

THE WAY

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FOR AUTHORS

The Way warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. Our next issue will be about ignatian spirituality and writing, so articles in this area will be particularly welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

FOREWORD

WRITING ABOUT THE LIGHT of the gospel revealed in Christ Jesus, Paul says: ‘we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us’ (2 Corinthians 4:7; KJV). Despite the afflictions they experience, Paul and his co-workers persist in their efforts to let this light shine. It transpires that their fragility as ‘earthen vessels’ is not an obstacle to fulfilling that purpose, but the very means by which it is to be accomplished. We can see our human fragility as a developmental stage through which we must pass, but it is also a necessary condition of our spiritual lives. This issue of *The Way* draws upon the wisdom of teachers, catechists, spiritual directors and other formators involved in promoting spirituality among those they serve. They show us how to let that light of the gospel shine forth in our fragility from the beginning of life right the way through to its end.

Graham Ward uses the Pauline distinction between body (*soma*), mind (*psuchê*) and spirit (*pneuma*) to delineate the fragile components that make up the human person. In a talk originally given at Campion Hall in Oxford, he offers a dynamic view of humanity as ‘a praxis, a verbal noun, being and becoming human’. In becoming who we are through spiritual education, he proposes, we are gradually drawn into the body of Christ.

The prevalence of undue clericalism in the Church is one way in which human fragility has been disguised. However the increased participation of laypeople in spheres previously reserved for religious and priests has led to a new openness. Pope Francis was amongst the fiercest proponents of the demythologization of the clergy, especially through his advocacy of a priestly and religious formation that accommodates human fragility. Kevin Stephon R. Centeno notes these efforts and explains how Jesuits in the Philippines have combined psychology and spirituality in the service of personal integration. Jean-Michel Laurent describes the goal of formation for priests and religious as ‘to bring candidates to the point where they can make a free offering of themselves to God’. He carefully outlines the role of the spiritual director in religious communities and seminaries, showing the pitfalls that are to

be avoided by both director and directee. Only by becoming a point of equilibrium and indifference can directors facilitate a mature vocational election in those they serve.

The necessity of honouring human freedom extends beyond religious formation to the wider educational system. One way this is manifested is in an attentiveness to the differing contexts from which students come to the classroom. Hong Kong is a multicultural city at the crossroads of civilisations, and also at the crossroads of Eastern and Western spiritualities. Paul Shing Ming Yu reports on a research project that sought to discover how students in a Roman Catholic secondary school perceived spirituality. And Laurien Nyiribakwe traces the principle of solidarity in Church tradition and the history of the Society of Jesus, to conclude that Jesuit education must ‘speak on the behalf of the voiceless, and strive for the freedom and dignity of all’.

The theme of solidarity re-emerges in relation to the liturgical prayers for the feast of St John de Matha (1160–1213). This medieval French saint ministered to Christians captured during the crusades, and offers a model for those involved in tackling modern slavery. Marvin Jhan Santos conducts a survey of the prayers to uncover how even liturgical participation can be a formative ethical experience. In an article reprinted from our online sister publication, *Thinking Faith*, Thomas Flowers explores the importance of catechesis in promoting and forming Christian faith: ‘to bring people to Christ while keeping grounded in the teachings of the Church’.

Those at the beginning of their journey of faith can experience their human fragility deeply as they let go of a previous way of life and discover their place in the Church. The Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults is the programme through which adults are received into the Roman Catholic Church. Luz Marina Díaz demonstrates the complementarity between this formative process and the *Spiritual Exercises*. Both offer a structure for individuals to experience spiritual conversion as they deepen their sense of belonging in the Church, facilitating a movement from head to heart that brings about lasting change.

The change brought about by such a conversion can persist for a lifetime. Robert Doud takes a break from his more philosophical writing to explore prayer in the fragility of seniority. Recently he has been discovering a simpler way of praying that expands to include the activities of daily life, and tends towards gratitude. He proposes that in this way the elderly can become leaders of families as they grow

together in prayer. He and all the writers in this issue teach us not to be afraid of our human fragility, but rather to recognise it as the sign of our readiness to be transformed. After all, it is the means through which the light of the gospel revealed in Christ Jesus is shining forth into our world. Long may that light shine bright and strong.

Philip Harrison SJ
Editor

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Gerard Manley Hopkins, Jesuit poet

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WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL EDUCATION?

Graham Ward

DO YOU EVER find yourself singing? The question has become important to me. I don't mean singing in a choir. My voice is not up to doing that. But my home is on the Isle of Mull, close to the beaches on the south peninsula of what is called the Ross. I often find when I'm walking on the beach that I break into song. The song is not always thanksgiving. It can be lamentation. It can be anger at warmongering and lives caught up in collateral damage. But it's still song. Fortunately, the beaches are rarely crowded. And, anyway, gusts of wind, the breaking of waves or the cries of oyster-catchers would prevent much from being heard if there *were* people around.

But there's something about being in the open space, whatever the weather—vast skies with the ocean stretching out towards distant islands, all that air and light—that just makes me want to sing out what I'm feeling. It might be hymns or pop songs, lyrics only half remembered and often made up as needed. Sometimes, they're just rhythms of my own creation that never will be written down. It's the singing of solitude, and its practice has taught me something about human being. I think this inner singing, being developed, is what poetry expresses. I hope it's also prayer. It doesn't come from the cognitive capacities of the mind, but from beneath them, from the spirit.

As poets listen to a music buried in themselves and in the language, they make even everyday words unfamiliar. Take Hopkins, for instance:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*¹

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame', in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 141.

That verse is full of the sound and rhythms that make up song: thanksgiving, in this case—and it isn't always the case with Hopkins. In being expressed, it says something about a spiritual work; for there is a healing and a reparation in singing—even in lamentation. Those key themes of song and solitude—where the 'being indoors each one dwells' relates to and syncs with being outside, breathing in light—are what I wish to focus on in attempting to answer a very simple question: what is a spiritual education?

Two scriptures, both by St Paul, will structure what I want to say, along with a single Latin word: *persona*. From *persona* we get the word 'person', and personhood is what we are concerned with here: the salvation of the unique, enfleshed, spatially and temporally located individual. *What I do is me: for that I came. My life is my witness.* But if you take *persona* back to its Latin root, it's formed from two bits of the Latin language, the main part being *sonere*, to sound, with the suffix *per* which means 'through'. So a *persona* is that through which sound sounds. We'll return to that.

The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God

Now for those scriptures: the first is 1 Corinthians 2:11. 'For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God.' What I want to draw attention to here is the repetition of the word 'spirit' (the Greek *pneuma* in both cases). However much there is an infinite difference between the divine and the human, there remains a spiritual communication across an analogical order in which human spirit encounters divine Spirit. By *analogical* here I only mean that there is a greater dissimilarity with respect to God within any similarity drawn. The Spirit of God works in, through and upon the human spirit. The human spirit is not some floating ectoplasm, some ghost in the machine. It's the breath of life itself, organic *and* transcendent because it's not ours alone and relates us to other breathing creatures, and to God.

Furthermore, we cannot have thoughts (about ourselves, other creatures or God) without consciousness and the brain; and in these aspects of being human the cognitive and the physiological cannot be divorced. In fact, the more we are learning about the relationship between the neurological and cognitive, and how emotions, moods and imagination work within and upon different levels of consciousness,

the more we are coming to see ourselves as, paradoxically, both closed and open biological systems.

The system is closed biologically because it is self-determining, self-protective and self-regulating. The system is open because it receives, feeds on and responds to all that is outside itself: the social, the non-human and the natural. We live in and through our entanglement with all that composes the evolving environment—natural, social and cultural. There are circulations between these open systems, both active and reactive, both processing and determining: creative energies, biological and psychological; and destructive energies that inhibit, such as fear, violence and starvation.

Human being, then, is subject to continual change, adaptation and transformation on three levels. According to St Paul, these are the body (*soma*), the mind (*psuchê*) and the spirit (*pneuma*). All of which make possible *metanoia*, the change of mind and orientation that we associate, as Christians, with repentance, or with the reorientation of a direction, a living-towards. Human being is not a name of an entity but a genus, *Homo*. And there were many forms of *Homo*, some of them co-existing for some time—a time far longer than *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been alone.

Being human is a praxis, a verbal noun, being and becoming human. Personhood involves various performative actions. In its operations, internally and externally, it is continually becoming and being. That's what living involves: becoming (growing up, maturing and growing old) and absorbing, responding and adapting to conditions, whether they be good or bad. And—just one more point—all that becoming is made possible by breathing. So, a person's spirit, *pneuma*, is related (as the word *pneuma* is related) to breathing. Once we stop breathing, we die.

'Spirit' here, a person's spirit, operates on the two other levels: breath (the body, the biological) and that which stirs within and forges cognitive processes (the mind, consciousness in all its complex concealments). In *De trinitate*, Augustine points out that God works through the Spirit of Christ so that He is written into the very structures of our mind and deep calls to deep. Spirit functions, then, at a level beneath what the psychologists call the unconscious. So the spirit has no language beyond bodily gestures, faint feelings, cries of joy or pain—what might be called the song that is one's flesh.

The scriptural verse adds to the human spirit, somewhat anthropomorphically, God-consciousness operating also through the Holy



The creation of Adam, mosaic, twelfth or thirteenth century, Monreale cathedral, Sicily

Spirit. I'm not going to go into the obvious Trinitarian implications of this, except to say there *are* implications. Very good ones. But I am going to focus instead on the way this description of *pneuma* returns us to Genesis and to God breathing the breath of life into the nostrils of an androgynous clay figure and, in this way, animating the human. The word for this breath of God in the Septuagint is, once again, *pneuma*. All this suggests that God's breathing is intimately associated, at some spiritual depth we can never grasp as such, with our own breathing,

our being alive as biological systems open to what life gives us and what we make of it. At this point, all I wish to do with this observation is note that spirituality begins here, sustained by a divine operation working in, through and beyond creation, and deeper than the realms psychology can plumb.

Service and Stewardship

The second scriptural verse is 1 Corinthians 4: 1: 'Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries'. In this context, what I have said about 1 Corinthians 2: 11—that which we receive as the Holy Spirit works within and upon our human spirit—is now given a social orientation. In the words of Hopkins, the 'being indoors each one dwells' now encounters other creatures, human and non-human.

What has been received has to be passed on, and in being passed on bears witness. Our spirituality, our spiritual education, is not simply some private sanctification. If it operates in and through our bodies, its orientation is the edification of the body of Christ, our *communio sanctorum*. This is fundamentally where Christian spirituality differs from exercises in mindfulness and well-being—though certainly we might

learn something from those practices, and I don't want at all to suggest that I dismiss their therapeutic capabilities. Like the work of salvation, which they can augment, they can heal.

Salvation and formation, which are what spirituality is all about (not mystical translations to another realm), work in and through us. So, what we receive we have to give. Otherwise, like the manna collected by the Israelites and kept overnight, the spirituality will not nourish but sicken. We can't keep the gospel to ourselves. Again: our living is our witnessing. Spiritual work testifies; it bears witness, because it is forming predispositions and behaviours. Our spiritual formation is for the formation of the body of Christ. And form is an emergent property: it cannot be predicted or prescribed. It's too complex a phenomenon and too entangled with biological and cultural (and therefore pedagogical) evolution.

Paul allots two roles in that passing on of what we have received. The first role is 'servants of Christ' and the second role is 'stewards of God's mysteries'. These roles emerge from the formation and they shape it; they are not independent administrative offices. The exercise of stewardship is grounded in being disposed to humility and the behaviour that follows: serving. There is a difference between the roles, and a development. A 'servant of Christ' is an assistant under the command of a superior, a *hupêtas*. And that can mean anything from mopping up vomit in toilets of the parish room to preparing food and drinks for tonight's feast.

Unless our servitude is in place—that is, worked out within us as a fundamental predisposition—we cannot develop the next role we are asked to perform (and Paul is talking about his own divine vocation here). The steward is a servant, but with far more responsibilities for the ordering and maintenance of order within the house. The steward has greater pastoral oversight, and to take on such a role a spiritual development of that fundamental predisposition of servitude has got to be worked out, and worked out thoroughly. We are not talking line-management here.

I have a rather curtailed MBA from the University of Manchester, in management and leadership, and although it taught me a lot about my limitations as a manager and also a handful of techniques, 'stewardship of God's mysteries' requires a more profound education in serving and being served. It is founded in being small enough (another name for humility) to sacrifice. I take Christ's descent from the cross as the leading

example here. And that means suffering. Excellence in administration is not necessarily a qualification for the role of being a steward of the mysteries and the greater formation of the body of Christ.

What I like about Paul's metaphor here is its groundedness. There were mystery religions and mystery cults throughout the Graeco-Roman world. They were secretive and highly selective, governed by priests (for Mithras) and priestesses (for Isis). Paul is not having any of that, and his use of 'stewards' make that plain. There are mysteries here, but the steward is not the guardian of any cult, possessed by oracular powers or, necessarily, personal charisma. The steward is a labourer who has been formed in his or her servitude to Christ.

That person knows that his or her own salvation, his or her private sanctification is nothing—a self-righteous fantasy—unless it builds up the body of Christ, through working alongside others with different callings and formations. The recognition of difference is vital here. We are each becoming human in different ways, with different backgrounds (cultural, biographical and even linguistic), along different destinies, with distinct spiritualities though participating in the one Spirit. All of which works through and across time for the upbuilding of the body of Christ by giving expression to, witnessing and testifying to, 'God's mysteries'. Stewards are not mystics: they are wise; they are prudent.

Hiddenness

Now, let me say something now about those 'mysteries'. For while *mysterion* indicates something that is secret, for Paul, God's revelation has made known what was once unknown. So, while the word retains a sense of concealment, stewardship is bringing to light those things now revealed in Christ. Our lives, Paul states in Colossians 3:3, are 'hidden [*kekruptai*] with Christ in God'. With concealments being revealed in and our own lives being hidden in Christ, we are not talking about ecstatic utterances or experiences here. We are embodied creatures. Whatever we experience, we experience in and through our embodiment. But the location or sphere within which that embodiment is placed is 'Christ'. The whole biological order is rooted in Christ the Pantocrator. We are *in* Christ, a dative locative in Greek. Christ is not just a historical figure but also a realm in which we move, the Logos by whom and in whom all things were created. Only God can be both personal and simultaneously a realm of operations.

Much of what goes on with respect to those divine operations we can only guess at in our very human and limited ways. Just as our thoughts are not God's thoughts, and we cannot surpass our creaturely limitations, so *much* about the workings of salvation and formation (which are, as I said, what spirituality is all about) is hidden from us—hidden since the realm of the spirit (*pneuma*) is only partially available to cognition and language (*psychê*). This is what is meant by 'mysteries'. We don't know where the lines can be drawn between nature and grace, what is created and what is uncreated. Our lives are 'hidden'; our futures are 'hidden'; the operations of God with respect to providence (my destiny or the destiny of anyone else) are hidden. 'No one has ever seen God', John's Gospel tells us (1:18). We have to trust, abide, have faith. That does not mean there is nothing we can say or do. A steward must both say and do. But the source of that saying or doing, and its consequences for ourselves and other people, are mainly hidden from us. The source of the spring is concealed. Those familiar with Hopkins's poetry recognise how frequently he refers to this secret spring.

Spiritual education must come to terms with 'hiddenness'. It's what faith requires. Hiddenness installs the need for faith. We don't know where we're going and sometimes have very little grasp of what we are doing. That is the condition of being 'hidden with Christ in God' and becoming, in the deepening of our relationship and trust in Christ, ever more aware of hidden and secret springs within us, of which we are the stewards. This condition gives rise to a paradox: as stewards we are workers actively pursuing and delivering a service; but what we are administering is 'hidden' (often even from us). Let's put that paradox under the microscope for a moment because it's at the heart of spiritual education.

We live; we breathe; we act and are acted upon. We move and are moved. We do not know when or where that movement will stop, and most of us do not know whether the stoppage will be abrupt or the result of a gradual winding down. We feel ourselves held in God's providential care. We follow; we are led; the shepherd goes before; we have learnt his name and learnt, too, that we are known. But in our following and being led we do not just sit waiting, in words from *The Sound of Music*, 'for fate to turn the light on'. We have appointments, services, meetings, correspondence, projects, plans, things to say to bishops, opinions *The Tablet* needs to know about and so on. We are active, sometimes overactive, in following after.

There's the paradox, and like all paradoxes this one involves a cross-hatching of tensions. The tensions emerge from the ripples of contrary movements, and what makes the centre hold is Christ, and the spiritual formation in Christ. What provides the ballast is our education in Christ, into all those things hidden in Christ and in the Godhead. We live; we breathe; we act and are acted upon, in and through a spiritual pedagogy that follows in the lines of grace: an education of ourselves for the benefit of a salvation offered to all. Biographies count. Nothing, I believe, is lost; however faulty my memory becomes the older I get. All is gathered up in a sanctification divine in origin and end. Our living and breathing educates us, and that education constitutes our witness to the glory of God. And without that belief we are just faffing and floundering because a lot of living seems to involve faffing and floundering.

Education and Formation

Our education here is not at all like doing GCSEs, or A levels, or even degrees. Modern education—I speak as one who has spent his career immersed in it—is instrumental. It is geared to acquiring skill sets and the efficient processing of information. Spiritual education is not at all instrumental. It's about salvation, being formed, eternal life. It is less about acquiring than letting go and being open. It is less about equipping than the transformation of dispositions and predispositions—a transformation that comes about by a reorientation of desires. Skills may be acquired, including coping skills with what life gives and what life takes. But, however many techniques we learn, from breath-control to feet placed firmly on the ground, from meandering in silence to the endless repetition of the Jesus prayer, none of them, in themselves, trigger the flow and direction of grace. No doubt you have tried every one of them, as I have, and sometimes there seems to be a pay-off, and most times there isn't. Spiritual operations are governed by a set of techniques.

We need to go right back to some ancient notions and languages. From *paideia* in Greek we get *pedagogy* and *paediatrics*; *pedes* is a foot and so education is a learning how to walk, a way to live correctly. *E-ducere* in Latin means to lead out; *ductus* is a route or path. Christian education, spiritual education, is a leading out along the way. And the way is Christ. We don't know the way, or the truth; that is all part of the 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge' that are 'hidden' in Christ (Colossians 2:3).

We do know something about life, beyond systems biology: life not as the name of something that scientists are seeking to replicate with chains of various fatty acids, but rather life as what we live and experience, breathing in a specific time, in a specific place, in a specific body—me, mine. ‘Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*’, in Hopkins’s words.

So we are led out, spiritually, intellectually, physiologically, emotionally into the mysteries and the concealments of which we are stewards. And what is emerging is a form that is con-formed to Christ (Romans 8: 29). To answer the question of what is formed in this process is absolutely right, but also absolutely abstract. This is too close to a mathematical formula to be of use in understanding what is taking place in and around us. And what exactly is it that is being ‘formed’? What is being formed in spiritual formation? Let’s start with what is not being formed.

Form is not a one-size-fits-all template. The character being formed is you, and you are an utterly unique creation. Hopkins again: ‘Selves—goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells’. If we take Paul’s metaphor of the different organs of the body (1 Corinthians 12), the eye’s formation is not the same as the foot’s. And who can name what part they are playing in the body of Christ? No doubt there are surprising formations which do not conform with social or cultural norms, especially the strong social and cultural expectations that operate within churches.

Furthermore, the form is always *forming* as you are *living*. It emerges with the transformation of fundamental predispositions and intentional orientations. It’s very much like the processes of artistic creation. As an artist, you can copy what’s out there, or you can allow what’s out there to shape something in you that becomes an expressive response. Any number of creative artists will speak about the labours of working with instinct and intuition, of not



Self-Portrait, by William Orpen, c. 1924

knowing what will emerge or how it will emerge. And most, when a form is found, are aware of its imperfections. They have worked the material—words or paint, musical notes or marble—but often what has emerged surprises them: it's original, it's authentic, it's something new. When Mark Rothko finished a painting he would sit in silence before it mesmerised by what had appeared.

The same thing holds for conformity to Christ. In the end, to cite Paul again, form is about coming to that place where 'I will know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Corinthians 13:12). Form concerns the shaping of the personhood that will stand before Christ and know even as I am known. Personhood emerges from life experiences held in prayer: how the details of my life, its chances, changes and circumstances, have led me to be the person I am—and have eternally always been—in Christ. Sometimes we can trace the transformations that have occurred over the tempering of time—transformations of attitude, of reaction and response, as we have learnt to love better (ourselves, others, Christ). But we will, I think, be surprised about who we are and what we have become when we know 'even as I have been fully known'.

Spiritual formation is, if you like, the realisation of the old oracle: know yourself. But the knowledge here, like the education which brought it about, is far more profound than the therapeutics of psychologists, because it is rooted in the movements of *pneuma*, in the human spirit in relation to the divine spirit, not just *psychê*—the life of the mind. Spiritual formation can learn much about mental health from mindfulness and well-being programmes but is not ultimately a self-help therapy. While it is absolutely centred in you, you do not belong to yourself. Your spiritual formation is only about your own salvation to the extent it is about the operation of salvation itself, in and through the work it does—through time, through biological evolution and entanglement, cultural location and every single one of the people around you—to bring about conformity in Christ.

In Romans 8:29, when Paul speaks about that conformity, the Greek word he uses is *summorphous*. We are to be formed-with, formed in accordance with, the image of Christ. That formation takes place *in* Christ. We do not become little copies of what we think being Christ looks like. Every single thing *you* have experienced works together, repairing and transforming so that you will know even as you are known: your sufferings, your bereavements, your confusions, your failings and

your brilliant successes, your joys and sorrows, the people you have hurt and the hurt you have received, your pathological insecurities and your assured well-being. Everything is gathered up into Christ, recapitulated, as both Paul and Irenaeus will say.² It is part of your providential education: following, being led, by faith.

We don't know what we will finally look like. We don't know what our spiritual formation has brought about and is bringing about. We don't know what we are as those who are saved; or what the appearance of that condition looks like. And yet, I think, one of the first things we will come to know is that we have never belonged to ourselves. Our biographies are only fragments of trillions of intersecting biographies that relay across the human species itself. We have only ever been, and will only ever be, servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. We have taken on the masks or roles that have been given to us—father, mother, brother, sister, teacher, priest, friend, lover, expert in AI, poet, preacher, neighbour and so on. It is through wearing these masks and playing these roles that our lives have been lived and our persons have been formed. Masks do not signify false identities here. It is just that in every situation we present to others only one face of the multiple faces that compose us.

**We have
never
belonged to
ourselves**

Sounding Through

We are back with that word *persona*, which can indeed mean mask as it can mean, extended, *dramatis personae*, the cast list for a divine drama. We have arrived at spiritual formation as discovering one's personhood 'hidden with Christ in God'. This is our salvation and, because we do not belong to ourselves, it brings the dynamic of salvation into every other relationship that has crafted that sense of our being a uniquely created person.

No one else can live the life you live, just as no one else can die in your place. We will know even as we are known *in* Christ and *by* Christ. We become *personae Christi*—those who have been sounded through by Christ, voiced beyond and yet through our own voice, so that our calling calls out, testifies, bears witness. What our formation concerns is the formation of the body of Christ, and just as sacrifice

² See, for example, *Against Heresies*, 5.21.1.

was intrinsic to the work of salvation on the cross, so sacrifice is intrinsic to formation. In this continuing donation and giving over of oneself, the body of Christ is extended, which is nothing more nor less than a eucharistic celebration.

The process of redemption continues, drawing all things into Christ so that we and the whole of creation can be given to the Father and all things ‘in heaven and on earth and under the earth’ (Philippians 2:10) are submitted. This is our participation in the redemption of time (Ephesians 5:16), effected by the Spirit in and through our prayers for the future and for the reconciliation and forgiveness of what is past. That is the present work—in us, through us and for us—until all things are brought to the light and are illuminated with grace, as grace, crafted in the beauty of their divine arrangement and donated in love.

Per-sonere—to sound through. Perhaps this gives you some sense of why I think singing is important. We are the song that is written in us, as us. We are, ultimately, prayer. God’s presence with us and in us, in our longing (for we will always desire), is prayer. So who is praying? We can stop sometimes to listen to that song, that praying—thanksgiving, intercession, even lament—welling up,

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell’s
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Which is where we began.

Graham Ward is Regius professor of divinity, emeritus, of the University of Oxford.

‘WHAT I CALL SPIRITUALITY’

Secondary School Students’ Perceptions of Spiritual Development in Hong Kong

Paul Shing Ming Yu

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH is the largest provider of education in Hong Kong, running around 190 primary and secondary schools. These schools are funded by the government and hence are accountable to wider society, while at the same time having the mission to educate adolescents in the Catholic tradition. The fact that Hong Kong ethnic Chinese have a predominantly Confucian cultural heritage but half of them have children attending Christian (Catholic or Protestant) schools indicates that the beliefs and values of Hong Kong people are subject to a mix of influences: Hong Kong is an international financial centre where East meets West. Hong Kong parents favour Christian schools because of their good academic standing and effective moral education.¹

The non-Catholic majority in the student body presents both opportunities and challenges to Catholic schools in Hong Kong. Against this background, I have conducted a study of how male adolescent students in a Jesuit boys’ school perceive spiritual development, the extent to which the school’s spiritual development provisions meet their expectations and needs, and the relationship between school culture and spiritual development. I found that the students see spirituality as important to human well-being and development, albeit in a predominantly secular way. In the study students found opportunities

¹ Roger H. M. Cheng, ‘Moral Education in Hong Kong: Confucian-Parental, Christian-Religious and Liberal-Civic Influences’, *Journal of Moral Education*, 33/4 (December 2004), 533–551; Cecilia Ka Yuk Chan and Nai Chi Jonathan Yeung, ‘Rethinking the “Tiger Parent” Stereotypes: Parents’ Choice of Primary School for Their Kindergarten Children in Hong Kong’, *Journal of School Choice*, 14/3 (2019), 325–348.

to reflect (notably through the Examen) and to connect with one another, and the school culture itself, to be relevant and conducive to spiritual development.

The Structure of the Study

Wah Yan College is a Roman Catholic grammar school for boys run by the Society of Jesus with over a hundred years of history. It is subsidised by the Hong Kong government and hence subject to stringent regulation in school administration, resource management and student admission. The school has thirty classes and close to a thousand students. With an area of over 40,000 square metres it is one of the largest schools in Hong Kong by campus area. The majority of teachers are non-Catholic, though there are a few Jesuit priests teaching in the school. Wah Yan College admits a large number of non-Catholic students each year, and the socio-economic background of the students is dictated by its catchment area.

Three research methods were employed: documentary review, a drawing task and semi-structured interviews. The documentary review involved examining official statements, policy documents and other written records of the school. The drawing task asked participants to draw pictures about specific human emotions associated with spiritual development. The interviews elicited the real-life stories and lived experience of the participants. A list of interview questions was provided to them beforehand for reference.

Research participants were chosen using the typical case purposeful sampling design, which seeks to describe and illustrate the typical or average individual.² The fifteen participants were aged between fourteen and eighteen, and studying in forms 2 to 6 (equivalent to years 8 to 12 in the English system). They were considered to be broadly representative of the student body of Wah Yan College because they covered a rather diverse range of characteristics in terms of grade, religious affiliation and involvement in extracurricular activities. Here are brief profiles of the participants.³

² For typical case purposeful sampling, see Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th edn (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 401, 429.

³ Consent was obtained from all participants and, where necessary, from their parents. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

1. Thomas	• form 5 • no religious belief • eleven years of Christian (Catholic) education • chairman of values education team
2. Chris	• form 6 • no religious belief • twelve years of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) education • vice captain of swimming team and member of school choir
3. Hugo	• form 6 • no religious belief • twelve years of Christian (Catholic) education • member of values education team
4. Michael	• form 3 • regular Protestant churchgoer, but not yet baptized • nine years of Christian (Catholic) education • member of assembly team
5. Rafael	• form 5 • no religious belief • eleven years of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) education • member of values education team, house vice captain, vice captain of volleyball team, vice chairman of stage management team
6. Charles	• form 5 • Catholic • eleven years of Christian (Catholic) education • vice president of Catholic association, former vice president of altar society, choir member • went on the Taiwan experiential learning trip
7. Colin	• form 2 • no religious belief • eight years of Christian (Catholic) education • presided at school assemblies
8. Ronald	• form 3 • Protestant • nine years of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) education • member of school orchestra

9. Felix	• form 3 • Catholic • twelve years of Christian (Catholic) education • member of mixed choir, altar server
10. Tony	• form 3 • no religious background • twelve years of Christian (Catholic) education • member of school orchestra
11. Gabriel	• form 4 • no religious background • ten years of Christian (Catholic) education • internal secretary of music association, vice chairman of school choir, prefect
12. Jason	• form 4 • regular Protestant churchgoer, but not yet baptized • ten years of Christian (Catholic) education • executive committee member of English debating team, secretary of students' association, music team (percussion ensemble) leader
13. Ryan	• form 5 • no religious background • eleven years of Christian (Catholic) education • head prefect, executive committee member of music association, acting chairman of the publication committee of the students' association
14. Sunny	• form 2 • Protestant • eight years of Christian (Catholic and Protestant) education • member of Chinese debating team and football team
15. Bosco	• form 2 • no religious background but will sometimes pray • five years of Christian (Catholic) education • member of school choir, scout, member of geography club and biology club

In order to analyse and interpret the survey data, codes (or keywords) and themes were developed to enable a contextualised 'thick description' and proper classification of the data. Themes were then organized into bigger units to make sense of the data.

Documentary Review

Numerous references in the school documents reviewed indicate the importance that Wah Yan College attaches to spiritual development. The documents show that their approach to education is rooted in Catholic values and practices, and they are concerned to teach students Catholic ideas about self-acceptance, family, love, justice and truth.⁴ Morning formation periods have been introduced for class teachers to instil positive values in their students.⁵

A unique feature of the school life of Wah Yan College is that ten minutes of each school day are set aside for students to practise the Examen, an Ignatian spiritual exercise that provides an opportunity to reflect prayerfully on the events of the day, so as to detect God’s presence and discern God’s direction. The Examen is considered to be helpful to students’ spiritual development and betterment, and helps prevent students from ‘being drifted away by turbulent currents’ in life.⁶

The student diary, known as the *Reflective Journal*, provides students with guidance on how to conduct the Examen. Students are asked to be aware of the blessings, tensions and decisions in life, reminded of the need to be grateful and challenged to think about how they might improve. The guidance makes it clear that the Examen can be used in both faith and non-faith contexts.

Drawing Task and Interview

Understanding Spirituality

Since most Hong Kong Chinese students are trilingual and biliterate, some participants defined spirituality in both English and Chinese. For example, Gabriel said:

I understand spirituality in Chinese as 靈性, ling xing. That is, how will a person act from the heart ... how to act is your decision.

⁴ ‘Values Education’, at <https://wyk.edu.hk/academic/learning-and-teaching/values-education>, accessed 25 September 2025.

⁵ Wah Yan College, Kowloon, ‘School Development Plan (2017–2020)’, 14, available at <https://wyk.edu.hk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/School-Development-Plan-2017-20-20-June.pdf>, accessed 23 September 2025)

⁶ ‘School Development Plan (2017–2020)’, 14; Wah Yan College, Kowloon, ‘Annual School Report 21–22’, 32, available at https://wyk.edu.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ASR_2021-22_FINAL_web.pdf, accessed 23 September 2025.

The notion of *ling xing* in Chinese is similar to ‘spirituality’ in English in the breadth, depth and diverse meanings of the term, and encompasses such concepts as spirit, soul, intelligence and inspiration.

The participants considered that spirituality was concerned with thinking and reflection (Bosco, Ryan), and referred to human beings’ search for the meaning of life, which helped them understand themselves and the world. Spirituality was seen as influencing human relationships with God, other humans, other creatures, society and the environment (Chris, Michael, Tony and Sunny).

Transcendence may be understood as a subjective reality beyond the individual, and beyond the biological and physical: the ability to ‘reach beyond the material realm and glimpse a deeper reality’.⁷ It featured in

**An
impulse to
build a closer
relationship
with God**

several participants’ understanding of spirituality. Spiritual transcendence was seen as an impulse to build a closer relationship with God; in secular terms transcendence was understood as the drive for self-improvement to reach some higher state or realm. Religious and secular views were not mutually exclusive. Jason, for instance, said he aspired to *have a deeper connection with God*; at the same time, he wanted to go beyond his personal limits, to *do better in everything, in a spiritual state*.

Spirituality and Religion

For the participants, the relationship between religion and spirituality lay in the fact that religion leads or helps followers to pursue spiritual things (Thomas, Hugo, Rafael, Felix) and that they share common ground and objectives, for example encouraging reflection (Felix) and bringing peace of mind (Ryan). Some participants thought that spirituality was a distinct and broader concept than religion (Thomas, Chris, Michael, Ryan, Bosco). Chris, for instance, commented:

Perhaps religion will lead you to a better direction, but there are ‘super’ many paths to go, and not just religion.

⁷ Tatiana Wilson, ‘Spiritual Development and Human Flourishing: Why We Bother’, in Church of England Education Office, *Spiritual Development: Interpretations of Spiritual Development in the Classroom* (London: National Society [Church of England and Church in Wales] for the Promotion of Education, 2019), 32–35, here 33. And see also Andrew Singleton, Michael Mason and Ruth Webber, ‘Spirituality in Adolescence and Young Adulthood: A Method for a Qualitative Study’, *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*, 9/3 (December 2004), 247–262; John M. Hull, ‘Spirituality, Religion, Faith: Mapping the Territory’, *Youth and Policy*, 65 (Autumn 1999), 48–59; and Lois Duff, ‘Spiritual Development and Education: A Contemplative View’, *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*, 13/3 (2008), 227–237.

The development of secular spirituality could be achieved through inspiration from one’s surroundings (Sunny), reading books (Thomas, Hugo), creating memories (Tony), and challenging oneself to do better and trying to help others (Gabriel).

Spirituality and Education

The participants unanimously agreed that schools should promote spiritual development, because education is meant to enable personal growth and transformation by instilling values and guiding individuals to choose the right path in life. In their view, spirituality had a positive impact on human values and emotions (Michael, Ronald and Ryan).

Michael indicated that spiritual development had made him happier and more able to let go of things. Rafael observed that, with the school’s emphasis on forming students to be ‘men for and with others’, its students were more involved in social service than their peers in other schools and more empathetic.⁸ Jason said he had become more open-minded and more willing to take up challenges. Colin described how he felt influenced and changed over time by the school’s spiritual ethos:

Input had been provided, to facilitate thinking. And then once it’s inside [your mind] ... over time, the entire person and character would somehow change.

Spirituality was also seen as related to values and moral principles. For instance, Thomas stated that spirituality taught humans to make the right choices in life through challenging the popular thinking about having to find a good job and earn a lot of money. The connection between spirituality and values cultivated a sense of service in students. Charles, who took part in a school activity assisting the visually impaired, felt challenged to put himself in their shoes. Gabriel claimed that he was no longer self-centred and became someone who *care[d] more about others ... being sensitive to what others think*. Participants felt they had transcended themselves. According to Tony, the values taught by the school shaped his own value system and led him to plan his future:

⁸ See <https://wyk.edu.hk>. ‘Men for and with others’ is an adaptation of Pedro Arrupe’s well-known definition of ‘the paramount objective of jesuit education’. See ‘Men for Others: Training Agents of Change for the Promotion of Justice’, in Pedro Arrupe, *Justice with Faith Today: Selected Letters and Addresses—II*, edited by Jerome Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 123–138.

The school's values education helped me build up my own values, making it clear to me how I should walk my path ... one will think about one's future, and will plan about it.

Spiritual education fostered students' social awareness, increasing their sensitivity towards society and the world. Bosco said he had become more resilient, more positive and more concerned about the world through spiritual education:

Now I'd care about things like wars and things in the news ... I wouldn't do so in the past Now, I'd read the news and want to know what others' views and perspectives are, and what others are doing.

This study resonates with earlier ones in the positive effects and impact of spiritual development in school reported by participants.⁹ These positive changes included a better mental outlook and resilience, increased happiness, a better attitude towards other people or better ways to interact with them, and a clearer picture about one's future. The participants reported that they were touched, inspired and motivated by the values promoted by the school—in particular that of being 'men for and with others'—and had become more sensitive and empathetic towards the needs and challenges of others.

Provision for Spiritual Development

Participants perceived the programmes and activities of the school as relevant and conducive to spiritual development in many ways, encompassing school assemblies, lessons, religious rituals and events, the Examen and extracurricular activities.

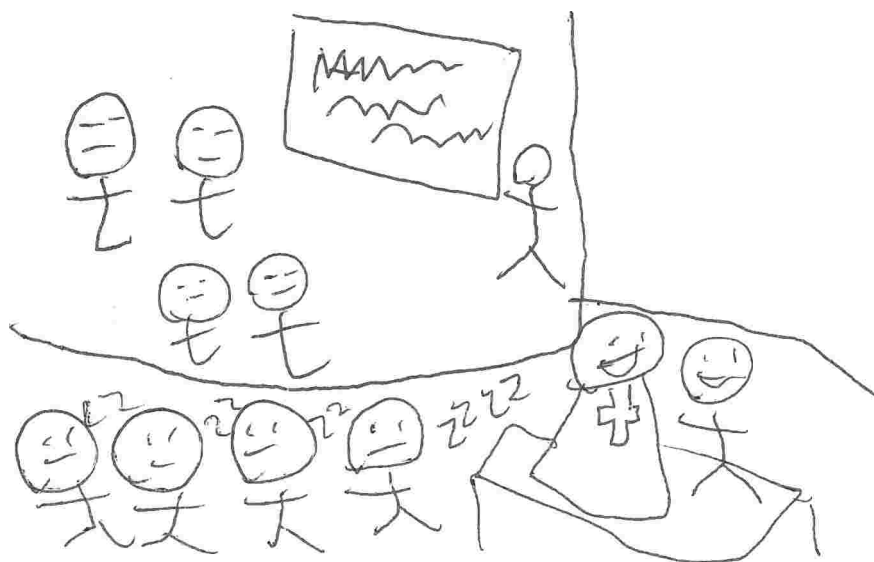
The assembly, held every two weeks throughout the academic year, was perceived to be a spiritual activity because some sections (the principal's address, the priest's sharing and prize presentation) were opportunities to express and celebrate the school's ethos, values and practices, providing students with food for thought and reflection.

The participants nominated lessons in ethics and religious education, and morning formation periods as fostering spiritual development. Like other Hong Kong Catholic schools, Wah Yan College offers ethics and

⁹ See Hong-yu Chow, 'Students' Perception of Spiritual Development' (MEd thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2008); and Kaili Chen Zhang, 'Through a Spiritual Lens: Early Childhood Inclusive Education in Hong Kong', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 53/6 (December 2014), 1728–1740.

religious education to all students. The lessons cover a range of topics, from bible stories to sex education and social issues (such as discrimination and freedom of the press). At Wah Yan College, the first lesson of every school day is the formation period. Non-Catholic students receive talks given by their class teacher: topics are mainly about values education, and include life attitudes, mental health and moral values (Rafael, Ronald, Ryan). Catholic students attend a Catholic formation session in which the talks cover topics such as the liturgical seasons and reflection on biblical stories (Felix).

Masses and other religious rituals were considered by the participants to be relevant to spiritual development, but the extent of engagement was questionable. Students falling asleep while the priest was preaching the sermon featured in Thomas's drawing of the 'bored' emotion.



Thomas: 'Bored'

The Examen is practised on every school day, and almost all the participants viewed it as a unique, important and valuable activity which let students quietly reflect on their experience for subsequent improvement. Some participants (Chris, Charles, Felix and Bosco) even equated the Examen directly with spiritual development. Bosco said:

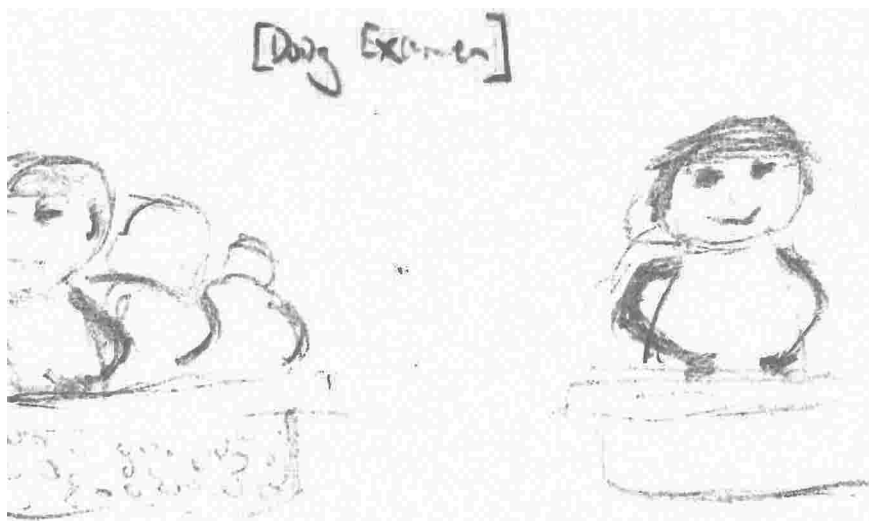
Examen ... is what I call spirituality, because it's about a self-awareness about your sense of existence towards God and other things ... to find your meaning ... and you may do better.

Hugo explained that students would typically be given a theme and be guided to think about what happened on that particular day, and what things one should be grateful for. While there were different styles of leading the Examen, reflection remained at the heart of the process.

The Examen was perceived as leading gradually to inner peace, personal growth and self-improvement. Gabriel commented:

... you could think about what you'd done in the morning, anything good that you should continue, and anything bad that you should improve. And then for the remaining half day, you'd live better.

Many participants reported an experience of calm after practising the Examen (Thomas, Rafael, Colin, Ronald, Felix, Tony and Jason). In the drawing task, Felix's portrayal of calm was about the Examen.



Felix: 'Calm'

Colin reported a feeling of positive energy from the Examen, of thinking more positively and becoming more thankful. Peace and calm represented an increase in emotional maturity, as students gradually developed the ability to control and master his own emotions through practising the Examen. The participants' appreciation of the Examen tends to suggest that teenagers, who are in the process of developing their own identity and perspectives on different things, desire and require the space and opportunity for thinking and reflection, and also genuine respect from adults (parents and teachers) for their points of view.

Extracurricular activities were regarded as an opportunity for spiritual development because students could connect with one another. Many activities are organized and led by students themselves (Tony, Ryan). Activities undertaken by participants included sports competitions, class concerts and the ‘Men for and with Others’ programme. This programme comprises various activities: older students mentoring younger ones (Ryan), experiential learning trips to mainland China and Taiwan (Charles), a volunteer teaching trip to Cambodia (Thomas) and giving out meal boxes to the needy (Rafael). It encourages students to be ‘men for and with others’ through knowing the world and serving others.

Whether a programme or activity fostered spiritual development hinged for the participants on whether it was able to enrich their connectedness and relationships, and let them generate meanings. As Jason pointed out, serving others is a way to transcend oneself by becoming a better person and letting oneself understand others’ feelings. Other extracurricular activities encouraged transcendence through teamwork and brotherhood. In the drawing task, most participants related their activities to positive emotions such as ‘happy’ (Charles, Jason), ‘interested’ (Sunny, Bosco) and ‘excited’ (Hugo, Tony). Tony said he was particularly excited to join activities involving students from girls’ schools.

School Culture

School culture, which includes ethos and values, and which influences the practices of the school, is a crucial factor informing and directing



Tony: ‘Excited’

spiritual development within the school. The culture was considered by the participants to be positively conducive to spiritual development. For instance, Thomas remarked:

... spiritual education [is done]... through... the overall atmosphere and that includes different teachers' words and deeds, or different activities, although on the face of it one may feel they aren't useful, but still, they may be able to infuse into me

All the participants perceived that the freedoms offered by their school were helpful to spiritual development: freedom is a cherished feature of Jesuit schools.¹⁰ Freedom at Wah Yan College could be described as a general atmosphere of ease, a genuine respect for students' individuality and choices, and a preference for students' self-discipline over imposition and enforcement of school rules. Freedom was related to spiritual development in two ways: students felt they were free to make their own choices about spirituality; and they embraced a generally positive outlook on life. Gabriel explained:

This school gives us a lot of freedom. I think it gives us ample room to develop our areas of strength ... we can really choose our own path.

The atmosphere of freedom contributed to a generally happy mood among the students so that they enjoyed going to school. For example, Chris's picture of happiness also showed the school campus. The freedom that students enjoyed was seen as facilitating reflection and perhaps leading to transcendence by developing a drive for self-improvement. Charles thought reflection was very important because one could ascertain right and wrong and could keep improving oneself.

Relationships within the School Community

Many participants regarded the student–teacher and student–student relationships within the school community as sources of, and avenues for, their spiritual development. Students generally enjoyed a positive relationship with their teachers, treating them as friends and companions, and had ready access to them if needed. Hugo shared that they could always go inside the staffroom to chat with teachers. Colin said his teachers taught him to be thankful:

¹⁰ See Wing-hang Henry Yuen, 'The Sustainability of an Ignatian Religious School in Hong Kong' (MEd thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2006).

Because teachers always emphasize that we need to be thankful, so I think I've come to think more about thankfulness. Like, anyone to thank, need to be happy about what's happened.

The quality of student–teacher relationships was enriched by the fact that some teachers were alumni of the school themselves.

The relationship between students is fondly seen as ‘brotherhood’ within the school community and is considered a core part of the ethos, values and culture of Wah Yan College. In the participants’ drawings, brotherhood was associated with both positive emotions—‘happy’ (playing, chatting and spending time with classmates: Michael, Ronald), ‘excited’ (playing video games with classmates, joining interschool competitions: Thomas, Chris)—and negative ones, such as ‘sad’ (quarrelling, friends leaving Hong Kong: Charles, Jason). Many participants claimed that they were touched by the brotherly love and care they received in school, and were inspired to take care of their younger schoolmates in future.

Spiritual Spots on Campus

During the interviews, the participants readily associated their spiritual experience with different places on the school campus. Some regarded the religious locations, such as the chapel (Colin, Felix and Jason), statue of Our Lady (Jason, Ryan) and the crucifix in the classroom (Rafael), as spiritual. For example, Colin observed:

Within the entire campus, I think the most spiritual and sacred place is the school [chapel]... you'll feel calm. Your whole person will have peace.

Some participants found their own comfort zones—places where their lessons, music practice and social interactions took place—to be their spiritual spots. Examples included classrooms, the music centre and the prefect’s room. Bosco observed, *even when you're bored during recess, you would think and reflect in the classroom.*

The study findings suggest that attention should be paid to the role and significance of spiritual places on campus in spiritual development. A big campus would enable or support a more vibrant school life, allowing for more interactions among students and teachers, and hence opportunities for building relationships.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

In Hong Kong, like many other places in the world, adolescents are increasingly described as self-absorbed, and they are faced with tremendous



stress in both academic and non-academic life, which can result in a lack of purpose and direction, a proliferation of mental health problems; it may even contribute to the increase in student suicide rates in recent years. There is a serious need to help adolescents with their spiritual well-being, to help them develop into happy, resilient and responsible individuals.

Against this background, spiritual development in education is particularly important, because it can instil in adolescents a sense of meaning and purpose, an awareness of self and surroundings, proper values and a positive outlook on life; and it can also help them experience inner peace and happiness. While there seems to be a broad consensus among education researchers, policymakers and practitioners about the importance and contributions of spiritual development in education, little is known about how it should be promoted in schools. This hinges on how spiritual development is understood and perceived by students.

This study, the first comprehensive exploration of perceptions and personal experience of spiritual development by male students in a Hong Kong Roman Catholic secondary school, engaged a group of students in a comprehensive and in-depth discussion about spirituality, and listened to their views and experiences. Besides filling a knowledge gap about the spirituality of adolescent boys and their prospects of developing into reflective, considerate and responsible individuals through spiritual development, the findings could also inform policy and practice of Catholic schools in and outside Hong Kong.

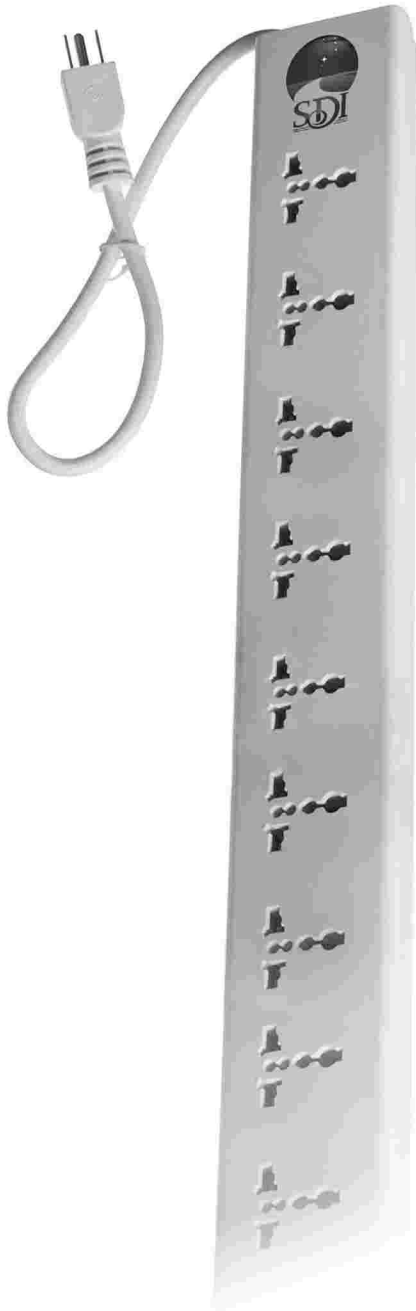
There are both challenges and opportunities. The challenges arise from the fact that the study participants’ understanding of spiritual development gave no preference to a particular religion and was much broader than that of the Catholic school. This inconsistency means that Catholic schools, which are bound by their Catholic tradition, teachings and education policies, may need to broaden their definition of spiritual development to extend beyond the traditional Catholic remit, and adjust and adapt their spiritual development provisions to reach out more effectively and minister to a student body with a non-Catholic majority.

This is not entirely negative. First, while many participants found religious activities boring, none rejected Catholic values altogether. In fact, they seemed to welcome these values as food for thought and reflection. Their immersion in such values presents a unique opportunity for Catholic schools to present their case to students, and a unique avenue for evangelization which is not otherwise available via traditional parochial channels. Rarely could one find so many non-Catholics being receptive to Catholic teachings and willing to use Catholic spiritual tools for personal growth, and one cannot rule out the possibility of seeds being sown in the students’ hearts such that they would find faith in the future.

The fact that a wide range of aspects and activities of the school were considered to be relevant and conducive to students’ spiritual development is consistent with the participants’ claims that spirituality goes to the heart of their humanity. This suggests that Catholic schools should utilise all these aspects and activities to help promote spiritual development among their students, and also that more emphasis should be placed on the non-academic and informal aspects of school life. Every school, especially in its school culture, has a clear and important role to play in students’ spiritual development.

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SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND FORMATION

Jean-Michel Laurent

OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT of religious formation and seminary life, spiritual direction is a helping relationship between two persons, one requesting the help of the other. The reasons vary: progress in spiritual life, a decision that needs to be taken, discerning the meaning and origin of various experiences or help when confronted with a recurrent spiritual or human problem. The parameters of the relationship are clear: the initiative comes from the person requesting the service; it can be ended at any time by either party and confidentiality is expected. Directees freely give their directors all relevant information about their lives, even their deepest secrets, as they know that a director needs to have a complete picture of the person in order to be able to help. Directors may never reveal to outsiders what they have learnt in direction. The confidentiality of spiritual direction is on a par with that of confession.

These parameters of spiritual direction change quite a lot when it takes place in the context of religious formation, where the main goal is to discern God's call to a particular candidate for religious life. In the first place, there is little free choice. Usually novices do not have the opportunity to choose their spiritual director, who will automatically be their novice master or mistress. On their side, novice masters and mistresses do not choose the persons entrusted to their care and appointed to the novitiate by their superiors. If the relationship does not develop according to their liking, the persons involved have no choice but to continue. Ending the relationship would usually entail ending the formation process.

There is also a marked difference in the degree of confidentiality, depending on the formation system used. In some congregations, confidentiality remains absolute during the whole process. The *vade mecum* for initial formation of the Missionaries of Africa states:

The Spiritual Director is committed to respect confidentiality He may speak of what he has seen or heard outside of the Spiritual Direction, for example during sports and manual work (public issues seen in public) Confidentiality does not cover only the contents of the spiritual direction but also the opinion of the Spiritual Director concerning the directee's advancement to the next stage of formation. The Spiritual Director does not, in any way, express his opinion in regard to that advancement.¹

These directives are clear: confidentiality must remain absolute. The aim of this approach is to encourage candidates to be as open as possible in spiritual companionship.

In this system a clear distinction is maintained between formation and spiritual direction. The director is at the service of the candidate and spiritual companionship aims solely at helping him with his discernment and his human, psychological and spiritual growth. If the spiritual director comes to the conclusion that a certain candidate is on the wrong track and should change direction, he has to mention his opinion to the person concerned but he may not say a word to other members of the formation team. The responsibility for his personal decision lies solely with the candidate, in the hope that he will be honest with God and his own self. The other formators (who are not the candidate's spiritual director) have the responsibility of discerning his progress and must base their decision on external factors. Their discernment may eventually lead them to dismiss the candidate.

By contrast, in a canonical novitiate according to the Ignatian tradition the novice master is automatically the spiritual director of all the novices. He knows them externally and internally, from what he sees and hears in everyday life, and also from the confidences heard in direction. At the time of their first vows, he presents the novices to their respective provincials, basing his opinion on everything he knows about them, public and private. Confidentiality is respected to a certain degree, as the novice master does not reveal details of the confidences heard, but he bases his recommendation (let this novice continue or not) on all he knows. Both parties are aware of this situation and have freely agreed to it.

The goal of both novice master and novice is to discover what God is expecting of the young person. Ideally, the novice has reached a stage

¹ The vade mecum is the compilation of norms, directives and procedures given by the General Council to formators.

of Ignatian indifference and desires wholeheartedly to discover the will of God and to be helped in this discovery. He has thus no desire to hide anything from the novice master, who helps him in searching for God's will. The novice who is open will be helped to see the way to which God calls him. If he is not totally open, the novice master is in a good position to perceive duplicity and unformulated or hidden motivations. In Jesuit novitiates, the novice master is formed in Ignatian spirituality and he is asked to have a supervisor, so that his natural likes and dislikes or his blind spots do not interfere with the discernment process. When formators are themselves well formed and are under supervision by someone of equal or greater experience, this system gives very good results, but its dangers are real and should not be overlooked: care needs to be taken.

After many years as formator in my own congregation, I know its formation system. I have no personal experience of the systems in other congregations, male or female, but, over the years, I have noticed that diocesan priests and seminarians, religious men and candidates do not come to directed retreats and seldom ask for spiritual guidance outside their own group. Either spiritual direction is done within the group, or it is not done at all. If a religious has not had serious spiritual direction during his years of formation, he is unlikely to discover its importance on his own later in life. If, one day, he becomes a formator himself, he will probably continue the unhealthy tradition of paying little or no attention to spiritual direction, although it is crucial for spiritual growth.

What follows is thus mainly based on contacts with junior sisters or candidates.² In sessions



² 'Candidate' refers to any woman requesting admission in a congregation either as aspirant, postulant or novice, or to be accepted for vows.

with female novices, and sometimes during conversations with their formators, there appeared to me to be certain problems with combining formation and spiritual direction, which pushed me to write about these issues.

Dangers for Formators

Centres preparing formators for their work exist in different countries (and have a lot of success, mainly with female congregations), but the practice of giving a serious formation to formators themselves is far from being universal. At times, superiors do not see the need for such a preparation. If the provincial or mother general was a formator in the past and managed to do the work relying on her own experience and common sense, she might easily assume that others can do the same. At times, the lack of available personnel is such that, very early in religious life, people are given responsibilities they are not prepared to assume. This is a first danger. Rather naturally, having little or no experience of formation work, a newly appointed formator may treat the young persons entrusted to her care in the same way she was treated herself. Both good and bad methods of proceeding thus become the formative tradition in the congregation. The postulant or novice mistress knows her job from the way it has always been done and continues according to the tradition received, which remains unquestioned.

A second danger comes from the lack of supervision. If the sister in charge is a person gifted with a good amount of common sense and self-knowledge, she is unlikely to do too much damage. But she may have serious blind spots and be unaware of some aspects of her own personality. How will a blind person be a good guide to others (Matthew 15:14)? When difficulties arise in relationships, responsibility is usually shared. But if the sister in charge of aspirants, postulants, novices or even junior sisters is convinced of the rightness of her own behaviour, she will automatically assume that the difficulties lie with others. She will expect changes in them and develop a negative impression when these do not occur, or not to the extent she is expecting. With no supervision, nobody will be there to point out to her that part of the change that is needed must occur in her own heart.

Dangers for Candidates

There are serious potential pitfalls on the side of the formator, but the system of mixing spiritual direction and formation at all levels of the

formation process can also have negative consequences for those undergoing formation.

Final profession is often seen by a candidate as the goal to be reached. The great fear for postulants, novices and temporary professed sisters is to be told to go home. When they have a formator whom they trust and with whom they feel at ease, they will easily be open in their conversations with her and reveal what they live or have lived. On the other hand, if the formator is a strong character, easily imposing her will on others, perhaps a person who has a reputation for 'kicking people out' and someone feared by the candidates, they are unlikely to open up and reveal present or past experiences, thoughts or ideas that might endanger their dream of becoming sisters. Traumatic experiences of the past, feelings and thoughts given by God to inform the person that she is on the wrong track, or even the real character of the person herself, may remain unknown or hidden.

She may discover that it is not fidelity to her own experiences that counts but conformity with what the formator expects. It is not her development according to the promptings of the Spirit that matters but her development according to the lines expected by the formator. The one who submits and plays the game is accepted. The candidate with a strong character or who wants to remain faithful to her own true self, refusing falsehood and simulation, is likely to be dismissed.

Even when there is a healthy relationship of trust between the candidate and her mistress, a young woman entering a religious congregation is unlikely to know the inner workings, habits or traditions of the group. She may expect that confidences made about her feelings, about present and past experiences or difficulties, about her inner world and secrets, will remain confidential but discover later on that they did not. When the limits of confidentiality and the reasons why the congregation behaves as it does are not clearly explained to the candidate from the very beginning of her formation, she is likely to have some nasty surprises. For example, confidences made in spiritual direction might pop up in conversations with the provincial or appear in official reports. As the proverb says: *a scalded cat fears cold water*. Trust becomes very difficult and the candidate will be very careful with what she shares.

The *Code of Canon Law* clearly states: 'When decisions are made about admitting students to orders or dismissing them from the seminary, the opinion of the spiritual director and confessors can never be sought'

(n.240). This is valid for clerics, but in congregations with the custom of mixing spiritual direction and formation at all levels of the formation programme, it can happen that the opinion of a sister who has access to a candidate's personal confidences is not only requested but heavily relied upon when accepting young women to temporary or even final vows.³ Up to the very last moment, a temporarily professed sister is never sure of being accepted, and some of them have had the disagreeable surprise of being refused just before final vows, after more than a decade in the congregation (temporary vows included). As most congregations are eager to get new members, refusals are rare, but they do happen. With such a sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, most young women will be extremely careful with their confidences in spiritual direction.

In such a situation, spiritual direction is no longer primarily a tool in the service of the candidate, to help her in her discernment of God's will. It has become a tool of her congregation. In their fear of admitting an undesirable element, superiors can use the combination of formation and spiritual direction to look into the heart of the candidate to see if she possesses the spiritual, human and psychological characteristics they desire. If the opinion of the formator and spiritual director is negative, there is little chance a positive answer will be given to the request for admission. And often, that person has no supervision and possibly no special formation.

Should Formation and Spiritual Direction Be Separated?

Under the right conditions, the practice of entrusting spiritual companionship and formation to a single person during the novitiate does not need to be questioned. It has proved its worth when it is properly understood and when both candidates and formators are aware of its goal and implications. In order to avoid misunderstanding, clear explanations about the limits of confidentiality should be given from the beginning of the formation programme. It should be evident that formators must be carefully chosen and well prepared for the task. Serious formation and regular supervision are not to be considered as optional

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³ One might object that the transfer of canonical references between the formation of clerics and of consecrated persons might not be adequate, but the reasons motivating canon 240.2 are likely to apply also in other circumstances.

extras. When the rules are clearly explained, when the candidate desires above all the discovery of the will of God, when she agrees to lay open the depth of her heart in front of a novice mistress whom she trusts, the situation is clear and healthy.

But this is not so when there is coercion in one form or another, or when the candidate feels the threat of being expelled. A practice that is not entered into freely and knowingly, in which people feel coerced or compelled and do not feel respected and free, should be seriously questioned. Where spiritual direction and formation are not separate during the whole process of formation, it might be good to have a serious review of the practice, to evaluate and study it attentively. A practice that is appropriate during the novitiate (or before the candidate has reached sufficient maturity and Ignatian indifference) might be better avoided at other times such as the moment of final commitment, when the process of initial formation has come to its end.

If formation and spiritual companionship are to be separated, it is obvious that teams of several formators are needed. In my congregation, formation teams usually consist of three or four members. When the report on one of his directees is being drawn up, a spiritual director only contributes remarks about what he has observed externally and does not sign. He does not vote and remains silent when a decision is made as to whether one of his directees continues or is reorientated.

This separation is impossible when candidates are entrusted to a single formator. In some places where there is only one formator, an external spiritual director is invited regularly to visit the community and to meet the candidates. In this way, encounters with the superior or formator do not need to reach the depth of spiritual direction, but this does not seem to be very common. In some places, a well organized inter-congregational centre with formed personnel might be more efficacious and rational than entrusting the formation of aspirants and postulants to ill-prepared sisters who have other tasks on their shoulders and have to face the responsibility on their own. The novitiate of the institute could later on introduce the candidates to the charism and specificity of each group.

The goal of a formation system should be to bring candidates to the point where they can make a free offering of themselves to God. Having learnt to listen to the indications given to them by the Spirit, having learnt to desire above all the fulfilment of God's will (Ignatian indifference), having learnt about themselves, the strong and weak

points of their personalities, they come to a point where the will of God appears clearly to them and they know that this is the path that God wants for them (an election). How can this process take place if they know that their election can at any moment be rejected? The most crucial decision of their lives, the most personal decision, engaging the whole of their life, the most mature decision, reached after years of reflection and prayer, the moment when they can freely make an offering of themselves to God, depends to an unknown degree on the opinion of other persons. Discernment is needed in the early years of formation, and unpromising candidates need to be shown the way out if they do not see it themselves, but this should not happen to a person who has reached a mature inner election after years of formation.

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THREADS OF TRANSFORMATION

The Spiritual Exercises and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Luz Marina Díaz

THE PROCESS BY WHICH adults formally join the Roman Catholic Church is traditionally known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The RCIA arose out of the Second Vatican Council, which directed the restoration of the ancient rite of initiation.¹ William Harmless writes:

The RCIA describes the initiation of adults as ‘a spiritual journey’, one that, throughout its length and breadth, ‘bears a markedly paschal character’. To plot out this journey, the concilium that drafted the RCIA turned to ancient ‘maps’: to ancient sacramentaries and Church orders, to patristic sermons and apologetic works. This was sparked not by some romantic yearning for the archaic. Rather the concilium found in these ancient Christian documents a forgotten wisdom—a theological vision, a psychological sensitivity, a pastoral realism—a wisdom that, despite its antiquity, seemed surprisingly contemporary.²

There is a general consensus that the RCIA is the most successful educational process introduced into the Church since the council.³ Its success stems from the wisdom it contains and offers regarding how to live a Christian life.

The RCIA aims to prepare those who wish to become Catholics by receiving the sacraments of initiation (baptism, eucharist and

¹ See *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nn. 64–66. In 2021, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved changing the name of the RCIA to Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), better to reflect the Latin term *ordo*. Several countries have adopted this change, but many regions around the world continue to use RCIA. This article retains the use of RCIA to honour its internationally common usage.

² William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995), 3.

³ Kieran Scott, ‘A Middle Way: The Road Not Traveled’, *The Living Light*, 37/4 (2001), 37–44, here 40.

confirmation), baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, and baptized Catholics who want to complete their sacraments of initiation—particularly those who have not received adequate religious education previously. It emphasizes doctrine, scripture, liturgical practices and sacraments to prepare participants for life within the Church.

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius have been described as,

... a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St Ignatius Loyola to help people deepen their relationship with God. For centuries the Exercises were most commonly given as a 'long retreat' of about 30 days in solitude and silence. In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on the Spiritual Exercises as a program for laypeople. The most common way of going through the Exercises now is a 'retreat in daily life', which involves a months long program of daily prayer and meetings with a spiritual director. The Exercises have also been adapted in many other ways to meet the needs of modern people.⁴

In the parish where I work, we require those undertaking the Spiritual Exercises already to have experience of monthly spiritual direction. The Exercises are accessible to Christian spiritual seekers interested in deepening their faith. However the Jesuit educator and retreat-giver Kevin O'Brien has recently been working on adapting Ignatian ideas to engage broader audiences, including those who may not identify as Christians:

I write with a diverse audience in mind: those with firm conviction in their faith and those who are struggling, those from the Christian tradition and those from other faith traditions, those who are actively religious and those who are seeking purpose and meaning in a less structured way.⁵

As director of the RCIA at the Church of St Francis Xavier in Manhattan, and a spiritual director guiding individuals through the Spiritual Exercises in everyday life, I have observed intriguing similarities between the two processes, while also recognising their differences in purpose and focus.

⁴ 'The Spiritual Exercises', *IgnatianSpirituality.com*, at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>, accessed 25 September 2025.

⁵ Kevin O'Brien, *Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures* (Chicago: Loyola, 2022), xi.

Conversion: A Key Common Element

The most notable commonality is *conversion*. The RCIA process is not solely about learning doctrine or understanding the Church's practices; it involves experiencing a profound inner transformation that leads individuals into a genuine relationship with God and Christ within a faith community. This transformation is also experienced by those making the Spiritual Exercises; conversion is one of the most compelling reasons people feel drawn to undertake them. Both emphasize discernment, helping individuals recognise movements of grace—and distraction—and inviting participants to reorientate their lives as Christian disciples.

In 'Conversion as Human Experience', Paul V. Robb writes that the word 'conversion' has been misinterpreted throughout history. Conversion, he contends, does not mean changing from one religion to another or entering a religious community. Rather it is a continuous process fundamental for theological understanding, Christian maturity, and mission in justice and peace. He quotes Bernard Lonergan:

It is not merely a change or even a development; rather, it is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments A changed relationship with God brings or follows changes that are personal, social, moral and intellectual.⁶

The RCIA and the Spiritual Exercises are potent catalysts for conversion in this sense, inspiring participants to adopt new lifestyles rooted in faith, grace and purpose. They invite individuals to embark on a spiritual path that encourages self-reflection, personal growth and renewed commitment to faith. Conversion implies a change of heart with an apostolic dimension that inspires both those undertaking the Exercises and RCIA participants to collaborate with God in Jesus Christ's mission of building a kingdom of peace and justice, here and now. According to Elizabeth Liebert and Annemarie Paulin-Campbell, 'Ignatius established a pattern of spiritual exercises that invited people into a profound experience of

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⁶ Bernard Lonergan, 'Theology in Its New Context', in *Renewal of Religious Thought: Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church Centenary of Canada, 1867–1967*, edited by L. K. Shook (Montreal: Palm, 1968), 44; quoted in Paul V. Robb, 'Conversion as a Human Experience', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 58/3 (May 1982), 3.

God and frequently evoked a deep conversion and a renewed sense of mission'.⁷ The key precursors of conversion in the Exercises are: discernment of spirits—the ability to recognise God's voice and differentiate it from distractions; freedom from attachments—releasing anything that impedes one's relationship with God; and commitment to action—understanding that conversion extends beyond the internal and necessitates tangible changes in one's life.

The very goal of the RCIA is conversion: it aims to transform hearts and minds. Kieran Scott calls the RCIA 'normative for all catechesis', as the experience of conversion—the heart of RCIA—is a lifelong process. Continual conversion progressively transports us towards 'psychological, social and religious maturity'.⁸ According to William Harmless:

Not only does it resurrect ancient rituals, practices, and stages. It also attempts to retrieve an ancient and quite radical vision of the Church—one which places conversion at the heart of things, which reshapes community roles, which radically redefines the meaning of catechesis, and which sees baptism as the taproot and catalyst for life-long transformation.⁹

Liturgy, Scripture and a Christocentric Commonality

Another similarity between RCIA and the Spiritual Exercises is that both processes can be deeply intertwined with the rhythms of the Church's liturgical calendar, anchoring participants in the spiritual life of the Christian community. Although one can guide the Spiritual Exercises in daily life at any time, I prefer to start the process in September so that the scriptures of the Exercises align with the themes and scriptures we hear at Mass during Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent and Easter. As Anne Arabome observes;

The engagement and openness to scripture are neither gratuitous nor perfunctory. The person making the Exercises does not take the scripture at face value. She or he is not expected to be exegetically literate; Ignatius presents scripture as stories and events in the life of Christ.¹⁰

⁷ Elizabeth Liebert and Annemarie Paulin-Campbell, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women*, 2nd edn (Mahwah: Paulist, 2022), xiii.

⁸ Scott, 'Middle Way', 39.

⁹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 9.

¹⁰ Anne Arabome, *Why Do You Trouble This Woman? Women and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Paulist), 91.



The same applies to the RCIA. Its deep connection to liturgy makes biblical scriptures essential to the RCIA process.

In particular, both the RCIA and the Spiritual Exercises are christocentric, with a shared focus on personal encounter with Christ, leading to transformation and discipleship. Both focus on Christ's life, mission, passion, death and resurrection, leading individuals to know, love and follow Christ, and resulting in personal commitment to Christ's mission. Harmless writes:

The RCIA text speaks of conversion as Christ-centered: the catechumen is signed with the cross of Christ and presented with the Gospel book, which is the 'good news of Christ'; in the years of the catechumenate, candidates 'come to reflect the image of Christ'; baptism is a 'sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ'; confirmation makes them 'more like Christ'; and Eucharist marks the culminating point of their incorporation into Christ.¹¹

Similarly, Elizabeth Liebert and Annemarie Paulin-Campbell explain the christocentric progression of the Spiritual Exercises:

They move from considerations of the generous love of God to the retreatant, a sinner, through increasing depth of relationship with Christ in the Second Week, to coming alongside the suffering Christ in such a way as to suffer alongside him in the Third Week, to—if the grace of the Exercises blossoms fully—simple contemplative presence

¹¹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 16.

with the risen Christ at the conclusion of the Fourth Week. From this contemplative presence, the one making the retreat joins in Christ's work in the world as the retreat concludes.¹²

And Kevin O'Brien shows how the Exercises are always centred on relationship with Christ:

In the meditations on sin, Ignatius suggests that we place ourselves before the cross and consider three questions that echo throughout the Exercises: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?¹³

Personal Experience and Spiritual Conversation

Sharing personal experiences is crucial to RCIA sessions among participants and sponsors, and between directors and individuals making the Spiritual Exercises, as these interactions can promote transformation. The RCIA and the Exercises equally rely on spiritual conversations to explore what the scriptures say to us personally and discover God's activity in our prayer and life experiences. This prompts a movement beyond surface understanding towards deeper introspection and transformation.

In 'A Middle Way: The Road Not Traveled', Kieran Scott affirms that while the pedagogical intention of RCIA is to teach participants how to live as Christians in a Catholic way, there is a need,

... to move away from a passive mode of incorporation to active participation, from passive recipients to self-conscious subjects, from repressive silence to dialogue. In short, the educational strategy should evoke a personal response within the traditioning process.¹⁴

Through spiritual conversation, the doctrines and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church may be explained and analyzed. During RCIA sessions, spiritual conversations occur either in small groups or involving everyone—RCIA team members, sponsors and participants. Participants also schedule one-to-one sessions with their sponsors to engage in spiritual conversations about their RCIA journey. The Spiritual Exercises in everyday life likewise emphasize the importance of spiritual conversation between a directee and spiritual director.

¹² Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 173–174.

¹³ Kevin O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola, 2011), 95–96; and see Exx 53.

¹⁴ Scott, 'Middle Way', 41.

Spiritual conversation involves sharing personal experiences (both prayer and life experiences) while seeking to find God within those moments, with an invitation to cultivate an awareness of all human dimensions: emotions, thoughts, bodily sensations, desires, perceptions and intuitions. Key aspects of spiritual conversation include deep listening and storytelling. We prioritise understanding others and being understood by them, as well as exploring the meaning of our own identities. Our interpretation of the world is shaped by the experiences we share in our stories.

Our interpretation of the world is shaped by the experiences we share in our stories

Additionally, we undergo a process of emancipation when we critically examine the assumptions that influence our actions. Doing so makes us aware of our ‘inherent distortions, limitations, and narrowness of vision’.¹⁵ This is the moment when transformation takes place. Exploring our assumptions can play a crucial role in conversion. Thomas R. Hawkins claims, ‘Our inability or unwillingness to examine the assumptive frameworks that justify our lives constitutes an essential part of our sinful condition’. Jesus challenged his followers and opponents to revise their ‘socially and religiously conditioned’ assumptions that prevented them from seeing the work of God among them.¹⁶ He confronted them with parables, provocative and evocative questions, and his own way of living.

From the Head to the Heart

Finally, the RCIA and Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises offer remarkable adaptability and flexibility, allowing for adaptation to individuals’ unique needs and contexts. This ensures that each person’s spiritual journey is personalised through a movement that makes a transition from the intellectual to the experiential—from the head to the heart. ‘Ignatius instructs the Exercises guide to “adapt to the needs of the person”, to do so “in accord with the person’s greater or lesser progress”, and that “the norm is the help found by the exercitant”’.¹⁷

Harmless writes of his early experience with the RCIA:

¹⁵ Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola, 2002), 80; and see 76–77.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 32.

¹⁷ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 9, quoting Exx 17, 72.

On the one hand, we found that it provides fairly detailed directions for executing its complex of rites. These made implementation of the rituals fairly straightforward. On the other hand, its directions and goals for catechesis, while provocative and innovative, seemed rather sketchy.¹⁸

Harmless sees the silence of the RCIA document about the curriculum, appropriate teaching styles and enculturation as a weakness. I see it rather as an opportunity to design a curriculum to suit the participants and the community where the process occurs. For instance, since RCIA at St Francis Xavier takes place in a Jesuit apostolate parish, I include elements of Ignatian spirituality, as presented in the Spiritual Exercises, such as the Examen, Principle and Foundation, Contemplation to Attain Love, Ignatian contemplation and colloquy. RCIA team members and guest speakers present on different themes: the Bible (Jewish and Christian Testaments), Jesus' ministry and teachings, Catholic Social Teaching, liturgy, sacraments, doctrines, prayer and church history.

The Four Stages of RCIA and the Four Weeks of the Exercises

The RCIA divides the journey of initiation into four stages and three rituals, to mark the transition from one stage to another. The stages are: evangelization and precatechumenate, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, and postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy. The rituals are: acceptance into the order of catechumens, election (or enrolment of names) and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.¹⁹ The RCIA has four stages, while the Spiritual Exercises are structured into four Weeks. I should like to conclude with a detailed comparison of the two.

The First Stage and the First Week

At St Francis Xavier, the first stage of RCIA takes place before the Advent season, when directees making the Spiritual Exercises are praying the First Week. This is a time for directees to reflect on their lives in light of God's infinite love, recognising their relationship with God and the world while contemplating both good and evil, sin and grace.

¹⁸ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 18 and following.

¹⁹ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (London: Burns and Oates, 1985), 1.6 and 1.7. And see Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 3.

The loved sinner stands at the centre of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises. Although sin provides the focus, the First Week really dwells on love, God's love, which is greater than human sin. This Week moves from awareness of and responsibility for sin to awareness of God's gracious love, a love that forgives sin and welcomes the sinner, like the forgiving and prodigal parent who embraces and welcomes home erring offspring. Stories provide an avenue for this discovery.²⁰

The first stage of the RCIA, evangelization and precatechumenate, conveys a similar dynamic. It is a time to encounter God and examine our true identity as beloved children of God and our response to God's love. In this stage, the participants (referred to as inquirers) reflect on their spiritual journeys and calls, and ask questions about the Roman Catholic faith, its beliefs, traditions and practices. Prayer is introduced; the first type of prayer we share with the inquirers is *colloquy*, known by some traditions as 'conversational prayer', which is also important in the Spiritual Exercises. With this type of prayer, Ignatius wanted to help people discover a personal, honest and uncomplicated relationship with God by conversing with God as one converses with a good friend.²¹

During this RCIA stage, an initial conversion should occur as inquirers turn away from sin and begin to immerse themselves in the love of God. It concludes with acceptance into the catechumenate, in a liturgical rite through which inquirers express the intention to respond to God's call by following the way of Christ, and the Church accepts that intention. The unbaptized are welcomed into the community of faith through the sign of the cross marked on the forehead, ears, lips, heart, shoulders,



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²⁰ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 126.

²¹ Vinita Hampton Wright, 'Colloquy: Conversing with God', *Ignatian Spirituality* (12 May 2023) at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/colloquy-conversing-with-god/>, accessed 1 May 2025.

hands and feet.²² For those making the Exercises, ‘conversion, healing, and transformation are all part of the process of the First Week’s movement toward freedom’.²³

Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation serves as an entry point to the First Week of the Exercises, but I encourage my directees to reflect on it throughout their retreat. In addition, I use the Principle and Foundation with RCIA participants at every stage of their journey and recommend it as a valuable spiritual resource. The Principle and Foundation offers a framework to examine our lives, helping us identify how we stand before Creator and creation, recognising our priorities in life. Here is a contemporary interpretation of the text:

The goal of our life is to live with God forever. God who loves us, gave us life. Our own response of love allows God’s life to flow into us without limit. All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily. As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God in so far as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal. In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all these created gifts in so far as we have the choice and are not bound by some obligation. We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to deepening God’s life in me.²⁴

In a lecture on the ‘Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises’ at Georgetown University, Howard Gray states that the Principle and Foundation,

... is neither a meditation nor is it a contemplation. It is what’s called a *consideracio*, a consideration. That is, it’s a meditative rumination The foundation, I would say, is an experiential period of reflection looking at the way I have been called to be this creature within a community of created reality by a loving, self-revelatory God.²⁵

²² Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 3–4.

²³ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 135.

²⁴ David L. Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 23. (Other editions of Fleming have a different text.) Also reprinted in Michael Harter, *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993), 9.

²⁵ Howard Gray, ‘Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises Lecture 2: Principle and Foundation’ (7 November 2012), at <https://youtu.be/Vk0F7CVtKFI?si=4dHcKxfNuhDMmhAJ>.

Gray describes the movement within the text as revelatory rather than didactic, experiential rather than programmatic: each person making the Exercises will experience the Principle and Foundation in his or her own way. Elizabeth Liebert and Annemarie Paulin-Campbell state:

Ignatius's purpose for the Principle and Foundation seems to have been twofold. He wanted to situate the one making the Exercises within God's plan of creation, but he also hoped that reflecting on the wonder of creation might elicit a deeper affectivity, a great desire for this God who so desires each person.²⁶

An important method of prayer from the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises that we share with RCIA participants is the Ignatian Examen. St Ignatius taught that we can find God in all things, even in the most ordinary moments. To do so we need to reflect on our experiences, examining each day's events and discerning their meaning. The Examen encourages us to look back over a specific period and pay attention to what is happening in and around us. Then, we look ahead to what comes next, praying to act in a way that suits our call to journey in God's ways. A simplified version of the Examen includes five steps: 'pray for God's help'; 'give thanks for the gifts of this day'; 'pray over the significant feelings that surface'; 'rejoice and seek forgiveness'; and 'look to tomorrow'.²⁷

The Second Stage and the Second Week

The second stage of the RCIA, called the catechumenate, aligns with Advent, Christmas and Ordinary Time at the Church of St Francis Xavier. This coincides with my Nineteenth Annotation directees praying the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, which focuses on contemplating Jesus as presented in the Gospels, including the incarnation, birth, hidden life and public life from his baptism to his entry into Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the Second Week, prayer focuses around hearing God's call and listening attentively and lovingly to God's revelation of love incarnate, Jesus. Imagining the Trinity's perspective of a sinful yet loved world leading God to 'dwell with us' situates the Second

²⁶ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 72.

²⁷ O'Brien, *Ignatian Adventure*, 75–77.

Week within the mystery of the incarnation. Traveling the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem engages one with the reality of Jesus's birth and the vulnerability of God who chooses to enter human history. The seeker accompanies Jesus as he journeys through 'cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God' (Luke 8:1).²⁸

The catechumenate includes reflections on the doctrine of the incarnation and the life of Jesus. This stage utilises biblical passages related to the annunciation, the visitation, the birth of Jesus, his baptism, the Sermon on the Mount, and his ministry of healing and teaching. It is a time for learning how to live a Christian life. During this time, sponsors play a crucial role. As William Harmless explains, sponsors should teach catechumens 'the everyday rhythms and demands of Christian living'.²⁹ Similarly, 'the grace of the Second Week consists in knowing, loving, and following in the path of discipleship with renewed life and commitment, a discovery of being called by God to follow "the Way"'.³⁰

We teach the RCIA participants to pray using gospel narratives through Ignatian contemplation, a prayer method introduced by Ignatius Loyola during the Second Week. Ignatian contemplation involves using our imagination to immerse ourselves entirely in a story from the Gospels. We become participant-observers and allow our imagination to run free.³¹ It fosters a direct and intimate connection with Jesus Christ.

When we are engaged in contemplation, Ignatius invites us to 'use the imagination and apply all five senses' (Spiritual Exercises, 121). We do this not to create a fantasy. Far from it. According to Ignatius, it is because we can draw more fruit or profit from our prayer when we enter it with all our sensory capacities.³²

The Third Stage and the Third Week

The third stage of RCIA is that of purification and enlightenment. On the first Sunday of Lent, the Church formally confirms that catechumens are ready to receive the sacraments of initiation with the rite of

²⁸ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 150.

²⁹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 6.

³⁰ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 173.

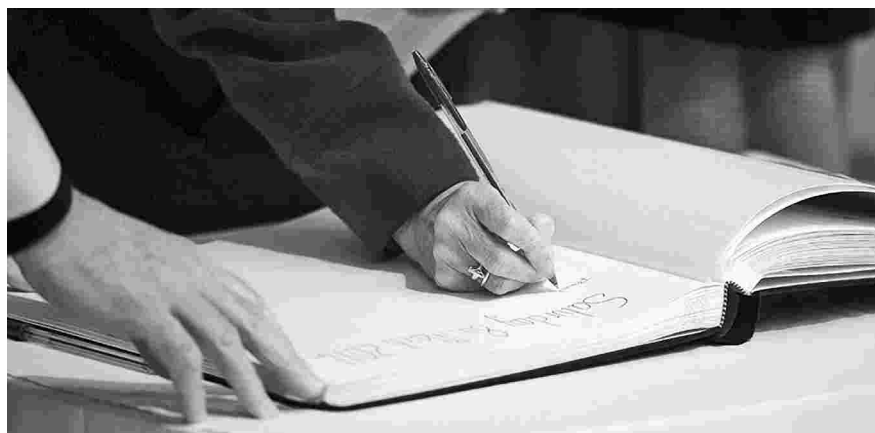
³¹ See David L. Fleming, 'Pray with Your Imagination', in *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola, 2008), 55–59.

³² Arabome, *Why Do You Trouble This Woman?* 63.

election. Now called the elect, they express their desire to receive these sacraments by writing their names in the Book of the Elect. On the second Sunday of Lent, the rite of calling to continue conversion is celebrated for the RCIA participants who are already baptized. During the third, fourth and fifth weeks of Lent, the elect receive special prayers known as scrutinies, aimed at healing what is broken and strengthening what is good, and they recite the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.³³

As part of the scrutinies, the elect are invited to analyze their lives using Ignatian contemplation with three gospel narratives on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent: the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5–42), the healing of the man born blind (John 9) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–45). These scriptures, which focus on the themes of living water, light and resurrection, encourage participants to reflect on how Christ offers them 'living water'. What areas of their lives need healing? How does their relationship with Christ help them see things in a new light? What are they being called to leave behind?

As Lent begins, my directees find themselves in the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises. During this time, they reflect deeply on Christ's passion and death, engaging in a profound and transformative experience that connects them with the sorrowful yet redemptive moments central to the Christian faith. This Week is a sacred journey into the depths of Jesus' suffering, guiding individuals to reflect on the harrowing events that foreshadow his crucifixion.



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³³ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 6–7.

In the Third (or Passion) Week, the one making the Spiritual Exercises hears anew the invitation to walk the way of discipleship, now accompanying Jesus through his passion. To know, love, and follow Jesus gains new meaning as well; it now includes the call to compassion with Jesus's suffering. Following Jesus draws the seeker into the drama of the cross, for she goes up to Jerusalem and engages in the conflict that leads to death. Being with Jesus means entering into his perspective, focusing not on her own personal experience of the passion, but willingly sharing his experience, his choices, his anguish, his truth, his desires, his aloneness, his sense of the absence of God.³⁴

The Fourth Stage and the Fourth Week

The next step in the RCIA process involves celebrating the sacraments of initiation in a liturgical rite at the paschal vigil. This marks the beginning of the final phase, known as mystagogy. During Easter, RCIA participants actively engage with the Christian community by taking part in the eucharist and community services, reflecting on the narratives of the post-resurrection appearances. Similarly, in the Fourth Week of the Exercises, directees begin a journey towards uniting with the Risen Christ.

Ignatius encourages the one making the Exercises to 'consider how the divinity, which seemed hidden during the Passion, now appears and manifests itself so miraculously in this holy Resurrection' [223]. This Week invites awareness of God's consoling presence in the reality and concrete experience of the one who makes the retreat. Just as the Gospel accounts reveal the risen Christ breaking through physical and psychological barriers in unexpected ways, so God is manifest in daily life—in gifts of joy, love, gratitude, and peace. These moments are marked by pure surprise and giftedness, rejoicing in the resurrection.³⁵

The culminating prayer of the Spiritual Exercises is the Contemplation to Attain Love or Contemplation on the Love of God. It invites reflection on four themes: God's gifts to us (life, family, friends, faith, church, eternal life); God's self-giving in Jesus; God's continuing work in the world; and the limitless quality of God's love. 'God's love shines down upon me like the light rays from the sun, or God's love is poured

³⁴ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 176.

³⁵ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 190.

forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters into an unending stream.³⁶

I also share this contemplation with the RCIA participants as they complete the mystagogy stage. With this contemplation, those engaged in the Exercises reflect on the graces they have received, while RCIA participants look back at the blessings of their journey. They become aware of God's generous gifts in their lives, cherishing this deep understanding with gratitude and love.

The Contemplation on Love is also significant because it challenges the one making it to look beyond herself and her own situation. If love expresses itself less in words than deeds, and if I desire to offer what I have to the Beloved, I cannot but be impelled by the desire to share my gifts for the benefit of others, especially those who are most vulnerable.³⁷

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³⁶ 'Contemplation on the Love of God', *IgnatianSpirituality.com*, at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/contemplation-on-the-love-of-god/>, accessed 2 May 2025; Fleming, *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, 143.

³⁷ Liebert and Paulin-Campbell, *Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed*, 197.

SPIRITUALITY IN ENDLESS FORMATION

Human Formation and Jesuit Formation

Kevin Stephon R. Centeno

The Humanity of Pope Francis

THE WHOLE WORLD was shocked on 21 April 2025 when Pope Francis passed away. Both Roman Catholics and non-Catholics mourned his death everywhere. The day before, the Pope had appeared on Easter Sunday and blessed the people for the very last time. What attracted people to Pope Francis was his humanity. He humanised our perception of church leaders. He demythologized the tendency to exalt the clergy as beings who are above human and mundane concerns. In a famous interview with Antonio Spadaro in *America* magazine, he replied to the question ‘Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?’ after a moment of silence with these very human words: ‘I do not know what might be the most fitting description I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.’¹ Throughout his papacy, he exuded a down-to-earth personality in his ministry. He apologised for his mistakes. He spoke openly about his unhealthy behaviour in the past. Why was this Pope so humble and simple? Why was he so human? One answer to that question is his religious identity as a Jesuit. To understand Pope Francis better we need to turn to his Jesuit roots; he lived and died as a Jesuit.²

One of the strengths of Jesuit formation is its emphasis on human formation, starting from the noviciate—two years dedicated to knowing one’s self, God and the Society of Jesus, which serve as a foundation before candidates proceed to philosophical and theological studies. Until the end, human formation remains an essential dimension of Jesuit life; for Jesuits the spiritual and human are intertwined. Although the two

¹ Pope Francis and Antonio Spadaro, *A Big Heart Open to God: Conversation with Pope Francis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 8.

² James Martin, ‘Pope Francis Never Stopped Being a Jesuit’, *America* (21 April 2025).

are separated in terms of direction and counselling, spirituality remains embedded within humanity. I remember telling my own novice master that I felt I was not sharing much about spirituality in my sessions with him, and he replied that, in God's eyes, nothing is secular.

Michael Higgins wrote that Jesuit spirituality is a 'spirituality in endless formation because the human person, the human project, is forever in formation'.³ I borrow this phrase to connect Jesuit formation with a fundamental insight in developmental psychology: that human growth is lifelong, beginning from infancy, and it is not linear. It varies from person to person under the influence of many interconnecting factors: 'human development requires both nature and nurture, it displays aspects of stability and also change, and it is both continuous and discontinuous'.⁴ Jesuit formation is open to this complex reality.

Jesuit Spirituality as Incarnational Spirituality⁵

Jesuit spirituality primarily derives its distinctive characteristics from the life and teaching of the founder of the Society of Jesus, St Ignatius of Loyola. In part X of Ignatius' *Constitutions*, the rulebook guiding the way of proceeding of Jesuits, he writes that God, 'desires to be glorified both



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³ Michael Higgins, *Jesuit Disruptor: A Personal Portrait of Pope Francis* (Canada: House of Anansi, 2024), 78.

⁴ Scott Johnson and others, 'Theories and Issues in Child Development', in *An Introduction to Developmental Psychology*, edited by Alan Slater and Gavin Bremner, 3rd edn (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 74.

⁵ Parts of this section are taken from my own essay 'The Scandal of the Incarnation', *Where Peter Is*, (8 July 2021), <https://wherepeteris.com/the-scandal-of-the-incarnation/>, accessed 15 September 2025.

through the natural means, which he gives as Creator, and through the supernatural means, which he gives as the Author of grace' (X.3 [814]). Thus there is no dichotomy between nature and grace, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural; everything is a pure gift from the God who donates Godself out of love. This Ignatian world-view carries particular weight since part X captures the entire dynamic of the *Constitutions*.⁶

This implies a positive view of the created world that serves as an overarching framework for the Jesuit charism. Patrick Saint-Jean explains:

Ignatius firmly believed there is no division between 'spiritual' and 'physical' realities, nor are there separate supernatural and natural worlds or sacred and secular realms because all things are different expressions of the same Spirit. The Divine Spirit manifests both tangibly and intangibly; it is present in every aspect of life, every interaction, and every object.⁷

Jesuits have the axiomatic expression 'finding God in all things'. This captures the incarnational nature of Jesuit spirituality: 'God can be found in the everyday events of our lives. God is not just out there. God is right here, too. If you are looking for God, look around.'⁸ Pope Francis often showed his faithfulness to this incarnational spirituality. In his angelus address of 4 July 2021, Francis delivered a beautiful reflection on the 'scandal of the incarnation'—the difficulty of embracing the human Christ, a God who revealed Godself in the flesh,

... that the immensity of God should be revealed in the smallness of our flesh, that the Son of God should be the son of a carpenter, that the divine should be hidden in the human, that God should inhabit a face, the words, the gestures of a simple man.⁹

From the very first months of his papacy, Francis expressed his profound belief in the incarnation as foundational to the Catholic faith and spirituality. In a morning meditation at the Casa Santa Marta on 1 June 2013, he said: 'That is the truth, that is the revelation of Jesus. That presence of Jesus Incarnate. That is the point.'¹⁰ In another

⁶ Parmananda Divarkar, *Faithful and Free: A Companion to the Updated Jesuit Constitutions* (New Delhi: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1997), 77–78.

⁷ Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Spirituality of Transformation, Joy, and Justice: The Ignatian Way for Everyone* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2023), 5.

⁸ James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 8.

⁹ Pope Francis, angelus address, 4 July 2021.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, morning meditation, 'The Scandal of the Incarnation', 1 June 2013.

meditation later that month, he added: ‘Jesus Christ did not save us with an idea, or an intellectual programme. He saved us with his flesh, with the concreteness of the flesh. He lowered himself, became man, and was made flesh until the end.’¹¹ Francis never neglected the humanity of Jesus Christ in his speeches and writings. His incarnational christology results in a changed vision of humanity. However, his emphasis on the truth of incarnation does not end with theological speculation. Through his humble, touching and very human gestures, he teaches us the true meaning of the incarnation of Jesus—to embrace our own humanity sanctified by God.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius’ Contemplation on the Incarnation depicts the Holy Trinity gazing on a world filled with people who are diverse, sinful and in need of salvation (Exx 102). Ignatius’ image of God is not self-absorbed and uninterested in what is happening in the world. Pope Francis referred to such a distorted image of God in his 2021 angelus address: ‘In reality, an abstract, distant god is more comfortable, one that does not get himself involved in situations and who accepts a faith that is far from life, from problems, from society’.¹²

For Ignatius, God is the one who ‘works the redemption of the human race’, and it is through Jesus Christ’s incarnation that this redemption reaches humanity. God is involved in the world and in human and social realities. God is involved in our psychological processes and human growth. Jesuit and Ignatian spirituality are all-inclusive: ‘The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face’, Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato si’*.¹³ Jesuits see the focal point for human and spiritual growth in the life of Jesus. Jesus is the ideal of every Jesuit—not the false image of an inhuman Jesus, but the real Jesus, both human and divine, who,

... united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.¹⁴

¹¹ Pope Francis, morning meditation, ‘Real Christian Humility’, 14 June 2013.

¹² Pope Francis, angelus address, , 4 July 2021.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato si’*, n.233.

¹⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22. And see Patrick Saint-Jean, *Spirituality of Transformation, Joy, and Justice*, 7.

***The more spiritual
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A Jesuit is a companion of Jesus. In the psycho-spiritual formation of the noviciate, the Jesuit in formation is slowly led to his interiority where the incarnate God dwells, thereby coming to know God and himself. The bodily and psychological components of the human person are given the proper attention; Jesuit formation is not just a formation of the head; rather, it is holistic, involving the entirety of a person's humanity and a balance between the head and the heart. The human and the spiritual are so interconnected that they grow in direct proportion: the more spiritual one becomes, the more one becomes grounded in humanity. With this incarnational spirituality in mind, Jesuits promote human means of formation, including psychology and human learning—in so far as they contribute to growth in our life with Christ. In the words of St Ignatius, 'we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created' (Exx 23).

The Church and Human Formation

Besides the rich tradition of Jesuit spirituality, another source of inspiration in Jesuit formation is the Church itself. Jesuits are in communion with the Church and they derive nourishment from the ecclesial community. Jesuits think and feel with the Church—*sentire cum ecclesia* (Exx 352). Without the Church's guidance, they would be led astray. The Society of Jesus was established to serve God through the Church and, despite sometimes unavoidable tensions, the Society has always declared its loyalty to Mother Church. The sometimes critical attitude of Jesuits is tempered by love and respect for the hierarchical Church. In my observation, the wider Church's call for a more integrated and solid human formation aligns well with the Jesuit vision of formation.

Pastores dabo vobis

A groundbreaking document on priestly formation is Pope John Paul II's *Pastores dabo vobis*, in English, 'I will give you shepherds'. The underlying framework of this document is the theological notion of cooperative grace, the relationship between God's grace and human freedom. The document states from the start, 'To remain faithful to the grace received! This gift of God does not cancel human freedom; instead it gives rise to freedom, develops freedom and demands freedom.' (n.2) This can be paraphrased as saying the grace of God does not remove the need for human formation. God's grace works through nature,

especially human nature. In the section ‘The Areas of Priestly Formation’, human formation is called ‘the basis of all priestly formation’:

The whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation So we see that the human formation of the priest shows its special importance when related to the receivers of the mission: In order that his ministry may be humanly as credible and acceptable as possible, it is important that the priest should mold his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ the Redeemer of humanity. (n.43)

Once again, mention of Jesus’ incarnation is indispensable.

Pastores dabō vobis served as a catalyst for the development of human formation in the context of the seminary. It emphasizes the necessity of human qualities for effective ministry, with a list of those that the ministry demands. A priest must be capable of forming authentic and healthy human relationships, demonstrating affective maturity, sound judgment, and balanced behaviour. He should possess a well-integrated sense of self. Openness to his own sexuality is important to enable him to embrace the life of celibate chastity with integrity.¹⁵ He is called to be generous and faithful in his commitments, guided by a well-formed moral conscience and with a sense of responsibility. Spiritual formation builds on human formation: ‘Human formation, when it is carried out in the context of an anthropology which is open to the full truth regarding the human person, leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation’ (n.45).

The impact of *Pastores dabō vobis*, with its focus on human formation, cannot be overestimated. Eva Galvey is the co-founder of the Emmaus Centre for Psycho-Spiritual Formation and a lay formator at the Sacred Heart Noviciate in Quezon City, Philippines, where I began my own formation. She praises the document’s fresh approach: ‘In Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabō vobis* ... human formation was, at long last, categorically described as indispensable in the preparation of church ministers’. Finally, the humanity of the minister is officially recognised. The minister is not an incorporeal angel for ‘the minister,

¹⁵ Katarina Schuth, *Seminary Formation: Recent History—Current Circumstances—New Directions* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2016), 90–91.

after all, is first and foremost a human being and remains a human being'.¹⁶

In the 2016 document on formation titled *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, the emphasis on human formation was reiterated in the light of contemporary issues that the Church is still facing. It states forcefully:

For priestly formation the importance of human formation cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Indeed, the holiness of a priest is built upon it and depends, in large part, upon the authenticity and maturity of his humanity. The lack of a well structured and balanced personality is a serious and objective hindrance to the continuation of formation for the priesthood.¹⁷

The Catholic Bishops' Conference in my home country of the Philippines takes the same approach: 'The seminary aims at forming men of virtue, of human excellence and goodness of character, founded on psycho-emotional integration and modelled on Christ's example of authentic humanity'. The goal is to form integrated disciples of Christ for 'a sound and harmonious spirituality demands a well-structured humanity that forms an integrated person'.¹⁸

The Signs of the Times

With the explosion of sexual abuses cases committed by priests and covered up by bishops, a clericalist mentality among some priests and the erosion of the credibility of the Church, psychologically informed human formation is more needed than ever to respond to the signs of the times.

How could God's ministers commit such horrible crimes? The National Review Board, the group of laypeople who initially researched and reported to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on child protection, cites the improper screening of candidates in the past as one reason that this was able to happen.¹⁹ The US Jesuit author James Martin reports that, from his conversations with men who joined minor

¹⁶ Eva Galvey, speech at Loyola School of Theology's commencement exercises, 15 May 2019, at <https://lst.edu/articles/speech-of-ms-eva-k-galvey-at-lsts-commencement-exercises-on-15-may-2019/>, accessed 4 August 2025.

¹⁷ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 2016), n. 63.

¹⁸ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 'Ratio formationis sacerdotalis nationalis for the Philippines', 31 May 2023, nn. 39, 286.

¹⁹ National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People, *A Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 66 following.

seminaries or religious orders in the 1940s and 1950s, the admission process to seminary back then was far less demanding than it is today:

One priest explained to me that to enter his religious order one needed merely to submit a recommendation from another priest and meet with the local provincial. If the provincial gave his approval, the candidate was accepted.²⁰

By contrast, Martin shares that when he entered the Jesuits in 1988, the process was rather more rigorous (I personally experienced this too!):

... a battery of psychological tests (which culminated in a lengthy psychological evaluation to the Jesuits), six face-to-face interviews, an eight-day retreat, as well as having to submit a comprehensive autobiography, recommendations from six friends and co-workers, a physician's examination, and so on.²¹

Another reason, related to the first, is poor formation and training of candidates. Seminarians in the past did not receive adequate counselling and guidance about issues involving sexuality.²² This is not necessarily a question of solving a person's problems, but more about allowing him to embrace his humanity and be aware of his shadows. If a seminarian's serious psychological issues are left unaddressed, disaster is likely to follow. Those with such issues may be judged as not well suited for the priesthood; psychological problems can interfere with a person's ability to carry out the duties of priestly life.

Jesuit Formation—schola affectus

There is a famous joke about the length of Jesuit formation:

A mother goes to her pastor and explains that her son seems very interested in becoming a priest. She'd like to know what this entails.

The priest begins to explain, 'If he wants to become a diocesan priest, he'll have to study for eight years. If he wants to become a Franciscan, he'll have to study for ten years. If he wants to become a Jesuit, he'll have to study for fourteen years.'

The mother listens carefully, and as the priest concludes, her eyes brighten. 'Sign him up for that last one, Father—he's a little slow!'²³

²⁰ James Martin, 'How Could It Happen?', in *Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 158.

²¹ Martin, 'How Could It Happen?' 158.

²² Martin, 'How Could It Happen?' 159.

²³ Nikolaas Sintobin, *Jesuits Telling Jokes: A (Serious) Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola, 2016), 35.



Truly, the formation of Jesuits for the ordained ministry takes some time. The shortest is ten years, while the longest can take as long as fifteen years depending on the readiness of the seminarian. The formation process involves both studies and psycho-spiritual formation, which includes a variety of placements and later the experience of schoolteaching. In other words, formation involves the head and the heart—in balance.

Jesuit formation has similar dynamics to seminary formation, despite its uniqueness and duration. Primarily, Jesuit formation is a progressive (since it has stages) training and integration (interiorising of the identity) into the spiritual and apostolic life of the Society of Jesus. In some regions, depending on the availability of resources, potential applicants undergo a period of *candidacy*. This is a discernment period for someone to decide whether he will apply to the Society of Jesus or not. It is non-committal and non-binding, since the candidate is not yet a Jesuit in formation.

Once accepted, the candidate proceeds to the *noviciate* and he's now called a Jesuit novice. The noviciate is the beginning of Jesuit formation. For two years, the novice will get to know the Society of Jesus more, undergo deep psycho-spiritual formation and experience different 'experiments' or immersions (making the Spiritual Exercises, serving in a hospital, visiting mission areas, working in a factory, living in poor urban communities, and the week-long pilgrimage).

After the noviciate, he takes his first perpetual vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, either as a *scholastic* (for the priesthood) or a

brother (still a Jesuit, but not a priest) depending on his own choice and the decision of his formators. A period of intensive study follows. If the noviciate focuses more on the formation of the heart, the scholasticate focuses on the formation of the mind. It begins with the juniorate, a year-long programme of studies in the humanities, arts and languages. After honing his skills reading and writing, the scholastic studies philosophy for two years or more (depending on the context) at a tertiary-level institution.

After approximately three years of academic studies, the scholastic is sent for *regency*, during which the young Jesuit receives his first assignment to an apostolic work, commonly, but not always, teaching in a school. Ideally, regency lasts for two years, but may be prolonged depending on the performance of the scholastic. The scholastic returns to academic studies after regency. This time, he studies theology for four years (bachelor in sacred theology and masters in theology). At the conclusion of theological studies, the Jesuit is ordained, first as a deacon and then as a priest, ready to be sent on mission wherever there is greatest need.

Notably, Jesuit formation does not end with priestly ordination. Formation is ongoing while the Jesuit is on mission or doing further studies. At any time, after years of apostolic work or on completion of special studies, a Jesuit receives the invitation to go for *tertianship*, also called the second noviciate. For Ignatius this was the *schola affectus*, or school of the heart (*Constitutions*, V.2.1 [516]). It basically repeats all of the formal components of noviciate training, but differently, since the appropriation of Jesuit spirituality and ways of proceeding is deeper. After tertianship the Jesuit will profess his final vows, which fully incorporate him in the Society's body. But even taking final vows does not end the formation of a Jesuit; returning to the key phrase of Michael Higgins, Jesuit spirituality is a 'spirituality in endless formation'.²⁴

If there is a phrase that defines Jesuit formation it is none other than *schola affectus*. My own novice master kept on repeating this to us during our novice years. Sacred Heart Noviciate is called 'the womb and tomb' of Jesuits. On entrance day, a person is born into the Society of Jesus when he starts as a novice. On his death as a Jesuit he is buried in the cemetery located in the same noviciate where he was nurtured. He enters the heart of Jesus as a Jesuit and returns to it as he completes his life

²⁴ See Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, 'Formation', in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Jesuits*, edited by Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2017), 303.

on earth. Venancio Calpotura, a former novice master and co-founder of the Emmaus Centre, compared the noviciate process to sculpture:

The two years of Jesuit Novitiate may be likened to carving out the 'bold chiseling strokes'. In this initial stage of carving, formation adopts a psycho-spiritual approach. This aims to bring out an initial understanding of the formand's personality, sexual orientation, and his motivation for entering Jesuit religious life.²⁵

The role of formators as God's human instruments is indispensable. 'Each formation is God's co-sculptor in the shaping of His unique masterpiece', writes Fr Venancio.²⁶

'Endless Formation' and Human Development

The understanding that the human person is forever in formation aligns with some aspects of developmental psychology. In particular, Erik Erikson's theory of psycho-social development accentuates that human development is a lifelong process, extending from infancy to old age.

Erikson's most original contribution to the study of ego processes is his account of the 'Eight ages of man'. In this he shows that a strong ego has many aspects and that its development is a process which lasts throughout life.²⁷

For Erikson, development is,

... an epigenetic process; that is, the growth of the ego involves a progressive differentiation of interrelated characteristics where each, although existing in some form throughout, has a time of special ascendancy which is critical for its development.

This means that the process of psychological maturation involves 'different qualities of ego strength' which 'arise at different stages of a person's life'.²⁸ Development is differentiated, and each stage is important for growth. In each stage, a basic tension or conflict allows a virtue to emerge.

²⁵ Venancio Calpotura, 'The Sculpting Process of Jesuit Formation', in *The Collected Writings: Ignatian Spirituality*, volume 2 (Quezon City: Jesuit Communications, 2007), 20.

²⁶ Calpotura, 'The Sculpting Process of Jesuit Formation', 19.

²⁷ Richard Stevens, *Erik Erikson: An Introduction* (New York: St Martin's, 1983), 41. The eight stages are: infancy (basic trust versus basic mistrust); early childhood (autonomy versus shame, doubt); play age (initiative versus guilt); school age (industry versus inferiority); adolescence (identity versus confusion); young adulthood (intimacy versus isolation); adulthood (generativity versus stagnation); and old age (integrity versus despair). See Erik Erikson, *A Way of Looking at Things: Selected Papers from 1930 to 1980* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 599.

²⁸ Stevens, *Erik Erikson*, 42.

Rather than trying to correlate the stages with the human formation undergone by Jesuits. I will emphasize the developmental understanding of the human person underlying both Erikson's theory and my own experience of Jesuit formation. Eva Galvey affirms how pioneering that formation is:

At Emmaus Centre for Psycho-Spiritual Formation, we had been doing the work of human formation since 1981, eleven years ahead of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. We accompany candidates to priesthood and religious life on the path to human maturity.²⁹

The approach to formation at the Sacred Heart Novitiate is influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is 'the theoretical view ... that much of our behaviour is determined by unconscious factors'.³⁰ Though Freud had some controversial psychological theories and ideas, undoubtedly his theory of the unconscious is beneficial in processing the past and current experiences of the formand. In my own formation we undertook activities designed to bring the unconscious to the surface, the better to understand our own behaviour. For Freud there is a need to revisit early childhood experiences since they can be connected with our later development and affect it both positively and negatively. Also, humans might not be aware that they are acting according to their unconscious needs and desires as a result of past experiences.³¹

Accompaniment must help the formand to face his past, no matter how painful it is. Psychological processing must deal with his personal history, which includes his development from childhood to adulthood. The *Ratio fundamentalis* fully supports this perspective:

In order for this training to be fruitful, it is important that every seminarian be aware of his own life history, and be ready to share it with his formators. This would include especially his experience of childhood and adolescence, the influence that his family and his relatives have exercised upon him, his ability to establish mature and well balanced interpersonal relationships, or his lack thereof, and his ability to handle positively moments of solitude. Such information will be helpful for choosing the most fitting pedagogical means, both for an assessment of the journey thus far and for a better understanding of any moments of regression or of difficulty.³²

²⁹ Galvey, speech at Loyola School of Theology's commencement exercises.

³⁰ Johnson and others, 'Theories and Issues in Child Development', 51.

³¹ Johnson and others, 'Theories and Issues in Child Development', 68.

³² Congregation for the Clergy, *Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, n. 94.

Novices go through separate genogram and sexuality workshops. The former is similar to creating a family tree, but with greater emphasis on connections among family members and relatives. The latter explores a person's history of sexual exploration, experiences and identity. Both of these return to childhood experiences for the benefit of more concrete data. Human maturity requires embracing one's life history, graced by God. We were always reminded that the psycho-spiritual integration workshops are not designed to fix us or to resolve all our issues. The point is growing in awareness and acceptance.

The Jesuit formand who responds to God does not need to be stuck in the past. Human development is ongoing, therefore moving forward is always possible. But one should be at home with one's humanity with its lights and shadows. Jesuit formation, too, is ongoing; priestly ordination does not perfect one. I consider this as a strength of Jesuit formation: its sensitivity to the individual's developing humanity. Jesuit formation is incarnational—deeply human, deeply Christic. I end with these powerful words from Pope Francis on seminary formation during his conversation with religious superiors on 29 November 2013:

Formation is a work of art, not of law enforcement. We have to form their hearts. Otherwise we create little monsters. And then these little monsters form the people of God. This really gives me goosebumps We must always think of the people of God, as one of them. Let us recall those religious who have hearts as acidic as vinegar: they are not made for the people. In short, we must not form administrators or managers, but fathers, brothers, companions on the journey.³³

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³³ Pope Francis, *Illuminate the Future: Pope Francis in Conversation with Religious Superiors*, edited by Antonio Spadaro (New York: Paulist, 2022), 14–15.

SAYING THEIR NAMES

Prayers Prayed by the Elderly

Robert E. Doud

I AM THINKING of a home Mass celebrated on All Souls' Day in 2024. We included a brief ritual called 'Say Their Names'. Slowly and reverently, all present mentioned names of family members, neighbours and friends who had passed away earlier in the year. Among notable celebrities mentioned were the actor Maggie Smith, the baseball player Fernando Valenzuela and the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez.

The word *mystery* occupies my mind. That home Mass, attended by eight people seated around a dining room table, with canes and walkers behind them, was the representation of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. It was the Last Supper and the Emmaus walk rolled into one. A New Testament scholar stumbled over some of the words in one of the readings. Someone hard of hearing mentioned some of the names a second time.

Being crippled following a stroke five years ago, I do not often get to our parish church for Mass. On the day before this one, All Saints' Day, I had watched a live-streamed Mass at our national basilica in Washington, DC. On All Souls' morning, I had seen a papal Mass celebrated in Rome on television. I had prayed that, in future, there would be roles for women making the priestly gestures and presentations. Being attentive to causes to pray for or against on television or in other media is important to the elderly, who are likely to be watching a great deal of news and entertainment.

The Mass originated in real time in the life of Jesus. It is a mystery because it transcends time and becomes present again every day all over the world. Jesus is no less present at our dining-room-table Mass than he was at the Last Supper or on the cross at Calvary. I have no way of knowing exactly what our little flock think as individuals about the mystery of the real presence. But, I am sure each one of them felt the presence of Our Lord very deeply at that Mass.

Habits and Interests

My mother's prayer book had, on the last page, a picture of a globe and the names of cities all over the world. There were also times of the day in the Eastern United States when Masses would be offered in these cities. There was, and is, no time when the Mass is not being offered somewhere in this world. The suggestion was that all of our prayers, whenever we prayed them, were mediated by the Mass and came before God in conjunction with the Mass.

We prayed the rosary together as a family every day when I was a child. In adulthood, I fell out of that practice but I am aware that, for many Catholics my age, the rosary is a daily practice and routine. I suppose, in any case, I say five to ten Hail Marys every day. In my first parish church, growing up as a child in Brooklyn, New York, I often heard the exalted titles of Our Lady: Mediatrix of all Graces and Co-Redemptrix of the Human Race. A Marian Year had been proclaimed in 1950. Since the Second Vatican Council, I have not heard these titles spoken of.

My academic fields were philosophy and religious studies. Thus, a good part of my day was spent in research or class preparation that had its basis in prayer and a faith perspective. In my seminary days, one morning was given over to meditation in silence, while students visited with their confessors. I found a room where the spiritual director had stored all the older books in his private library. While he taught his classes, which were quite boring, out of Tanqueray's *The Spiritual Life*, his library contained older works on mysticism and contemplation, which I found interesting.

Earlier in my life, in the minor seminary, I lived at home and commuted every day to the cathedral school. I had paperback books by Thomas Merton, including the old version of *Seeds of Contemplation* and *The Silent Life*. Along with two other minor seminarians, we would meet in church for confession on Saturday nights, and then read to one another some of our recent gleanings from Merton. We were budding mystics before we reached the major seminary.

The habits and interests we form in early life, we take with us into our old age. My preferred moments of prayer were quiet, not always meditative, but focused on God and relishing moments of intense communion. The Mass was always central, and unworthiness was never a theme. It was not even an issue. I always wanted to be a priest, applied myself to my studies, and presumed that relations were okay

between me and God. I never lost that focus, even as I was drawn away from priestly ministry, but ever deeper into my studies and eventually into marriage.

Wonder and Perplexity

We ought always to pray. So says St Paul in the Bible. The appeal to God for guidance can be always in the back of our minds. Most of the time, we are either doing our jobs or doing something that can be considered a favour for others. Driving a car always involves a hidden residual prayer for God's protection. Working on a report for school or work is accompanied by an appeal for help from God or the angels. Elderly people boost the prayers of younger friends and family members with their own sympathetic prayer.

Two kinds of prayer that prevail in my life as a senior citizen are the relaxed but intense contemplative type and the busy type with lots of prayer intentions. I have friends who are not well, and a few ailments of my own. Hence, my well-wishes for others are also prayers for their comfort and recovery. On nearly a weekly basis, a dear one passes away and I wonder what has become of them. I pray.

Wonder and perplexity are the precursors to prayer, and old folks have the time to wonder about things. We have the sense that God wants us to wonder, to dream more often and to let our faith be tested, while praying for the gifts of faith, hope and charity. We need help from one another, and need the gift of gratitude towards one another when we receive help.



Dimensions of spiritual life include the *purgative* or incipient stage in which we turn away from sin and distracting secularity; the *illuminative* in which we cherish our insights into scripture, liturgy and Christian living; and the *unitive* in which we abide in communion with God and in contemplation of his presence. In older ways of thinking, these three dimensions were seen as successive stages by which we made progress towards perfection in spirituality. Nowadays, we might see them as rather mixed, with predominance of one over the other on any particular day as we advance in the spiritual life.

The four ends or objectives of prayer are adoration, which is due to God alone; contrition, which entails repentance for sins committed; thanksgiving, which is gratitude to God for God's many gifts to us; and petition, which includes prayers in which we ask God for graces and favours. An elderly person may focus on any one or any combination of these purposes at any given time, but the preparation for one's own demise is liable to be frequently in the forefront.

The great fear of old persons is not so much that of death itself but, rather, of suffering due to accumulated ailments and disabilities. Loss of memory, hearing, eyesight or the ability to walk are horrifying prospects for senior citizens. We pray against these anticipated or present disabilities, while surrounded by dear ones who are worse off than we are. Fear and love feed our prayers and contemplation.

We sometimes join our prayers to the great contemplative religious orders and communities. We also send in mass intentions and offerings to religious congregations. We have a sense of communion, some of us do, with the Carmelites, Cistercians, Carthusians or Camaldolese. Some of us have made retreats in the past at monasteries run by these contemplative orders. It is a great inspiration and consolation to us that members of these orders live lives of intense contemplation and liturgical worship.

Some of the saints wrote about *passive* contemplation, in which God activates the soul and prayer descends into the heart like soft raindrops that fall into us, beyond our power to stop them or slow them down. This may be what is happening to old folks who frequently fall asleep while saying their prayers. Bishop Fulton Sheen used to say that if we fall asleep during prayer, the angels finish the prayers for us.

Practices

Spiritual directors often talk about *practices*, which can be explicitly religious, or anything we might do on a regular basis that relaxes or

focuses the mind and body. Some people do yoga, or just practise sitting attentively for a certain period. Some read the scriptures daily. Some walk slowly and reverently to achieve peace of mind. Some write down their favourite thoughts or compose poems.

Writing demands concentration and discipline, and so it can have a dimension that is spiritual as well. Writing to friends who can benefit from our attention and encouragement has a spiritual dimension. Writing letters or submitting articles to magazines and newspapers can be beneficial for us, whether they are published or not. Writing a book that is educational or inspirational will inevitably have a spiritual dimension too.

Thinking about ministry and ministerial practices can be helpful in prayer. Meditation on the Mass or slowly reading the eucharistic prayers is a recommended practice. Praying for missionaries while imagining events in the lives they lead and the sacrifices they make is food for meditative practice. Pondering our own lives as having ministerial and missionary dimensions and opportunities is valuable. Preparing a homily, sermon or conference is directly prayerful work.

Lectio divina can have several forms, involving concentration on the scriptures or spiritual reading. Recently, I have found great profit in reading works by Richard Rohr and Ilia Delio. Throughout my life I have spiritually enjoyed the works of Thomas Merton, Basil Pennington, Basil Hume, Thomas Keating and other contemplative authors. Indeed, the contemplative movement has been growing and spreading among the laity of many denominations, and the works of non-Christian authors have added to this phenomenon.

Reading poetry can become a contemplative practice. Thanking God for the vision or sheer talent of a particular poet can be helpful. Attuning the inner rhythm of your soul to the flow of language in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* while meditating on his thoughts about life, locations, time and eternity will inspire many, as will growing familiar with Emily Dickinson, and her insights into death, immortality, felicity and eternity. Thomas Traherne was a metaphysical poet who found heavenly felicity breaking into this earthly life.

Even watching television can become a spiritual practice. There are everyday tragedies on the highways, fires and floods, and unthinkable crimes about which we can pray in sympathy for our neighbours. The crime shows remind us of our human perversity, and again evoke a sense of justice or empathy for the police and detectives who fight crime on a daily basis. We can become more grateful for our own safety and security. I

remember my own grandmother, who lived many hours between her rosary beads and her lurid detective novels.

No doubt, the use of the computer brings opportunities for prayer as well. Many websites give us the chance to appreciate beauty in nature through photography. We can also contact and encourage friends and acquire new friends through social media. Religious and spiritual topics can be addressed in e-mail. Some of my favourite hymns are available on YouTube! I have learnt to love the Anglican hymn 'Abide with Me'; 'Now Thank We All Our God' is another favourite, as is 'Take a Closer Walk'. I associate these hymns with certain times and people in my past life that are precious in my memory. Again, I pray!

Gardening can also be a spiritual practice. While placing our hands in the soil we can raise our minds and hearts to God. Leaves can appear as beautiful to us as the flowers on plants in bloom. Stones have beauty too, as do the surrounding trees. The garden teaches us to see the beauty around us, and all beauty belongs to God in a special way. It is hard to love nature and not love God in the same way.

For some, doing household chores can become a spiritual practice. The mother who makes the beds of her small children experiences a joy and gratitude that only she can appreciate. Doing the dishes after a family dinner can bring to awareness the joy of a family's togetherness, and thankfulness for time and food shared. Taking care of a home celebrates the awareness that we have a home to take care of, and offers a prayer for the homeless who live on our streets.

A priest friend has a reputation for the assiduous preparation of his homilies. During these prayerful spells of preparation he also listens to instrumental music, usually Baroque music, of which he is particularly fond. He likes Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* best of all, and also admires and craves the tunes and tones of Scarlatti, Telemann, Vivaldi and Pachelbel. No life is complete without its frequent doses of beauty, and Father George has a very complete life. For him, prayer feeds on the beauty of music.

Liberation and Beyond

The themes of liberation theology and social justice have entered powerfully into our thought and practice in recent decades. Inevitably they have entered our prayer life as well. Older people have adopted and adapted to these themes: the generosity of our prayers has been extended to poor and oppressed peoples living throughout the world. Not everyone



Rohingya refugees at a camp in Bangladesh

lives in a nation that respects personal freedom, social justice and the rights of its people. Despotic and autocratic regimes control the lives of their people, and in particular, the lives of the poor and underprivileged.

Theologies exist that are derived from neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School of German philosophy; Christian thinkers have turned to them to draw attention to the plight of oppressed people. Accordingly, we are challenged to see the world and its nations through two different lenses: the lens that sees the oppressors and the lens that sees the oppressed. There are two social classes: the dominant class that abuses its power and the oppressed class that is abused. Accordingly, the challenge is presented to the Church and to its members to identify—in ways that include our prayers—with the poor, and to redirect any power that we may have away from the rich and dominant.

The book of Isaiah and the prophets in general are cited and invoked in building the theology of liberation. Our prayers are seriously lacking if they do not show that we hear the cry of the poor and respond accordingly. Older people who are well cared for must find ways to assist those in their communities who are abused or neglected. It is not only in behalf of our own family and neighbours that we should be offering our prayers. Even people living close to our homes are suffering racial and social injustice.

While hundreds of thousands are sleeping in the streets of our cities, many more are crossing borders illegally and taxing the resources of the more fortunate nations. As aliens and as homeless, these people have a special claim on our care, our kindness and our prayers. Liberation thought has placed emphasis on the *preferential option for the poor*, coming out of South America with its notorious neglect and

exploitation of the indigenous population. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a leader of the liberation movement, has inspired not only missionaries and theologians, but leaders in the Black and feminist movements as well.

Moving, in Pope Francis's words, from the cry of the poor to the cry of the Earth (*Laudato si'*, n.49), we can find much to pray for in the love of our planet. Changes in climate threaten the welfare of human beings everywhere. We see floods and fires reported in the media caused by environmental problems and climate change. We can pray too for more awareness among ourselves and recognition of this ever-increasing problem. The polar ice caps are melting and rising sea levels are threatening to inundate shores and coastlines all over the globe. The maintenance of forests, and the purity and abundance of water supplies are also key environmental issues. These require not only action, but also prayerful increase in awareness among all the people on the globe.

Gratitude

There are many reasons to pray. But beneath all of these must lie the conviction that prayer can help. Our gratitude for the planet and all that sustains us in life and gives us natural beauty must increase. Selfishness and narrowness in our prayer intentions must decrease. Religion itself is a quest for ever-widening vision. Respect and cooperation between the many religions and denominations must grow as well. Our families can educate themselves in ways of praying and the need for prayer. Elders can be the leaders of this project!

Gratitude is the dominant theme in the prayers of older people. We are grateful for the health, good fortune and the length of days that God has given us. We give thanks for the goodness of nature and the wealth of our languages and culture. We have enjoyed our education and employment. We acknowledge the favours and services rendered to us by other people. And we are grateful for a Church that has brought us liturgy, education and faith formation, along with the joy and celebration of the eucharist.

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LITURGICAL SPIRITUALITY AND ETHICAL FORMATION

The Formulary of St John de Matha

Marvin Jhan Santos

ST JOHN DE MATHA (1160–1213) founded the Order of the Most Holy Trinity, a religious order approved by Innocent III in 1198 with the specific mission of redeeming Christians held captive during the Crusades. With its devotion to the Trinity, the order embodies a distinctive union of theological reflection and charitable action. The solemnity of St John de Matha is rooted in its mission: this liturgical feast commemorates the founder's commitment to ransoming captives and manifests the Trinitarian charism of liberation and mercy. It also provides a good model for exploring how liturgy informs Christian identity, ethical responsibility and mission.

The formulary draws attention to themes of solidarity with the oppressed, sacrificial love and the pursuit of justice in imitation of the Trinity's redemptive work. The collect, for example, petitions God to inspire the faithful with the spirit of self-sacrificial service, echoing the order's historical dedication to liberating captives and caring for those marginalised by injustice. Through these liturgical texts and ritual practices, participants are invited to internalise the virtues of compassion and courage.

The formulary was revised in 1976 in light of the reforms promulgated by the Second Vatican Council and the determinations of the General Chapter of the Trinitarians in consonance with *Perfectae caritatis* and *Sacrosanctum concilium*. This renewal reflects a theological reorientation from primarily *caritas redemptiva*—centred on the act of ransom—to a more comprehensive *caritas agapica*, embodying the universal and self-diffusive love of God. Such a development underlines

This article is based on a class discussion of liturgical spirituality facilitated by Dr Starke at St Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore, Fall 2024.

the essential vocation and mission entrusted to every Trinitarian: to manifest in the contemporary world the mystery of divine love as both liberating and unitive. Here is the full text of both versions.

1684 Text¹

Oratio

God, who through our holy Father John of Matha, deigned to establish the Order of the Most Holy Trinity from heaven to redeem captives from the power of the Saracens, grant, we beseech you, that by his supporting merits, with your help, we may be freed from captivity of body and soul.

Super Oblata

We beseech you, O Lord, that these gifts, through the intercession of our holy Father John, may loosen the bonds of our sinfulness and grant us the gifts of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord.

Post Communionem

Having been refreshed by heavenly food and drink, we implore your mercy, our God, that through the intercession of our holy Father John, you may make us fervent in your love and enable us to advance in the increase of eternal redemption. Through our Lord ...

1976 Text²

Collecta

Father, who imbued our holy father John with the mercy of your Son and the love of the Divine Spirit, grant, we beseech you, that following in his footsteps, we may both become devout worshipers of the Holy Trinity and effective workers of charity. Through our Lord ...

OR

God, who enriched our holy father John with the gifts of faith and charity, grant that, following in his footsteps, we may eagerly labor for the redemption of our brothers from the bondage of soul and body, to the glory of the Holy Trinity. Through our Lord ...

Super Oblata

We offer to you, Lord, the sacrifice of our redemption, so that, clinging to the spirit of our blessed father John, we may also joyfully lay down our lives for the glory of your name and the service of our brothers. Through our Lord ...

Post Communionem

May the sacraments which we have received, our Lord God, nurture within us the fervor of charity, by which our blessed father John, being strongly inflamed, dedicated himself to the Holy Trinity and to his brothers. Through Christ. Through our Lord ...

¹ *Missae propriae festorum totius Ordinis Sanctissimae Trinitatis et Redemptionis Captivorum* (Rome: Ordo Sanctissimae Trinitatis et Redemptionis Captivorum, 1684).

² *Proprium missarum pro Ordine Sanctissimae Trinitatis* (Rome: Curia Generalis Ordinis Sanctissimae Trinitatis, 1976), 179.

Liturgical Spirituality and the Formulary

Liturgical spirituality is a transformative encounter in which the glorification of God intersects with the ethical and missionary responsibilities of Christian life. This concept, deeply rooted in theological tradition, emphasizes that worship is not an isolated spiritual exercise but a holistic experience shaping Christian identity and mission.

Don Saliers: Liturgy as Formative Practice

In his exploration of liturgy as a formative practice, Don E. Saliers challenges reductive understandings of worship as mere ritual performance. He argues that liturgy ‘opens a way of life’, emphasizing its formative power in shaping moral and ethical character.³ According to Saliers, worship does more than convey doctrinal knowledge—it immerses believers in the redemptive narrative of God’s work. This orientates the faithful to interpret the world through a Christ-centred lens, equipping them with categories and practices that bridge contemplation and ethical action.⁴

For Saliers the spiritual dimension of worship is not merely an interior, private experience, but a communal formation of moral sensibilities and virtues. Liturgical spirituality, as Saliers presents it, arises from the interplay of ritual, prayer, scriptural proclamation and sacramental celebration, all of which shape the affections and character of worshippers. This spirituality, he contends, does not culminate in the liturgical moment alone but extends into the believer’s daily engagements, guiding his or her moral imagination and ethical responsiveness in the world.

Central to Saliers’s thesis is the transformative potential of worship to integrate belief and practice. The liturgical act is not confined to the sanctuary; rather, it overflows into the believer’s social contexts as an encounter that teaches participants to embody the values expressed in communal worship. As the faithful rehearse God’s justice and mercy through prayers, hymns, and ritual actions, they learn to see the brokenness of the world through divine compassion.⁵ Saliers thus portrays the liturgy as a school of discipleship—a space for moral

³ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 97.

⁴ Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 172 following.

⁵ Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 132.

formation where Christ-like virtues take root and direct the Christian's engagement with social realities.⁶

In line with Saliers's argument, the liturgical spirituality formed on the formulary of St John de Matha does not stop at admiration of the Trinitarian order's past deeds. Instead, it summons worshippers to act similarly in their own time, discerning how the Church's historical commitments inform responses to contemporary forms of enslavement—such as human trafficking and systemic oppression. Liturgy becomes both aesthetic and ethical: the aesthetic dimensions of this solemnity, especially its ritual movement, further embed ethical ideals in the worshippers' imaginations, making tangible the link between glorifying God and doing God's work in the world.⁷

Saliers's insights highlight how the liturgy—as exemplified by the solemnity of St John de Matha—cultivates an ethical imagination shaped by the Church's tradition and witness. Worship becomes a practice that binds inner spiritual formation to outward moral engagement, ensuring that adoration of God unfolds in acts of justice and mercy. By framing worship as a formative, spiritual-ethical endeavour, Saliers presents Christian liturgy as a wellspring of moral identity, compelling believers to inhabit the virtues of Christ in the complexities of daily life.

Kevin Irwin: Eucharist and Mission

For Kevin Irwin, as for Saliers, liturgy goes beyond mere ritual. In *Context and Text*, he describes a liturgical spirituality that integrates the eucharist with mission. The formulary for the Solemnity of St John de Matha reflects core aspects of this spirituality, demonstrating how eucharistic worship leads to active service through acts of charity, justice and redemption, making worship inseparable from mission. The first version of the collect asks that 'we may both become devout worshippers of the Holy Trinity and effective workers of charity', and the second

⁶ Don, E. Saliers, 'Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 7/2 (Fall 1979), 173–189, at 189.

⁷ Ritual movement, in this context, refers to the dynamic progression within the structure of the liturgical celebration. This concept underscores how various liturgical texts function not as isolated components but as interconnected elements that contribute to a unified theological and ritual whole. A concrete example can be found in the *orations* of the liturgical formulary, where the Collect, Super Oblata and Post Communionem are not just distinct prayers but integral parts of a single liturgical reality. Together, they form a cohesive spiritual and theological narrative unfolding through the ritual actions of the liturgy.

that ‘we may eagerly labor for the redemption of our brothers from the bondage of soul and body, to the glory of the Holy Trinity’.⁸

The formulary reflects the ethical dimension of the eucharist in its intercessory focus. The act of praying for the spiritual and physical liberation of others parallels Irwin’s description of bread, wine and goods for the poor offered as a liturgical and symbolic act: ‘at the very moment when we take bread and wine and through them present creation back to God, we simultaneously commit ourselves to sharing creation with all God’s creatures’.⁹ Prayers for the liberation of Christian captives underline the theological principle that participation in the eucharist extends beyond sacred space into the world.

The historical Trinitarian practice of gathering funds for ransom is a concrete expression of this sacramental ethic, demonstrating how the eucharist generates an obligation towards those in need. The Trinitarians tirelessly dedicated themselves to collecting funds to ransom Christian captives during the early thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The petition to ‘labor for the redemption of our brothers’ reflects more than a spiritual aspiration; it embodies a lived expression of eucharistic spirituality rooted in social justice and sacrificial service. Furthermore, the Trinitarian identity embedded in the formulary emphasizes the communal nature of the eucharistic celebration and its sharing. This identity is not limited to spiritual communion but extends to social engagement.



St John de Matha Ransoms Christian Captives, by
Vincenzo Carducci, 1634

⁸ *Proprium missarum pro Ordine Sanctissimae Trinitatis*, 179.

⁹ Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2018), 600.

The paschal mystery, a central theological theme in the formulary, reinforces the connection between eucharist and mission. The prayers' focus on deliverance from captivity symbolizes both spiritual and physical redemption, aligning with Irwin's assertion that the eucharist enacts Christ's death and resurrection: 'we share in Christ's death and resurrection in and through the act of the Eucharist'.¹⁰ In this sense, the formulary expresses the eucharist's transformative power as the Church's mission of liberation and restoration is made a tangible reality by the work of the Trinitarian order.

***A spirituality in
which faith, ritual
and mission are
inseparably united***

The formulary for the Solemnity of St John de Matha serves as a liturgical and theological expression of eucharistic spirituality, integrating worship with mission. Its sacramental prayers, ethical focus and paschal orientation reflect the theological vision articulated by Irwin, in which liturgy not only celebrates divine grace but also demands active participation in God's redemptive work. Through its liturgical framework, the formulary underlines that authentic worship is lived out through compassionate service and the pursuit of justice, embodying a spirituality in which faith, ritual and mission are inseparably united.

Sacrosanctum concilium

Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* provides a foundational understanding of how liturgical celebrations form and express authentic Christian spirituality. It teaches that the liturgy is 'the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows' (n.10). Thus liturgical spirituality is not an added dimension on the periphery of Christian life; rather, it is integral, shaping both personal devotion and communal faith.

According to *Sacrosanctum concilium*, one of the most significant aspects of liturgical spirituality is the call to active participation. The document states: 'Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy' (n.14). This active engagement, both interiorly through prayerful attentiveness and exteriorly through the prescribed liturgical actions,

¹⁰ Irwin, *Context and Text*, 604.

nurtures a spirituality that emerges from the heart of the Church's worship. The liturgy thereby becomes the common language through which the faithful encounter the mystery of Christ.

Sacrosanctum concilium also underscores that the liturgy, especially that of the eucharist as the celebration of the paschal mystery, serves as the source and summit of all Christian life (n. 10). Through participation in the sacraments believers are drawn into Christ's saving mystery and are enriched by the grace that sustains their spiritual growth. The constitution likewise highlights the role of the liturgical year, including the commemoration of saints:

In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, holy Church honors with especial love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God The Church has also included in the annual cycle days devoted to the memory of the martyrs and the other saints. (nn. 103–104)

In these celebrations, the faithful encounter models of holiness and learn how to live Christ's gospel in their own contexts.

The formulary for the solemnity of St John de Matha clearly illustrates these principles. It highlights the saint's commitment to charity and liberation, making it a concrete example of how liturgy can inspire and shape spirituality. 'God, who enriched our holy father John with the gifts of faith and charity, grant that, following in his footsteps, we may eagerly labor for the redemption of our brothers.' Such a prayer connects the faithful's spiritual journey—seeking freedom from sin and a life of service—with the witness of the saint. This alignment between the saint's life and the liturgical texts exemplifies what *Sacrosanctum concilium* envisions: that the celebration of a saint's feast day not only commemorates a historical figure but makes present an inspiration for all believers. *Sacrosanctum concilium* n. 14 calls for 'fully conscious, and active participation', and the faithful who join in these prayers and readings are invited to enter deeply into the mystery of redemption that St John de Matha strove to embody.

Sacrosanctum concilium presents liturgical spirituality as a dynamic reality that emerges from the Church's communal worship. The liturgy is not only the highest form of worship but also the source of grace and spiritual growth, 'the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit' (n. 14). By commemorating the feasts of St John de Matha and all the other saints in the liturgy, the Church provides concrete models of holiness that

draw believers into active participation in Christ's saving work. Through the prayers, readings and rites of the saint's solemnity, the faithful are formed spiritually, growing in the freedom and generosity that marked the saint's life and thus embody the very principles outlined by the Second Vatican Council.

The Primary and Indispensable Source

The solemnity of St John de Matha may be seen to exemplify a vision of liturgical spirituality that binds together ritual participation, ecclesial identity, moral formation and socio-political engagement. It demonstrates how the commemoration of a saint's historical witness can be liturgically actualised in ways that shape the faithful's contemporary ethical discernment. In this paradigm, the liturgy functions as a site of theological reflection, ethical formation and pastoral action, rather than a static or isolated devotional exercise.

Theologically, this approach resists any sharp distinction between cult and ethical practice. Saliers's notion of liturgy as formative practice underscores that ritual action and proclamation cultivate dispositions and sensibilities attuned to God's justice and mercy. Irwin's articulation of the eucharist as the nexus of worship and mission further consolidates this view: active liturgical participation engenders a heightened sense of accountability to the world's suffering. From a pastoral perspective, clergy and pastoral ministers can draw on these insights to frame homilies, catechesis and parish programming that highlight the ethical dimensions of liturgical celebration. By doing so, they may guide the faithful to recognise the eucharistic liturgy, in particular, not merely as an obligation or spiritual comfort, but as a catalyst for ecclesial commitment to transformative service and social advocacy.

Sacrosanctum concilium's insistence on 'fully conscious, and active participation' situates liturgical spirituality at the heart of the Church's life and mission. The council's vision, supported by the theological perspectives of Saliers and Irwin, suggests that pastoral agents—bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, liturgy coordinators—should prioritise initiatives that help the faithful engage with the liturgy more deeply. For instance, systematic liturgical formation could involve adult education elucidating the theological meaning of feast day formularies, scriptural commentaries that connect the historical charism of a saint with current social realities, and parish outreach projects that translate

liturgical inspiration into concrete works of mercy. Such practices foster an ecclesial culture in which worship and justice are mutually reinforcing dimensions of Christian discipleship.

In the specific context of the solemnity of St John de Matha, the liturgy's thematic emphasis on redemption from captivity and compassionate solidarity aligns closely with contemporary pastoral priorities. Pastors and lay leaders might use this celebration to address issues such as human trafficking, prison ministry or economic exploitation. As the liturgy recalls the saint's historical acts of ransom, pastors can encourage the faithful to engage in advocacy, support charitable organizations dedicated to emancipation, or participate in interfaith collaborations working towards systemic change. In so doing, the liturgy not only forms the Christian moral imagination but also generates tangible pastoral initiatives responding to pressing human needs.

For lay Catholics, the pastoral implications are equally significant. Liturgical spirituality, informed by the paschal mystery, provides a lens through which they can discern their responsibilities in family life, professional endeavours and civic engagement.¹¹ Pastoral counsel, spiritual direction and parish-based study groups can help individuals and families reflect on how the ritual enactment of the gospel—particularly as exemplified by the saints—translates into sustained ethical commitments in the secular sphere. By integrating these pastoral strategies into the communal life of the Church, the faithful learn to understand liturgy as both the source and summit of Christian life and the normative guide for ethical behaviour and social transformation.

The solemnity of St John de Matha illustrates how liturgical commemoration can function as a theological-ethical nexus, shaping both individual spirituality and the Church's collective practice. By bridging contemplation and action, worship and ethics, such liturgical celebrations provide a theological framework for understanding the liturgy's formative role, while also offering a pastoral blueprint for translating sacramental participation into concrete ecclesial initiatives. This integrative vision, grounded in Vatican II's reforms and enriched by contemporary theological scholarship, presents the liturgy as a primary

***Bridging
contemplation
and action,
worship and
ethics***

¹¹ Once again I am grateful to James Starke for discussion of these insights.

agent of ecclesial renewal—one that calls forth a mature discipleship expressed in service, justice and the ongoing pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

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JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION

Fostering Solidarity

Laurien Nyiribakwe

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLIDARITY in our fractured world cannot be overstated. The value of solidarity is an invitation to transcend cultures, ideologies and physical frontiers out of commitment to the least among us, giving them hope as a part of our shared human destiny. Solidarity is anchored in the ethics of interdependence and the equality of all human beings. As Meghan Clark writes:

Solidarity is multifaceted, at once a feeling, an attitude, and a duty, with each of these building to culminate in the virtue. As an attitude, solidarity is descriptive of our feelings and awareness of interdependence. As a duty, it is a normative category rooted in the moral requirements of interdependence; and as a moral category, solidarity turns on the equality of all humanity.¹

Solidarity is particularly important in the field of education, which strives to empower the minds and spirits of tomorrow's leaders. Through education, individuals and societies are capable of harming or saving other individuals, systems or societies by means of the values that they uphold or neglect. Value-based education can promote scientific research and discoveries, and attitudes and behaviours that contribute to human flourishing. The Jesuit involvement with such education dates back to St Ignatius of Loyola himself and the foundation of the Society of Jesus.

Solidarity in the Roman Catholic Tradition

The concept of solidarity itself is relatively new. In Ignatius' terms, solidarity would equate to charity, to pious works, to helping the

¹ Meghan Clark, 'Anatomy of a Social Virtue: Solidarity and Corresponding Vices', *Political Theology*, 15/1 (2014), 26–39, here 27.

neighbour. These words are pervasive in Ignatius' *Autobiography*, in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* and in his letters, which demonstrate a resolute attention to the poor. There is no doubt that he had been nurtured by intellectual and spiritual wealth of St Thomas Aquinas, especially during his theologate studies and in his pastoral ministries in Rome. He repeatedly recommends the study of Aquinas to Jesuits in formation, and the early Jesuits took this recommendation seriously, codifying it in the first pedagogical blueprint for Jesuit education, the *Ratio studiorum*.² It is important, then, to examine what St Thomas Aquinas can teach us about solidarity.³

Aquinas' understanding of what we would call solidarity was biblical and anthropological, specifically using the concept of *imago Dei*, which posits humankind as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Thus solidarity among human beings is less an issue of being good or feeling compassionate than a recognition of inherent human value which transcends individual ties. Solidarity is an awareness of the dignity inherent in all human beings, whoever they are, wherever they are or whatever they do. Moreover, Aquinas links solidarity to charity (*caritas*): concrete deeds express that we love our neighbours as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31; Mathew 22:39).⁴ And it is not enough for solidarity to be performed on an individual level; it needs to be collective.⁵ In Aquinas, solidarity is related to justice in its distributive and reparative forms. A just share and sustenance of the common good, ensuring that each and every one has access to the necessities, fosters solidarity.

Aquinas was an important influence on Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which became foundational for Catholic Social Teaching. In it Pope Leo addressed the grave issue of the exploitation of human labour amid the rapid growth of industries across European nations. He pleaded with both employers and governments, urging them to uphold the principles of justice and fairness by ensuring that workers received their due wages. In 1991, a century after this first

² See *The Ratio studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, translated by Claude Pavur (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005). The *Ratio studiorum* prescribed the study of Thomas Aquinas as a mandatory subject in Jesuit colleges and universities.

³ On Aquinas and solidarity see John Finnis, 'Aquinas as a Primary Source of Catholic Social Teaching', in *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, edited by Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 2019), 11–33.

⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2. 2, q. 44 a. 7.

⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri ethicorum*, 1. 2, nn. 11–12 [29–30].

social encyclical, John Paul II commemorated it by stressing the timeless importance of solidarity in *Centesimus annus*. He added that the principle of solidarity extends beyond national boundaries to encompass a global perspective, challenging us to evaluate our commitment to the most marginalised members of society (n.21).

At Vatican II the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World boldly pointed out:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts This community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.⁶

Since then the holy fathers, called to 'interpret the signs of the times' (Matthew 16:3), have unceasingly underlined the essential role of integral solidarity in confronting the evils of modern and postmodern society.⁷ Through encyclical letters addressing contemporary issues—capitalism, technocratic development and climate change—pontiffs have repeatedly suggested the antidote of solidarity.

In the aftermath of Vatican II, Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio* (1967) highlighted the link between the progress of humanity and individual development within the framework of solidarity. In this vision the interconnectedness of human beings as a cohesive entity allows each and every one to realise his or her potential (n.17). In emphasizing solidarity and freedom within the realm of authentic development, the pontiff stressed that genuine progress must stem from a foundation rooted in love for both God and neighbour. While economic advancement and the process of globalization have their own significance, they are incomplete without the essential part of solidarity that underpins the fundamental aspects of human existence. As Pope John Paul II articulately expresses in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, his own encyclical marking the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum progressio*, this intrinsic need for solidarity transcends mere economic considerations and stands as an imperative moral obligation essential to nurturing meaningful relationships within society.

⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

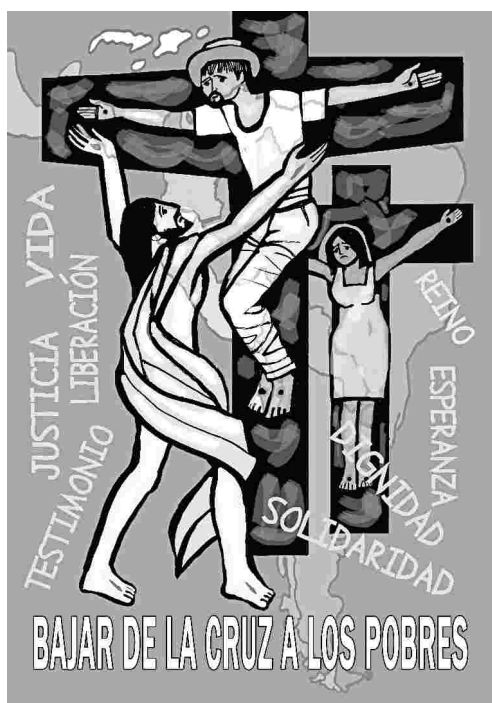
⁷ See John XXIII, *Humanae salutis*, n.4. With this apostolic constitution he convoked the Second Vatican Council on 25 December 1961.

Indeed, the essence of solidarity lies in the recognition of the innate interconnectedness of all individuals, and the shared responsibility people have towards one another. This principle, highlighted in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, transcends mere sympathy or a concern for the plight of others. Rather, it calls for a resolute dedication to contributing actively to collective well-being, emphasizing the intrinsic link between the common good and the flourishing of everyone within the societal fabric. By understanding that we are all accountable for the welfare of every member of our global community, we embrace the profound moral imperative that unites us all.

From a christological point of view, two Salvadoran Jesuits, Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (who was martyred in 1983) upheld the principle of solidarity in the image of Jesus of Galilee and the ‘crucified people’.⁸ They underlined the relation of Jesus’ ministry with the plight of the poor, calling the Church not simply to theorize about

suffering and oppression but also to work for liberation and social transformation. Sobrino and Ellacuría challenged the faithful, especially the elite and intellectuals, to be more engaged with the social realities of our time and embody the transformative love and justice exemplified in the agapic love of Jesus Christ of Galilee.

Over the last decade, Pope Francis has pointed out the urgent need for global and intergenerational solidarity to heal the divisions within our world. In *Laudato si’: On Care of our Common Home* he outlined the implications of environmental destruction for society, particularly the poor.



Poster by Maximino Cerezo Barredo, 2007

⁸ This phrase was first used by Ellacuría in 'El pueblo crucificado, ensayo de soteriología histórica', in Ignacio Ellacuría and others, *Cruz y resurrección* (Mexico City: CTR, 1978), 49–82.

Pope Francis urged individuals, communities and nations to stand together in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. Addressing the issue of climate change, Francis stood out as an indefatigable voice in global discussions, promoting policies to restore, protect and safeguard the health of our fractured planet and humanity.

Education and the Early Jesuits

In his essay 'Is Tolerance Enough? The Catholic University and the Common Good', David Hollenbach connects solidarity with the common good in relation to Catholic and Jesuit higher education. He suggests that Catholic education needs to be rooted in the Church's tradition of solidarity to advance the common good within a highly pluralistic and wounded world.⁹ According to Hollenbach, the Roman Catholic tradition has certain unique assets that can help to confront current issues: the widening gap between rich and poor, the prevalence of negative ideologies (fundamentalism, extremism, sexism), war and political divisions, among many other social, political and economic issues across the globe. This tradition values both individual autonomy and community solidarity in shaping societal structures, and recognises that 'the dignity of human persons is achieved only in community with others'.¹⁰ Hollenbach speaks about the significance of solidarity in Catholic and Jesuit higher education, noting the challenges it faces in the context of pluralism, particularly in the United States of America.

The Christian and social virtue of solidarity was at work in the Jesuits' educational ministry from the very beginning. St Ignatius had a dream of a society dedicated to the advancement of spiritual growth and education among the Christian Catholic community, 'especially children and the unlettered' (Formula of the Institute, 1). Jesuits saw nurturing faith and human knowledge as a complex and noble mission requiring a spirit of collaboration that responded to the demands of solidarity.

In an important letter outlining the Jesuits' educational mission, Ignatius had his secretary, Juan de Polanco, compile a list of fifteen reasons why the Society of Jesus should start colleges and universities.¹¹

⁹ David Hollenbach, 'Is Tolerance Enough? The Catholic University and the Common Good', in *Vision and Values: Ethical Viewpoints in the Catholic Tradition*, edited by Judith A. Dwyer (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 1999), 179–195.

¹⁰ Hollenbach, 'Is Tolerance Enough?' 184.

¹¹ Ignatius to Antonio Araoz, 1 December 1551, in St Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, edited by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 360–363.

One was so that ‘poor boys, who could not possibly pay for teachers, much less for private tutors, will make progress in learning and that their parents will be able to satisfy their obligation to educate their children’. There are also reasons concerning the propagation of Catholic faith and the search for the common good: ‘Those who are now only students will grow up to be pastors, civic officials, administrators of justice, and will fill other important posts to everybody’s profit and advantage’.¹²

Education is, in view of Ignatius, a tremendous contribution to the common good, therefore a work of charity. Jesuit colleges embodied charity by both educating students and edifying their neighbours. In a well-known letter to scholastics, Ignatius wrote:

Do not imagine that during this interval of studies you are not being useful to your neighbor. Over and above the advantage to yourself (which is demanded by well-ordered charity ...) you are serving God’s honor and glory in many ways.¹³

Scholastics should not blame themselves for studying rather than giving themselves to work directly for the well-being of the poor. Ignatius understood that the very fact of dedicating time and effort to excellence in learning and growth is, for them, an act of charity and service to others. Ignatius thought Jesuits could live out charity profoundly through their holy desires and constant prayer as a means of becoming men of spiritual depth. In his letter, Ignatius urged students to be efficient with their time and ‘maintain a holy and discerning ardor in working to acquire both learning and virtues’. In his words:

As you acquire learning on the one hand and grow in fraternal charity on the other, you will become perfect instruments of God’s grace, and collaborators in the sublime work of bringing God’s creatures back to him as their highest end.¹⁴

In a letter to Jean Pelletier, the rector of the Jesuit college in Ferrara, Ignatius suggested giving priority to noble and charitable works for the betterment of the city: ‘to be aware of the pious works in the

¹² William O’Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate? Studies in Jesuit History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 208.

¹³ Ignatius to the fathers and brothers at Coimbra, 7 May 1547, in *Letters and Instructions*, 173.

¹⁴ Ignatius to the fathers and brothers at Coimbra, 7 May 1547, in *Letters and Instructions*, 168, 172.

city where they reside and do what they can to further them'. He invited the college to perform acts of mercy as a means of realising the common good; Ignatius added that charitable works would not only help the neighbour and the city but also generate good publicity for the Jesuit institution: 'the greater service of God, the common good, and the Society's good reputation'. Ignatius cherished the fact of having a good reputation in so far as it serves for the greater glory of God.

The *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* state that colleges were founded to serve as integral institutions where public classes were provided to nurture the intellectual and moral growth both of young Jesuits in formation and lay learners. Jesuit universities were not only planned for production and dissemination of knowledge but for 'the divine service, which alone is sought in the case of both members of the Society and externs' (*Constitutions*, IV.3.B[338]). They were to promote a sense of community, including individuals from diverse backgrounds and enriching the educational experience for all. It is through this spirit of charity, empowerment and inclusivity that the impact of Jesuit colleges extended beyond their walls, reaching out to communicate intellectual and Christian values to individuals and communities. This was something revolutionary in the sixteenth century, and it is needed more than ever today.

The efforts made by the early Jesuits to promote solidarity were consistent and pervasive and came at a critical time. The Jesuits saw formal education as both a means of intellectual cultivation and a driving force for imparting virtues that would guide individuals, systems and societies towards a life of service and a collective commitment to the common good. These efforts should continue to inspire the Church and Jesuits, especially in today's social and educational ministry. The early Jesuits offer the current generation a challenge to reflect deeply on strategies to achieve a more just and equitable society.

***A life of service
and a collective
commitment to
the common good***

The Spiritual Exercises

Without the Spiritual Exercises, Jesuit educational ministry would not have been the way it is today. For Ignatius, the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises was to bring order to the human soul, which is constantly affected by circumstances and events within us and around us. The First Annotation explains:

By the term Spiritual Exercises we mean every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities For, just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of spiritual exercises given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul. (Exx 1)

Ignatius suggested different ways of doing the Spiritual Exercises, but examination of conscience was his indispensable prayer, and it remains valuable to students in their search for a more reconciled world. Ignatius took seriously the effect of introspection on personal and social life. He emphasized the relationship between moral integrity and spiritual growth.

The Spiritual Exercises also provide insights that guide people to understand the purpose of existence in this world. Ignatius' Principle and Foundation can inspire those in Jesuit education to cultivate a life of integrity, fairness, justice and solidarity as they relate to the world with its wealth, pleasures, glories and vanities. The Principle and Foundation states:

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls. The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it. To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters. Rather, we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created. (Exx 23)

The disorder, inequities, wars and calamities that perpetuate poverty in the world have much to do with missing our essential call 'to praise, reverence, and serve God'; and following that call leads to solidarity and realising the common good.

Finally, the discernment cultivated by the Spiritual Exercises is 'critical to Jesuit spirituality and education', as it guides individuals

towards making thoughtful and deliberated decisions.¹⁵ Jesuit universities are called to integrate discernment into the academic learning environment. Discernment of spirits is a way of leading society through education towards the realisation of the common good in a secularised world. The insights of the Spiritual Exercises can affect not only individual students but also social ecologies and can help in evaluating the motivations that foster or inhibit human actions for or against others.



Ignatius of Loyola Teaching the Children of New Spain, circle of Miguel Cabrera, late eighteenth century

Solidarity in Contemporary Jesuit Education

Pedro Arrupe, the 28th superior general of the Society of Jesus (1964–1983) made solidarity into a question of identity for Jesuits. The 32nd General Congregation, at which he presided, redefined Jesuit solidarity in the following words:

For us, the promotion of justice is not one apostolic area among others ... rather, it should be the concern of our whole life and a dimension of all our apostolic endeavors. Similarly, solidarity with men and women who live a life of hardship and who are victims of oppression cannot be the choice of a few Jesuits only. It should be a characteristic of the life of all of us as individuals and a characteristic of our communities and institutions as well.¹⁶

The Decree on Mission emphasizes crucial priorities for the Society's apostolic ministry, which includes higher education. It underlines the importance of promoting social justice as central to Jesuit apostolic

¹⁵ Abigail Gosselin, 'Cultivating Discernment', *Jesuit Higher Education*, 1/1 (2012), 16–30, here 16.

¹⁶ GC 32, decree 4, nn. 47–48.

concerns: the promotion of justice transcends specific areas of focus. The Society of Jesus is called to stand in unity with individuals enduring hardships and oppression and strive to address their needs with compassion and urgency. Moreover, the decree suggests that solidarity should not be merely a theoretical concept but should find expression in the very lifestyle of those who have vowed poverty to Christ: 'to share more closely the lot of families who are of modest means, who make up the majority of every country, and who are often poor and oppressed'.¹⁷ True solidarity enables Jesuits to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and hopes of the marginalised and a greater empathy with them.

Arrupe's successor as superior general, Peter Hans Kolvenbach, quoted Pope John Paul II in emphasizing the importance of 'contact', or practice, over 'concepts', or theory, as fundamental to Ignatian solidarity with the poor.¹⁸ Contact entails active interactions with marginalised, and implies deep reflection on these engagements. On the other hand, concepts involve intellectual exploration, calling for critical analysis of contemporary societal issues and cultural dynamics. Arguably both are important to the future of Jesuit education. At the heart of both contact and concept there is exploration, and they reinforce each other mutually within a dialectical framework. Their relationship challenges the mind to evolve as it inspires the heart through direct exposure to diverse cultures.

Service Learning

Contact and concepts together encourage the Jesuit engagement with community-based pedagogy or service learning—an educational practice that involves immersing students in community outreach as they study. Depending on the institution or its department, service learning has been given different names. At Boston College school of theology and ministry it takes the name of Arrupe Immersion to recognise Pedro Arrupe's legacy for social justice; Hekima University College in Kenya calls it pastoral fieldwork. The University of Pennsylvania refers to

¹⁷ GC 32, decree 4, n. 49.

¹⁸ Peter Hans Kolvenbach, 'The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in Jesuit Higher Education', in *A Jesuit Education Reader: Contemporary Writings on the Jesuit Mission in Education, Principles, the Issue of Catholic Identity, Practical Applications of the Ignatian Way, and More*, edited by George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola, 2008), 144–162, at 155. And see John Paul II, message to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, 5 May 2000.

‘academically based community service’; Portland State University to ‘community-based scholarship’.¹⁹

Some scholars have objected to the confusing and complex variety of names and definitions,²⁰ but whichever name service learning may take, the aim remains the same: to help students and faculty members relate learning to the real world. Service learning has the potential to give students the confidence to help those in need. It also creates awareness of their own prejudices and uneasiness in these circumstances as students become involved in the cultural and interpersonal aspects of life in the community.

It has been shown that students who have had immersive learning experiences not only enhance their awareness of societal issues but also develop a stronger bond with the community, increasing their agency as advocates for social justice. Scholars suggest that being involved with local communities promotes academic excellence and intellectual growth, and fosters a deeper sense of global awareness and civic duty.²¹ Exposure to ethical dilemmas through community interactions may enhance students’ moral reasoning abilities compared to peers with limited community engagement.²² This approach empowers students to grasp the truth of what Kolvenbach calls ‘gritty reality’, cultivating a profound self-awareness and a comprehensive understanding of the world from different viewpoints.²³ Ultimately, this holistic experience motivates students to engage critically with societal challenges and become more compassionate towards others.

***A deeper sense
of global
awareness and
civic duty***

Fostering Intellectual Presence at the Margins

In 1995 the 34th Jesuit General Congregation stated:

Father Pedro Arrupe named theological reflection as one of the four priority apostolates of the Society of Jesus GC 32 cited and confirmed Father Arrupe’s emphasis on theological reflection and also called for a social analysis of the structural causes of contemporary

¹⁹ James J. Fleming, ‘The Emerging Role of Service Learning at Jesuit Universities’, *Explore* (Spring 1999), 6–10, here 7.

²⁰ Cho See Chong, ‘Service-Learning Research: Definitional Challenges and Complexities’, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 15/4 (2014), 347–358, at 348.

²¹ See Cheng-Fang Huang and Lih-Wei Lei, ‘The Impacts of Service-Learning Experience: An Exploratory Case Study of Alumni Perspective’, *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, 17 (Summer 2023), 44–57.

²² See Mike Coquyt, ‘The Effects of Service-Learning on the Moral Development of College Students’, *The Interactive Journal of Global Leadership and Learning*, 1/1 (2020), 11–12.

²³ Kolvenbach, ‘Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice in Jesuit Higher Education’, 155.

injustices and for Ignatian discernment regarding the appropriate apostolic response to these injustices. GC 34 reconfirms the need for this theological reflection and, to the issues it must address, adds the contemporary understanding of the promotion of justice.²⁴

The distinctiveness of Jesuit intellectual responsibility lies in its advocacy of those living at the margins. Jesuit education and the intellectual apostolate are intertwined, but the Jesuit intellectual presence is not limited to university attendance or teaching students. It also calls Jesuits to be present where there are social injustices, rivalries, calamities and catastrophes to comfort and reconcile people: 'For the Jesuit priest, the world is where he is to be most active, in the name of Christ the healer and reconciler'.²⁵

The gross word 'scholasticide' is quite new.²⁶ It describes what United Nations experts have found in Palestine: 'The term refers to the systemic obliteration of education through the arrest, detention or killing of teachers, students and staff, and the destruction of educational infrastructure'.²⁷ The destruction of schools does not only affect physical buildings but the aspirations and future dreams of students, teachers and families. The negative impact of such devastation extends far beyond the confines of the educational institution itself. It affects the broader community and society as a whole.

The example of Palestine opens a window on what may and does also befall millions of sub-Saharan Africans, Latin Americans and other people in the developing world. Their fate is not isolated from the rest of humanity. Their poverty is largely structural rather than personal—the consequence of the exploitation of natural resources, histories of colonisation and the slave trade, the effects of climate change, tribal and racial disputes and rivalries, endemic insecurities and the suppression of people's freedoms, limited employment opportunities, unjust World Bank policies, poor governance and corruption of leaders among other causes.²⁸

²⁴ GC 34, decree 16, n.17. The decree cited GC 32, decree 2, n.59 following, 'Guidelines for Concerted Action'.

²⁵ GC 34, decree 6, n. 12.

²⁶ It was coined by the Oxford academic Karma Nabulsi in a lecture as long ago as 2009. See Ameera Ahmad and Ed Vulliamy, 'In Gaza, the Schools Are Dying Too', *The Guardian* (10 January 2009).

²⁷ 'UN Experts Deeply Concerned over "Scholasticide" in Gaza', at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>, accessed 2 September 2025.

²⁸ See for example, Alex Addae-Korankye, 'Causes of Poverty in Africa: A Review of Literature', *American International Journal of Social Science*, 3/7 (December 2014).

Under these circumstances, Jesuit higher education can play a vital role in cultivating empathy, understanding and solidarity in our societies, and in fostering a collective morality of support and justice. Students and staff become agents of social change in the quest for sustainable solutions to complex and unresolved problems in a world plagued by injustice. In the words of Adolfo Nicolás, Jesuit superior general between 2008 and 2016:

In Jesuit education, the depth of learning and imagination encompasses and integrates intellectual rigor with reflection on the experience of reality together with the creative imagination to work toward constructing a more humane, just, sustainable, and faith-filled world.²⁹

Courses and degrees in social justice are offered by several Jesuit universities on different continents. In the USA, Boston College runs a postgraduate course in 'Social Justice in Jesuit Contexts' as part of its certificate in Jesuit studies.³⁰ To prepare leaders for social change, Loyola University in Maryland provides a master's degree in social justice.³¹ In Zimbabwe, Arrupe Jesuit University offers a degree in transformative leadership which encourages students to apply a social analysis framework to effect social change and 'transform destructive development structures through the conscientization and mobilization of disempowered people'.³²

Colleges and universities are also engaged in global collaboration with Jesuit Worldwide Learning, an online organization of the Society of Jesus, to help provide access to higher education for the most marginalised members of society, including refugees and migrants. Jesuit Worldwide Learning was founded in 2010 as Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, an initiative of Regis College in Massachusetts.³³ Since then it has grown to become an international organization which in 2024 reached over 13,000 students at 96 community learning centres in 36 countries.³⁴

²⁹ Adolfo Nicolás, 'Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today', *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, 40/1 (2011), 8.

³⁰ See <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/centers/iajs/programs/certificate-in-jesuit-studies-/course-descriptions/course-social-justice-in-jesuit-contexts.html>.

³¹ See <https://gpem.luc.edu/portal/program?name=divinitysocialjusticemdivma>.

³² See <https://www.aju.ac.zw/ba-honours-in-transformational-leadership-2/>.

³³ Peter Balleis, 'Reflection on Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins', *Jesuit Higher Education*, 5/2 (2016).

³⁴ Jesuit Worldwide Learning, Annual Report 2024, available at https://www.jwl.org/Downloads/Annual%20Reports/Annual%20Report%202024/annual_report_2024_web_finalfinal.pdf

In his commencement address at the University of Santa Clara on 12 June 1981, Ignacio Ellacuría spoke about intellectual presence. In his words:

The university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those who have no science; to provide skills for the unskilled; to be a voice for those who have no voice; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights.³⁵

The Society of Jesus needs such intellectual presence wherever it can promote social, economic and environmental justice. Intellectual presence is a call for Jesuit higher education to revisit its history in order to empower the disempowered, stand by and with and speak on behalf of the voiceless, and strive for the freedom and dignity of all.

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³⁵ Ignacio Ellacuría, 'The Task of a Christian University', in Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría and others, *Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 147–151, here 150.

THE TROUBLE WITH CATECHESIS

Thomas Flowers

IN MARCH OF 1550, Peter Canisius wrote an anxious letter to his Jesuit superiors in Rome, pleading for their prayers and counsel, and that they send him ‘a catechism for the Germans’.¹ Dismayed at the religious ignorance of his students at the University of Ingolstadt and the popularity of Lutheran ideas among the Catholic faculty, Canisius saw a new, Jesuit-created catechism as an essential tool for restoring the Catholic faith in Bavaria.

In June 2020, the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization issued a new *Directory for Catechesis*. Its authors note:

In the current situation, marked by a great distance between faith and culture, it is urgent to rethink the work of evangelisation with new categories and new languages that may serve to emphasise its missionary dimension’.²

The question of how to teach the faith to people grown sceptical and suspicious is not new. But as often as we attempt to answer it, we are dismayed to discover that the world has changed again and our catechetical methods have not kept pace with the language, needs and doubts that permeate our culture. Yet the work of St Peter Canisius—doctor of the Church and one of history’s most successful catechists—holds particular hope for the challenge offered by the new *Directory for Catechesis*. For Canisius’ catechism demonstrates the inherent adaptability of Catholic catechesis, and so how we might better meet the moment in which we find ourselves today.

¹ *Beati Petri Canisii, Societatis Iesu, epistolae et acta*, volume 1, edited by Otto Braunsberger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1896), 313. The original letter is in Italian; the translation is my own.

² Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2020), n.44 (subsequent references in the text).

The new *Directory for Catechesis* makes clear that the goal of catechesis must always remain enabling 'intimate communion with Christ', and in pursuit of this end, the local Church is called to inculturate the general principles of catechesis laid out by the *Directory* (nn.3–10). Increasing our knowledge of doctrine serves as a means toward the end of deepening our relationship with Christ. Yet if we present doctrine in a language people do not understand, if our theological constructions are arcane or bound to an irrelevant cultural context, then people will not understand the faith well enough to desire to know Christ. Given this challenge, the *Directory* does not itself attempt to engage in a definitive exposition of doctrine, but rather considers carefully the principles that ought to govern both how we teach the faith and how we form people to teach the faith.

The *Directory* makes its most significant foray into the content of catechesis in its discussion of the continued relevance of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published and promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1992 and issued in its definitive form in 1997. The *Directory* presents the *Catechism* as the Church's official and 'indispensable' guide for catechesis, and its four parts—the Profession of Faith (the creed), Liturgy (the sacraments), the Life of Discipleship (the commandments) and Prayer (the Our Father)—as 'the fundamental dimensions of the Christian life' (n.184). The *Directory* holds that the *Catechism* is 'a dynamic instrument, suitable for inspiring and nourishing the journey of faith in the life of every person' (n.169). While the *Catechism* itself does not contain a universally applicable methodology, the *Directory* nevertheless regards both its content and its approach as fundamental for any current-day catechetical endeavour.

The *Directory* roots its claim that the fourfold structure of the *Catechism* represents the 'fundamental dimensions of Christian life' in a line from the Acts of the Apostles: 'These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers' (Acts 2:42; NJB). It then goes on to assert that the same fourfold structure of the *Catechism* was used by the catechuminate in the early Church and by 'various' catechisms throughout the centuries. There has always been, according to the *Directory*, a fourfold approach to catechesis that uses the creed, the sacraments, the commandments and the Our Father as a way of teaching the four pillars of Christian life. Admittedly, the *Directory* is not primarily interested in the history of catechesis, and so some degree of historical oversimplification is

understandable. Yet an appreciation of how much more complex the actual history of catechesis is serves to advance the goal of the *Directory*.

The life of the Apostolic Church described in Acts 2:42 evokes the sort of holistic approach to catechesis we all desire: one that involves not just teaching, but public liturgy, private prayer and community. But this line from Acts did not provide the early Church with a fourfold structure for catechesis. In the early Church, the process of becoming a Christian—the catechumenate—involved both ritual actions and instruction. As the catechetical sermons of St Cyril of Jerusalem testify, teaching the creed was often a key component of preparation for sacramental initiation, and once new Christians had been baptized, confirmed and begun to participate in the eucharist, they were further taught about these sacraments they had received. Other Church Fathers, such as St Augustine of Hippo, point to the centrality of the Lord's Prayer in early church religious instruction. But there was no fixed programme for the catechumenate that was standard in all parts of the Church. No codified set of catechetical pillars existed.

In the Middle Ages and early modern period, books of catechesis were written—what we would now call 'catechisms'. Many of these taught the Christian faith using key texts and lists: for example, the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father, the cardinal and theological virtues, the seven deadly sins and the ten commandments. But there was no one curriculum, and many popular catechisms lacked one or more of the four texts the *Directory* and the *Catechism* regard as pillars. For example, the *Lay Folks' Catechism* issued by the archbishop of York in 1357 did not include the Our Father or any teaching on prayer, and the popular 1535 German catechism of Georg Witzel did not teach anything on the sacraments. The array of approaches and texts included among the Catholic catechisms produced up through the sixteenth century is vast, and while they are all clearly Catholic, they just as clearly do not agree on pedagogical principles or content.

Peter Canisius was the inheritor of this confused catechetical tradition. He also witnessed the enormous popularity and influence of the Protestant catechism written by Martin Luther in 1529. Luther's purposely simple catechism taught the Christian faith using the texts of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and the Our Father, with an appendix on the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. The popularity of Luther's catechism was part of what drove Canisius to desire the creation of a new Catholic catechism.



Peter Canisius, by A. E., 1546

the beatitudes, the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, obedience), the principal good works (prayer, fasting, almsgiving), and many more obscure topics, such as the four sins in scripture that are said to ‘cry unto heaven’ and the list of the ‘sins of another in which some fault is our own’.³

But the breadth of subjects he covers is not nearly as revealing of his catechetical approach as the way he arranges them. According to the new *Directory for Catechesis*, the commandments properly appear in Catholic catechesis as an exposition of the Life of Discipleship. Thus, the section on ‘Life in Christ’ in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* prominently features the Ten Commandments as categories to explain the moral life, outlining the obligations these commandments impose upon us and the particular sins they call us to avoid. On the other hand, Canisius frames his teaching of the Ten Commandments as an elaboration of the theological virtue of love. In this, he follows not only Christ’s teaching on the greatest commandment, but also a

The request that Canisius made of his Jesuit superiors in 1550 for a new catechism eventually resulted in Canisius writing the catechism himself. He published his first catechism in 1555, and then, over the next few years, he wrote smaller, simpler versions for young adolescents and children. Since there was no clear set of principles governing how to write a catechism, Canisius created his own. He included nearly everything: it is hard to find a catechism before or after Canisius that treats a more extensive set of topics. He certainly covers the creed, the sacraments, the commandments and the Our Father, but he also teaches the seven deadly sins,

³ Petrus Canisius, *Summa doctrinae Christianae* (1555), 2. 163, 2. 144.

catechetical tradition going back at least as far as St Augustine, linking the theological virtue of love to teaching the commandments. Canisius' explanations of each commandment are relatively brief, eschewing the sort of elaboration of Catholic moral teaching provided by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The reason for this choice lies in the structure of the catechism. Canisius' catechism has two parts: one on wisdom and one on justice. The part on wisdom contains his teaching on the creed, the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. The part on justice offers a first chapter on 'fleeing evil' and a second on 'pursuing the good'. This is Canisius' primary vehicle for moral instruction. It begins with a description of sin and why we should avoid it, and builds towards a portrait of blessedness based on imitating Christ in a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. When Canisius made the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, he had learned from his retreat director, St Pierre Favre, that in order to follow Christ, we need to know our sins, so we can reject them, and then to know Christ, so we can follow Him. Canisius could think of no better way to frame the moral life than this, so in his catechism he used traditional Catholic lists of sins and virtues as a means to teach his students how to reject evil and pursue the good.

In so many ways, Canisius' catechism bears the marks of its age: he speaks in the theological language of the sixteenth century, he uses texts and lists made popular by medieval catechesis, and his understanding of the Church and who can be saved, by our post-Vatican II standards, is severely limited. But the spirit of his catechesis embraces the most fundamental message at the heart of the new *Directory for Catechesis*: catechesis must be orientated towards 'intimate union with Christ' and adapted to the language and particular needs of the people whom it addresses. By teaching morality according to the logic of the Spiritual Exercises, Canisius offers a means of presenting the moral teachings of the Church in a way that is significantly more christocentric than any catechetical programme simply derived from the Ten Commandments. He did not deny the importance of the commandments, but found them a more apt way to describe the wisdom of God than to ground our life of Christian discipleship.

The new *Directory for Catechesis* again and again calls for a renewal of catechesis along evangelical lines, so that as we teach people the faith and help them to grow in it, all our efforts keep 'the person of Jesus Christ, living, present, and active' at their centre (n. 169). This enterprise,

the *Directory* makes clear, requires that we know the people whom we teach and that we respond to their questions and concerns in a way they will understand. Catechesis must be adaptable. Yet the *Directory* presumes a consistency in catechetical methodology and structure over the centuries that the complicated history of catechesis belies.

Our somewhat erratic efforts at catechesis over the centuries suggest that perhaps we need worry less about specific texts and catechetical pillars and more about how to bring people to Christ while keeping grounded in the teachings of the Church. St Peter Canisius has been consistently lauded by popes—including St John Paul II and Benedict XVI—for the wisdom and effectiveness of his catechetical efforts, and yet his approach to catechesis does not cling to what we tend to assume are necessary catechetical norms. Perhaps his ability to adapt catechesis so radically while staying true to Christ and the Church's teaching has something to tell us about how to teach the faith today.

Thomas Flowers SJ is a member of the USA West Jesuit Province and is studying for a PhD in Jesuit history at the University of York.

RECENT BOOKS

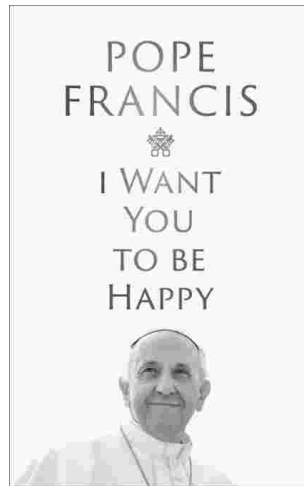
Pope Francis, *I Want You to be Happy: Finding Peace and Abundance in Everyday Life*, translated by Oonagh Stransky (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2025). 978 1 3998 1198 9, pp.256, £10.99.

In a world overflowing with noise, distraction and contradiction, *I Want You to Be Happy* reads like a clear, compassionate voice calling out from the wilderness. Pope Francis's short but weighty volume is really for *everyone*, for all who find themselves tired, disconnected or quietly wondering whether true happiness is still possible in the midst of everything that modern life demands. Rather than a theological treatise, this is a book that speaks plainly, accessibly and personally. Its message is as old as the gospel, and yet it feels strikingly fresh—almost prophetic for our current moment.

While reading, I was reminded again and again of the quiet call at the heart of the Christian life: a call to joy, not distraction; to simplicity, not excess; to truth, not performance. In an age bursting with accessible pleasures, opinions, curated images and all sorts of surface-level connection, Francis gently but firmly asks: are we truly happy? Are we, as Christians living in this maelstrom of modernity, able to tap into the joy of our faith, or are we allowing ourselves to be pulled further away by things that leave us tired, dry and absent?

The strength of this book lies in how Francis reshapes our understanding of happiness. This is not a feel-good manual or a checklist of spiritual tips. It is a journey through layers, gently peeled back, to help the reader rediscover what happiness is, and just as importantly, what it is not. Francis names, without fear or euphemism, the very things that so many of us struggle with today: fear of missing out, self-image, social-media addiction, anxiety, isolation, the loss of silence, and a gnawing disconnection from ourselves and others. His words carry weight not because they are new, but because they are true and spoken with love.

There is a deep sense of universality in this book. It is addressed widely: to young and old, believers and seekers, those on the fringes and those well



within the fold. It transcends age, class and background. And while it speaks clearly to the heart of the modern world, it never condemns. It consoles, even as it challenges. Francis does not let us off the hook, but neither does he leave us without hope. He speaks candidly, sometimes bluntly, but always with gentleness and at times humour. He grounds spiritual truths in real human experience, making theological ideas accessible and tangible.

One of the recurring themes that struck me most is courage: courage to be oneself, courage to dream, courage to listen to the quiet inner voice of the Spirit which moves each of us. Francis urges us to swim against the tide, something he repeats more than once. It is not enough simply to recognise where we have gone astray. We are invited to wake up. The world, he warns, has ways of anaesthetizing us. He names this clearly. When we are lulled by false comforts or shallow promises, we risk losing touch with who we really are and what truly matters.

Another powerful section focuses on freedom. What does real freedom look like? For Francis it is not the world's definition of doing whatever we please, but rather the inner freedom to choose love, truth and goodness. He turns many modern assumptions upside down in the light of what the gospel teaches. He invites us to look again at the world, not with cynicism or fear, but with the eyes of Christ. We are not defined by productivity or public opinion. Our value is not up for negotiation. Each of us is a beloved child of God, individually known and personally loved.

As I read, I kept returning to that well known phrase from Isaiah: a voice crying in the wilderness (40:3). That, to me, is the spirit of this book. In the unrelenting static of our times, where everyone seems to be shouting and few are really listening, Francis's book feels like a quiet, yet urgent, invitation. If only we would stop long enough to hear it.

What makes his message so compelling is the way it holds the reader. Yes, there are challenges. I was confronted at times with uncomfortable truths, such as my own distractions, my lack of attention in relationships or the ways I fall short in serving others. And yet, I never felt condemned. Francis continually points the reader back to God's mercy. There is no guilt-trip here, only an ever-renewed call to return to the One who knows us, loves us and longs for our joy. Francis reminds us that we are each prodigal daughters and sons of God. And, as in the parable, we are not met with reproach but with open arms.

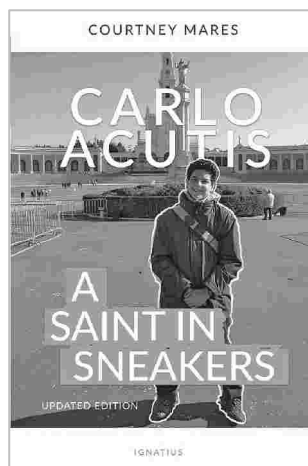
At its heart, *I Want You to Be Happy* is a book of profound consolation. But it is not comfort without depth. It demands that we examine what really brings joy, what really matters and whether we are truly living in the freedom we were made for. It calls us to let go of illusions, not to fall into despair, but so that we can receive something greater.

This is a book I will return to, and one I will recommend widely. For those looking for a theological deep-dive, this is not it, but perhaps that is precisely what makes it so important. Pope Francis's words carry the weight of experience, not abstraction. He speaks plainly, without jargon, and yet what he offers is anything but shallow. There is a deep earthiness to his message, a simplicity that does not dilute the truth but makes it more accessible, more human. He reminds us that some of the most profound insights about God arrive clothed in the language of everyday life. He offers not just thoughts, but presence. And through his words, we hear again the voice of Christ, quietly calling each one of us towards a happiness that is real, lasting and liberating.

Syed Mikhael Ahmad

Courtney Mares, *Blessed Carlo Acutis: A Saint in Sneakers* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2023). 978 1 6216 4544 3, pp.185, £14.99.

The recent canonization of St Carlo Acutis (1991–2006) has placed a fifteen-year-old boy in the spotlight of the world. This biography, by a Rome-based journalist, gives a comprehensive account of his life, death and subsequent beatification, with great attention to the personal details revealing his character. It masterfully interweaves his story with that of the rise of the modern internet, with a deep appreciation for the spirituality of those born into the digital age. It also offers insights into the Roman Catholic faith along the way—making it accessible to believers and non-believers alike.



The story begins in London, where Carlo was born to wealthy Italian parents. Shortly after his baptism they moved to live in Milan, where a Polish nanny was instrumental in Carlo's early piety. His childhood is described with an air of normality as he goes to kindergarten and then to elementary school. However there are streaks of unexpected grace running through it right from the start, as his piety begins to flourish in acts of generosity amongst his friends. The biographer pays particular attention to Carlo's reception of the sacraments, when it seems as though 'something had happened within him, known only to him, something too great for him to contain' (32). It is clear that even at a very young age his growing faith was already an encouragement to the faith of his parents, especially as he became devoted to the eucharist. Later, they sought a Hindu carer for him who converted to Catholicism under Carlo's inspiration.

He received his first computer as a gift in the year 2000 and dedicated himself to learning not just how to use it, but how it worked. His talent for adapting to new technology would later come to the surface when he wrote a website and created an exhibition to popularise devotion to eucharistic miracles. The occasion for this was his mother's foundation of an institute for the propagation of the fundamental truths of our faith.

Some readers might be somewhat aghast that a young boy so immersed in the modern world would believe in miracles that go against the grain of modern science: those miracles that the Church has declared 'worthy of belief' without saying that all should necessarily believe them. However the biographer easily communicates Carlo's enthusiastic fondness for these miracles in a way that is difficult to resist. It is clear how learning about them simply offered a way to help to deepen Carlo's faith. He came to believe firmly in the real presence of Jesus in the eucharist, and it inspired within him the desire to lead other people to that same faith.

Throughout his life, Carlo's holiness was never a matter of self-contained, private devotion, but rather was shared with his peers, especially as he began to come to maturity in a Jesuit high school. He was not just generous with his schoolfriends, but also with parishioners and the homeless, and, most significantly, through his ministry of evangelization to countless people on the internet. Undoubtedly Carlo offers a model of holiness for the new millennium, and especially for a generation of young people attempting to evangelize the digital world in the same way that previous generations evangelized its territorial counterpart. He offers a constant reminder that holiness is not just for a select few, but for all of us, each in our unique way, and that that call to holiness is just as valid in the modern world as it was in any other period of the Church's history.

Carlo died rapidly, first complaining of a sore throat, then being diagnosed with a blood condition and finally a rare form of leukaemia. He died twelve days after first seeing a doctor. His father said of his faith:

He understood that he was headed toward a wonderful goal, far greater than anything we could experience in earthly life, and this made him happy. He had believed it all the way until his last breath. He wanted with all his heart to go to heaven even while he was on this earth. (113)

In a world that casts so much doubt on Christian belief, the simplicity of his faith gives a luminous testament to the possibility of living in that unbelieving world with a degree of tranquillity. That is one of the greatest legacies that he has left us.

After Carlo's death, reports of miracles followed swiftly, and the appeal of his own belief in the miraculous lends them credit. It can hardly be

denied that his life has already begun to inspire the lives of countless young people. Recently I gave a talk to students at the University of Manchester about his life. When I spoke about the emergence of the internet in the 1990s they looked at me as though I were speaking about ancient history. The world has changed a great deal since then. However they found deeply appealing the simplicity of Carlo's faith, his generosity and the hope that he generates that the Church can and will fulfil its mission in every age.

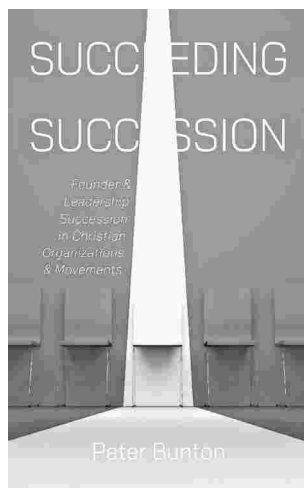
His body was laid to rest, wearing tracksuit and trainers, in the Sanctuary of the Spoliation in Assisi, because of his devotion to St Francis. The reason he himself gave for this devotion was that St Francis 'prayed a lot for sinners, for their salvation. He was always making sacrifices, saying no to desserts, no to video games and films.' (55) The modern world is beset by consumerism, and Carlo grew up in the midst of it. However he sought to cultivate the opposite in his own spiritual life: a life that did not negate the modern world but found tranquillity within it by offering his life for others in a spirit of prayer and sacrifice.

Philip Harrison SJ

Peter Bunton, *Succeeding at Succession: Founder and Leadership Succession in Christian Organizations and Movements* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2023). 978 1 6667 6682 0, pp.314, £27.00.

How do you replace the founder of a prominent international Christian organization? With great difficulty, it would seem. In *Succeeding at Succession*, Peter Bunton provides timely insight and guidance for the sensitive, often complex, process of leadership transition within Christian movements. His book offers both scholarly rigour and practical wisdom, making it a significant contribution for leaders, theologians and anyone navigating the legacy of founding figures.

In an era when many Christian organizations are grappling with ageing founders, shifting cultural landscapes and increased scrutiny of leadership structures, Bunton's work is both timely and prophetic. Leadership succession is not simply an organizational or managerial issue; it is a profoundly spiritual and human one. Bunton recognises that the transition from founder to successor affects not just vision and strategy, but identity, theology, culture and emotional continuity.



The book opens with a critical review of the existing literature on founder succession and Christian leadership transitions. Bunton identifies significant gaps in research and offers what he calls a ‘fresh approach’ through the use of a generative or dialectic interview method, supported by documentary analysis. This qualitative research design enables him to reflect on a priori assumptions about leadership succession and to explore deeper undercurrents shaping these transitions. The dialectic method, based on co-created meaning-making between researcher and participant, draws out the spiritual, psychological and cultural complexities often missed by purely strategic or technical approaches.

The book is structured in three parts: a review of existing literature and theory, an in-depth analysis of three case studies, and a final section offering theological reflection and practical strategies for succession planning. This structure makes the work accessible to a range of readers, from academics interested in qualitative research to Christian leaders actively considering their own organizational future. At the heart of the book are the three rich case studies drawn from international Christian organisations, each of which experienced a leadership handover from a founding figure.

- **Newfrontiers (UK).** This is a network of churches that evolved from a 1960s evangelistic movement into a global apostolic network with over 850 churches in sixty countries. Bunton explores the succession process within this structure, paying special attention to how the departure of the founder affected the organization’s theological and relational cohesion.
- **Grace Network (USA).** Founded in 1980, this network supports church planting, biblical teaching and pastoral care. The case study shows how leadership transition was navigated with intentionality, seeking to preserve the founder’s vision while opening space for new leadership voices and cultural shifts.
- **International Aid Services (Sweden).** This mission and development agency, founded in 1989 to assist conflict-affected populations, had grown to employ over 350 staff across ten countries by 2015. Bunton investigates how the organization balanced humanitarian objectives with the challenges of leadership succession, especially in a cross-cultural context.

These case studies are not presented as blueprints but as lived stories, filled with tensions, discernments, risks and graces. Bunton brings their narratives to life with authenticity and empathy. They offer tangible illustrations of the principles he discusses, making the concepts easier to understand and apply. His own experience as a long-standing member of

the Bruderhof community, and a leader within the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians, lends him a grounded and ecumenical perspective. This is not a book of abstract theory; rather, it is a theologically rooted, practical reflection infused with real-world insight.

One of the recurring themes in the book is the fear that accompanies succession planning. Bunton identifies several anxieties that founders and organizations may experience: the fear of losing distinctive Christian values; the fear of bureaucratisation and a decline in spiritual vitality; and the fear that the founder might remain in post too long, inadvertently blocking renewal. These fears, Bunton suggests, are real but not insurmountable. With thoughtful planning, transparent processes, and spiritual maturity, organizations can face these fears directly and faithfully.

Another major emphasis is early and intentional succession planning. Bunton argues that the conversation must begin while the founder is still in a position of influence. If initiated wisely, this allows the process to unfold gradually and collaboratively, without causing others to feel that they are prematurely trying to remove a respected leader. Founders, he argues, must help model the very vulnerability and discernment they hope to instil in the next generation.

Theologically, Bunton is deeply rooted. He cautions against uncritically adopting secular leadership models and insists on framing leadership transitions within a Christian understanding of vocation, calling and discernment. For Bunton, leadership is never merely functional, it is spiritual, relational and sacrificial. Leaders are stewards, not owners, of their roles and responsibilities. By reflecting on the theological meaning of transition, organizations are better able to align their succession processes with their spiritual identity and mission.

While the first half of the book is quite academic, particularly in its review of literature and explanation of methodology, it remains accessible thanks to Bunton's clear structuring. Each chapter is broken into manageable sections with clear subheadings, helping readers engage without being overwhelmed. Readers unfamiliar with academic writing might find some passages dense, but they will also find much to reward their persistence, especially in the richly illustrated case studies and concluding practical chapters.

The final chapters are especially strong, offering step-by-step guidance on how to plan for and manage a successful transition. These include:

- early and intentional planning: initiating the conversation while the founder is still active to allow for gradual, healthy change;
- developing internal leadership: investing in the spiritual and organizational formation of emerging leaders to ensure continuity;

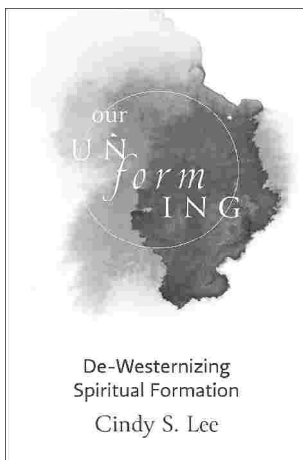
- theological reflection: developing a shared theological understanding of leadership and succession within the community;
- balancing continuity and innovation: helping successors honour the founder's legacy while also giving them the freedom to lead authentically.

Bunton's tone is encouraging, respectful and wise. He does not prescribe a single model for succession, nor does he gloss over the pain and messiness that often accompany these moments. Instead, he walks alongside his readers, offering a map, not a mandate. He encourages leaders to engage the process with humility, openness to the Spirit, and a long view of their organization's calling. More than a manual on leadership change, this book invites Christian organizations to discern how the Spirit continues to lead through endings and new beginnings.

Ultimately, *Succeeding at Succession* is a gift to the Church. It equips Christian leaders to honour the past, embrace the future, and navigate the liminal space between with clarity and care. For any faith-based organization asking the question, *What comes next?* Bunton's work offers a deeply considered and faithful response. It will resonate with seasoned leaders approaching transition, emerging leaders stepping into new roles, and boards and councils discerning how to serve the future of their mission. Whether you are a founder, a successor, or a faithful steward of organizational life, this book will serve as both compass and companion.

Bernadette Miles

Cindy S. Lee:, *Our Unforming: De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2022). 978 1 5064 8478 5, pp.154, £16.99.



How we are formed spiritually depends on many factors besides the spiritual tradition we inhabit, most of which are at work in us unconsciously. The way we understand time, how we respond to uncertainty, our attitude to dependence and the place of elders in our society are just some of the areas touched on in Cindy Lee's exploration of how Western culture has dominated spiritual formation and how limiting it is to assume that this is the only valid perspective.

This is an accessible book and the overall tone affirms a wide range of perspectives. Lee's hope is that if we are open to 'unforming'

where Western assumptions have led to a limited understanding of spiritual formation, insights from other cultures could help us gain a more holistic spirituality as well as affirm people from non-Western traditions and their heritage. In her explorations of what different cultures bring to the table regarding spiritual formation, Lee points out the damage that was done by Western missionaries in their wholesale rejection of deeply held cultural values that appeared on the surface to be incompatible with Christianity. Embracing a wider approach, she argues, would expand our understanding and experience of God, and provide a spirituality that is more relevant to our diverse and complex world. She writes that our 'collective soul as a church will atrophy if one culture or tradition holds the power and control over what is taught and practised in the church' (2).

Lee is a spiritual director and an 'urban explorer'. She is also a retreat giver and an academic. She writes as an Asian woman who lives in the USA, but she also draws on the wisdom accumulated in Black, Latine, Indigenous and other voices from around the world. One of the most interesting aspects of the book for this reviewer was reading about how she has found herself continually being asked to conform to a Western way of being and behaving, the assumption being that it is the obvious and only way. Her early life was spent in Taiwan which has heightened her awareness of the disconnect and enables her to speak with authority about crossing cultures and experiencing the impact of it all upon spiritual formation. As a spiritual director she is concerned with spiritual transformation, so she sets out what she understands by this and by the concept of 'soul', which she describes as a space where the sacred self dwells and where prayer happens.

Her book is divided into three 'cultural orientations' and nine 'postures'—postures being ways that we enter practically into the spiritual life. Each 'orientation' shows how formation shifts when we take into account other cultural ways of being. The three orientations cover attitudes to time, from linear to cyclical; how we experience the world, from cerebral to experiential; and the way we relate to one another, from individual to collective. The spiritual life, Lee insists, requires a continuous cycle of unforming and re-forming. Unforming includes the false ways of this world, not least the harmful effects of colonialism and racism that have penetrated the Church.

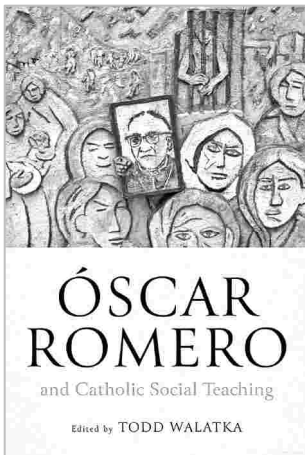
Western ways of being run very deep in the global Churches, sometimes because their leaders were trained in Western seminaries and are now unable to imagine that they can do things any differently. De-Westernising spiritual formation has to be done in an intentional way to help the global Church re-imagine spirituality in richer and more diverse forms. Each chapter ends with some questions for reflection and discussion on our own experience, based on the material in that chapter. It would be an ideal book for a group to study together. Lee also includes suggestions for further reading.

For this Western reviewer, there were challenging aspects to some of the themes in the book, yet stories from other cultures highlight the limitations of thinking there is only one way of seeing in so many areas of life, some of which we already know. Consider how the lack of respect for the elderly in many Western contexts, for example, could be re-imagined by paying attention to alternative forms of intergenerational living. Attitudes towards work and rest, to the imagination, to uncertainty are all shaped by the underlying culture; and we are surely aware that Western individualism and the encouragement towards independence will not build the Church as the body of Christ in the way that a more collectivist and dependent culture makes possible.

It is also abundantly clear that the Western emphasis on a linear understanding of progress is full of pitfalls when translated into the spiritual realm. It has strengths which are acknowledged in the book, but most people experience their spiritual formation as a tangled mess of movement forwards only to slip back into confusion and struggle. What do other cultures experience in this and other areas that could help us become more whole? Lee, by her own admission, is writing as a spiritual director and not a theologian, but there is plenty of room for further theological reflection on what she has to offer to take her insights further with regard to how we are formed and transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Elizabeth A. Hoare

Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching, edited by Todd Walatka (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame P, 2024). 978 0 2682 0875 2, pp.402, \$65.00.



Who was God for Óscar Romero? For the Salvadoran archbishop, God was both an encounter and a profound mystery, something both incomprehensible and deeply personal, revealed through the beauty and harshness of human life. Humanity can never fully grasp God's essence; at best, we can sense God's presence in those around us. And when that presence fades, we feel its absence sharply, our hearts crying out, *Where are you, my beloved? Why have you abandoned me?* This tension, between encounter and absence, becomes a lifelong struggle for those who seek God. However, how can such

pain be a source of hope? Is this not a contradiction? Saints such as Monsignor Óscar Romero offer an answer, opening a window into a reality accessible to those who are willing to be led by faith.

Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching offers an intimate look into Romero's spiritual and human journey. It invites readers to accompany him from his childhood in Ciudad Barrios, El Salvador, in the early twentieth century, through his priestly formation and into his turbulent tenure as bishop during one of the country's darkest historical periods. The book skilfully brings Romero's world to life: we see not only the external events but also the inner struggles of a man who battled with perfectionism, shyness and the challenge of forging deep human connections.

One of the most powerful sections of the book reveals a spiritual discovery that sustained Romero: the profound human vulnerability of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was not only a role model of love and service but also a man who endured sorrow and misunderstanding, even from his closest companions. This realisation became a wellspring of strength for Romero, especially as he faced rejection by members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the political elites of El Salvador.

A standout feature of this book is the calibre of its contributors, scholars who are not only experts in their fields but, in several cases, also knew Romero personally. Their insights reveal Romero's gift for listening and his openness to the wisdom of others. He distilled these encounters into concrete pastoral action. Above all, Romero emerges as a shepherd, someone who guided, accompanied and protected his people. The book is rich with examples of this pastoral style, showing how Romero's homilies, for instance, were born from a threefold dialogue: with the lived reality of El Salvador's poor, with fellow pastoral workers and with God in prayerful silence.

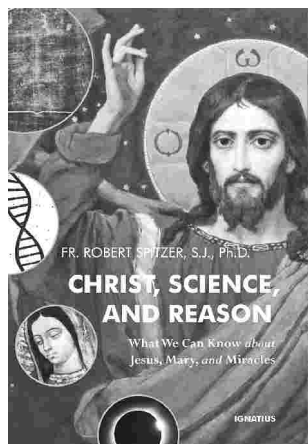
The authors also highlight Romero's deep engagement with the Church. He was shaped by the transformative spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the groundbreaking reflections of the bishops' assemblies in Medellín and Puebla. His faithfulness to the Church did not mean blind obedience; rather, he allowed these documents and teachings, alongside the raw suffering of his people, to challenge and transform him. His homilies and actions became living contributions to Catholic Social Teaching, embodying the Church's call for justice and dignity for the oppressed.

In summary, this book offers a compelling and insightful journey for anyone seeking to understand who God was for Óscar Romero. It also serves as an invaluable resource for exploring the Roman Catholic Church's social teaching, providing a dual perspective on Romero's spiritual legacy and the complex socio-political history of El Salvador.

Luis Orlando Pérez SJ

Robert Spitzer, *Christ, Science, and Reason: What We Can Know about Jesus, Mary, and Miracles* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2024).

978 1 6216 4743 0, pp.361, \$21.95.



In this scholarly book, Robert Spitzer looks at the scientific evidence for many well-known miraculous events across different parts of the world and over several centuries. He defines miracles as ‘supernatural phenomena’, which appear ‘to be naturalistically inexplicable’ (158). Spitzer details what scientists present as evidence for the miraculous nature of certain hosts; of the Turin shroud; of the Guadalupe *tilma* image; of the miracle of the dancing sun at Fátima; and of the healings of Lourdes. For those unfamiliar with any of these miraculous phenomena, they are explained in detail: what happened; where

they occurred; how they have been received by Church authorities; and their continuing impact on the lives of the faithful today.

Spitzer argues not only that these phenomena are scientifically inexplicable, but also that when scientifically examined they corroborate the case for the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as His real presence in the eucharist. They likewise reveal ‘the cosmic and salvific significance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her answer to our prayers’ (16).

The chapter ‘Science and Eucharistic Miracles’ examines ‘special events in which a consecrated Host (with organic compounds ordinarily constitutive of bread) undergoes transmutation into living human heart tissue with white blood cells and other living blood constituents’ (163). Spitzer also details the scientific investigations that have taken place into the Lanciano host (1970), the host of Tixla (2006), the host of Sokółka (2008) and the host of Buenos Aires (1996). Summarising the investigation of the Lanciano host overseen by Dr Edoardo Linoli, Spitzer says: ‘The Host is constituted by authentic flesh consisting of muscular striated tissue of the myocardium’ (164). Similar claims are made for the other three miraculous hosts. It is significant that with regard to these eucharistic miracles, Spitzer points out that his ‘purpose ... is not to delve into the theology and philosophy of this kind of substantial change’, but simply to give weight to their miraculous nature (63).

When it comes to the shroud of Turin, Spitzer tells us that recent analysis has discredited the 1988 carbon dating that placed the shroud’s origin between AD 1260 and 1390 (97). He details five new dating tests and

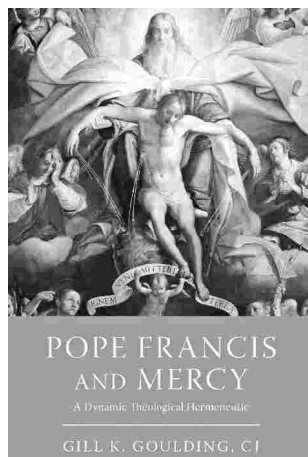
other extrinsic dating evidence, such as the presence of Palestinian pollen grains, that appear to point to a first-century origin for the shroud in Judaea. Spitzer concludes that recent scientific evidence demonstrates that the Turin shroud appears to be the burial cloth of Christ, and that the likelihood of the shroud being a forgery is 'positively miniscule' (152). What Spitzer terms the '*nonscientific* reasonable evidence for the historicity and Resurrection of Jesus' (57) is set out well and in considerable detail, demonstrating that there is evidence for the rationality of belief prior to the miraculous experiences. He sees scientific proof of the miraculous nature of certain phenomena as bolstering non-scientific evidence for the truths of Catholic faith.

Spitzer defends the Roman Catholic Church against the accusation that it is the enemy of science, detailing the contribution of various Catholic clerics to the development of all branches of science. With regard to the sentencing of Galileo, Spitzer says that the problem for the Church was that heliocentrism could not be proven as a fact. While mentioning the public apology of Pope John Paul II for the Church's actions and acknowledging that 'in retrospect, Galileo's sentence was too harsh', he nonetheless defends Galileo's trial, in so far as 'the court believed that Galileo had recklessly undermined the veracity of Scripture without the appropriate proof' (283).

Perhaps the densest section of the book is that which deals with the science of evolution versus the biblical account of creation, and what the Hungarian scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi had to say on this subject. Spitzer explains that biblical and scientific accounts of creation are quite different, but that does not mean that they are in conflict; rather, as the 1943 encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* makes clear, they have different purposes. As Thomas Aquinas discerned, they cannot be in conflict, since they come from the *same source*—the mind of God. Spitzer can appear ambiguous on this point. He says, for example, 'if we allow each domain to articulate its truth by means of its own proper method, and acknowledge the limits of those methods, there would be virtually no conflicts between faith and science' (302). The word 'virtually' is perhaps problematic. Again, this time following Bellarmine, Spitzer says: 'if a fact that seems contrary to Scripture is scientifically demonstrated, we should reinterpret the Scriptures rather than contradict a scientifically demonstrated fact'. (302). Spitzer, of course, would not wish to give the impression that science, as it were trumps, scripture.

Nonetheless this is an important book in so far as, with comprehensive citations throughout, it explains the miraculous events themselves and the findings of modern scholarship which claim to prove their miraculous nature through scientific means.

Gill K. Goulding, *Pope Francis and Mercy: A Dynamic Theological Hermeneutic* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame P, 2023). 978 0 2682 0644 4, pp. 276, \$40.00.



‘We are called to promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters.’ ‘I would thus propose the graphic image of inter-relating myopia and hyperopia such that relating to the immediacy of what is seen in the fullness of temporal short-sightedness is integral to the fullness of perception of long-sightedness.’¹ These two quotations appear in the same chapter of the work under review. The first is from Pope Francis, the second from Gill

Goulding herself. Set alongside each other in this way they illustrate the strengths, and the challenges, to be encountered in approaching this book.

There is widespread agreement that the concept of mercy was central to the ministry and teaching of Pope Francis. He desired that everyone, without exception, should be given the chance personally to encounter the loving, merciful and forgiving God, and that the Church’s ministers should be above all conveyors of this mercy. As a theme it runs through his encyclicals, homilies and other writings. Goulding uses this rich source material to ‘re-appropriate’ the theological foundations of mercy. She looks, too, at the writings of those theologians in dialogue with whom Francis developed his ideas: his immediate papal predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as well as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Romano Guardini, Walter Kaspar and others. This approach, as she understands it, is able to weave together ecclesiology, christology and the doctrine of the Trinity in new and significant ways. Each of these three theological areas has a dedicated chapter in which Goulding develops her understanding.

For most readers of *The Way*, the second chapter, in which the Ignatian influences on the Jesuit Pope Francis are traced, may well resonate most clearly. Unsurprisingly, it is the Spiritual Exercises which prove fundamental here, with the mercy that the sinful exercitants encounter in their meeting with

¹ These quotations are taken from chapter 3 of the book, ‘Specific Christological Underpinnings of Mercy’, on pages 69 and 63 respectively.

God in the First Week resulting in a mission to be ‘mercifying’ themselves, discerned in more detail as the Exercises’ dynamic unfolds. It is the image of, and devotion to, the heart of the wounded Christ in which this mercy shown by God to humanity is most clearly encountered. And Pope Francis himself demonstrated his debt to the Exercises in the way in which his leadership style was able to combine the needs of guidance and of governance, in a manner that can be ultimately traced to the working of the Holy Spirit.

It would be wrong to think of this book as an easy read. The fact that its 134 pages of main text are followed by another 110 of postscript, appendices, notes, bibliography and index hints at this. In mapping the streams feeding into Pope Francis’s approach to mercy, Goulding is in dialogue with theologians whose work is itself frequently dense and technical. As shown in the second quotation at the beginning of this review, her own writing can at times take considerable unpacking. By contrast the frequent passages from Francis’s works which she presents are usually clear on a first reading, which throws the contrast in style into high relief. But the topic is an important one, since we are now in a position to reach a comprehensive overview of the thinking of the late Pope (Francis was still alive and adding to his own writings frequently at the time when Goulding was writing the book). The fact that she is prepared to cross some of the usual boundaries within the discipline of theology, and look at the Church, and the Trinity, and the nature of Christ Himself, offers an uncommonly wide and comprehensive view of her chosen topic.

Actions speak louder than words or, as Ignatius Loyola says in the *Spiritual Exercises*, ‘Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words’. Many will remember Pope Francis as much by recalling what he did as by rereading what he wrote. From the smiling greeting offered to the crowds by the figure in a simple white cassock on the night of his election to the papacy, through the rain-drenched Pope leading prayers of intercession on the steps of St Peter’s during the pandemic, to the almost offhand ‘Who am I to judge?’ with which he responded to a journalist’s question on one of his travels, and the embraces offered to disabled and needy people on those same travels, Francis demonstrated that loving mercy of God that clearly formed the foundation of his own faith. Goulding’s work both shows something of where that faith came from, and points to its implications for the Church as it moves forward. No easy task, but one of value for those prepared to engage with it.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Pamela Baker Powell, *Friendship: The Forgotten Spiritual Discipline* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2024). 978 1 6667 5036 2, pp.142, £17.00.



We all need friends, and this slim book is an exploration and celebration of Christian friendship. It turns out that friendship has one surprising, overlooked, almost forgotten aspect: its spiritual quality. Participation in the joy of friendship is a spiritual blessing which affects all those engaged in friendships. Powell has embraced the topic of friendship in a deep and profound way, taking us from Aristotle's three categories of friendship ('useful', 'pleasant' and 'good') to the Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx's 'four stages of friendship' that can challenge us to encounter God as the nexus of our friendships. I read this fascinating book

against the backdrop of a growing culture of social and racial intolerance and lack of friendship throughout the world, a context in which it feels particularly welcome.

Powell suggests that God is inherently relational, with the Trinity implying a constant communion of spiritual love and friendship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She goes on to present the spiritual dimension of friendship as showing how we can and should relate to each other and to God. Aelred understood friendship as eternal, beginning in Christ, being preserved in the Spirit of Christ and returning to Christ. Powell suggests, therefore, that friendship has a crucial spiritual dimension based on practices that deepen one's life in Christ and with each other. She summarises the distinctions between the Greek words for love:

... *agape*—the love that God extends to us and the love that through God we extend to others; *eros*—the love of physical passion and the love of beauty and the arts; *philia*—the love that we have for our friends; *storge*—the love that is affection for things and people we like. (40)

The 'heart and core of friendship', she asserts, is love as *agape*, 'the love of God in Christ flowing through the world' (41).

She then proceeds to unpack the spiritual dimension of friendship within the domains of the good life, time and the invitation to friendships with each other and with the Trinity. Her exploration of friendship within the group and the family was particularly interesting and useful, with numerous examples taken from the author's personal life and friends which gave flesh

to the conceptual bones, bringing the concept of friendship to life. Powell's attention to friendship in relation to sadness, pain and lament is a welcome addition, as these aspects of friendship are often downplayed and forgotten. Powell concludes her book by revisiting Aelred, or more accurately, physically visiting Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire as a form of pilgrimage while taking in the delights of Betty's Tea Rooms and engaging in a conversation with her husband about Aelred's teaching on friendship.

There were a few issues that niggled a bit. As a Pentecostal Christian, Powell appears to accept much of the rhetoric around the 'prosperity gospel', and her chapter on 'the good life' seems to equate it with material prosperity. Sometimes she seems a little unrealistic, seeing the formation of a bible study group, for example, as an easy, if somewhat simplistic, way of forming long-term friendships: in an ordinary parish this may not be as easy as it looks. The example of the idealized family portrayed on page 47 also does not work well outside the US context. That being said, however, Powell also gives numerous examples of family life, much of it from her own personal experience, that are more authentic and far from idyllic.

Nevertheless, this is a well-written and useful introduction to the area of spiritual friendship.

Christopher Barber

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