by David Ray Griffin and Thomas J. J. Altizer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 179 : 'From the Christian side a vista opens up for a creative transformation of Christianity through inner appropriation of Buddhist contributions'. And see John B. Cobb Jr, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

[8] John B. Cobb Jr, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', in *Religious Experience and Process Theology: the Pastoral Implications of a Major Modern Movement*, edited by Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist, 1976), 349–367.

In it he describes prayer as 'the whole stance of openness to God and responsiveness to the divine call'. Prayer is always a state of communion with God, but it is also involves sustained attention and cultivated sensibility towards the will of God and the aims God sends to us as regards our wider human welfare: 'God's aim at a more inclusive realisation contributing to a more inclusive future'. There is a sense in which formal times and exercises of prayer are appropriate—in a 'specific practice of intensification of the Christian stance toward God'—and a wider sense in which we ought always to pray.[9] On some level, our entire human consciousness and our unconscious as well should evolve into a sustained state of prayer as communion with God and atunement to the divine will. Especially in his discussion of the *consequent nature of God* in the final pages of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead insists on God as experiencing the world, just as humans experience things, themselves and the world. God is not beyond being influenced by the world. For Cobb as well, God is always immanent in the world, and the world is immanent in God. Mutual immanence also entails mutual influence.

A sustained state of prayer as communion with God

The discernment of spirits is a part of our constant praying, and it involves a stream of choices in which we accept and embrace the path God offers us, while eschewing the delusions, deceptions and temptations that lead away from God and hinder our development towards ever more enriched spiritual experience.[10] Cobb's suggestion for pastoral practice is that it should be based on discernment, understood as sustained attention to the divine aims available in prayer, that it be tied in some way to biblical study and inspiration, and that it be non-mechanical and free of techniques that might tend to direct it towards particular vocations or spiritual interests.[11]

Here the contemplative movements in the Christian Churches blend and merge with the active and missionary approaches of the religious orders. The reading of the scriptures remains a key feature of our piety, but we recognise that action and service are required of us as we build together the Kingdom of God, in so far as this is possible in this world and on this planet, without ever claiming that we earn or deserve our

[9] Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 364.
[10] See Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 366.
[11] See Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 356, 360; John B. Cobb Jr, *Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), especially 46–52.

salvation by Christ: 'We are saved as we are and do not earn God's favors'.[12]

Our discernment should be orientated towards future directions more than to past traditions. It should favour freedom and novelty—and even, at times, disruption. It should favour the building up of civilisation, the Church and the Kingdom of God.[13] Cobb's spirituality focuses on the future as it might afford an enrichment of spiritual experience. What decisions in the present show the most promise for a richer and more rewarding piety in the future, near and far? We can learn from the past, but our mission is not to preserve attitudes and practices that have become bankrupt or antiquarian. The constant sifting of our experience for clues and lures given to us by God manifests our faith in God as our primary spiritual director. Our hope and our future rest in the mystery of divinity—which may be somewhat richer in our living faith that it is in the philosophy of Whitehead and Cobb.

Reason and philosophy cannot fully or exhaustively comprehend God's mystery. Even so, God supplies lures and instigations, to ordinary people as well as to some of the most intellectually gifted individuals, to pursue philosophy and try with natural reason to express and to appreciate the height, depth and penetrating presence in the world of divine truth, bounty and beauty. With brains in our heads, we probe for connections between our beliefs, and philosophy and natural theology. Ultimately, there is no merely rational or scientific explanation of our faith; neither is Christian faith irrational or purely mythical. The truths of faith and the divine aims for our lives, individually and corporately, are to be discerned in prayer and in sacramental living as mysteries that envelope us as beloved creatures of God as 'the great Companion' who understands us.[14]

Our Environment and the Kingdom

Divine prompts and instigations do not only come to us directly from God as lures provided to individual actual entities. They also come through our interactions with nature, educational experiences, and relationships with other people and institutions. Our entire environment is charged with influences from others that stream into us and

[12] Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 363.
[13] See Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 356–357.
[14] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 255, quoting Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 532.

become part of our internal constitution. Discerning God in family, friendships and other associations, and in planetary nature, is part of our task. Cobb is committed to the thought of the heavenly kingdom as present and operative in our world and on our planet.[15]

Rocky Mountains, 'Lander's Peak', *by Albert Bierstadt, 1863*

In his book on christology, Cobb cites the work of André Malraux about the images of Christ that continue in the arts through the ages since biblical times.[16] There are *images of hope* available to us in the arts of many times and cultures—even ones not historically connected to Christianity—that may serve as lures to holiness for Christians. Cobb observes how the Christian message has seeped into and penetrated the general secular culture.[17] In particular, the arts and entertainment have picked up Christian themes and interpreted them for modern consumption. While the biblical and Christian messages have not been replaced, they have been recast and have found complementary implementation in the fields of painting, literature, music and the other arts. Theological writers have noticed that Christian virtues and spiritual attitudes have cropped up globally, sometimes in ways inspired by other religions.[18] Our piety, like history and culture, is always undergoing transformations that make it ever more global, secular and ecological.[19]

[15] See Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, chapter 14.
[16] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 23: 'In the creative transformation of styles that is the history of art the Christian may discern Christ'; and, 'Art became increasingly autonomous and the sacredness that once attached to the visible Christ progressively defined the creative principle of art itself' (40).
[17] See Cobb, 'Spiritual Discernment in a Whiteheadian Perspective', 350: 'As our churches became secular, our culture grew religious'.
[18] See Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 178.
[19] On secularisation see John B. Cobb Jr, *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 114: 'The secularization of Christianity turns attention away from our inner states and our quest for peace of mind or spirit toward the outward work of transforming the world'; on ecology see Birch and Cobb, *Liberation of Life*, especially chapter 4.

Beauty and Poetry

Thinking with Whitehead, the most ultimate and universal intention of God, governing and directing all of God's other aims, is that of the aim towards *beauty*. According to Cobb, 'Whitehead uses the term "beauty" to refer to that which gives value to actual occasions of experience'. A thing's beauty belongs to its intrinsic value. But beauty is also 'a property of the experience and not as such, directly, of the things experienced'.[20] Beauty is an organic concept, because it entails the coming into harmony of several factors. It has *strength* in so far as it harmonizes more or fewer factors, and it has *intensity* if it has novelty or freshness and sharpness of impact. God's general aim is to intensify the experience of beauty for actual entities; each aim God supplies participates in this aura of intention. For Whitehead, God is the 'poet of the world' who aims at a Harmony of Harmonies in which everything fits in and does its job.[21]

A Harmony of Harmonies in which everything fits in

Whitehead writes about the importance of poetry in 'The Romantic Reaction', a chapter in *Science in the Modern World.* Poetry celebrates value and enhances our experiences of beauty—or provides more of them. The Romantic poets 'emphatically bear witness that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values'.[22]

> The nature poetry of the Romantic revival was a protest on behalf of the organic view of nature, and also a protest against the exclusion of value from the essence of matter of fact …. The romantic reaction was a protest on behalf of value.[23]

Value is an 'element which permeates through and through the poetic view of nature'.[24] So poetry and the cultural arts can raise awareness and help us discern God's presence and direction in nature and in our social connections.

[20] Cobb, *Christian Natural Theology*, 101. And see Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 252: 'Beauty is the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience'; and, in *Process and Reality*, 112: 'Thus God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensity [beauty]'.

[21] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346: 'He is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness'.

[22] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1969 [1925]), 87.

[23] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 94.

[24] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 93.

Ecological Civilisation

If the will of God, as we discern it together for our common benefit, is to enhance the experience of beauty for all creatures, then *sustainability* becomes our focal concern. If our common global problem today is one of keeping our planet alive and flourishing in all ways and for all species of life, then our behaviours must change, especially in regard to consumption of goods and resources.

As long ago as 1972 Cobb warned in his book *Is It Too Late?* of a coming ecological catastrophe caused by pollution and overpopulation. He went on to create the idea of an 'ecological civilisation' as the grand theme and culmination of his theological programme. This theme is being continued and developed by the Cobb Institute, which was named in his honour in 2019.[25] I notice that in his recent comments on these matters, Cobb often made reference to Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'*. I should like to conclude with my own attempt to envision an ecological civilisation, faithful to the inspirations of Whitehead and Cobb.

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We all live in one house, our common home, on one planet, in one universe. We are called to create and maintain a common global civilisation. The backbone of this civilisation is a peaceful state in which the institutions that are civilisation's pillars can endure. Peace is the tranquillity of order. There can be no civilisation without a residual condition of peace and coexistence. Civilisation is order among a complex of institutions that govern all aspects of human living and endeavour.

Each person in a civilised community must cultivate attitudes and join in activities that are fuelled by love, solidarity, compassion, benevolence, cooperation, tolerance and respect. Civilised societies and institutions support and invoke the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Peace on earth means mutual good will, good sense, fellowship and helpful forms of religion. Order is the rule of sound institutions, involving law, education, science and the rules of fair play.

Civilisation entails matters and practices of civil law and criminal justice, nutrition and food security, communication and transportation, sewer systems and sanitation, health and medical care, education,

[25] See https://cobb.institute, accessed 10 February 2025.

entertainment, corporations and entrepreneurs, maintenance and good repairs, employment and compensation, wealth and property, supply of essentials and fair distribution, defence and national protection, taxation that is minimal, fair and even, and the arbitration of rights and claims.

Included are concerns for the care and cleanliness of skies, oceans, landscapes, fields, rivers, forests and mountains: reducing polar ice melts, stopping smoke and air pollution, frugal use of energy (especially fossil fuels), development of renewable energy sources, purging the seas of plastics and other debris, preservation of wild areas, control of human population, and education on matters of common concern. To achieve these ends the cooperation of global governments is essential.

Religion must temper itself to avoid fanaticism, annoying people, and imposing beliefs and practices on others; it should respect the diversity of religious expressions among people. Civilised values are inchoately Christian if they are inclusive, global and ecological; Christianity may be present and doing its best when working in covert ways and being less obvious. Concern for the ecology or planetary environment marks a high state of social and cultural evolution. This concern may appear at first to be merely secular, but it is radically Christian as well.

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THE UNIVERSE, COSMOLOGY AND THE FULLNESS OF THE KINGDOM

Enriching Our Perspectives

E. Edward Kinerk

PERSPECTIVES ARE IMPORTANT because they affect what we see and hear, and give significant meaning to our lives. For believers, the most important perspective imaginable is our faith: it influences every aspect of our lives, and is a perspective that we share with vast numbers of other beings both alive today and deceased many years ago. We believe that there is a God who created us and the whole universe. We believe that God loves us and wants us to love one another; we believe that God loves us so much that we can always deepen our awareness of that love. But we need constantly to expand our perspective, both in particular situations and in broader generalities.

Let me give a personal example. Several years ago I was installed as the new president of Rockhurst University in Kansas City. As president I wore my clericals almost daily, whereas in my previous jobs I had only worn them on special occasions. In any case, shortly after my installation I was driving off campus to a meeting. It was early afternoon and I found myself behind a car which was following the speed limit—much too slow for me. However, there was no traffic, so I moved into the oncoming lane and sped past the car. Just a short distance ahead there was a traffic light with two lanes. The light was red, so both I and the driver whom I had passed pulled up—right next to each other. I looked over at the other car and its driver; a woman turned and looked back and then put her hand over her mouth as if she were surprised.

I instantly realised that she had seen I was a priest, and perhaps even recognised me as the new president of Rockhurst University. At that moment it was as if a message flashed up on the window in front of me: 'You are a public person now; you can't drive the way you used

to!' I knew I had to do something, so I decided then that whenever I got impatient on the road, I should remind myself that the driver of the car in front and I would one day be united in all-consuming love for all eternity, so I should start now! And I know it worked because I remember one incident when I thought, 'I'm not going to think that this time'. But in general, it changed the way I drove, and it gave me a much better perspective from which to view other drivers on the road.

The Universe

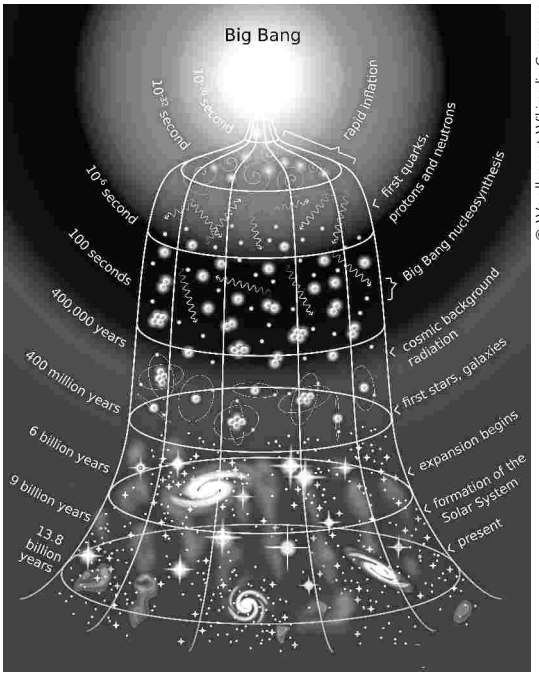
In recent years, especially with the help of advanced telescopes, we have learnt a great deal about the universe which is our home. It is enormous, beyond our wildest imagination. At the same time, one of the most rapidly advancing areas of knowledge is quantum physics, which studies the tiniest particles in the universe and their interaction. While none of this changes the essentials of our faith, it does give us a richer perspective from which to view that faith. The kinds of perspectives we can gain from both cosmology and quantum physics can enhance our faith in extraordinary ways. Beginning with the microscopic, at the beginning of the universe, and ending with the incredible size of the universe now, I hope to find here a much broader perspective on the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

We know now that the universe began about 13.8 billion years ago. This sounds like a long time (and it definitely is), but scientists believe that the universe is still in its infancy. The current expectation is that it has about one trillion years to go. So, if the universe were a human being who was going to live for a hundred years, we would be one year and four months old at this time.

We also know what our universe looked like within a few microseconds of the Big Bang, and I shall start there with the understanding of God's creation. What is now known as the Big Bang theory was proposed by a Belgian Jesuit priest, Georges Lemaître.[1] He was instrumental in establishing the model of a universe which was expanding and would

[1] See Georges Lemaître, 'Contributions to a British Association Discussion on the Evolution of the Universe', *Nature*, 128 (1931), 704–706. The phrase 'big bang' itself was coined by the astronomer Fred Hoyle in a 1949 radio programme explaining competing theories of the universe. See Helge Kragh, 'How Did the Big Bang Get Its Name? Here's the Real Story', *Nature*, 627 (2024), 726–728; and her book *Cosmology and Controversy: The Historical Development of Two Theories of the Universe* (Princeton: Princeton U, 1996).

continue to expand and not fall back on itself. Some scientists saw the notion that the universe had a beginning as an attempt to bring God into the picture. But, the Big Bang theory does not, of course, prove that there is a God. The faith question should be: *why is there something rather than nothing?*



The history of the universe

There are a trillion years to go before matter will be so spread out that no interaction will occur. We will not look seriously at that future, but we will conclude our view of the universe with death—anyone's death, whether he or she died five thousand years ago or will die fifty thousand years from now. It is important to remember that there is no time after death, so everything will be totally present to us. For example, when you die you will be in the Kingdom of God with all of your family including those who are still alive and even those who have not yet been born.

The Microscopic

Let us go, then, to the beginning of time. Within a few microseconds of the Big Bang there was an incredibly dense packet of microscopic matter, principally quarks—the first and smallest of elementary particles and fundamental constituents of matter—and electrons. Very quickly after the Big Bang subatomic particles began to combine, while still remaining themselves. The quarks united with other quarks to become neutrons and protons, held together by an incredibly strong force named, imaginatively, the strong force.

The four fundamental forces of nature are gravity, the electromagnetic force, the nuclear force called the weak force, and the strong force. Gravity is the attraction between two objects that have mass or energy.

The electromagnetic force is the force between electrically charged particles. The weak nuclear force is responsible for particle decay. The strong force is the force which binds quarks together so powerfully it is almost impossible to separate them.

The neutrons and protons were then brought together by the electromagnetic force to become the nuclei for atoms. After about 300,000 years, electrons got in on the act and united with these nuclei actually to form atoms, initially of hydrogen and some helium. Then the atoms, brought together through gravity, combined to make stars. From stars' furnaces and later explosions came heavier atoms, and from the formation of new stars came planets. Sometimes in stars, and especially on planets, atoms came together with other atoms to make molecules. On planets came more complex molecules, and eventually molecules on some planets joined to make something more, what we call living cells. Then, again on some planets, cells came together to make plant life and animal life. And animal life evolved, creating ever more complex animals; and, finally, here we are—human beings.

Now while this is the present end of the line for evolutionary science, it is not the end of the line as far as ultimate reality (including God) is concerned. First of all, there is now a new energy at work in making things happen, and that energy is love. Of course, also at work is the opposite of love, which is fear. Love, however, is not a physical energy, totally predictable like the original four fundamental forces. Love is a free choice on the part of a living being. Now love is obviously extremely important, but human love is not the last step. The last step is the fullness of love among us and the fullness of love with God in the Kingdom of God. This is the final outcome of a process that began with the quarks.

The final outcome of a process that began with the quarks

As human beings we work now towards the Kingdom, but ultimately it is completed beyond our wildest dreams by God, Who is love. God, through creation, keeps bringing things together to make even more complex things, including us. God set this all into motion by causing the Big Bang to produce quarks and electrons, and by establishing the four forces, which are still operative. And out of this initial creation came everything we know and see today. Now we, using a force (love) given us by God, continue to bring people together to help God provide the Kingdom of God.

It is worth noting that in the coming together of similar elements, progress is not necessarily made by identical particles combining. Even

the quarks that formed protons and neutrons had different charges. And the atoms coming together to form molecules were not generally all the same. For example, water, H_2O, is two hydrogen atoms combined with an oxygen atom. Nevertheless, all the quarks are quarks, and all the atoms are atoms. God intended that mixing elements that were different, but from the same category, would be important.

This models how human beings come together. It is important to note that every person brings to others not just his or her human nature but also what makes him or her unique: a human being, but a unique human being. Pope Francis touches on this in his wonderful book, *Let Us Dream*, when he speaks about synodality: bringing together the truth from each side and coming up with a new proposition which will be better than either of the two initial propositions.[2]

Finally, we need to realise that the energies that most shape our world today are love and fear. Fear leads to anger, separation and even demonization. Love leads to union, peace and joy. Since God is love, love is never lost. A simple act of kindness can help to change the world. One person's act of kindness does not just affect the person who receives it, but is likely to make that person a bit kinder in turn; and that person's kindness touches others. A kind smile on the street can lead to a gentler heart in the recipient, who is kinder to others, and so on. Who knows: that initial smile might have prevented World War Three. We must remember that ultimately love is from God, and so love never dies.

The Macroscopic

The visible universe, that is, the universe that we can detect using radio telescopes, contains as many as 7×10^{22} stars.[3] That would be 70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, or seventy thousand billion, billion. Another way that cosmologists describe the visible universe is to say that there are more stars in it than grains of sand on the planet earth. We do not know the full size of the universe but it is clearly much larger than the number of stars we can detect. Now this is a lot of stars; but we are not finished. We know from the way stars are formed that most stars have planets, so there are probably several times more

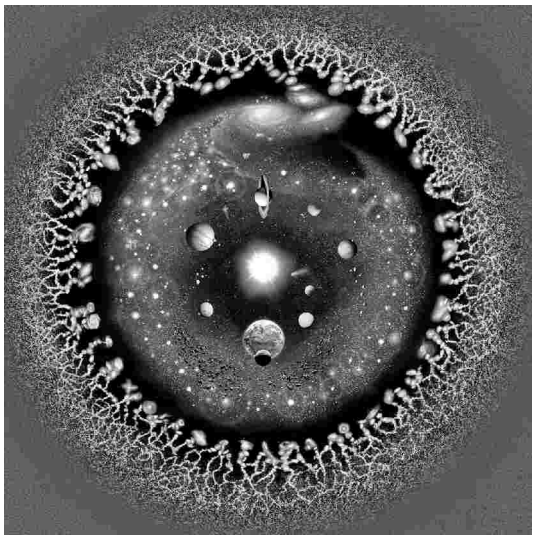
[2] See Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 82 following.

[3] The actual estimate is between 3×10^{22} and 7×10^{22}. I used the larger number—both are huge beyond our imagination—because, though we have been speaking about the visible universe, we know that the actual universe is much larger, and so there would be many more stars in the total universe.

planets than stars in the visible universe. We cannot detect most of these planets directly because they do not produce light as stars do, but through other means we know that they are there.

What are the odds that we are the only intelligent species in the universe? About zero! Remember that the same dynamics and particles which God established with the Big Bang exist throughout the universe, and clearly God wanted intelligent life to emerge on this planet, so probably this is true for other planets as well. What if only one intelligent species existed in each galaxy (there are at least one hundred billion stars in our galaxy)? The wild estimate on the number of galaxies goes from 200 million to 2 trillion. In any case, the odds are terrifically in favour of there being many other intelligent species throughout the universe. And we must remember, too, that the universe is in its infancy; even if there are only a few other sentient species scattered across it today there will almost certainly be more eventually.

But our neighbours who might exist could well live very, very far away. Even if the nearest star to us has a planet inhabited by intelligent species, they would be 4.5 light years away from us. And our Milky Way galaxy is huge—nearly 100,000 light years across. The nearest other galaxy to ours is Andromeda, and it is 2.5 million light years away. If we were to send a radio message to intelligent life on a planet in that galaxy it would not reach them until 2,502,023 years later on Earth! Moreover, the universe is expanding at an ever-increasing rate of speed, so galaxies are getting further apart.[4]



Earth's location in the universe

So, at present, it would seem unlikely that we will

[4] This expansion is caused by dark energy (we call it dark because it is a bit mysterious, though we can detect it). Dark energy causes space to expand between galaxies. It does not cause expansion within a galaxy because it is offset there by gravity and something called dark matter, which is another mysterious force that augments the gravity of ordinary matter.

be encountering any other intelligent species soon. On the other hand, science and communication may be very different hundreds of years from now? Perhaps the speed of light may not remain a boundary for communication and travel. It is not likely, but who could have dreamed just a hundred years ago about where we would be today. And who knows how many other species are out there, even though we are not likely to encounter them in our lifetime on Earth. Unless we destroy them sooner, our planet and the human race on earth have about 7.5 billion years to find them before the sun explodes and obliterates our home.

Now, accepting that there are probably other intelligent species in our universe, what does it mean for us? Well, for one, it will be a revolutionary moment if we encounter such a species. It will probably bring both fear and excitement and it will certainly draw us closer together on this planet. Skin colour and accent become pretty insignificant if we meet or envision an intelligent being who has an elephant's trunk with twenty fingers, weighs six hundred pounds and speaks like a small baby squeaking. (Just joking, but who knows?)

What is more immediately important is that this is God's universe, and so another sentient species that we encounter will also be God's children. They will have the same type of origin as human beings: quarks coming together to make the nuclei of atoms, and so on. This leads to two immediate conclusions. The first is that these beings, as different as they might seem to us, are our brothers and sisters as God's children. It also means that we can expect to be totally united with them after we die and are in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

We may be surprised, but we will almost certainly find that many of these creatures also believe in God, and acknowledge that God is love and that we need to love one another. Whether or not an incarnation took place on their planet, we cannot know. But for all species love brings union and joy. Meeting them may mean widening our concept of expressing love but it will not diminish our understanding, or their understanding, that God is love and that God wants us to love one another and love God. Remember that on this planet Earth we came from unions of particles: quarks and quarks, atoms and atoms. The same physical bonds will exist on any planet in any galaxy, so it is likely that any intelligent beings will also bond with one another through love. After all, the same God who created this universe will be working among them just as much as God does with us.

One thing that we can do now is pray for these beings. Prayer for others is always an act of love and love never vanishes. So, praying for sentient beings from other planets, wherever they may be, is never wasted because, with God, a loving prayer is always heard and always makes a difference though we rarely know during this life on Earth what that difference is. We may not have contact with beings from other worlds in this life but eventually, in the fullness of the Kingdom, of course we will. Finally, we have always known that the fullness of the Kingdom is beyond our imagination—because God is beyond our imagination—but now we need to realise that the members of the Kingdom will be beyond our imagination too. That 'beyond' is only in this life. In the fullness of life we will not only know and love all those in the Kingdom but we will also, as John the Evangelist puts it, 'be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). Praying for them—even though we have no idea who they are—gives us a broader vision of God and of God's Kingdom.

The Ultimate Perspective: The Kingdom of God

We now know that, from the beginning of the universe, particles came together to make something more, ultimately resulting in sentient life. We also know that the purpose of sentient life is to come together to help make the Kingdom of God. This is the ultimate perspective through which we need to view our own lives and the lives of others. Every sentient creature in the universe plays a role in the final make-up of the Kingdom of God. We do this through the life we live (which we hope will be loving) and through what we do for others (which we hope will help them to be more loving).

Every soul that is lost somehow subtracts from the potential great love in the Kingdom. Love is ultimately from God and is always infinite, so subtracting something finite from the infinite still leaves a result that is infinite. But our mission as human beings is to do whatever we can to increase the love around us which helps to build up the Kingdom of God. Jesus saw this as his role in his public ministry. His first teaching in Mark's Gospel was, 'the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news' (Mark 1:15); and later in that same chapter he walked away from people who had come to Peter's house seeking healing in order to go to other towns to proclaim the good news: 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do'.

(Mark 1:38). In other words, his public life was all about getting people to prepare for the fullness of the Kingdom.

The coming of the Kingdom is going on everywhere but it is helpful every now and then to recognise what is truly happening and rejoice in it. Imagine going to a friend's home for a picnic supper one late afternoon and evening in the spring. After parking you walk around to the garden. It is gorgeous. Grass as green as can be, flowers in bloom with a delightful smell. Several families are already there, the adults talking and the kids playing. Just for a moment, you thank God for the scene. God has laboured for all eternity by bringing particles (including humans) together on the way towards the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Those comings together which you are witnessing have been going on for 13.8 billion years and will continue into eternity when they will be completed. In the meantime, you can enjoy the intermediate consequences of God's work and desires: from quarks to cells coming together to make something more—the grass and the flowers; from cells coming together to make you and your friends; and now you and your friends coming together to make something more—the body of Christ, which will be completed in the fullness of the Kingdom. This is the Kingdom of God unfolding in front of you and a promise of what is to come if you continue to love.

The Kingdom of God unfolding in front of you

Or on some clear night look up into the sky and see the stars. It is often a beautiful and even breathtaking experience. And then tell yourself that there is more love up there (other planets with sentient creatures) than you can possibly imagine. Rejoice with them and for them, and imagine God rejoicing for you and with you. It is often too easy to think that we are alone in our relationship with God and even somewhat in our relationships with others. In fact, we are not alone. Yes, we are all unique individuals. There is no other sentient creature exactly like me. Only I can bring my uniqueness to the fullness of the Kingdom; and there are probably billions, if not trillions, of other sentient creatures also bringing unique contributions to the fullness of the Kingdom.

Enriched Perspectives: Spiritual Thoughts and Practices

What can we take from our deeper scientific perspective? There are several thoughts or practices we might want to consider. First of all, we can expand our perspective on the Kingdom of God. Our contemporary

perspective on the universe, fostered by recent science, can expand our notion of the fullness of the Kingdom of God and make us more and more aware of our own desired destiny. Reflection on the fullness of the Kingdom moves us to give more attention to Jesus' message to us: 'the kingdom of God has come near'. This does not mean we should not focus on life around us now; it means that we should do this by loving more and helping others to love more, encouraging them to see this life as a preparation for true life. This perspective shows us that we are completely surrounded by love and that God is working through everything to bring us into the Kingdom.

Second, we can deepen our perspective on our own selves. We can trace our human existence back to quarks coming together to make something more. And those quarks, now part of atoms, molecules and cells, are still within each of our bodies today. God intended this, and intended all of the other comings together that contributed to the bodies we now possess. Of course, the matter in our bodies constantly changes; but God knew all of the quarks, atoms, molecules and cells from their beginning and intended them. God intends me, loves me and enjoys my unique participation in the Kingdom.

This is an awareness to take to prayer—both God's awareness and God's infinite love for me and, of course, my uniqueness. There is no other creature in the universe exactly like me, and God intended this. God's relationship with me is unique since I am unique, and therefore God's love for me is unique. This is a wonderful thought but a challenging one, for the fullness of the Kingdom of God will be more or less dependent on how fully each of us (both humans and other sentient creatures) gives ourselves in love. I realise that the Kingdom of God will be the fullness of love whether or not I choose to love, but it will somehow be less if I choose not to. I realise, too, that this seems like a contradiction, but again we are dealing with the infinite. If you subtract 25 points from infinite points then the points are still infinite, but those 25 subtracted points will not be there any more. The fullness of the Kingdom will remain even if I chose not to participate, but somehow it will be less without me. Look at all that the Second Person of the Trinity went through to get each of us into the Kingdom!

The third thought is to broaden our prayer. We are destined by God to be members of the fullness of God's Kingdom, a Kingdom which is likely to be home to millions of other races, all of whom are deeply loved by God—and by us if we are members of the Kingdom. It might

Our neighbours, seen from Luhasoo bog in Estonia

be interesting to pray for them now. After all, we pray for lots of people today whom we do not know and will probably never meet; people suffering violence around the world, the hungry, and so on. Why not occasionally include our bigger home, the universe? Obviously, we have no particular news to go on and we cannot imagine them or even know for certain that they are really there. But it does expand our notion of the Kingdom and of God's creation and God's love. And prayer is love, and love always makes a difference somehow, even though we will rarely see it ourselves in this life on Earth. Eventually we will be with created beings from other planets who, in the fullness of the Kingdom, will know that we prayed for them. Once again, prayer is never wasted. It shows our love for the other, and God never throws love away.

Finally, a fourth thought is to have a deeper perspective on ourselves and on everyone else. For ourselves, we need to realise that God intended for all time that the particles he created would result in ME. This deepens my perspective on myself—I am not only unique among trillions of other sentient creatures but I am special and loved by God as a special and unique instance of God's creation. Then, taking in the larger perspective of the huge universe I can feel closer to those fellow creatures who look like me and those who do not look like me. God intended for every sentient creature in the universe to be a unique part of the fullness of the Kingdom. None of us are perfect but we still bring a unique gift to the Kingdom

This is the work that we do now on this planet, and that is highly unlikely ever to change. However, by keeping other sentient creatures in mind and occasional prayer we add the broader universe to our concerns. It also enriches the fullness of the Kingdom as our goal which helps to put everything else in perspective.

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RENEWAL

Comfort or Transformation?

John Stroyan

MANY YEARS AGO, I had a conversation with an Orthodox hermit friend of mine in which he raised the question: *Is the Church of England more interested in comfort than transformation?* Comfort helps us to be more contented as and where we are: we might think of a nurse plumping up our pillows on a hospital bed. Transformation takes us to a new place, a new way of being: we might think of taking up our bed and walking. Is the gospel that we have experienced and seek to communicate more about comfort than transformation? Are we like the caterpillar in the cartoon which, on seeing a butterfly fly overhead, says to his friend, 'you won't catch me going up in one of those'? Or are we like the geese in Kierkegaard's parable, that have become too comfortable where they are on the ground to take off and reach their destination? Have we allowed our calling as wild geese to be domesticated? Have we chosen to be tame?[1]

For the paradox at the heart of Christian life is that we can only discover and enter into real life, true life, in all its fullness, when we surrender our lives to God, when we give our lives away: 'For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it' (Luke 9:24). Or, as W. H. Auden writes: 'Life is the destiny you are bound to refuse until you have consented to die'.[2] Or, again, in the words I saw written on a monastery wall on Mount Athos: 'Unless you die before you die, you will die when you die'. So, if our preference *is* for comfort over transformation, are we, in fact, refusing to die?

[1] Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Wild Goose: A Metaphor', in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, volume 9, *NB26–NB30*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and others (Princeton: Princeton U, 2017), 406–407. Kierkegaard writes, 'remain among them, these tame geese, remain among them with but a single concern: to win them for the transformation—but … as soon as you notice the tame geese beginning to gain power over you, then away, away on the migration, so that all does not end with your becoming, like the tame geese, blissful in your misery'.

[2] W. H. Auden, 'For the Time Being', in *Poems*, volume 2, *1940–1973*, edited by Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton U, 2022), 173.

Creation and Crucifixion

Atomic Cross, *artist unknown, Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage*

Renewal and re-creation cannot, surely, take place without some kind of dying. This is at the heart of Jesus' teaching on discipleship and, I am suggesting, it is also a principle at work in all creation. I think of the words of Irenaeus of Lyons, in the second century, 'God has traced the sign of the cross on all that he has made'.[3] I was intrigued to see the image on the left when I first went to the Community of St Mary the Virgin convent in Wantage some 35 years ago. It is known as the *Atomic Cross*: it is an image of a cluster of atoms in a single crystal of metal at the tip of a platinum needle, magnified 750,000 times. There is a cruciformity, a dying and rising at work in and through all of creation.

This was recognised centuries before the discoveries of modern science and astronomy. (I know and understand little about astronomy myself, but I gather from those who do, that the death of stars—and they all die—leads to new life in the planetary system, indeed that the Earth on which we live is one such consequence.) The fourth-century theologian St Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Catechetical Lectures*, encourages his readers to see the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection in the life of creation:

> When the seed has fallen, it dies and rots …. But that which has rotted springs up in verdure …. [The trees] in winter time are dead, but green in spring; and when the season is come, there is restored to them a quickening as it were from a state of death.[4]

This is a related principle to the one that Jesus uses when speaking of the pruning of the vine in John 15. It is the cutting back of the branches, the *reducing* of them that will lead to the *increase* of their fruitfulness.

[3] St Irenaeus, *Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis*, n. 34.

[4] St Cyril of Jerusalem, 'Lecture XVIII', nn. 6–7, in *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem*, translated by Edwin Hamilton Gifford (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 135.

St Paul uses a similar analogy to describe the resurrection. 'What you sow does not come to life unless it dies' (1 Corinthians 15:36); 'What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable' (1 Corinthians 15:42). There is no resurrection life, no renewal, no re-creation which is not preceded by some kind of death. Paul knows that the fruitfulness of his witness flows precisely from this: his own participation in the dying and rising of Christ. 'For to me living is Christ, and dying is gain' (Philippians 1:21) he writes, and that it is in dying that we live (Romans 6:8). This, too is our calling, baptized, as we are, into the dying and rising of Christ.

But, for Paul, the cross is not simply of human significance, it is also of *cosmic* significance. The whole creation shares in the dying and rising, in the labour pains, the groaning of all humanity awaiting salvation, the reconciliation of all things in God. In Christ, Paul writes, 'God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Colossians 1:20). So, we are not saved *from* creation, we are saved *with* creation. To repeat the words of Irenaeus: 'God has traced the sign of the cross on all that he has made'. If I can use this analogy, the DNA of creation is the DNA of the Creator. What is this DNA, this intrinsic characteristic of God? It is the self-giving, self-offering, sacrificial love of God, revealed, supremely, once and for all, on the cross, in the dying and rising of Christ.

And so, what about us, made as we are in the image of our self-giving God? Jesus said, Jesus says: 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24). The husk of the seed needs to be softened and broken open before it can release abundant new life. If we are seeking to align ourselves with the movements of the Holy Spirit, should this not form the backcloth of our pastoral engagements and our encounters in spiritual accompaniment? What do we need to let die, to let go of, in order to live more fully and freely as children of God? Is not this, also, the substance of our daily prayer life, the surrender of my will to God's will? Giving our lives back to God. Thy Kingdom come—not mine.

Brokenness

Here the *kintsugi* principle applies.[5] We cannot become truly beautiful for God without first having been broken open, without having got to

[5] *Kintsugi* is a Japanese tradition of mending ceramics without trying to disguise damage but rather drawing attention to it, often by gilding the repair.

the point of knowing that we cannot fix ourselves, without knowing (with Paul) that our sufficiency is not of ourselves but of God. The Psalms remind us of this: 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit' (51:17); 'The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit' (34:18). The poet Henry Vaughan writes in 'The Revival': 'And here, in dust and dirt, O here,/The lilies of his love appear'.[6] We know this, do we not? It is in our frailties, our failures, our fallings that God comes to meet us, to renew and re-create us. Mother Julian writes, we need to fall and to see that we have fallen. It is in falling and rising again that we are kept in that same precious love.[7]

In my own journey and in my pastoral experience of the journeys of others over the last forty years, I have seen God working most powerfully amongst those who most know their need of God. This surely confirms the core teaching of Jesus, as expressed in both the Beatitudes and the opening words of Isaiah 61, appropriated by Jesus as he reads them in the synagogue. God comes to bless, to renew and to liberate those most in need—the hurting, the hungry, the poor, the oppressed, the longing. As Jesus says, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31).

Here I would like to share a reflection by Sr Macrina Wiederkehr, a US Benedictine, on the woman with the haemorrhage who reached out, in faith, to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. I have recently discovered St Macrina's work, which I believe is a real gift to those of us who take the inner journey seriously, our own and that of others.

> That woman is you! I don't know what your hemorrhage looks like but I have little doubt that something in you is bleeding. I don't know what your faith looks like, but I have little doubt that something in you is believing. And so that's really enough. All you need do is approach Jesus bleeding and believing. That's really enough. The hem will be enough for touching.[8]

Is not this precisely the place of renewal and re-creation—bleeding and believing?

[6] Henry Vaughan, 'The Revival', in *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, edited by Leonard Cyril Martin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914), volume 2, 643.
[7] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 61.
[8] Macrina Wiederkehr, *Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 17.

And as for us, what good can we possibly be to those who are struggling, poor or broken, if we have not been in that place ourselves? Just as we are made whole by the one who still bears the scars of the crucifixion, God can only use us as wounded healers if we, ourselves, have experienced the grace and mercy of God in our own need. It is only here that others, our fellow human strugglers, can find the space and compassion of God at work in us.

The Woman with the Haemorrhage, *by Francesco Morandini, sixteenth century*

Cruciformity and Creativity

This principle of cruciformity, of dying to self before new birth can happen, applies not only in our life journeys, not only in creation; it is also at work, I believe, in *creativity* and in the arts. True creativity involves more than producing what we already know we can do. Truly great art—whether it be music or painting or poetry or sculpture—transcends the gifts and the labour of the artist, however talented he or she may be. Something more is needed. We call it inspiration. This is gift, this is grace and it is beyond human achievement or control. In this sense, the artist is not so much the source of the inspiration as the conduit.

But the inspiration rarely comes without first the perspiration and the struggle. According to the famous saying attributed to Picasso: 'Inspiration exists, but it must find you working'. God uses our gifts and our labour to take us to a place where our gifts and our labour alone could never have taken us. We have to get to the end of ourselves, to our own insufficiency, before we can discover the sufficiency of God. As Christians, we might call this inspiration, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, beauty and goodness that comes from God. But in art—as in discipleship—the self, the 'ego' can get in the way. The insistence on 'my way' blocks the liberating movement of God's way in me.

Self-sacrifice is essential in the creative process. T. S. Eliot writes that poetry 'is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'.[9] C. S. Lewis, in similar vein, says: 'Total surrender is the first step towards the fruition', for both nature and art.[10] It is interesting to note that in the world of iconography, traditionally and over many centuries, the abbot or abbess would choose, not the brother or sister with the greatest artistic gifts to be the iconographer of the monastery, but the one with the greatest humility: one who would not allow pride or self-expression to get in the way of submission to God through prayer and fasting in this act of prayerful creation. Self-consciousness gets in the way of creativity. It can also get in the way of prayer—hence the importance of contemplative prayer. Much more could be said on how the paschal mystery, the principle of dying and rising, applies in the arts. But time does not allow.

Theology

I now want to reflect, briefly, on how this principle of cruciformity applies to *theology*. When I speak of theology, I am speaking not so much of musty books in theological libraries, but of how you and I understand God, speak about God and write about God. We are all theologians in this sense. Every time we preach, speak or write about God, we are expressing our understanding of God—our theology.

From the Orthodox perspective, the theologian is the one who prays. So, true theology, theology inspired by the Holy Spirit, flows not so much from philosophizing *about* God but from a *relationship with* God. This is a relationship that only truly kicks in when we know our need and reach out to God. It is from this perspective, I believe, that Ken Leech said: 'theology begins where the pain is'.[11]

Theology, in order to connect with human experience, needs to embrace the reality of suffering. It must embrace the cross, both the cross of Christ Jesus—and him crucified—and the particular crosses that you and I are carrying at any particular time. What you or I say or write about God must flow from our own participation, as baptized Christians, in the dying and rising of Christ at work in us, from our own relationship

[9] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 42–53, here 52–53.
[10] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Collins, 1962 [1955]), 118.
[11] Kenneth Leech, *The Eye of the Storm: Living Spirituality in the Real World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 164.

with God (2 Corinthians 4:7–11). The Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori, writing after the destruction and devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, saw that what we need is a theology that has suffered, a theology which, like the crucified, risen and ascended Lord, bears the scars of human experience: 'The theology of the pain of God is pursued only by our own pain. This means that we place ourselves in an emotional situation where we are taken down from our ivory tower.'[12]

So how can we do this, personally and corporately as Church? How can our own theology be more rooted in the dying and rising of Christ? Well, we cannot do it simply through our own thinking, however intelligent, by the standards of the world, we may be deemed to be. St Paul, one of the finest minds of his generation, exhorts Christ-followers in Rome to 'be transformed by the renewing of your minds' (Romans 12:2). Paul, of course has been there, done that and got the T-shirt. And he is clear that this is not a one-off event. They—and we—are to *go on* being transformed. None of us is there yet. Our knowledge, this side of eternity, will always be partial. 'Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

For the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and to lead us into the truth, we need to be prepared to jettison our old ways of thinking—and indeed some of our current ways of thinking. So, our journey into the Truth, to the One who *is* the Truth, must involve some 'unlearning'. If we are to be guided by the Spirit of truth, we will need to be 'dis-illusioned', as Bonhoeffer put it: to let our illusions die.[13]

This journey, experienced by Paul, Peter and all the first disciples, is one which, in the language of Paul, takes us from seeing things *kata sarka*, according to the flesh, or through a human lens, to seeing things *kata pneuma*, according to the Spirit, as God sees. St Basil the Great writes to his friend St Gregory of Nyssa in 358: 'It is impossible to receive the impress of divine doctrine without unlearning our inherited preconceptions and prejudices'.[14]

And yet the tenor and content of much contemporary—and historical—theological debate so often does not reflect this humility or this recognition. We see the weaponising of theology and the 'othering' of those with whom we disagree. *God is on my side, not yours*. We see

[12] Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond, Vi: John Knox, 1965), 149.
[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 8.
[14] St Basil, letter 2, translated by Robert Atwell, in *Spiritual Classics from the Early Church: An Anthology* (London: National Society and Church House, 1995), 71.

also the weaponising of scripture. As Sr Macrina prays: 'Teach us to use the scripture as food for our souls and never as a weapon to defend our point of view'.[15] The fourteenth-century Greek theologian Gregory Palamas, who was himself caught up in much theological controversy, wrote: 'Every word can be argued with another word, but who can argue with experience?'[16] This points to the danger of allowing our beliefs *about* God to eclipse our *relationship with* God. Only our life in Christ can authenticate our theology and that is what matters.

Or, as Paul might have added in 1 Corinthians 13, though I might have what I believe is the finest developed theology, but have not love, it profits me and others nothing. I come back again and again to the early theologians whose wisdom is honed by deep prayer and contemplation. Isaac the Syrian wrote in the seventh century: 'If you've tasted the truth, you are not contentious for the truth'.[17] In other words, you don't need to win arguments about it because you're experiencing it. You're living it.

Death and Resurrection

The gist of all that I have been trying to say is to be found in the phrase of St Paul 'dying, and see—we are alive' (2 Corinthians 6:9). Without some kind of dying we cannot experience renewal or re-creation, we cannot participate in resurrection life. This is expressed richly in our liturgy. At our baptism we are signed and anointed with the sign of the cross. At our confirmation we are signed and chrismated with the sign of the cross. At the beginning of the journey of Lent we are signed with the sign of the cross in ash. In the Eucharist we join our lives to the dying and rising of Christ and offer our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

This paschal dimension of life, as C. S. Lewis noted, is true not only in our relationship with God but also in our personal relationships: 'every merely natural love has to be crucified before it can achieve resurrection'.[18] (It might be an interesting exercise to discern the movement of the Spirit and to detect the dyings and risings in our own closest relationships.) Paul applies this not only to himself but to the Church, the body of Christ. What is true of us personally, is true of us corporately. Karl Barth

[15] Macrina Wiederkehr, *The Flowing Grace of Now: Encountering Wisdom through the Weeks of the Year* (Notre Dame: Sorin, 2019), 91.
[16] St Gregory Palamas, *Pro hesychastis*, 1.3.13.
[17] Isaac the Syrian, *Kephalaia gnostica*, 4.77.
[18] C. S. Lewis to Sheldon Vanauken, 10 February 1955, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, volume 3, *Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950–1963*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 561.

wrote: 'unwillingness-to-die is the real tragedy of the Church'.[19] When the Church, for reasons of security, self-protection or comfort, over-identifies with the powers that be or the regime in which it lives, it is in danger of losing its soul. Jesus said: 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8:36, KJV).

The place of comfort and safety is, perhaps, the most dangerous place for the Church to be. We see this danger, perhaps, most vividly today in the strong identification of Patriarch Kyrill of the Russian Orthodox Church with the ruthless imperialism of Vladimir Putin. We saw it in Nazi Germany. We have seen elements of this, too, in British imperialism. The Church prefers a comfortable alliance with the powers that be over costly witness to Christ Jesus—including Christ crucified. No Church, no Christian is entirely free this temptation. But the Church that suffers for the gospel's sake is almost invariably a growing Church. We might remember the words of Tertullian that the Church springs from the blood of the martyrs.[20]

Resurrection is integrally related to death, indeed flows from it. This is true of our daily dyings as we journey on as in our final physical death. As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. I shall close with the words of the fourth-century theologian Gregory Nazianzus, which encapsulate this dynamic at the heart of Christian living:

> Yesterday I was crucified with Christ; today I am glorified with him. Yesterday I was dead with Christ; today I am sharing his resurrection. Yesterday I was buried with him; today I am waking with him from the sleep of death.[21]

John Stroyan joined the Anglican diocese of Peterborough as an honorary assistant bishop in summer 2024 after retiring as bishop of Warwick. He has represented the Church of England internationally in Syria and Israel–Palestine, and also in theological dialogue with the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and with the French Protestant Church. He is president of the Association for Promoting Retreats and is an experienced retreat leader. He continues to be involved in rural affairs and the farming community and is now increasingly engaged in prison ministry. He is the author of *Turned by Divine Love: Starting Again with God and with Others* (2020).

[19] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford U, 1965 [1933]), 344.
[20] Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, chapter 50.
[21] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 1.4.

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DESERTIFICATION AS A SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

Jaime Tatay

WHEN WE THINK OF A DESERT today, we imagine a waterless, desolate area of land with little or no vegetation, typically covered with sand or rocks. The Sahara, the Gobi or the Atacama deserts would be examples of such barren places. In a world that is becoming ever more crowded, we define deserts by an absence.

But the term 'desert' had a slightly different meaning for the first generations of Christians: they didn't see deserts as being empty or lacking, they saw them as the purest examples of God's creation. The so-called Desert Fathers searched for uninhabited spaces, where they could find God in places uncontaminated by anything other than his creation. These could be either bone-dry places or heavily forested areas where little or no human presence, and therefore solitude, was the norm. Anthony the Great was one of the first ascetics who moved into the wilderness—the Eastern Desert of Egypt—and the Christian monastic tradition began as others followed in his footsteps.

During Lent, Christians are invited to go—metaphorically and literally—into the desert, as the Desert Fathers did. This is not a quirky invitation, one for the adventurous or outdoorsy few; it is an invitation to all, an invitation to imitate Jesus' own spiritual quest for silence, to simplify our lives and cultivate a contemplative attitude that will prepare us to grasp fully the mystery of Easter.

As Pope Francis has pointed out:

> Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.[1]

[1] Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, n. 222.

But why must we go into the wilderness to put this into practice instead of staying in our churches and homes? One reason stands out. When we read the Gospels, we realise that Jesus didn't go to the local synagogue or even to the Temple in Jerusalem when he wanted to pray. He preferred to go to the wilderness. Like Moses, the prophets and John the Baptist before him, Jesus talked to his Father, the Creator, in a place where he could be most in touch with creation.

Across the Gospels, we find many examples of divine encounter in the midst of nature. At the very beginning of his apostolic life, 'Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness' (Matthew 4:1). Later on, Matthew tells us that, after Jesus had 'dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray' (14:23). Luke also reminds us several times that Jesus 'would withdraw to deserted places and pray' (5:16).

Sometimes he would rather go to a garden, or a lake shore, or the Judaean desert. The place changed, but the pattern is obvious. Jesus went to Jerusalem to argue with the priests or celebrate Passover, but when he needed to be with God, he fled to places devoid of synagogues and unmediated by the authorities that governed them. We could paraphrase Henry David Thoreau's oft-quoted phrase—'in Wilderness is the preservation of the world'—by saying that, for Jesus, in the wilderness dwells the living God.[2]

Pope Francis highlights this pattern:

> The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things.[3]

So, during Lent, we are specially invited to imitate Jesus and go into the spiritual and natural wildernesses of our time for transformation and encounter with God. However, to accept this invitation we have to overcome several obstacles in our contemporary, noisy, hyper-connected, rapidly urbanising world.

The first, obvious challenge is the very place where most of us live today: cities. In a world where more than half of humanity lives in urban

[2] Henry David Thoreau, 'Walking' [1862], in *Walden, Civil Disobedience and Other Writings*, edited by William Rossi (New York: Norton, 2008), 273.
[3] *Laudato si'*, n. 97.

areas, one needs to make an effort to find repose, silence and time within those environments to stop and contemplate. And even more effort is required if one wants to get out of the city and move into the diminishing wilderness surrounding the urban jungle.

Which brings us to the second major challenge to finding God in creation: the increasing degradation of that creation that is a living sacrament of the presence of the Creator. At this point it is illustrative to distinguish between the (natural) deserts that the first monks looked for and the (human-caused) desertification going on in many parts of the world today. Desertification is the process by which fertile land becomes desert, as a result of drought, warming weather, deforestation or inappropriate agriculture. Pope Francis has warned us of this grave problem in the context of the Amazon in particular.[4] The challenge that desertification poses to us is not only economic and cultural, but spiritual as well: 'God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement'.[5]

The physicality of this environmental destruction, the way in which we *feel* it, means that the desert can still, as it did for the Desert Fathers, mediate our relationship with God too, although in a different way. Today's deserts can be the agent for the conversion we strive for, particularly in Lent—our full conversion, which must include an ecological dimension.

[4] *Laudato si'*, n. 38.
[5] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 215.

To facilitate that, we can draw on a Christian spiritual tradition not so different from the one the Desert Fathers cultivated.

Those familiar with the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola know that the 'Contemplation to Attain Love' is not only the concluding meditation of the month-long retreat originally designed by the Basque mystic. It is, above all, a sending forth into the world urging the retreatant to live with eyes wide open and find God in creation, 'in all things'. This is a meditation that surely inspired the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. In 'God's Grandeur', one of Hopkins's best-known poems, we are invited to contemplate the plants, the animals, the waters and the skies—in a word, creation—to discover that, 'There lives the dearest freshness deep down things'.[6]

However, we live in a world where water and air are being polluted, the atmosphere and the oceans are warming up, and animal and plant species are disappearing at an alarming rate. Isn't it becoming more difficult to find God out there in the wilderness, when the wilderness is of our making? Finding God in the natural desert is one thing, but how are we to find God in the deserts that are formed from the destructive tendencies of humankind? As Benedict XVI said: 'The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast'.[7]

In short, desertification is as much a cultural and spiritual challenge as it is a technological and economic one. We need, more than ever, to go beyond the scientific information and technological assessments and contemplate the destruction of nature with eyes wide open—we need to undertake a spiritual exercise as well as a scientific one in order to determine the causes and effects of this destruction.

Here, Ignatian spirituality proves helpful again. In the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, the retreatant is invited to meditate on sin—social and personal. Ignatius insists on the importance of the retreatant being affected and moved by what he or she meditates on. Could we adapt this type of prayer to contemplate the desertification and degradation of the natural world? Could the expanding cultural and biological deserts of our time be the locus of—or, even better, the stimulus for—transformation, or *ecological conversion*? We can't just 'know' what's

[6] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 139.
[7] Benedict XVI, homily for the solemn inauguration of the Petrine ministry, 24 April 2005.

going on out there, in the atmosphere, in the oceans and in the forests; we also need to 'feel' and then reflect on our personal contribution to all these transformations and disfigurements. This ecological orientation is integral to any cultural transformation that truly seeks to shape more enlightened and responsible ways of thinking, feeling and behaving.[8]

Again, Pope Francis, quoting Patriarch Bartholomew, seems to be pointing in this direction when he speaks of,

> … the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for 'inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage', we are called to acknowledge 'our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation'.[9]

Back in 2001, John Paul II called for a global *ecological conversion.* Now, Francis details the personal and social character of this call affirming:

> The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion … [an] ecological conversion, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.[10]

The Desert Fathers were 'convinced that [the desert] was the best place for encountering the presence of God'.[11] In Lent, we are called to seek the wilderness, convinced it is the best place for repenting, contemplating and meditating upon the external and internal deserts of our time. May this repentance, contemplation and meditation lead us to ecological conversion.

Jaime Tatay SJ is a forest engineer and a Jesuit priest. He is the author of many articles on ecology, spirituality and Catholic Social Teaching. He is also part of the @Ecojesuit team (www.ecojesuit.com).

[8] Donal Dorr, 'Ecological Conversion and Cultural Transformation', *Thinking Faith* (20 July 2015), at https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ecological-conversion-and-cultural-transformation.
[9] *Laudato si'*, n. 8.
[10] *Laudato si'*, n. 217.
[11] *Laudato si'*, n. 218.

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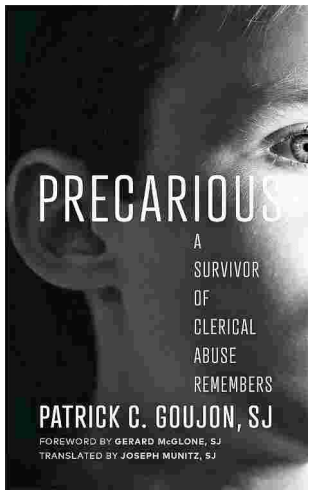
Patrick C. Goujon, *Precarious: A Survivor of Clerical Abuse Remembers* (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 2023). 978 1 6471 2381 9, pp.104, $19.95.



Patrick Goujon SJ was sexually abused by a Roman Catholic priest as a child. This account of his survival is both a poignant and a difficult read. But never have I found a narrative like this one so consoling. In the opening he admires musicians and poets 'who know how to sing about silence' (1). Along with the scriptures, their creativity forms a counterpoint to the lifting of his own silence. He seethes with pain and roars with anger but finally, as a Jesuit priest who unites his voice with the survivors of abuse, he strikes a note of quiet, confident joy. As though expressing a sentiment from one of the psalms, he affirms: 'The pain at work in my spine finally rose to my lips. My words were pulled out from my painful muscles. They allowed me to become embodied and to choose freedom. My story could now find words.' (2)

The emergence of chronic pain in Goujon's forties was the catalyst for his release from psychological denial of his abuse. Despite numerous treatments and tests his pain persisted, but a visit to St Peter's basilica in Rome was the occasion for an awakening. He read the opening lines of Psalm 121 and heard in them the gentle voice of his doctor saying: 'Take care of yourself!' (12). With great beauty he describes the moment when, while walking through the old quarter of Paris, the memory of abuse began to resurface. He strode home as 'as if walking on air', such was his joy at having 'identified the evil' (14).

The most remarkable feature of Goujon's testimony is his eloquent awareness of his own body as a vessel for his painful memories and for the release from them that followed. The comforting image of his childhood is shattered and a new understanding of his past is brought to bear upon the present. At first shame hangs over the experience, and then the impossibility

of being alone except in prayer. He asks about the priest who had abused him, and discovers that he was a known abuser who had been defrocked some years earlier. Once this piece of the puzzle has fallen into place, Goujon gains the confidence to articulate the truth before the civil and ecclesial authorities. Despite his exhaustion, his prayer life deepens. He says, 'I felt strengthened by the joy of telling the truth, with the minimum of words and silence' (28).

The only way forward is to make a complaint against the priest who had taken away his childhood. But the statute of limitations has passed and there is nothing to be done. He experiences the rage of a body that is beginning to remember but cannot yet find words to express the memory it holds. Justice seems out of reach. He feels powerless to forgive the perpetrator because he is unable to recreate what has been destroyed, only finding hope that God will.

One of the most astonishing insights in this work is generated by the relationship between the experience of survival and the challenge of living as a celibate priest, as Goujon attempts to reconcile the child who was abused with the Jesuit who has now begun to speak the truth. If priests were unable to find genuine mutual love they might fall into the same condition as the abuser. But hope in the love of the gospel dispels the power of that fear. A police inspector asks him, 'And nevertheless, today you're a priest! How is that possible?', and his reply comes immediately, 'I believe in God' (55). Here he touches on the tender point through which his account brings healing. Instead of turning away, Goujon gently turns towards God.

Jesus Christ appears throughout the narrative as a fleeting and unobtrusive presence. The deep, magnetic attraction of God persists through history despite the challenges of the contemporary Church. It is this that has led Goujon into the priesthood. He does raise the question: 'But where was your God when you were being abused?' (58) There is no easy answer. While God does not shield us from the violence of abuse, there can be no doubt that God asks us to unite our voices against it.

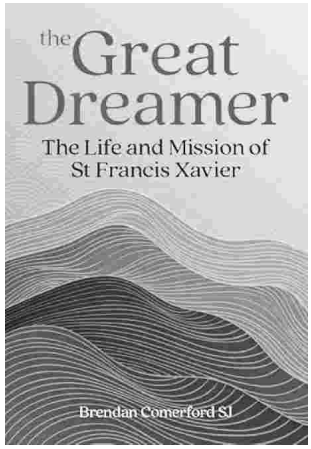
The capacity to find words to speak brings healing, and a little life to the places where it has been taken away. The years pass and in the end the Vatican decides to open a canonical inquiry into his abuser, the state opens a criminal inquiry after other victims are found and finally a prosecution of the abuser is begun. Goujon's testimony reveals to us just how deeply the bodies and minds of survivors have been suppressed. For many decades the Church has remained in the grip of structures of power that permitted such abuse. As a survivor and as a priest, Goujon speaks with survivors and for the whole Church as he reveals what happens when the structures that permitted abuse begin to crumble. In the paradoxical joy of his vocation

shines the simple insight that priestly celibacy can only be based on the mutual love of the gospel. In the conclusion he give us a prophetic prayer for our times (82):

> Let our ears hear the complaint,
> And our eyes will see the bodies that freeze.
> Let's decipher the whispers;
> Let's risk our word, precariously.
> Children will rise up to lead us.

Philip Harrison SJ

Brendan Comerford, *The Great Dreamer: The Life and Mission of St Francis Xavier* (Dublin: Messenger, 2024). 978 1 7881 2663 2, pp.112, €12.95.



The Great Dreamer is an accessible introduction to the life of Francis Xavier. It is concise yet full of informative detail about this well-loved Jesuit saint. It will be a helpful companion to Brendan Comerford's previous introduction to the life of St Ignatius Loyola, *The Pilgrim's Story* (2017).

Francis Xavier was born in 1506 in the castle of Xavier in northern Spain. By 1525 he was an energetic athlete at the University of Paris where he became a lifelong friend of St Ignatius. More importantly he was drawn through the experience of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises into a deep and unbreakable friendship with the Jesus of the Gospels, who would inspire him to bring Good News to the whole world. Ignatius and Xavier were two of the close-knit group of friends who would later become the Society of Jesus. For a number of formative years they lived and studied together and gave generous pastoral care to many in France, Spain and Italy. Even when separated on various journeys, they were connected by a deep sense of shared prayer and, above all, a commitment truly to discern God's will.

The book's concise chapters indicate the major stages of Xavier's life, including the background to the religious and cultural situations of the time. The year 1540 was a watershed moment. Pope Paul III requested that two of the newly formed Society of Jesus be missioned to carry the Christian message to India. When one became seriously ill Ignatius called Francis at short notice, saying, 'This is a task for you', to which Xavier responded simply, 'I am ready'. Within a few days he left for Lisbon, the starting point

of the voyage to the Portuguese Indies. He was never to see Ignatius or his other close companions again, yet, as this book reminds us constantly, they all retained a close friendship at a very deep level.

The journey started in April 1541, and from this point onwards the reader would be well advised to have to hand a map of the voyages of Francis Xavier. (This is easily accessible on the internet.) He sailed from Portugal to Mozambique, enduring many months of seasickness and disease. When the ship was becalmed Xavier became a support and friend to all on board, helping the sick and dying, encouraging the passengers and ship's crew alike. There developed a growing reputation around him for humour, kindness and above all a kind of accessible sanctity. After a year's journey he arrived in Goa. From there the short sections of the book show him building up the Jesuit college of St Paul in Goa and sailing to the Fishery Coast and to Malacca. Throughout his life Xavier constantly offered the ministry of reconciliation, prompting many to try to persuade him to remain with them, but his missionary drive called him further afield. There are short but fascinating descriptions of people among whom he found himself, such as the pearl fishers of Cape Comorin.

By 1524 Xavier was in Cochin. Here the author notes two important facts. One was his commitment to writing to Ignatius and the early companions in Rome, though letters could take many months to arrive. The other was Xavier's hallmark missionary activity: baptizing great numbers of people. Comerford notes that this indicates some limitations in his theology of physical baptism and salvation. Although his approach was already being questioned even among Xavier's contemporaries, his multiple baptisms became a kind of symbol of his missionary zeal. There is no doubt that he was a holy man; sleeping little, travelling much and absolutely dedicated to bringing the gospel to as many as would hear it.

His restless voyaging brought Xavier to Malacca, back to India and to Japan in 1549, after many other missions and adventures. Here, as elsewhere, he experienced tensions with different cultures and ways of religious thinking. In 1551 Xavier returned to India, intending to gather companions and to sail back to Japan the following year. It was not to be: fierce opposition broke out in Japan that lasted well into the seventeenth century, costing many Christian lives.

Xavier still had one great wish: to go to China, a land almost entirely closed to foreigners. It lay only a boat ride away from where he landed on the small island of Sancian. However, God's providence and Xavier's dream were not in alignment. By now very ill, Xavier died, on a lonely shoreline with only his servant present. It was on 3 December 1552 and he was aged

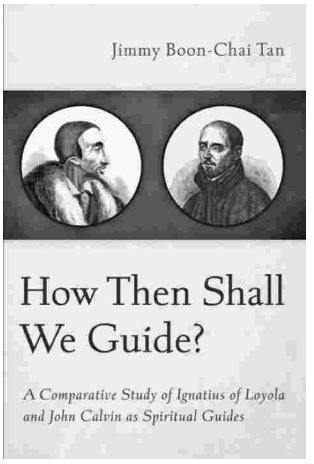
only 46. It was a strange paradox that one so vigorous and so much loved in his time was alone in the end, becoming a model of Ignatius' own prayer: 'Take Lord and receive … You have given all to me, now I return it'.

Brendan Comerford completes his short study with some careful reflections about what makes Francis Xavier a great saint, despite his shortcomings. The author describes movingly the great and deepening love Xavier had for Jesus, to whom he had given his life. He was a man filled with compassion for the poor and the sick, one who was at home with lepers and slaves—and equally at home with the nobility and powerful decision-makers of his time. He was hailed throughout Europe for his missionary zeal, yet in the end he was alone with God. Xavier's deep affection for his original Jesuit companions, half a world away, is highlighted throughout the book.

The book ends with descriptions of the solemnity with which the incorrupt body of Xavier was returned to India, venerated by thousands of people and finally buried in the Church of Bom Jesu in Goa. Comerford concludes that Francis Xavier was a unique, paradoxical, but genuinely holy person through whom, and within the culture of his time, God touched many thousands of people. *The Great Dreamer*, a term used in a recent address by Pope Francis in 2023, is an endearing and memorable title for this readable and reflective book.

Tom McGuinness SJ

Jimmy Boon-Chai Tan, *How Then Shall We Guide? A Comparative Study of Ignatius of Loyola and John Calvin as Spiritual Guides* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2023). 978 1 6667 3525 3, pp. 270, £24.00.



I have often wondered about possible connections between Ignatius and John Calvin: two men, active as reformers at a key period of church history, who were at the University of Paris at the same time yet operating out of utterly different assumptions about the Church. Neither man came out of nowhere. They had a context, in particular a religious context, so what shaped them and how did it inform their method of guiding others spiritually?

How Then Shall We Guide? arose out of the author's concerns surrounding the widening interest in spiritual direction. So broad has this

become in some quarters that he saw a risk that spiritual direction would lose touch with its historical and theological roots. It is this concern that lies behind the author's focus on history, theology and method as the guiding principles of his comparison between Ignatius of Loyola and John Calvin and their respective approaches to spiritual formation.

Following the hermeneutical approach of Sandra Schneiders, Boon-Chai Tan first describes, then critically analyses, and finally works towards a constructive interpretation of Ignatius and Calvin. He is interested in similarities, but refuses to shy away from differences, asserting that we do each one a disservice if we airbrush out difficulties that people from a different tradition might encounter with them. Convinced that there is only gain to be had from clarity on the continuities and discontinuities in their respective approaches, he seeks to interpret both men in their sixteenth-century historical and theological contexts.

At every stage Boon-Chai Tan explains his own methodology. He begins by surveying the literature that indicates how spiritual direction is viewed within the major Christian traditions. As the scope widens to ecumenical, then interfaith and on to contemporary spiritualities, the author exposes a blurring of differences that leads to a breach between theology and practice. Contemporary spiritualities, in particular, can be rootless and theologically shallow, and the author cites a number of writers who share his concern. Chapter two provides a historical survey of spiritual direction, beginning with five approaches from the Early Church on through the medieval period.

Chapter three is an exploration of the theological assumptions of spiritual direction. It offers a useful overview of the theological foundations that underpin spiritual direction, showing how they matter for its ensuing practice if it is to remain Christian in nature. The Trinity and its implications, the role of scripture, sin and human nature and, in an especially helpful section, the ecclesial foundations are covered. Pointing out that much contemporary direction is overly individualistic, the author shows how direction should be intimately connected to the life of the worshipping community and is especially in focus when we participate in the eucharist. The chapter concludes with a section on the missiological and eschatological dimensions of Christian doctrine and their relevance for spiritual direction.

Then the book finally embarks on the comparative study of Ignatius and Calvin. Two chapters on each examine first their historical and theological context, followed by their method of spiritual guidance. These provide a useful summary of a number of important scholarly works such as Ivens, Ganss and Cusson on Ignatius, and Wendel and Zachman on Calvin. There are considerably more footnotes for the chapters on Ignatius than Calvin, and many of those for the latter refer to Calvin's *Institutes of*

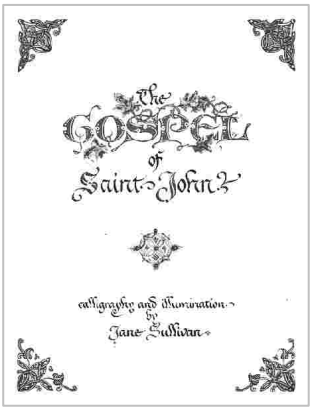
the Christian Religion, a much longer and more comprehensive work than Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*.

The last two chapters summarise the author's findings and offer a comparative analysis of these two spiritual giants. Boon-Chai Tan concludes that Ignatius was primarily an exegete of spiritual experience and guided from experience through imaginative prayer using scripture, while Calvin was primarily an exegete of scripture and guided from scripture into the experience of deepening communion with God in prayer. These two chapters are especially useful for readers who recognise the importance of the theological underpinning of spiritual direction.

Although it sometimes seems that the author is over-explaining, the tone of the book is positive towards both men throughout. Boon-Chai Tan believes we have much to gain from a better awareness of the interconnectivity between history, theology and practice in the ministry of spiritual direction, and the last chapter aims to demonstrate how these two traditions might each enrich the other in areas such as discernment. The book has a comprehensive bibliography, which is both a useful tool and an indicator of sources consulted, theological and methodological. It demonstrates the rich variety of scholars across the traditions as well as over the long history of spiritual direction that have been drawn upon. There are a few typos, but the book is otherwise clearly presented.

Elizabeth A. Hoare

***The Illuminated Gospel of St John*, illustrated by Jane Sullivan (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2024). 978 1 0094 8261 5, pp.160, £35.00.**



Over the past several years there has been an upsurge in the publication of books about the history of illuminated manuscripts. Chief among these are Christopher de Hamel's *History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, Mary Wellesley's *Hidden Hands* and, most recently, Sara J. Charles's *Medieval Scriptorium*. Meticulously researched and accessibly written (and thereby neatly bridging the scholarly–popular divide), these publications shed light on what was involved in the making of illuminated manuscripts, including what might have constituted the inventory of the typical

monastic scriptorium. Greater attention has also been paid to the humble scribe and artist (they were rarely one and the same person) whose manual dexterity and artistic prowess rested on a spiritual foundation. Expensive to produce, labour-intensive and singular, the elegant script and gorgeous miniature paintings which were the defining features of such manuscripts were generally commissioned by wealthy patrons for private devotion or public worship.

Amid such renewed interest in the illuminated manuscript, the specialist department charged with responsibility for the printing of Bibles and prayer books at Cambridge University Press made the bold decision to publish an original illuminated edition of St John's Gospel. A year in the making, this unique and beautifully produced Gospel is the work of Jane Sullivan, a gifted artist and calligrapher whose academic and professional path took her from her native California to Cork followed by Cambridge and, finally, France where she has lived since 2014.

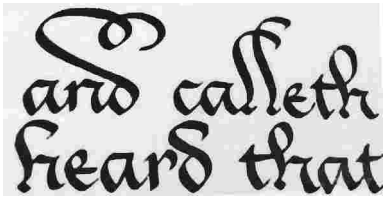
Robustly bound and printed in the Netherlands with a cream cover upon which title and ornate designs have been superimposed, the Gospel measures 210 × 270 mm. At first sight, its dimensions might suggest what, since at least the eighteenth century, has been known as a 'coffee table book'—which roughly translates as an attractive book intended for ornamental display within a domestic setting rather than a work intended for serious reading or study.

This, however, would be to miss the point. The size would have been determined not solely as a means of setting off the Gospel's visually exquisite content but by the demands such a work might exact upon a twenty-first-century reader, used to the bland uniformity of contemporary texts—whether print or electronic. This edition of St John's Gospel, which has been painstakingly copied out in a fifteenth-century calligraphic script, demands to be read patiently and deliberately. This allows the text to be received meditatively, much along the lines of the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* whereby meaning is revealed in a slow, progressive tempo.

Arguably freer and less restrained than a commissioned edition might have been, this is a work of striking originality. This can be evidenced in the choice of script, visual display of illuminated chapter letters, artistic tableaux and motifs—many of which recall the playfulness present in medieval versions. Also of note was Sullivan's preference for the King James Version of the Gospel rather than one of the more recent translations singled out for greater accuracy and clarity. Her decision, based on the beauty and musicality of its language—which is at once poetic and haunting—was to prove fortuitous. The rights to the King James Version are vested in the

Crown and licensed by letters patent, and Cambridge University Press is the king's printer and publisher of the KJV.

The artist's afterword to the Gospel tells us something about Jane Sullivan's background, including that she spent four years producing a limited edition of the Psalter at the invitation of the monks at the abbey of St Martin in Ligugé. We are also told what, for this present work, influenced her choice of Gospel and her preferred calligraphic script. The decision to use French Bâtarde stemmed from its being a more adaptable and softer script than some of its predecessors. Having originated in the fifteenth century, and being the progeny of Gothic script, it allows for more elegant flourishes, especially in the ascender strokes, giving the calligrapher greater freedom. Another characteristic is that of words broken off at unexpected junctures and the ends of some words straying vertically up the page—an addition forming a visual bond between the presence of words and images in this work since both are bound up in a capacity to surprise and even enchant.



French Bâtarde script

Artistically, there are both conventional and more fantastical images to delight the eye. In second chapter, for example, we find a Holy Spirit crowned with a very ornate gold nimbus, reminiscent of a crest. Elsewhere, among the 160 pages that make up the Gospel we meet winged dragons, rabbits (one of which has dived into a hollow tree-trunk, its identity sealed by its scut), spouting volcanoes, winged horses hovering in mid-air and even a pair of unicorns locking horns.

One quibble with the publication is the lack of a coloured ribbon marker—both for its aesthetic value and to signal that it is a sacred text meant to be read in more than one sitting. However, the lack of such a bookmark is mitigated by the fact that, historically, illuminated chapter initials were intended to serve as visual memoranda so that places left off could be easily found again. Chapter initials include one depicting Nicodemus, strikingly framed against a blue-black night sky lit by crescent moon and stars, holding on tight to a fragile tendril. Elsewhere, there is a visually stunning 'T' with an angelic harpist set against a bright red background. Other images include a quartet of variously positioned cats cradled between an embrace of words.

In this most spiritual and mystical of Gospels, with its theological unfolding of signs and implorations to see, the symbolic has its place. Take, for instance, the account of the raising of Lazarus. In this version, the allusion to

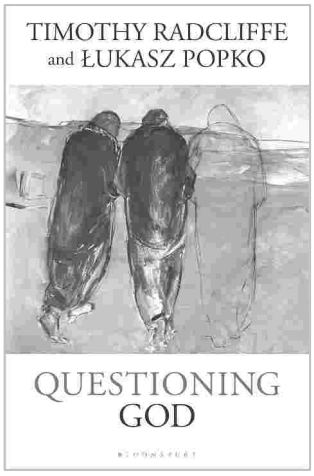
resurrection is juxtaposed with delicately coloured butterflies fluttering up and down the pages. Sullivan's gorgeous range of colour extends beyond

chapter letters to the choice of colours for naming God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in this case, spelled out in blue, red (for its association with Jesus' sacrificial death) and shimmering gold—and a pacific green for 'Peace'. Of artistic note, too, is the recurrence of Celtic design and interlace, a visual reference to Sullivan's postgraduate study in Ireland where she first encountered it.

In an age dominated by digital content, a twenty-first-century edition of an illuminated manuscript, unmediated by technology, has a special appeal. In spite of the greater accessibility of rare and precious manuscripts by means of digitisation, there remains a place within the contemporary material world for works such as to answer our need for that which, through its very materiality, can be held, worked through and prayed over.

Susanne Jennings

Timothy Radcliffe and Łukasz Popko, *Questioning God: God Still Speaks* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). 978 1 3994 0925 4, pp. 224, £12.59.



Is it 'daring' to ask God questions? In *Questioning God,* the Dominican friars Timothy Radcliffe and Łukasz Popko suggest not, presenting the scriptures as a place where revelation takes place through dialogue. For these authors conversation is the primary way of unveil God's mystery. Following their dialogical understanding of revelation, each chapter in *Questioning God* is itself laid out as a conversation, between the spiritual depth of Radcliffe and the biblical expertise of Popko. Each chapter starts with Popko's translation of a biblical passage and a carefully selected sacred image.

Radcliffe and Popko begin by discussing three Genesis stories in which God seeks an absent person. These are the hiding of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8–12), Cain's denial of Abel's death (Genesis 4:1–16), and

Sarah hiding from the three visitors (Genesis 18: 1–16). Through the discussion of these sacred narratives, the authors remind us of the vulnerability of the human condition, as the milieu in which our shortcomings may become spaces for growth and grace.

The second part of *Questioning God* explores conversations in the Pentateuch in which identity is given or disclosed. These are the renaming of Jacob (Genesis 32: 23–33) and the disclosure of God's name to Moses (Exodus 3: 1–14). Through these human–divine exchanges, Radcliffe and Popko suggest that in our most authentic selves our identity is revealed since it communes with God's desire for us. Likewise, when God discloses God's very self, this presence is no longer associated with a person ('*I am the God of Isaac*') but rather God shows us a transcendent identity ('*I am that I am*') accessible to all.

In the third section of the book, Radcliffe and Popko consider the initial hesitations of the prophets towards their vocations. These include the calls of Elijah (1 Kings 19: 8–18) and Jeremiah (1: 4–10), and the anger of Jonah (4: 1–13). Through these 'prophetic' conversations, the Dominican authors show us the fine interplay between the overwhelming reality of the divine call and the vastness of God's trust towards the prophets. In doing so, the authors remind us that the dialogical nature of our relationship with God informs the shape of our specific Christian vocation.

The fourth and briefest section of *Questioning God* explores the human desire to love God through the romantic imagery of the beginning of the Song of Songs (1: 12 – 2: 7). By discussing the erotic overtones and the mystical interpretations of this passage, Radcliffe and Popko present to us a God who cherishes our human desires and reciprocates them with tenderness. In doing so, the authors (rather elegantly) make the transition from the Old to the New Testament by affirming that the intimate nature of God's love offered in the Song of Songs anticipates the fullness of God's love in Christ Jesus.

Radcliffe and Popko then present to us four New Testament encounters in which the unveiling of Jesus' identity transforms those who become aware of it. These include the annunciation (Luke 1: 26–38), the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2: 41–52), the encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (John 4: 4–42) and Peter's Messianic confession (Matthew 16: 13–28). Through these dialogues, the authors invite us to consider how transient our received (or self-given) identities are in comparison to the redeemed selves that are the result of Jesus' reconfiguring presence in our lives.

Next, Radcliffe and Popko invite us to discover Jesus as the wisdom of God through two tense conversations: Jesus being questioned by the Sadducees (Mark 12: 18–28) and his confrontation with Pontius Pilate (John 18: 28 – 19: 16). Through these passages from Jesus' life, Radcliffe and

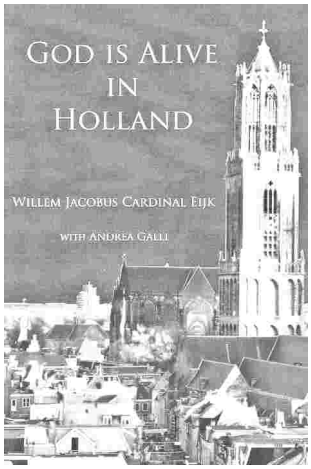
Popko affirm that the Son of God is not startled by conflict but open respond to all human enquiry with fairness.

Lastly, the authors present turn to three crucial conversations from the early Church. These are the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–35), Peter's loving confession (John 21: 1–22) and the Petro-Pauline discussion about Christian observance of the Jewish law (Galatians 2: 1–14). Through them, Radcliffe and Popko remind us that in the intentionality and genuineness of our ecclesial conversations the presence of the Risen Christ inhabits the Church and renews it.

In the translation, presentation and discussion of these eighteen dialogical biblical passages, Radcliffe and Popko provide a novel interpretation of such exchanges, as well as carefully reflected spiritual insight for the contemporary believer. Hence, as a biblically rooted spiritual text, *Questioning God* reminds the reader that in the Christian tradition the dialogical nature of Triune God compels us to foster and cherish the dialogical nature of our human existence.

Carlos Chuquihuara SJ

Cardinal Eijk with Andrea Galli, *God Is Alive in Holland* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2023). 978 0 8524 4997 4, pp. 144, £12.99.



Who might become the new Pope? Who are the cardinals who will elect him? And what makes these cardinals tick? For anyone thinking ahead to the post-Francis era, it could be instructive to read *God Is Alive in Holland* by the Italian journalist Andrea Galli. This book is a series of interviews with a cardinal who does not shy away from controversy. The cardinal in question is Willem Jacobus (Wim for short) Eijk, archbishop of Utrecht and a specialist in bioethics.

Cardinal Eijk made worldwide headlines in 2018 when he wrote a reaction in the US-based *National Catholic Register* to proposals in Rome that Protestants could receive the Roman Catholic eucharist. At the end he quoted the catechism of the Catholic Church on the final temptation of the Church to apostasy by way of deceptive easy solutions. This appeared to suggest that 'the mystery of iniquity', often associated with the antichrist, could be linked to some of Francis's policies.

This, however, is not his normal approach. Most Dutch know him as a church leader of conservative bent who is involved in restructuring the Church's finances and parishes, closing dozens of churches in the process.

His reputation in the Netherlands as a cold and aloof crisis manager is hard to shake off, given that he tends to stay out of the media limelight. This short book does not aim to remedy the perception of Cardinal Eijk in the Netherlands, however. That much is clear from the fact that no Dutch edition appears to be intended. *God Is Alive in Holland* seems above all intended for an international Catholic readership.

The book consists of three chapters, a foreword and 'epilogue' which turns out to be another round of interviews. The prologue consists of the interviewer's personal impressions of an environment which is unfamiliar to him in several ways. Chapter 1 deals with the severe financial constraints of the archdiocese of Utrecht and the Catholic Church in the Netherlands more generally. The acuteness of the situation is what led Cardinal Eijk to implement very drastic layoffs and restructuring when he was transferred from the diocese of Groningen-Leeuwarden to the much bigger archdiocese of Utrecht. The theme then changes to Eijk's vocation—he pursued a medical education before returning to his earlier desire to join the priesthood—and daily routine, and ends with a lengthy discussion of euthanasia and abortion.

Chapter 2, titled '*Lex orandi*', contains a plea for a catechesis which is unambiguous, which nurtures a life of prayer and relationship with Jesus, and which is embedded in a liturgical practice that sticks to the texts of the Roman Missal. Galli also broaches a wide variety of subjects, such as the impact of recreational drugs on crime and mental health, the changing religious make-up in society and Church due to immigration, and Eijk's personal experiences of hostility owing to his embrace of his vocation. When Cardinal Eijk speaks of his spiritual struggle in the aftermath of a stroke and of his profound eucharistic spirituality, the reader receives an view into his inner life which offers valuable lessons.

Cardinal Eijk then talks about celibacy, about his high-profile criticism of Francis's policies in 2018—but also about his bedtime reading. Eijk turns out to prefer English and Russian nineteenth-century literature. In the epilogue the cardinal insists on the need for an encyclical on gender theory (112–113), for bishops as well as their curial staff and professors in Catholic universities who are faithful to Church teaching, and for parish renewal programmes. Eijk also explains how a Christian believer should read, interpret and pray the Psalms (107–110; see also 67–68).

Personal, doctrinal and moral aspects are intertwined throughout the book, which the reader may find inconvenient. To some questions, Cardinal Eijk replies at length and provides insight; to others, such as that of synodality (107), his response is almost comically short. Notably absent is any reference to Cardinal Eijk's teaching that Catholics had a moral obligation to receive a COVID-19 vaccination. This is perhaps unsurprising, as it alienated him

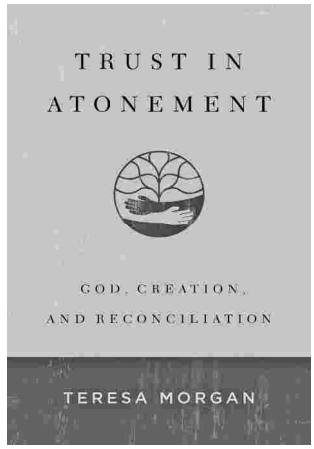
from many conservative Catholics who had shown support for him. One common thread that Cardinal Eijk repeatedly picks up is the social hostility and 'bloodless martyrdom' that comes with fidelity to the Church's teaching (22, 31–32, 82, 89–90). Towards the end of the book, Eijk's twin preoccupations of orthodoxy and reform find a figurehead in the professor-turned-pope Adrian VI, so far the only Pope from the Netherlands.

Occasionally one senses how English is neither the mother tongue of the interviewer nor that of the interviewee. This is only an issue with technical terms, such as 'private church' ('particular church' is probably intended). The first chapter has the title 'Blessed Are the Poor'. This seems to have been be added by the interviewer to frame the lack of formal links between the Church and State in the Netherlands as a blessing. In fact, in view of the social isolation and marginalisation of the Church there, one could equally draw the opposite conclusion.

This book offers conservative solutions to the pitfalls of a drastically secularised society. Without any doubt, *God Is Alive in Holland* is an exercise in agenda-setting. but the book is often very prescriptive in proposing solutions. Cardinal Eijk even provides handy lists of what the hierarchy ought to do in seminary (59–61) and academic education (106, 111), catechesis (37–38) and the Church at large (111–114). The first fruits of its strategy are no mean feat: *Dignitatis humanae* and its recent rejection of gender theory is partly a response to Cardinal Eijk's book.

Wouter Blesgraaf SJ

Teresa Morgan, *Trust in Atonement: God, Creation, and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024). 978 0 8028 8337 7, pp. 359, $39.99.



In this book Teresa Morgan aims to illuminate atonement as 'the return of humanity to its right relationship with God, however the means of return is understood' (2). She proposes to offer 'a new model of atonement through the restoration of trust between God and humanity that seeks to be biblical and relevant, coherent and compassionate' (7). Her model assumes that 'God takes a risk on humanity, entrusting Jesus Christ to the world, trusting him to be able to form trust-relationships with those who encounter him, and trusting humanity to respond' (22). Morgan suggests that 'Jesus creates from the

cross a space in which God reaches out in trust to humanity, and humanity is invited to take a step of trust with Christ into relationship with God'. In addition, 'Jesus had to die because he could not be other than he was, wholly trusting and trustworthy toward God and humanity' (31).

Five abundantly referenced chapters develop the main theme of the centrality of trust in the divine plan for reconciling humans. Chapter 1, 'Wrongdoing and Suffering, Trust and Mistrust', identifies different kinds of wrongdoing in the Hebrew Bible and in the Gospels and Paul's letter to the Romans. It aims to explain such wrongdoing in terms of trusting in the wrong things or not at all, and it proposes that suffering results. Chapter 2, 'Trust after Trauma, Conflict, and Offending', examines the role of trust in restoring societies after conflict, in working with survivors of trauma, and in rehabilitating ex-offenders. It focuses on the need to restore trust in such cases. Chapter 3, 'The Trust and Trustworthiness of Jesus Christ', refers to Paul's letter to the Romans to sketch a model of atonement that begins with the trust between God and Jesus and extends it to desired trust between Christ and all humans and thereby between God and all humans. The claim is that God offers 'therapeutic trust' to humans in order to bring them to a right relationship with God.

Chapter 4, 'Trust in Creation', turns to creation beyond humans, asking whether non-human creation can be restored to a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It considers how non-human animals and plants can come to reconciliation with God through Christ, with attention to how humans can play a role in this re-creative effort. Chapter 5, 'As We Forgive', focuses on how humans are to relate to each other with repentance and forgiveness. It proposes that such relating is to be mediated by Jesus Christ in a context of divine re-creation of trust involving humans and God.

The book's emphasis on trust is theologically important and agreeable toward much Christian theology and spirituality, past and present. Even so, something important seems to be missing, especially if a theology is to bear on spirituality. A simple question will focus the omission: where's the love? In passing, the book remarks that 'without trust, both love and hope become much harder to practice' (23), but the word 'love' does not earn an entry in the index.

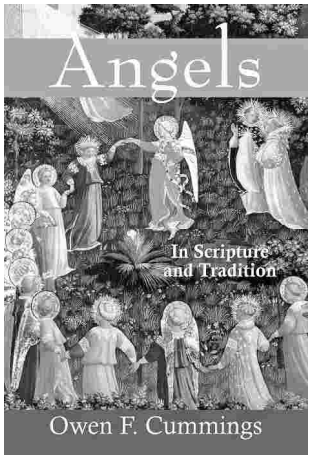
The apostle Paul, particularly his letter to the Romans, is credited as the main inspiration for the book's account. He famously remarks that God proves his *love* (*agapē*) for us in sending Jesus to die for us (Romans 5:8). This is not a claim that God proves his trust in humanity. Paul also comments that faith and hope in God have their basis, saving us from shame and disappointment, in divine *love* 'poured into' our hearts (Romans 5:1–5).

Here again this is not a claim about trust. We find the same theme in Paul's other claims about the basis of human trust in God: a power prior to trust, namely divine love (2 Corinthians 5:14, Galatians 5:6; and compare 1 Corinthians 2:5). Paul here reflects the central perspective of Jesus about the supreme divine commands being *love* commands, not commands to trust (Mark 12:28–34).

The primacy of divine love over trust enables us to acknowledge a distinction between God's *wanting to build trust* in cooperative humans and God's *actually trusting* humans. It also enable us to accommodate the report of the Gospel of John that 'Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone, for he himself knew what was in everyone' (John 2:24–25). This book rightly endorses the importance of trust between God and humans, but this importance depends on a wider context of divine love at work to encourage people to learn to trust on the basis of such love. A Christian theology and spirituality does well to embrace the priority of this context endorsed by Jesus and Paul.

Paul Moser

Owen F. Cummings, *Angels: In Scripture and Tradition* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2023). 978 0 8091 5633 7, pp. 120, $16.95.



There is a discernible increase of interest in angels just now, at least on social media. Readers of *The Way* may find themselves wondering what degree of academic rigour obtains in dealing with such questions. Here is a book whose heart is definitely in the right place, both careful in its theology and attentive to scripture. As every schoolchild knows, angels are prominent in the 'religions of the book': Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Angels, of course, are everywhere in the Bible; the trick is first to examine what has come down to us in the tradition and second to offer a critical evaluation of what has been recorded. There are useful chapters here on angels in the Old Testament, in apocalyptic literature, the New Testament, the Christian tradition and liturgy, followed by a brief but nevertheless helpful review of angels in modern theology, including, of course, Karl Rahner.

The chapter on the Old Testament tradition argues that basically an angel is a messenger of God (which is what you might already have supposed). Certainly there is no evidence for the widespread assumption that angels are a Babylonian accretion. Scholars are now more inclined than they once were to argue for angels as an important part of Israel's sense of God, so John McKenzie, for example, finds the idea 'in the earliest part of the Hebrew tradition' (10). Cummings affirms that they represent 'God's saving interest in the Hebrew people and their history' (11). After the Exile, it is true, they tend to name various aspects of God's activity in relation to humans.

Turning to apocalyptic literature, here we find far more on angels than in the Old Testament (as you might have guessed). And what we have here is certainly not the detailed prediction of what is to come, so much as the profound belief that God is in charge of the present and therefore the future is secure. At this time, of course, there is an increasing belief in the transcendence of God, and therefore a greater need for a bridge between the creator and creation. It is also the case, as Cummings points out, that there is a great deal of speculation, into which the doctrine of angels makes a helpful intrusion, on the problem of evil and suffering, which all cultures have to face, perhaps in this case under the influence of the widespread Zoroastrianism in the Near East at the time.

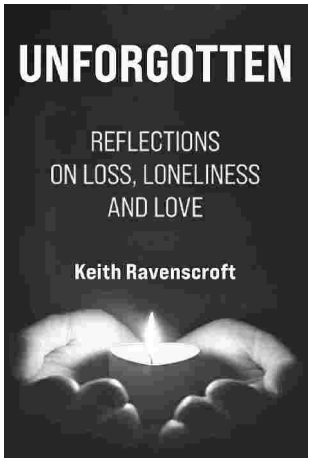
You also encounter the idea of the rebellious angels, so that Satan now becomes, no longer the prosecuting attorney in God's court, so much as God's arch-enemy. And it is no coincidence that at this stage there is much more attention to the hierarchical ordering of angels. This also appears, of course, in the New Testament, possibly originating in the house churches (see for example Ephesians 1: 20–21). Cummings argues that very often angels are no more than a word for a divine communication or specific action of God which is personified. The angels in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke would be an example of this.

There are helpful, if over-rapid, reflections on angels in the Christian tradition. These make up chapter 5, which offers a somewhat eclectic account, but will nevertheless probably be helpful to those investigating the topic for the first time, and certainly covers the main areas of difficulty. Chapter 6 has some stimulating reflections on 'angels and the liturgy', and the presence at our liturgy of angels and of those human beings who have gone before us (it may be the right time for speculations along these lines to emerge once more). Angels are 'unseen but not unreal'. Chapter 7 gives us a very good account of post-Enlightenment theology on the matter, with consideration of Karl Rahner (illuminating and careful as always), MacQuarrie and Bernard Cooke. This is an excellent chapter, warmly to be recommended. Chapter 8

raises and intelligently discusses the inevitably related question: 'What about the Devil?'; and it must be said that Cummings does it judiciously and well. The conclusion brings the opus happily to an end. What to say at the end? Certainly this is a very engaging book, and not at all difficult to read; but at no point does it feel as though we are ploughing a new scholarly furrow. It feels, to be honest, a bit thin on secondary literature; but it performs a useful task for those who want to start asking the angel question.

Nicholas King SJ

Keith Ravenscroft, *Unforgotten: Reflections on Loss, Loneliness and Love* (London: Austin Macauley, 2024). 978 1 0358 0439 9, pp.100, £7.99.



This book brings together a number of reflections that the author (who is an Anglican lay reader), offered to residents in two care homes during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Alongside the more visible and dramatic experiences of separation and loss that many people experienced, there were countless 'small' losses resulting from the necessary restrictions that were in force.

At a time when he could no longer maintain what had been his ministry of visiting residents, Keith Ravenscroft decided to share with them reflections and prayers rooted in scripture. This created an experience of community 'together though apart', as well as providing comfort and encouragement in the texts themselves.

Keith Ravenscroft makes it clear that he was not attempting theological or scriptural analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic, but helping people who had been separated from those they love and who love them to know that, however left behind they may have felt, they are never forgotten by God. So while a number of the reflections refer to particular elements and stages of the pandemic, the message they offer reaches out to all of us, as like all people, we experience losses and separations in our lives here and now. Grounded in the often painful realities of COVID-19, these pages offer us all the reassurances and challenges that flow from being, and knowing ourselves to be, God's 'Unforgotten'.

Brendan Callaghan SJ