RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD

The Throne of Grace
13th-century wall painting
from St Christophorus Church, Hausfeld, Remda-Teichel, Germany
Id quod volo: The Erotic Grace of the Second Week

Robert R. Marsh

During the Second Week of the Exercises, we are called to grow in the love of Christ—it is only on this basis that good discernments about discipleship can be made. Rob Marsh uncovers some erotic elements in the Ignatian process, and offers directors of the Exercises some provocative suggestions about love.

Pierre Favre and the Experience of Salvation

Michel de Certeau

Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) began his distinguished academic career with studies of two great French-speaking Jesuit figures in the history of spirituality: Jean-Joseph Surin (1600-1665) and Pierre Favre (1506-1540). To mark Favre’s centenary, we publish in English this classic, eloquent article which brings out the relational warmth of Favre’s spiritual personality.

Ignatian Spirituality and Positive Psychology

Phyllis Zagano and C. Kevin Gillespie

Classically, psychology has often focused on how people’s lives are going wrong; by contrast, Positive Psychology, an approach developed in the last decade, aims to build on what is going well in our lives. A theologian and a Jesuit psychologist explore the convergences between this new psychological approach and Ignatian spirituality.

Marital Spirituality: A Spiritual Paradigm-Shift

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi

Married people today are discovering and claiming a genuine spirituality at the heart of their relationships. As they do so, they are inaugurating a quite new way of understanding spirituality.

That They May Be One: An Interchurch Marriage

Ruth Reardon

Ruth and Martin Reardon were founder members of the Association of Interchurch Families. Ruth here writes of how she and Martin met and fell in love, and of how a genuine interchurch marriage became possible during the Conciliar period.
Kierkegaard the Celibate

Thomas G. Casey

Celibacy should not be a state of mere singleness, but rather a rich form of relatedness to God and to God’s people. Tom Casey explores what celibacy meant for Søren Kierkegaard, the noted Danish philosopher.

Cities and Human Community: Spirituality and the Urban

Philip Sheldrake

Human life is becoming increasingly urban, a point with profound spiritual implications. What is the Christian vision of the good city? What makes for enriching human relationships and the fulfilment of authentic desire in the circumstances of modern urban life?

Prayer and Ecology

André Louf

A distinguished French Cistercian reflects on the deep connections between the life of prayer and an appreciation of God’s gifts in nature and creation.

Animals as Grace: On Being an Animal Liturgist

Andrew Linzey

It is a commonplace to think of spirituality as bound up with human relationships, and also with creation as a whole. But what of other created beings such as animals? A leading writer in the field of animal theology explores the question of animals and Christian liturgy.

FOR AUTHORS

The Way warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal’s aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. Further details can be found on The Way’s website, www.theway.org.uk. In the second half of 2007, we will be publishing a special issue entitled Spirituality and Social Transformation. Contributions to this project will be especially welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

THROUGHOUT 2006, THE IGNATIAN FAMILY has been marking the 450th anniversary of Ignatius’ death, and also the fifth centenary of the births of his first two companions, Pierre Favre (1506-1546) and Francis Xavier (1506-1552). In some ways, the first three issues of The Way this year have echoed the special gifts of these three figures in turn. An issue on ‘Directing the Imagination’ in January evoked the remarkable sensitivity of Pierre Favre as a spiritual director; ‘Ignatian Experimenting’ in April was centred on Ignatius’ quite specific programme of formation for ministry; and ‘Exploring Difference’ in July took up the missionary thrust of Christianity towards new frontiers, as exemplified by the remarkable journeys of Francis Xavier. But the celebrations were always intended to recall not simply these three remarkable personalities in their own right, but also the fact that their charisms and gifts grew out of a powerful mutuality between them. Their spiritual genius was nurtured in relationship. Hence The Way’s principal celebration of the jubilee comes in this present Special Number: Relationships in God.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Pierre Favre’s spiritual journal, conventionally called the Memoriale, is the important role played by other creatures—not only people but also angels—in his religious imagination. Typical is an entry made just as Favre was about to say Mass for the intention of his confessor. Immediately, the particular intention broadens. He remembers ‘with the grace of a deep and unusual feeling of gratitude all the confessors I ever had in my life’, and goes on to remember all the priests who were significant in his life, and ‘in short, all those who by word or example or in any other way had become for me ministers of the grace of God’. The long entry ends with a richly interpersonal prayer about what heaven will be like. Before God, Favre’s desire is that these same people who have helped him on earth will also be for him ‘dispensers of God’s glory and of heavenly blessings’,

... that I, through a kind of glorious servitude in the realm of grace, would submit myself to all those I ever had to obey in this life.
On another occasion, he ponders Christ’s goodness as shown in his giving himself fully both to those who were grateful to him and to the wicked. And Favre draws a lesson for himself that is once again richly relational:

If Christ communicates himself to me each day when I celebrate Mass, and if he is ready to communicate himself in every other way in prayer and in other religious activities, then I too should communicate myself and abandon myself to him in every way, and not only to him, but because of him also to all my fellow human beings, good and evil ….

This issue celebrates Favre personally by making available a classic introduction to his work written by the noted French Jesuit intellectual Michel de Certeau. More generally, it looks at different ways in which relationships and spirituality enrich each other. Robert Marsh points us to an ‘erotic’ grace even in the Ignatian Second Week; Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Ruth Reardon both look at spirituality and marriage; Thomas Casey explores how Søren Kierkegaard lived out a vocation to loving celibacy. Other pieces look at how Ignatian spirituality might interact with one modern psychological approach to relational growth known as Positive Psychology, and at relationships in the modern city. Finally we consider a set of relationships that are important and that arguably the Christian tradition has neglected: our relationships with the world of nature and with the animal kingdom.

To speak of relationships in the spiritual life is not uncontroversial. Favre and the first Jesuits lived at a time when intercession in the Christian life was being radically called into question. And surely the Reformers had a point: Catholic talk of the saints can easily slide over into the manipulative or the superstitious. Yet there must be a fundamental rightness in how Favre’s prayer is nourished by memories of human goodness. If God has called the whole creation into being, if God’s purpose is being worked out in all that God has made, then the path to God must of its very nature draw us into ever more intense communion.

*Philip Endean SJ*

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LET ME START WITH A SERIES OF PUZZLES THAT NAG AT ME. The first is this. The Exercises open with a rather formal reflection on indifference—the Principle and Foundation—and yet they end with the grateful, passionate Contemplation to Attain Love. How do we get from the one to the other, from the formal to the passionate?

The second puzzle is similar, but focuses on our specific concern: the Second Week. The Second Week begins with the idealistic King and his heroic plans, but ends with something more intimate and more surprising: Jesus going to his death. The way we approach him during those first days of the Second Week is so different from the quality of our companionship at the end. What makes the difference? And what makes this difference possible?

My third puzzle is this. Why was Ignatius so obsessed with the Holy Land, with the Holy Places? He tells us in his Autobiography that he sought out the place, footprints and all, on Mount Olivet from which Jesus ascended into heaven. He was fixated on which way the footprints faced, even to the point of risking death to see and touch them again? Why? What powers such a passion?

Beginning Some Answers

I believe that these three questions share a common answer. Let me begin to sketch it out.

What are the Exercises all about? Some say they are about making decisions; others that they constitute a school of prayer. I have sometimes spoken of the Exercises as a training in discernment. But none of those accounts of what the Exercises are quite resolve that first puzzle: how do the Exercises get us from the Principle and Foundation to the Suscipe, from ‘I ought to desire and elect only the thing which is
more conducive to the end for which I am created’ to ‘Give me only your love and your grace—that’s enough for me’?

In one sense these two exercises, standing as they do like bookends framing the whole sequence, say the same thing: something about creation, something about mission, something about purpose. They both put the question of indifference: what is enough; what can satisfy the soul? But something has happened in the thirty days between them. Perhaps the differences in language bring it out. At the start, the Principle and Foundation, we are talking to ourselves—lecturing ourselves even—and proposing an ideal that we can measure ourselves against: what I ought to desire. By the end, in the Contemplation to Attain Love, we are talking to someone else, to God, to Christ. We are opening our hearts with a shocking intimacy. What has happened to us? All I can say is that we have fallen in love. ‘Give me only your love’—whom else could we speak to so but a lover? What are the Exercises for? They are for falling in love.

Perhaps the point becomes most obvious in the Second Week. Who is Jesus to us as the Week begins? The Kingdom meditation presents a hypothetical King full of projects, a gauntlet of idealism thrown down before us. Should we, could we, ever follow him, share his knocks, live his dream? But a long week later, as Jesus goes to the cross, what dies is not just a dream or a project. It is my beloved. I’m not mourning my shattered hopes, my doomed calling. I’m mourning a man, a man I have come to love. At the start he was all abstraction and hope and activity; but by the end he is this man, a man I have come to know intimately. I’ve watched his birth and held his warm weight; I’ve been there as he’s grown up and been made man before me; I’ve seen his struggle and loved his laughter. I’ve gazed at him and found him gazing back; I’ve heard my name on his lips. I’ve been drawn into his friendship; I’ve watched him work, suffered his hardship, wrestled with his self-discovery. I’ve discovered I need him, and been sweetly shocked that he needs me too. To repeat my first puzzle: how can his death mean so much to me now, when a week ago he was just God? Something has happened. I have fallen in love.

Isn’t it the particulars we fall in love with? The shape of that nose; the way he works with fish; the look in his eye; the things he can say to move me; the fire in his heart; the little hurts that bruise him. I think
that Ignatius knew this only too well. He needed to touch the places that Jesus had touched, to stand in Jesus’ footprints, to know which way Jesus had faced. He so yearned to feel kinship and connection with Jesus in his body, through his flesh, that it took the threat of excommunication to pry him loose from that almost physical presence. And it was a dream that died hard. Sixteen years later he was still waiting and waiting to take his new companions back to the same shores, to show them the same sites. He never did.

Ignatius’ compromise was the Exercises. If geographical presence was impossible he would draw his pilgrims to experience Jesus in the flesh of the imagination. I think that anyone who has walked the ways of the Second Week has their own parallel to Ignatius’ experience with the footprints. For me personally, it was sitting beside Jesus in the last days of the Second Week: there was a price on his head, and I was looking with him out into the desert, seeing sand and sand and sand, as he struggled to find a way forward with God which led him past Jerusalem and his death. I can feel it now: sitting tensely, unable to help, the stone wall under me and grit in my eyes, feeling intense sorrow, intense love, even a sort of pride. The body remembers. The body knows.

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1 He tells us as much in the Autobiography, when he describes his time in Jerusalem (nn. 35-48).
Grace and Desire

If I am right about any of this, the grace of the Second Week is an erotic grace. What do I mean?

All of the Exercises’ graces are erotic in the sense that they are something we desire. Desire is the core of what I mean by eros and the erotic—and not just desire as whim or fancy, but desire as an impelling passion, a passion that justifies the language of eros, even when its articulation is not overtly sexual. Ignatius asks us to pray for id quod volo, that which I desire. We call it ‘the grace’, but to put it like that dresses it up much too much. The prayer here is about desire, and desire is not always graceful. I am in want of what I want; what I desire I also lack. And we feel it in the flesh. We miss it, in both senses of the word: we yearn for it, and we fail to attain it. The grace is something always desired, something beyond grasp. When we talk about ‘getting the grace’, it sounds as though the desire could be fulfilled and put to rest, as though I could stop wanting what I want. But the reality is different. To ‘get’ the grace is always to find that desire has run ahead, and that my original desire has been replaced. What I want has transformed itself so that my desiring strains after it yet again: grace upon grace.

To Know, to Love, to Follow

All the graces of the Exercises are erotic in this sense, but the grace of the Second Week is especially so. What is my Second Week desire?

Here it will be to ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely. (Exx 104)

That threefold unfolding of the grace is key: to know, to love, to follow. And listen to the modifiers in the English version: ‘interior’, ‘intensely’, ‘closely’.

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2 I am following Wendy Farley, who uses the language of eros ‘as a metaphor for modes of thought and relationships whose movement runs in a direction … outward, towards others, toward the world …. Enchanted by this reality, in its concreteness, variety, and beauty, eros is drawn out … toward others, toward truth, which is for eros always exterior to consciousness and possession.’ Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996), 67.

3 Ignatius’ Spanish is rather more concise, speaking simply of loving and following more. Quotations in this article generally follow the translation of George E. Ganos (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).
What we pray for in the Second Week—what gets us from idealism to companionship—is this desire: the desire to know and to be transformed by knowing. Our Hebrew ancestors in faith said something profound when they used the same word, yâda, for knowing and for sex, because both invite relationship and both demand transformation. The Second Week desire is not just to know about Jesus but to know him. Ignatius is perfectly confident that to know Jesus is to love him. He cannot imagine anyone knowing Jesus interiorly without feeling growing attraction, intense attraction. Second Week knowing leads to loving because in it we feel desire, feel attraction, feel knowledge in the flesh. And through desire, knowing moves into action—not just any action, but the action that emerges from loving, and from loving what the lover loves. To know and to love move us to follow: not just doing but doing with, doing what he is doing.

How do I, as Ignatius writes in the title of the Exercises, ‘overcome myself and order my life, without reaching a decision through some disordered affection’ (Exx 21)? It sounds so rough and wilful—overcoming myself, ordering my life. But it’s not wilful; it’s about relationships. How do I find my way and my lifework? I look at someone else. I watch. I contemplate. Yet those words, those visual metaphors, suggest a distance—physical and emotional; if these are the only words we use, the risk is that we’ll remain at a distance, unengaged. Ignatian prayer calls us beyond the merely visual into an intimate, felt experience of the mystery we contemplate: the tone and timbre, taste and touch. Like Ignatius’ imagined maidservant in the Contemplation on the Nativity, I am moved from ‘gazing at’ the Holy Family to ‘serving them in their needs, just as if I were there’ (Exx 114). What we see with our eyes calls forth our desire … and our desire to desire; it draws us closer and closer to its heart, to its touch.

And—amazingly—we discover it is a mutual vision, a mutual knowing, loving and following. I start each prayer with that complex, simple moment of mutual gazing: I look at God looking at me—God’s contemplation of me precedes my ever contemplating God—and I
honour that gaze. I make some sign of reverence. Or maybe God does. This is the beginning of falling in love.4

**But Is It Eros?**

I say that deliberately: *falling* in love rather than just loving. Loving alone might let us stay in the safer setting of *agape*. It is far from comfortable to let God look at us even with *agape*, with *charity*—the disinterested benevolence towards which we are urged when we can't bring ourselves actually to like a person—but it is at least *respectable*. But for that look of love to be erotic, for there to be a *falling*—that makes me tremble. How can I fall in love with God that way? How on earth can it be mutual? How can God experience that lack, that want, that need that infects desire and gives it its heat?

Writers on love love analysis; they divide love into kinds and species. Anders Nygren finds two kinds, *eros* and *agape*. C. S. Lewis, famously, four: *agape* or charity, *eros*, *philia* or friendship, and *storge* or affection. Sallie McFague opted for three in her *Models of God*. What any theological account of love has to grapple with is the question of how these terms apply when the language of love is spoken to God and by God. Understandably, we protect God from those aspects of love which we find most disturbing ourselves. We do not want God's love for us to be capricious, as our love can sometimes be. We do not want it to be based in our merits, because we know how undeserving and unattractive we can be. Yet, if we know anything of love, we know how it makes us vulnerable. Love is the chink in our armour—our armour against change. When God gazes at us and we gaze at God, something distressingly mutual passes between us. We uncover the daring of a God who matches us desire for desire, want for want, need for need. Can we risk falling into the hands of such love?

**Eros and Sex**

As Pope Benedict recently wrote, ‘fundamentally, “love” is a single reality’.5 We might experience love in friendship as different from love

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5 *Deus caritas est*, n. 8. He goes on: ‘We have seen that God’s *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but
in desire; we might have to be taught the kind of love that gives and fails to count the cost. But in God all love is one. Eros, agape, philia, and God knows what else are one in God, indeed are God.

This is an important point—particularly important in a world where ‘erotic’ usually suggests something titillating, illicit, sordid. So what do I mean by ‘erotic’? Desire is certainly part of the picture. Particularity is another part; bodiliness is a third; and beauty a fourth. Let me throw in vulnerable risk as well.

Eros is the kind of love proper to our being embodied. Look back at how Ignatius talks about the Second Week grace—‘an interior knowledge of our Lord who became human for me’ (Exx 104). Eros is felt in the flesh—this human flesh; eros moves me. The prime example is certainly the sexual love that draws one person to another, drawing them together not through a mere idea but through the here-and-now configuration of physical being. But eros is there also when you hold your newborn nephew for the first time, and know in your bowels a complete connection and devotion. I think eros powers the passion of a Mother Teresa too—that love for the unlovely unloved. And I hope I can show shortly that there is an eros is at the heart of all callings from God, a vocational love beyond all reasons or unreason for a particular way of life and its fit.

Eros, then, is the love we feel when we are moved to desire by the particular beauty of some person or way of life. Sometimes it is a beauty that only we can see. ‘What does she see in him?’ is a question we may all have asked. Eros is, in this sense, a creative love. Sallie McFague says that the heart of being in love is not lust or sex or desire but value:

It is finding someone else valuable and being found valuable. And this perceiving of valuableness is, in the final analysis, unfounded … the reasons do not add up.6

She is right: in eros the lover makes the beloved valuable, makes the invisible visible. Eros lifts up the lowly. Eros is inherently healing.

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But *eros* is also risky. It is no accident that half the songs on the radio are laments over *eros* run awry. To feel desire is to become vulnerable. To express desire is to place your heart in another’s hands; when we contemplate Jesus in the Second Week we take a terrible risk. But there is a consolation. While we are worrying about our risk Jesus is hazarding his own heart into our hands, over and over again, undaunted yet vulnerable.

While on the subject of hazard, we might say that authentic *eros* involves avoiding two pitfalls: lust and obsession. *Eros* is a desire for what I want. The *I* here can cause trouble. *Eros* can shade over into lust if my focus shifts from the connection with the one I love to the satisfaction simply of my desire, a satisfaction involving little care for the other. What separates lust from erotic love is not lust’s strength or its fleshliness or its capacity to incite strange behaviour—all of these are part of *eros* too, and in themselves good. The problem with lust is that it cares less and less for relationship, it refuses risk.

There is also a temptation to addiction in all *eros*. *Eros* is always searching for the satisfaction of a lack, a need. And whenever that goal is reached, there is, alongside the pleasure, the possibility of disappointment—climax never escapes anticlimax. *Eros* knows that its object can never be quite obtained. It knows that anything—anyone—which can be possessed is not worthy of the loving. So *eros* is always striving for more, for *magis*, whereas addiction and obsession fall victim to the illusion that they can be satisfied—next time. And in the search for satisfaction they seek things less and less capable of satisfying them. What lust and obsession share is a mistaken shift of focus.
**Eros and Jesus**

The deeper we explore *eros*, the less safe it sounds. How can we possibly apply it to the relationship with Jesus we try to foster in the Exercises?

The grace of the Second Week is to know, to *love*, to follow. *Eros* is a bridging term: the copula and connection between knowing and doing. Doing is often seen as the hallmark of Ignatian spirituality, with the result that loving becomes, intentionally or not, just an incidental along the way. Once the way of discipleship has been revealed, once I know what I’m meant to do, I won’t have any time or need for love or for the lover I have known and followed. Once I know the will of God, I can go and do it on my own. But for Ignatius the loving is essential. Knowing, loving and doing: none of this is abstract; none of this is a matter of universal law. Each is contingent and particular. What matters is knowing *this* Jesus—the one whom my graceful imagination makes present—loving *him*, and following him in a unique way. In him my own desire is revealed to me and with it my life’s pattern at his side. Desire is both the engine of the Second Week and its endpoint.

**Discernment and Eros**

I hope I am hinting that *discernment* is erotic through and through, both when I elect a life alongside Jesus under the banner of his cross, *and* in the delicate dance of day-to-day discernment of spirits. Ignatius structures the Exercises around a potentially explosive collision between desire and freedom. How can I ever find my heart’s desire when my desires are disordered in so many unfree ways? Ignatius’ solution is to encourage one desire to grow in us until it rules them all, to set us up to fall in love with Jesus in such a way that our desire for him draws all our other desires in train behind it. This is Ignatian indifference: to be so passionately drawn by God that all those other good and glorious desires of ours can be taken up or left behind as seems fit. And not just at the moment of choosing, but also in the living out of our choices.

The journey to this kind of indifference, this kind of falling in love with Jesus, is the journey with which I began, the journey from the Principle and Foundation to the Contemplation to Attain Love. But, as Catherine of Siena once said, ‘all the way to heaven is heaven’; that epic, erotic journey is made in a million little erotic steps. The engine
of the Exercises is powered by discernment—choosing where to linger in a prayer period, where to return in repetition, which threads of experience to encourage and which to set aside. And discernment is about a growing feel for the differences of desire and attraction and beauty. Second Week discernment involves a growing nose for the unique scent of the real Jesus as he chooses to be for me. It is informed by an ever more certain sense of exactly who one is falling for, and of how he differs from all our previous loves and attachments, with their compulsions and cautions, fears and unfreedoms.

Those of you who have read as far as this will probably be wondering how much of what I have said fits your experience as makers and givers of the Exercises. Does the full-blown language of erotic love come anywhere near describing your experience of the Second Week or your relationship with Jesus? Maybe it does and

Detail from The Garden of Earthly Desires, by Hieronymus Bosch
maybe it doesn’t: the last thing I’d want to do is to shoehorn anyone’s experience of God into footwear that doesn’t fit. My hope is simply that an awareness of what is erotic in the grace of the Second Week may be of help to us in directing others. Let me illustrate that hope with just two points about the erotic in spiritual accompaniment: one about what I’ll call taboo and another about what I’ll call seduction.

**Erotic Taboo**

It doesn't take that much experience as a spiritual director before you run into someone wanting—but hesitating—to talk about erotic feelings arising in their prayer. At this point spiritual directors have a choice. Either they cut the conversation short, in which case the erotic will probably never crop up again; or else they treat it with the kind of discerning honour they would give any other area of experience.

A friend of mine, after returning from a sabbatical course on sexuality and spirituality, immediately met a series of retreatants wanting to broach sexual dimensions of their prayer and experience. Obviously, she was—even if only half consciously—giving people an opening that no director had given them before. People hesitate to speak of erotic elements in their relationship with God for many reasons: they may sense a taboo, or fear judgment, or dislike vulnerability, or—perhaps most often—they may simply have been trained not to acknowledge that these erotic elements exist. Implicitly or explicitly, they have been given any number of strategies to suppress, sublimate or sidestep such feelings. Nevertheless, they have the deep sense that there is something more within them that they need to own, something holy. Give them the slightest hint that you might be receptive to hearing this material openly, and they will talk with relief. Conversely, even the slightest shift in body language will shut down that line of communication again. It is very sad when people’s sense of God’s presence to them is circumscribed in such a way. After all, we believe that God is supremely desirable, consummately beautiful, a love which we can scarcely grasp. And the God who has taken on the fullness of our humanity is a God capable of all the desire and love and need humans can know. If *eros* is at the heart of the Second Week grace, it should be no surprise when that grace sometimes takes on an explicitly romantic or sexual shape. And if God goes there, why shouldn't we?
God's Courtship

That brings me to seduction. God often seems to go to places in prayer that unsettle or embarrass us. Even when a person's experience of God isn't overtly erotic, they might still feel that God seems to be seducing, or courting, or wooing them.

As a spiritual director, I often find that people speak first and most comfortably about what they have found difficult since I last saw them: what has distracted them, what has harried them away from God, what has deepened their own poor sense of themselves, or confirmed their doubt of God’s continued interest in them. Yet at the same time, buried in there, among the mess, there are usually one or two nuggets of pure gold: encounters with a God who is beautiful and attractive and bold and unsettling. Often enough, if we try to stay with those moments of consolation—delightful though they may be—there is discomfort or even acute embarrassment. Why do we so easily prefer the dark to the light? We may recognise God as the fulfilment of all our longing, but when we come face to face with this God, we find it hard to stay there. We prefer to talk about the weather. My sense is that God is too attractive for us. God’s desire for us far exceeds our desire for God. God’s gaze reveals us to be valued, valuable, beautiful—far more so than we can easily accept.

Perhaps the reason why eros can be a problem is that God’s desire and love makes our own seem puny. We can only take so much before we back away and bury ourselves in safer stuff—even if this safer stuff is also unpleasant stuff. But God nevertheless seems to court us, woo us, seduce us. When we are enticed by God’s beauty, perhaps we can stand for a moment in its sun before seeking the shade. But then we enter into a cycle of desire and distress, drawn to God as a moth to a flame, always fearing the fire. We approach and we withdraw. Left to ourselves, we can just stay in the shade, and remain permanently in the safer, duller position. A good spiritual director will encourage us to move into the sun again, and to follow our desire for God little by little. Good direction will help us not to avert our gaze, and not to despair when we do.

I suspect that mythical ‘good directors’ learn this skill from their own experience, from recognising in their own life-history the endless seductiveness of God. The seduction I am talking about here may not
become overtly sexual, but nevertheless it instils a familiarity with the erotic ways of God’s grace, and a readiness to venture with someone else wherever God takes them.

To know, to love, to follow: interiorly, intensely, intimately—that’s the grace we seek in the Second Week. We seek it for ourselves and we seek it for those we accompany. We play matchmaker. We act as go-between, watching love dawn and deepen, witnessing love’s passion and price. Sometimes it may feel as if we are playing gooseberry. Yet, if we are lucky, we are also following our own beloved through life and death and life again. And we find we can pray, from an ever-healing heart, our own Suscipe: ‘give me only your love and your grace—that’s enough for me’.

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This article has emerged from a paper first given at the Loyola Hall Spiritual Accompaniment Seminar in April 2006.
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PIERRE FAVRE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

Michel de Certeau

PIERRE FAVRE CAME FROM SAVOIE; he was a man of tender heart and subtle mind. Driven by the desire for learning, he left his home country and went to seek education in Paris. There it was that this brilliant student met Ignatius Loyola, who was his senior by fifteen years. He became Ignatius’ first companion, and throughout ten rich years they shared every aspect of their lives: work at the university, relaxation, prayer, their emerging common ‘way of life’, the conception and foundation of the Society of Jesus, priestly ordination, and the first Jesuit apostolic work in Rome. Then, in his thirties, Favre was entrusted with delicate missions that were to take him across the whole of Europe as a theological adviser, a retreat director, and a confidant to bishops (just as he had been to Ignatius). This way of life rapidly exhausted him, and he died in Rome in 1546, on his way to Trent as a conciliar theologian. He was forty.

All that we have of this learned man, this apostle, is a few letters and the spiritual notes that he used to commit to paper each day towards the end of his life: the so-called Memoriale. The first thing that this journal reveals—something confirmed by the witness of those who knew him—is the paradoxical nature of his life. He was a quiet and peaceful character, yet he found himself engaged in the great struggles of the Reformation and the Renaissance. He was attached to his native country and disinclined to adventure, yet it was his lot to travel throughout Europe, a traveller always on the move, constantly opening up new frontiers for the Society. He was a reserved person, and yet he was sent to the courts of princes and of bishops, and became involved with the great ones of the world. However, in all these situations, he gave off what Simão Rodrigues called a ‘gentleness and grace’ (suavitas...
Combining as he did doctrinal soundness with human delicacy, he could give guidance without ever seeming overbearing. His acute sense of his own fragility, his clear awareness of who he was, his sensitivity that was touched by whatever happened—all these contributed to his gift for supporting people without dominating them, for understanding them without ever transgressing boundaries, for attracting people without making a great parade of virtue. His acceptance of his own powerlessness and his entrusting of himself to God had enabled him to find a strength and a peace that radiated from him as a discreet grace—one whose irresistible working was such that it seemed not to be coming from him at all, but rather from within the hearts of those with whom he was speaking.

The Memoriale allows us to enter more deeply into his life. If you listen to this journal, and if you try to interpret its silences, Favre’s experience comes across as completely dominated by the idea of salvation: a salvation coming from the Lord. This salvation Favre apprehends in faith; its workings are spread throughout the world; and it makes manifest the mystery of God. Favre’s whole life can be summed up in these three aspects of the one central experience of redemption.

**Salvation through Faith**

Even Favre’s sentence-structures reflect the movement of his life. Practically every one of the notes in the Memoriale begins with ‘I’: ‘I

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Favre was a privileged and sheltered young man, but he was also troubled. He himself described his studious youth and his conflicting desires. For all that he loved the place where he was born, he dreamt of leaving. He wanted to change. He wanted to discover a world that was different, corresponding to his desire for ‘purity’. But how was he to escape from the impurity that haunted him, in himself and in others? How was he to leave behind the sin of this world in order to dedicate himself to a ‘heavenly’ existence? He imagined a wide range of possibilities: theologian, doctor, lawyer, monk, and so on. They all fascinated him, but the attraction never lasted. Furthermore, convinced as he was that he had to change his life, he also recognised, as he became more familiar with his experience, that this was impossible. Every lapse served only to convince him that what he thought he had learnt in his previous fervour was in fact empty. A victim of his enthusiasms and disappointments, this man already rich in learning was still, spiritually, a child. Events and the emotional highs and lows they provoked merely brought about transitory enthusiasm or depression. Powerless to make a real offering of what he wanted to give, he fell into doubt and anxiety. He kept on searching but never found. He longed for a paradise, but was always losing it.

Meeting Ignatius in Paris transformed all this. Favre summarised what happened with the clear-sightedness that came from twelve years’ hindsight. Ignatius did not force a choice on him. Favre listed the benefits ‘which the Lord conferred on me in those days through that man’:

First, he gave me an understanding of my conscience and of the temptations and scruples I had had for so long without either understanding them or seeing the way by which I would be able to get peace.

2 References to the Memoriale are taken from Memoriale, n. 9. References to this document are taken from The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, edited and translated by Edmond C. Murphy, John W. Padberg and Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996); from now on, the paragraph numbers will be given in brackets in the main text.
The first thing was to get some insight into the nature of the fragility: that was already to become less trapped by it. But he also learnt from his ‘maestro en las cosas spirituales’ (8) how to discover in these alternations of fervour and depression the movements of one and the same grace. He was to learn neither to let himself be dominated by the things that were imposing themselves upon him, nor to disregard them. They were there not in order to test his strength, but rather to show what God was wanting from him. This new significance that he perceived did not remove him from the reality in which he lived, but it did liberate him from it. He remained in one sense dependent on that reality, to be sure, but only in so far as it was a means of depending on God. In this perspective, desolation became the experience of God, who is always elusive, depriving a person of His gifts, but only as a means of giving yet greater ones. And consolation became a sign of the fidelity of a God who never abandons us, a God constantly giving us new favours so as to open us up to new ways of acting. As God gradually taught him, Favre learnt to become more faithful to what was happening to him, precisely as a means of finding and following this God of steadfast fidelity.

No longer, then, did he feel as though he needed to embark for some enchanted island, only for it then to recede as he approached. Rather, his task was to attach himself passionately to the present, to return to daily tasks, to examine his consciousness regularly and in detail. It was reality to which he had to submit himself, so that in reality he could find God. It was in and through this kind of attention that he approached the majesty and purity of God; this God was speaking in the detail of his life. Paradoxically, his new religious attitude at once rescued him from himself and also grounded him more deeply in the reality of his life. No longer was he at the mercy of events; rather, it was in those events that he received the gift of the Eternal One. The movement by which God gave Himself to Pierre also sent Pierre back to the reality of his own existence, to the reality of the world.

To put it another way, Pierre Favre found salvation by faith; and this faith allowed him gradually to discern and to understand his experience. Individual experiences relativised one another, and a meaning became clear through the whole: God was constantly giving Himself within all of Pierre’s experience. Experience became a divine
pedagogy: there was a consistent pattern to what it revealed of God’s intentions and dealings in his regard. As he responded, his experience led him to choices that had matured slowly, choices that had been born in him at the same time as they had been born in God. Now he was able to take decisions—not without risks, but with an interior certainty. He was no longer putting together ‘projects’, ideas that might just be wishful thinking; rather, he was accepting a vocation. And the truth of the calling was borne out in his experience.

**Salvation Lavished on the World: Ascent and Descent**

We can see the rest of Pierre’s life as but a commentary on what was happening in these decisive years. It would be easy to show how all the themes of his meditation and his activity flowed from this Ignatian grace. The parable of the talents, a theme which often recurs in the Memoriale, restates this basic theme. The talents are the graces which Favre has. They lead him at once back to the Master who has given them and forward to the forms of service that they prompt. What he receives from on high is orientated to the future here below. Small everyday signs become tokens of the power that is gradually transforming him as a person, and also instruments conveying a call which directs him on his journeyings through the world. There is a double movement running through the Memoriale, and its religious nature makes it quite unique. The soul is raised to God; the soul is also lowered with God in humble everyday service.

‘Ascent’ first. This term points to the interior leap by which Favre detaches himself from his immediate feelings, whether of well-being or distress. He lets go of his current emotional state, and entrusts himself to this God who is greater than his heart. He is led to restrain his instinct to grasp simply at emotional security. Instead, by recourse to God, he breaks out of the morass of his inadequacies. ‘Accidental’ graces may overflow or dry up, but Favre directs himself towards what he calls the ‘essential’ grace, towards God’s fidelity within him. Among the many movements which agitate him, he learns not to be controlled by what is merely peripheral, and instead to hold on to ‘the principal spirit’, the interior movement of docility and fidelity to God.

This permanent conversion occurs at many different levels, and hence Favre refers to it through a variety of expressions: the movement from the exterior to the interior; the desire not so much to be loved as
to love; the return from what is experienced to what is believed. But it is always an ‘ascent’, an act of faith:

… we should petition God to raise us up to the world above and to the contemplation of matters altogether spiritual so that in the end all else becomes in some way spiritual and is apprehended in a spiritual manner (108).

Once this happens, then ‘stability of heart’—Pierre’s name for spiritual freedom—is consolidated. Salvation through faith keeps coming to him, gradually transforming his soul; the spiritual takes hold of his being at every level. His mind, his heart and even his body benefit from this interior resurrection. Virtues, far from being a matter directly of human effort, blossom abundantly, and bear a rich harvest of fruit.

When Favre abandons all security in himself, he does so in order to find, in the world, a security that has come from God. When he renounces the satisfaction of counting up his successes, he does so in order to let the Spirit’s power enter the world. When he raises himself up to God, he does so only in order to descend again to the world in the humble state that he finds to be Jesus’ own. The private ascent towards the Lord turns out to be only a diversion on his silent path towards the particularities of everyday life, the details in which his fidelity is lived out. The world that he sought to flee turns out to be God’s world. And Favre engages all the more ardently with it because of his interior link with God, through a kind of life hidden in God:

… there must first come so many kinds of fear, so many kinds of disgust, repugnance, and aversion concerning those lowest things in which peace cannot be found, even though they are the means to ascend to the love of the Lord and to enter fully into it. But once a person has arrived there, he ‘goes in and comes out’ with joy, and ‘finds pasture’ both inside and outside (John 10:9). … Before having that love, he could but mount up and gaze towards the heights. But once he has entered loving intimacy with God, he will be able to go on increasing in that love while daily getting to the heart of many things in God Himself, and he will be able with more assurance to go down among his neighbours, seeing them and listening to them, and so on. (66)

The truth is that the ascent and the descent are one. The faith which ascends towards God involves also a recognition that God has
come to us. This religious awareness of the divine descent sees in every event a gift of the Most High, and attaches itself to Christ who, though he does not come from below, approaches us in his own self through love. And as the soul is mysteriously transformed by Christ’s invisible presence, it inevitably opens up a path, through its own being and through all things, to the grace being lavished. ‘Ascending’ and ‘descending’ are one: both are a joining with this divine movement from on high, which as such is so powerful in its effects on the world.

Thus Favre is neither completely from above nor from below. Because above and below are one, he escapes simple identification with either. What might appear confusion and division is merely the mystery of this life in union with God. To be oneself and yet no longer self-contained; to be in the world and yet not of the world—interiorly this is, for Favre, the experience of the cross. The cross is the supreme
sign of love and the manifestation of God’s inner life; but its form is scandalous, shot through with the mystery that it unfolds. Through consolations and desolations alike, Favre is carried inwards—which for Favre means ‘along the direction that leads to the cross’ (211). Moreover, this movement also takes him beyond the relative simplicities of prayer towards ‘this other cross … the great and continuous labours’ of the apostolic life (241).

Favre at one point expresses his spiritual self-understanding through the image of a tree. He is fond of this image, and often uses it to express the hidden harmonies between the life of the Spirit and the life of nature. Here, however, his concern is rather to point up the radical difference between them. He uses the idea of an inverted tree to speak of what is most central to his experience, in such a way that the strange beauty of the writing itself also evokes the paradox:

Up to the present you found more consolation in the splendour of the tree, which proceeds from divine grace, than in its root, where abides its vigour and its power. You had eyes only for the branches and the flowers, for the leaves and the fruit—all very changeable things, inasmuch as they tend to their own perfection. From them no constant and stable consolation can be derived.

Do not seek the root of this tree for the sake of its fruit, but rather the fruit and the other things for the sake of the root. Seek to tarry even longer as days go by and to strike deeper roots where this tree has its roots, but do not seek to have its fruit remain in you. By its root and by its fruit will you be led to the glory of this tree.

Put whatever you can close to the root, for one day it will appear in its glory as it first appeared in its glory in the bosom of the earth when the soul of Christ descended into the lower regions, that soul which is the true created root, and which has become, of all rational creatures, the fruit which is the highest in glory. This tree is then inverted, so that the root attains the highest point, dropping beneath it all its fruit and sending its power out in streams from the heights to the depths.

Here, the spiritual life amounts to a reversal of the natural life. It is not a matter of striving upwards in order to be raised to God. Rather, the spiritual life comes as a gift from on high, descending in blessing and abundance on the earth. It is received in faith; it unfolds from an interior event of reception. The sign of its divine origin is not that it
literally descends from on high, but rather that it emerges invisibly from within the self.

The Redemption of the World

Favre is salvation’s herald, not its proprietor. He has to hand on what he has received. Here too, his language, expressed in unedited form in the journal where he records his desires, reveals the movement within: he moves from the self to others. From the point in his personality that is touched by salvation he opens himself out gradually to others, and eventually to all without exception. The words expressing his meditation become enriched with new meanings as he invests external realities with a spiritual élan. His sentences become more complex and diffuse as they incorporate a larger number of realities. And this linguistic complexity reflects a spiritual truth: Favre’s prayers and desires unfold themselves in all directions and in many different ways to reach an ever increasing number of people—people in their turn called not just to be passive recipients of salvation, but also to hand it on further.

This ‘dilation’ (a favourite word of Favre’s) characterizes his prayer. He is no longer worried about illusion. Salvation is present: he cannot but seek to spread it. Without departing from his life hidden in God, Favre ‘will come in and go out and find pasture’. He refers several times to this phrase from John’s Gospel (John 10:9); what it evokes for him is not departure from God but rather a more intimate, spiritual communion with God’s action:

When we see a deed of God, when we hear His word or when we touch holy things with our hands, the spirit should come to these things whole and entire, bringing with it the sensitive soul whole and entire so that it too can grasp them. This is indeed ‘to go out and find pasture’. In truth, we cannot succeed in this unless we are deeply living within our interior, in other words completely recollected within ourselves. (108)

Once again Favre is on the move. But it is no longer a move from one dream to another: now his journeys take place along the world’s dusty pathways. He journeys across the map of Europe, through France and Italy, Germany and the Low Countries, Portugal and Spain. And these physical journeys are a geographical expression of a vast
‘pilgrimage’ that he undertakes in imitation of the Good Shepherd, searching for ‘each and every one’. The integration he has found within becomes a principle of diffusion. Salvation is something to be spread.

But a capacity that Favre had from his youth remains. He is still sensitive to the infinite variety of human beings and to the constant diversity of interior movements. More than others would, he notices detail—he feels it, he notes it, and the detail fills the Memoriale in abundant complexity, occasionally too much so. Everything is precious to him, because everything is open to God. These little things are crumbs, as it were, from the messianic banquet where Jesus is showing his prodigality as both creator and saviour. They must therefore be gathered up. Each has its value; nothing must be squandered; nothing that the apostle meets in the randomness of his travelling must remain unexploited—no word, no gesture, no deed. Every moment of time has to be used properly—a conviction typical of a man who was precociously conscientious and who is sensing the approach of death. So it is that he reproaches himself with having let one or other of these trivialities go. For each, if we hear them with the ears of Christ, is freighted with a call:

I then acknowledged that I had often been negligent during the course of my numerous and varied journeys up to now—negligent above all in instructing or correcting, admonishing or consoling, those I happened to associate with or greet or merely see. For nothing should come into our sight or to our notice in vain, because our Lord Jesus Christ has permitted nothing to be without a purpose—not the sight of things, nor the sound of any voice. But not without purpose, either, did he pass through certain places, rest his eyes on certain persons, and will to be now on land, now on the sea, at one time in a house, at another out of doors, at times among people, at other times by himself. His standing, his sitting, his walking, his eating, sleeping and so forth were not without a purpose. (434)

Pilgrimage in itself has a tendency to distract a person, especially someone who is as attracted by the sheer variety of things as Favre was. But, amid the diversions, one single concern animated Favre and unified his life: the work of salvation, ‘edification’. It was Favre’s task to be the minister of salvation wherever the Lord opened the door to
him and drew him on into new pastures—or, to put it differently, wherever obedience led him. Everywhere he moved forward as a bearer of this mystery of redemption. He looked at people just as a saviour, indeed just as the Saviour, was looking at them. He was there to support and relieve human beings, both in body and in soul.

There is no point in looking within Favre for any other quality that might explain the fascination he radiated and the friendships that clustered round him. For each person he met, he was a saviour of something deep within that was being lost. He was not eloquent or brilliant; rather he bore, humbly, people’s burdens. To each individual soul he was redemptively attentive. And through this attentive submission to the reality of other people, combined with a passion for their restoration, Favre obtained the charism of spiritual direction, a charism which enabled him to discern and uncover in all whom he met the point at which salvation was coming to them from God. That is why Ignatius said that he gave the Spiritual Exercises better than anyone else—these Exercises that were designed to reveal the Redeemer’s interior appeal through people’s own choices. By virtue of his vows—he addressed his final vows to ‘Iñigo of Loyola, Superior of the Company of priests of Jesus’—he wanted both to proclaim himself and actually to be a means of salvation, a priest of Jesus Christ. This he wanted above all else.

A Constant Pilgrim

But none of this could happen except through the cross, through a deeper entry into the world’s misery. Even the simple activity of travelling was particularly painful for him. Having discovered, with much difficulty, how to unify his heart, he could not but suffer all the more from the constant fragmentation of his life. He would have liked to stay where he was and to establish roots in the place where God had led him. Wherever he went, there was something in him that wanted to settle down and make, through his apostolate, a reality of the stability which his soul had learnt to savour and for which it longed. But every time he had to set off again, in order to carry further the good news which revives drowsy hearts. He always spoke tenderly of

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3 For Ignatius on Favre, see Gonçalves da Câmara, Memoriale, n. 226. For Favre’s last vows, see MHSJ MF, 119.
his native land, but he was never able to remain there or return there; indeed he never had a country in which he could establish himself. He was a constant ‘pilgrim’—a word that for him always carries an overtone of grief:

> If they accuse me of being unknown and a foreigner, I confess it. I am a foreigner like all my ancestors—I am a foreigner on the territory of this province, and I shall be a foreigner in every land to which God’s goodness may lead me for as long as I live.'

‘Taken away’ as he was from places that he nevertheless never forgot, he turned in each new separation to the One who comes from on high to animate all that exists: ‘the Lord’s Spirit, which fills the entire world’, ‘the source where all creatures are more alive than within themselves’.6

A still sterner trial was his sense of sin and misery, something that only increased his desire for redemption. In Germany, above all, but in fact everywhere, and indeed in his own self, he discovered inadequacy, weakness, vice—even within those who should be examples of charity. At this time of Reformation ferment, this man whose mind and soul had been nurtured in medieval culture was a witness to its death. He saw, with a clarity that could so easily have become cynicism, the impurity of the clergy and the arrogance of the so-called religious. He simply carried on amid the Church’s distress, haunted by the reality that he was forced to encounter every day in his ministry. He suffered from it not only spiritually but also physically: he had a sharp sense of hidden spiritual corruption, a sense that manifested itself in the body and took him over as if it were an illness; it lies in the background throughout the Memoriale. The corruption extends even to the invisible realm, to Purgatory, where suffering still reigns because of sin. Words of catastrophe and misery were often on Favre’s lips; and they were also present in the depths of his heart.

4 Favre to Wendelina van den Berg (Peter Canisius’ stepmother), February (?) 1544, The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 361-362, here 362.  
5 Favre to Ignatius, 7 November 1525, The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 339-340, here 339: ‘Our Lord knows the reasons why I do not deserve to stay in one place for any length of time but am always being taken away at the moment when the harvest begins to peak’. He was one of those ‘who are always setting off throughout the world’ (Favre, quoting Ortiz, to Ignatius, 25 January 1541, MHSJ MF, 65).  
6 Favre to Ignatius and Pietro Codazzo, 1 September 1540, The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre, 319-320, here 320; Favre to Ignatius, late May 1544, MHSJ MF 261.
Faith was his only defence. Over and over again he appealed to whatever already bore witness to Christ’s resurrection. Whenever we find depression or sin in the Memoriale, we also see angels sent to support the Church militant, bearing witness to the Lord’s victory as in the Book of Revelation. Favre’s prayer was constantly turned towards these angels and towards the saints, because his life was constantly being crushed by the world’s errors and its needs. The souls that seemed most lost, the towns that seemed most blighted, found in him a kind of servant of their restoration, a minister of an invisible kindness that had descended from the heights.

Thus it is that in Favre’s prayer and imagination the earthly landscape is coupled with a heavenly one. The land has a subsoil of sanctity, a kind of subterranean power for resurrection: the relics and other seeds of life scattered into the earth’s depths by the saints where they lived and died. The evil enveloping Favre is thus only part, a provisional part, of the story, a story driven from both above and below by the overflow of divine life which is grace. Our resistance is only temporary; greater powers than those of sin are at work.

Obviously this is a viewpoint informed by faith, but it enables Favre as an apostle to be confident and active. All Favre’s ‘devotions’ draw on his apostolic experience at the heart of redemption’s drama. They grow out of his interior life as impulses towards invisible realities already at work in the bosom of the earth, and towards the infinite hosts of angels who are close both to God and to ourselves, and who are guaranteeing that salvation is assured. His devotions represent not an escape from the Christian struggle, but a renewal of hope. Emerging as they do from the reality of this world, and charged with all the
affective resonance that such a vibrant soul can give them, they are cries both of pain and of assured confidence.

**Salvation within the Mystery of God**

Favre’s apostolic life, with all its difficulties, was thus leading him constantly to engage with ‘heaven above’ in order to return ‘here below’. The experience of ministry gradually revealed to him God’s own reality, at once infinitely ‘above’ and infinitely ‘below’. It is God’s own inner life that is unfolded within Favre’s inner life and in that of the world. In the movements he notes within himself and in the surrounding world, Favre recognises the movement of God, of the self-unfolding mystery drawing all people into a shared life.

This God is infinite, surpassing all we might expect of God, both in height and depth:

> He is infinite in every way: infinitely above the comprehension and understanding of a created being, infinitely prior to every created capacity, infinitely beyond every created intellect, infinitely before all created beings, infinitely future to all created beings, and infinitely deep-seated in every creature …. (161)

But given this infinite height and this infinite depth, it is the depth which more captivates Favre, the depth revealed in the very fact of God’s dealing with us at all:

> But when He wills to give orders, He is so humble and sets such limits and bounds to his commandments that not one of his obligatory precepts is beyond the powers of any person however weak, aided as a person is by the grace available to them and which they can more easily draw upon than upon their own powers. God commands and makes obligatory nothing that is not within or even inferior to human powers, nothing that is beyond the limits of human capability …. (161)

The fullness of the mystery is in Jesus Christ. Though he is the fullness of the divinity, he has descended into the depths of humanity. He is present ‘beneath me’ and ‘within me’ just as much as ‘above me’ (307). The divine abundance poured out in Christ moves outwards from him into ourselves, and from ourselves to others beyond us. Initially, Favre simply notes this abundance as a feature of his interior movements of devotion. But gradually he discovers it to be a current
that proceeds from the Father’s infinity, that is appropriated in its
fullness by Christ, and spreads from Christ among all people until in
them it reaches the darkest depths of the human and the material. So
it is that the unification of the world is being brought about by the
Source from whom all things proceed, the Source whom all things
come to meditate:

I wished too that people’s bodies, their souls, and their spirits,
whose God-given nature is to be vessels of great capacity, could all
be filled with graces and with glory from the overflow of that
noblest vessel, the humanity of Christ, which contains all the
fullness of the deity. May we, in our turn, be filled from his
abundance. (275)

As God enters the world, He is drawing into His retinue all those
who are born of His living, personal graciousness. The angels are
following in His path, exerting a mysterious influence over our
existence and having effects, even on our physical powers, of which we
are scarcely aware. Within our towns, the saints are forming a city of
the living God, a reality to which our acts and thoughts bear witness
even without our being able to see it. Even inanimate things bear
within themselves this sanctifying power that is consecrating them as
means of salvation. Holy water, churches, the aesthetic beauty of
liturgy, relics and whatever evokes the saints—all these things are
intrinsic to the mystery of God’s coming. The natures of things, and
the powers that Favre perceives as emanating from those natures, are
natures and powers of God’s own self. These realities filled with God represent the very reality of this divine descent, the mystery of the divine coming: God, the true God, is appearing in the world, giving Himself to innumerable created realities, and thus becoming manifest within them.

Thus it is that Favre’s prayer and action always begin and end at the living centre of this divine advent pervading all that is, a centre which, for all its visibility, is hidden in its deepest reality: the sacrifice of the Mass. There, at the heart of the humblest realities, the Lord in person is transforming the world and working its salvation. There, God Most High is somehow touching the deepest depths of reality in order to make them live with His own life. It is one single conviction that draws Favre to meditate on the descent of Jesus to Hell and on his eucharistic presence: the furthest reaches of the universe, the inertness of matter, and the deepest pangs of grief are all alike touched by the all-powerful descending impulse of the Creator.

*The Interior Work of the Spirit*

It is through his Spirit that Jesus is thus impregnating the world with his life-giving activity—for Favre, the Spirit is less a spirit of sonship than a spirit of sanctification and illumination filling the world. What Christ brings about sacramentally in the mystery of the Eucharist finds its complement and completion in what the Spirit is bringing about in each human person. Here too, the infinity of the gift manifests itself in the sheer depth at which it appears. Favre, an active witness of this interior work of the Spirit within himself and others, religiously notes all the different phases of this process: God is coming within him.

The passive nature of these interior events comes out in the language Favre uses. He mentions them one after the other, as nothing but occurrences, in a pattern beyond his design: ‘it was given to me …’, or ‘then it happened that …’. What he notes are things received: occurrences one after the other that press themselves on him, irruptions that are secret and always—to use his word—new.

So it is that Favre comes to see a gradual transformation in the three ‘powers of the soul’ whose subtle interplay scholastic philosophy had taught him to analyze. Just as a new horizon can loom up in the mist, so his memory, understanding and will are gradually touched by a new life welling up from within, and come mysteriously to reproduce the inner life of the three divine Persons. As always, the work of the
Spirit begins with what is the most hidden and distinctive feature of the human person: the will, the affectivity, those obscure and deep movements which emerge into consciousness in the form of emotions, decisions and insights. It is in this subterranean depth of human life that the divine life first enters.

As soon as he begins to become conscious of them, Favre notes these fragile beginnings, and tries to open himself to accept them fully. Thus he 'notices' these affectus, awakenings at the bottom of his heart arising from a divine presence attracting him through what it is stirring up in the soul—notices them even before he knows what they asking him to do. He receives all these inspirations and interior movements—spiritus. They are the signs, at the roots of human affectivity, of a communication between the human person and God; they are impulses provoked by a hidden visitation; they are signs of a renewal coming, as Favre well knows, from outside himself. He also notes the desires he feels that proceed from these impulses—desires that are perhaps less reliable because they are more subjective—and the delicate signs and calls which his listening heart perceives. Of course he also senses within himself, just as in the surrounding world, the influence of evil powers. But experience tells him that these are not coming from such a deep place; they do not enter him with quite the same quality of silence. They may be constraining him, but they do not seduce him. They are not in their native element.

To use a phrase often used by St Ignatius, Favre feels himself to be 'an instrument united with God' (Constitutions X.3 [813])—and this at the very root of his being:

On the holy day of Pentecost, I was borne towards God by keen longings that He might grant me through His Spirit to understand and will in a spiritual manner the things of the spirit. I asked Him
to make spiritual my being, my life, my feelings and my thoughts.

... I was then given to seek grace from the Holy Spirit in prayer that my being, my life, and my inner awareness of things might be carried away into that Spirit so that the work of the salvation of my soul might be accomplished in those depths that lie open to the Holy Spirit. I begged also to be delivered from all that remains corporeal or carnal in my sensibility .... (313)

It is there, at the ‘centre of his heart’ (307), that God appears in such a way as to spread Himself through Favre’s whole life, through all his activities, through all those whom Favre meets, even in the bodies of those who have been made open to the Spirit. The self becomes in a real sense the sacrament of a sanctifying movement of descent. Into ‘those depths that lie open to the Holy Spirit’, the infinite loving-kindness descends from on high in order to diffuse, starting from the interior and secret place where He has appeared, a life that extends to every degree of being.

From between the Father ‘who is said to be “above”’ and the Holy Spirit ‘who in some way can be said to be “below”, that is within us’, the divine life spreads in silence, as if in a moment of night when only a few signs reveal it. In its very coming, it remains invisible by nature. The Saviour comes from the silence of the Trinitarian fullness; he acts in the silent heart of the world; and he attracts to this interior silence those whom he touches from within—both within themselves and within himself. Penetrated as he was by this mystery, Favre moved through the world as if within a temple that had already been consecrated, an extension here below of the Divine Majesty’s heavenly temple. He moved among human beings in silence, as one would be silent in church, with a devout modesty that respected the divine presence everywhere to which he was bearing witness and with which he was working. It is hardly surprising that this contemplative in action admired and wanted to imitate this ‘modesty’ as it is found in Mary—an image of the prayer of the Church which, along with Mary, adores the God whom she bears and who is growing within her:

During Vespers I remained gazing at a picture of the Virgin Mary, drawn by her look of modesty. I realised then to some degree the great value of that grace from God through which a person’s sole concern is to please God alone, to preserve all His grace and retain
it in their heart, like a person unwilling to attract to themselves the love or the attention of others by an open and unrestrained communication of themselves. The beauty of Mary is completely interior, hidden in God. (208)

In the end, anxiety about salvation is transformed into thanksgiving, because the reality of salvation has indeed come. Faith discovers the salvation which comes down to us; memory recalls blessings received; desire yearns in hope for what is promised—and all these things come together in the one act of thanks, grounded in a compelling conviction that the Most High has descended to the miseries of this world. This is what Favre gradually learns in his reflection on being an apostle. Moreover, this divine life planted in the heart of the earth is called to bear all the fruits willed by God; it is this call which evokes within Favre a response that is both his own gratitude and the power of the Spirit.

Favre thus continues to work for the greater glory of God. But when Favre commits himself to this glory—at one point he calls himself 'a lover of God's glory'—what matters is not the glorification that might arise out of the homage we might pay, but only the true glory of God's self-manifestation. The real presence of God transforms the reality of the human world, so that this latter becomes an active witness to the glorious loving-kindness that has descended from the highest heavens to the deepest depths. Favre finds himself drawn into this passion of God that renews the universe. He enters into a hidden life which is gradually becoming visible; he follows its mysterious ways within the depths of human wretchedness, and lets it wrench from him, as he works in his ministry, 'cries' of thanksgiving and praise that run in a kind of transforming counterpoint with his constant laments—laments at his illnesses, at the demands made on him, and at the evils of his time.

Favre’s voice has come down to us. It was not that Favre wanted to perpetuate his own memory through his spiritual journal—quite the contrary; he was the quiet companion. The text was not meant for us and it was not passed on to us; it was published only three centuries after its author’s death. But today, thanks to the chance circumstances that have opened this hidden sanctuary of interior meditation, we can
overhear this life hidden within God, and we find Favre on offer as he was, even though he made no display. He is a man hidden within the gift that he transmits. He addresses us as our brother; he does not impose himself; he comes from within—just like the Word whom he wanted to follow, and of whom he is merely an echo.

Michel de Certeau SJ was born in 1925 in Chambéry, France, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1950. His early academic career as a Jesuit was taken up with important work on Pierre Favre and on Jean-Joseph Surin. The study of Surin led him to develop an interest in psychoanalysis, and in later life he became an influential and wide-ranging intellectual, holding professorships in Los Angeles and in Paris. He died in 1986.
IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Phyllis Zagano and C. Kevin Gillespie

The wisdom of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, as the 2006 Jubilee Year celebrations have reminded us, is over 450 years old. Yet Ignatius’ extraordinary genius continues to lead individuals to a critical encounter with God that enables them to live joyfully in the plan of the Creator. Crucial to Ignatian spirituality is the practice of gratitude to God, as well as the set of habits which Christians know as virtues, and the character traits which Christians recognise as gifts of the Spirit.

In recent years, some influential empirical psychologists, initially in the USA but now in various parts of the world, have begun to take note of the gracious and grateful attention to life characteristic of Ignatian spirituality. Rather than centring their attention on problems and ill-health, they advocate what is called Positive Psychology. Their strategies focus on life’s positive features rather than on the negative events assumed to be the root causes of depression or dysfunction. The chief proponent of Positive Psychology is Martin E. P. Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania, a former president of the American Psychological Association, who defines Positive Psychology as a way of speaking of ‘positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions’. Seligman and his followers take issue with the dominant assumptions among their colleagues:

A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promises to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless. The exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living. Hope,

Ignatian spirituality seeks to help individuals ‘choose what is more to the glory of His Divine Majesty and the salvation of my soul’ (Exx 152). It too is in many ways positive in its approach to the world and the self, but it is rooted explicitly in the Christian understanding of God’s reality. Further, Ignatian spirituality is predisposed to Catholic terminology and teachings.

Both Positive Psychology and Ignatian spirituality have as a particular focus the freeing of the individual to engage the world in social commitment. Both, too, can be applied in group settings. While they diverge widely in their grounding and practice, each can be seen as assisting and informing the other. Positive Psychology researches how, why and under what conditions positive emotions, character traits and enabling institutions can flourish. Ignatian spirituality is concerned in its own way with these areas, and perhaps Positive Psychology can offer the Ignatian movement some useful techniques and resources. But in its concern for an explicit relationship with God, Ignatian spirituality is more than merely a therapeutic method.

This paper explores the areas of overlap between Positive Psychology and Ignatian spirituality. It begins by looking at how Positive Psychology has borrowed some of its terminology from Christian spirituality, and considers what this might imply. It then compares some of the practices of both these methods of human growth, exploring how Ignatian consolation and desolation might be related to the Positive Psychology concept of ‘flow’, and comparing what Ignatius and the Positive Psychology school say about gratitude. Finally it addresses a more general question: what is right and what is wrong with seeing Positive Psychology and Ignatian spirituality as secular and sacred versions of the same fundamental effort—the effort to free the individual for engagement with the world in social commitment?

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Overlapping Terminologies

Positive Psychology uses specific terminologies to describe its goals and its successes. The essential overall goal is ‘happiness’, which is defined as the absence of such clinical symptoms as depression, anger and withdrawal. The goal of ‘authentic happiness’, as presented by Seligman, is gauged by a ‘happiness formula’: \( H = S + C + V \). ‘\( H \)’ refers to Enduring Level Happiness; it arises from an interaction of ‘\( S \)’ (the Set Range of inherited emotional traits), ‘\( C \)’ (Circumstances), and ‘\( V \)’ (Voluntary Control).³ Seligman carefully distinguishes between ‘momentary happiness’ and an ‘enduring level of happiness’. Transitory or momentary happiness is the result of transitory events or stimuli: a new article of clothing, a piece of chocolate, a funny film. Enduring happiness is more complex. It is not simply, despite the addition signs in the formula, an accumulation of emotional traits, circumstances and control. It occurs when we break out of ‘\( S \)’, the Set Range of traits, when we accept ‘\( C \)’, the Circumstances of our lives, and when we exercise whatever possible ‘\( V \)’, Voluntary Control, over these circumstances and emotions. This latter is especially important:

> To the extent that you believe that the past determines the future, you will tend to allow yourself to be a passive vessel that does not actively change its course.⁴

Already we can begin to see both the overlaps and the differences between Positive Psychology and Ignatian spirituality. Individuals following Ignatian spirituality learn early on to distinguish transitory pleasures from the causes of genuine happiness, and to recognise the negative affections arising from specific unfreedoms, whether or not these are sinful. But they acquire these skills in a context of a growing grateful understanding of God’s gifts. And the goal is not simply happiness, but rather the personal recognition of God’s gifts and will that comes from careful attention to the pattern of consolations and desolations, both inside and outside times of formal prayer.

Positive Psychology involves ‘exercises’, through which individuals’ habitual negative emotions can be positively and permanently changed,

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⁴ Seligman, Authentic Happiness, 66.
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| Courage 2                     | 勇气                                                      |
|                              | 坚毅，勤奋，毅力                                        |
|                              | 诚实，真实性，真诚性，公正性                              |
|                              | 善良，慷慨                                                |
|                              | 节制 5                                                   |
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|                              | 谨慎，审慎，谨慎                                        |
|                              | 节制，谦逊                                              |
|                              | 欣赏美，卓越性                                           |
|                              | 感恩                                                      |
|                              | 希望，乐观，未来愿景                                    |
|                              | 信仰，宗教性                                              |
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often in conjunction with traditional therapeutic methods. While the term 'exercises' is not unique to Ignatian spirituality, the fact that psychologists have adopted both specific practices and the term demonstrates that modern psychology can recognise the soundness of Ignatius’ foundations. At the present state of Positive Psychology’s development, it involves six initial exercises that build on each other and foster key dispositions:

1. Three Blessings, teaching a person to be routinely grateful;
2. Gratitude Visit, helping the person to become profoundly grateful;
3. Savour a Beautiful Day, making the person more appreciative of creation;
4. Signature Strengths, developing self-appreciation;
5. Active and Constructive Friendship and Love, fostering positive other-directedness;

Positive Psychology’s proponents report empirical studies that demonstrate increased happiness after three to six months among those who follow this programme.

Key to Positive Psychology is a classification proposed by Seligman and Christopher Peterson, according to which the 24 ‘Signature Strengths’ can be grouped into six ‘Core Virtues’. Peterson and Seligman report three empirical findings: adults worldwide report ‘a remarkable similarity in the relative endorsement of the 24 character strengths’; US adults and adolescents report similar rankings; and, while a character strength is defined as something that ‘contributes to fulfilment’, the ‘strengths of the heart’—zest, gratitude, hope and love—are more robustly associated with life satisfaction than are the more cerebral strengths such as ‘curiosity’ and ‘love of learning’.

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5 Seligman and others, ‘Positive Psychology Progress’, 416. There are multiple ongoing studies.
The ‘Core Virtues’ and ‘Signature Strengths’ of Positive Psychology can find some correlation in the terms of Christian spirituality. The six ‘Core Virtues’, defined by Positive Psychology in secular terms, are: (1) Wisdom and Knowledge; (2) Courage; (3) Humanity and Love; (4) Justice; (5) Temperance; (6) Spirituality and Transcendence. These terms correspond somewhat to several traditional terms of Christian spirituality, particularly the Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity), the Cardinal Virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude), and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and the Fear of the Lord).

However, while the words used may be the same, the meanings they carry for scientists interested in Positive Psychology and for those pursuing spirituality may diverge considerably, essentially because psychology is rooted in an appeal to reason, whereas authentic Christian spirituality is grounded in a recognition that all depends on God. Hence a term like ‘gratitude’ has richer, more specific nuances in Christian spirituality, arising from a sense that all things depend for their very existence on a creator God. When empirical scientists investigate what a person says about the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, they simply note the statement and proceed as if the terms meant what the client believes or needs them to mean. But within a religion the question of truth has to be raised. Talk of faith implies the question: ‘faith in what?’ At least in conventional settings, the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises involves a specific form of faith: faith in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Because these teachings necessarily involve a particular understanding of the nature of God, and especially of the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation, one can transfer the dynamic of the Exercises to other religious belief-systems, or to a wholly secular system, only up to a point.

Each of the six ‘Core Virtues’ includes one or more of the 24 ‘Signature Strengths’. When, therefore, Positive Psychology Speaks of its third ‘Core Virtue’ as Humanity and Love and names the ‘Signature
Strengths’ of Kindness and Generosity and Loving and Allowing Oneself to be Loved, what is being said does not fully conform to the Christian understanding of caritas, Charity. The most we can say is that there may be some overlap, or that Humanity and Love could be included within caritas. Similar points can be made about the Cardinal Virtues: there is some convergence with the fourth and fifth ‘Core Virtues’ of Justice and Temperance, and their associated ‘Signature Strengths’ such as Loyalty; Self-Control and Modesty—but the Christian terms are richer, and presuppose a whole framework of belief. Again, the traditional classification of the Gifts of the Spirit corresponds roughly to the ‘Signature Strengths’ associated with the first and second ‘Core Virtues’: Wisdom and Knowledge and Courage. A person rich in these Core Virtues will show an interest in the world, a love of learning, open-mindedness, intelligence of various sorts, valour, diligence and integrity. But there is little in Positive Psychology’s classification that coincides with the gifts of Piety and of the Fear of the Lord, both of which presuppose a quite definite Christian conception of faith. Positive Psychology’s sixth ‘Core Virtue’ is indeed called Spirituality and Transcendence, and its ‘Signature Strengths’, such as Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Sense of Purpose, Forgiveness, Humour and Enthusiasm, echo themes in much spiritual writing. But these ‘Signature Strengths’ are not necessarily to be equated with Christian virtues, with habits of behaviour informed by Christian belief. On the contrary, the realities denoted may be very different. Indeed, as Positive Psychology uses the language of Christian virtue in abstraction from Christian belief and practice, it may be providing a rationale for the increasingly popular notion that one can be ‘spiritual’ without being ‘religious’.

Practices

Central to Positive Psychology is the identification and refinement of the ‘Signature Strengths’. Through this mechanism individuals regain or retain self-worth in ways that overlap to some extent with the practices of Ignatian spirituality, and invite comparison. There are other features, too, of Positive Psychology that demonstrate striking similarities with Ignatian practice. We can look, for example, at the initial exercises mentioned above: Three Blessings; Gratitude Visit;
Savour a Beautiful Day; Active and Constructive Friendship and Love; and Meaning and Positive Service.

Three Blessings

Ordinarily, the Three Blessings is the first of the Positive Psychology exercises. Each night before retiring, the individual is asked to write down three things that have gone well during the day just completed, and also to note why they have gone well. After a week has passed, the exercise continues, but the actual writing becomes optional. Individuals report an increased facility in recognising and remembering positive events and, within three to six months, an overall increase in happiness. More statistical studies by graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania reveal that depressive symptoms decrease. The Three Blessings exercise has obvious similarities with the Ignatian Examination of Consciousness, which is rooted in the expression of gratitude to God for the gifts and blessings of the day.  

Gratitude Visit

In the second Positive Psychology exercise, the Gratitude Visit, individuals are directed to recall someone who was a positive influence on them earlier in their lives. In particular, and if appropriate, they are asked to remember someone whom they have not properly thanked and who is still alive. The exercise comprises writing down a three-hundred word testimonial about how that person has touched their lives, then making contact with the individual and visiting him or

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8 Exx 43. The steps of the Examen can be understood as: 1) ask the Holy Spirit’s assistance in reviewing the day; 2) look at the day in gratitude and give thanks for its gifts; 3) ask the Spirit’s assistance in looking at the response to God’s gifts; 4) review the day, attempting to note and feel interior freedoms and lack of freedom; 5) seek reconciliation and make a resolution. The Examen ends with the ‘Our Father’. See Phyllis Zagano, ‘Examen of Consciousness: Finding God in All Things’, Catholic Update (March 2003), http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0303.asp.
her in order to read the testimonial aloud. The results are predictable, and touch both parties.

The key point of convergence here with Ignatian spirituality is the notion of profound gratitude. Positive Psychology focuses on gratitude to one person. But the Spiritual Exercises, though they certainly direct exercitants towards the recognition of personal interdependence in their lives, do so within a wider context of gratitude to God. While Seligman’s research shows that the most grateful people are the happiest people, Christian spirituality usually recognises the most grateful people as the holiest people. The difference between the two, of course, is belief in the centrality of God in personal existence.

This is not to say that Seligman’s categories and practices are godless, or that one must renounce belief in any system before engaging in Positive Psychology practices. Rather, these practices can be viewed as secular—and therefore somewhat diminished—correlatives to older religious practices.

*Savour a Beautiful Day*

The third Positive Psychology exercise, Savour a Beautiful Day, involves setting aside a block of time, whether an hour or a day, and spending that time engaging in favourite activities. The exercise requires that the time be strictly blocked off, and that nothing be allowed to interfere with it. When the appointed time arrives, the individual is to engage in only that activity—whatever it is—without interference. More significantly, the person is not to feel any guilt about it. Instead, he or she is to ‘savour’ it. Positive Psychology posits that such pleasurable activity, deliberately and knowingly enjoyed, can instil a habit of enjoyment. And this habit can promote the enduring happiness that is the goal of Positive Psychology.

Strictly setting aside a block of time in this way is reminiscent of Ignatius’ advice (Exx 13), but it is here that Positive Psychology most clearly diverges from Ignatian spirituality. While the rationale of the ‘Savour a Beautiful Day’ exercise is deceptively close to the grace of gratitude aimed for at various points in the Spiritual Exercises, the omission of any equivalent to the Principle and Foundation represents a striking and significant difference. Against the background of the Principle and Foundation, with its vision of all life and all creation as directed towards life with God, and its insistence that that the point applies also to the exercitant’s own personal life, ‘Savour a Beautiful
Day’ can be criticized as empty and meaningless, as merely about enjoyment. In the therapeutic setting, ‘recovery’—or, in the terms of Positive Psychology, ‘happiness’—may well be dependent on a person’s acquiring the ability to enjoy creation—including and especially the creation of his or her own self. But in the long term mere enjoyment is not enough and neither does it last.

‘Signature Strengths’

A fourth exercise focuses specifically on developing the ‘Signature Strengths’ already mentioned. Participants are invited to identify and own their ‘Signature Strengths’ more fully by finding new and more frequent uses for them, and by considering how these strengths could be used to improve difficult situations.

Again, there are questions about emphasis and purpose. Positive Psychology encourages people to nurture their ‘Signature Strengths’ in order to enhance interpersonal relations and personal happiness, not as a by-product but as a goal, whereas the crucial point of Ignatian spirituality, indeed of all Christian spirituality, is to serve God and God’s creation. Positive Psychology can appear as a self-seeking and self-serving process aimed simply at obtaining individual and interpersonal happiness; it does not clearly name the end for which such progress is sought other than ‘happiness’. Christianity involves facing the question of ultimate confrontation with God; it also sees lifelong happiness as a matter of people living in accord with God’s will for them.

By contrast, a programme of Positive Psychology training available on the internet speaks much more of the individual’s efforts. The goals are those of self-improvement:

This personalised program empowers you to take control over life’s challenges and adversities. First you will measure the characteristics that make up resilience, and get insight into your areas of strength and weakness. Then you are taught how to apply the 7 Skills of Resilience to help you overcome obstacles, steer through day-to-day adversities, bounce back from major setbacks, and reach out to achieve all of which you are capable. The tested results have
helped thousands of people increase their happiness, productivity, success, and balance in their lives.9

Shortly after the beginning of the Positive Psychology movement, Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi collected fifteen articles in a special issue of *American Psychologist*. These pieces reflected on what made experiences, personalities, communities and institutions ‘positive’. Each in their own way addressed the claim that ‘the basic building block of a positive psychology’ was pleasure—or, more technically, ‘the hedonic quality of current experience’.10 In particular, Ed Diener developed his earlier work on the identification and measurement of subjective well-being.11 Spirituality—at least in these studies—was only glanced at.12

*Active and Constructive Friendship and Love*

The point of the fifth Positive Psychology exercise, ‘Active and Constructive Friendship and Love’ (also termed ‘Active and Constructive Responding’), is to help individuals respond more constructively and actively to positive events in their lives. That is, the individual must learn to accept what goes well and learn why and how the event went well. Again, there is overlap here with spiritual direction: in direction, too, the individual might well be encouraged to recognise where there has been positive energy or activity. But again too, a religious discussion of these responses will focus on the acceptance of God’s creation of the individual, and on the individual’s response to God’s graces in a given situation.

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12 Diener writes: ‘Certain coping strategies are consistently related to higher SWB [Subjective Well-Being]. For example, Folkman (1997) found that spiritual beliefs, giving ordinary events a positive meaning, positive reappraisal, and problem-focused coping were all related to positive states in HIV caregivers.’ See Susan Folkman, ‘Positive Psychological States and Coping with Severe Stress’, *Social Science and Medicine*, 45/8 (October 1997), 1207-1221.
Meaning and Positive Service

The last of the six Positive Psychology exercises, ‘Meaning and Positive Service’, overlaps with Christian social commitment. Within the terms of Positive Psychology, the exercise seeks to help the individual find a higher purpose and meaning outside the self. Christian spirituality, for its part, would raise questions about motivation. The donation of time and effort to a cause has positive spiritual value only when the donation is selfless. If a person engages in service only for the sake of personal happiness, the activity is essentially self-centred, and empty of value. Clearly, ulterior motives will often be present when people undertake ‘Positive Service’ (usually a combination of tax breaks and feel-good); these should not be denied or condemned out of hand. But it is central to the Christian practice of virtue that both the individuals concerned and those who help them by providing such services as spiritual direction constantly question the motives for action. Mere engagement in service is a spiritual trap. Dorothy Day recounts an encounter she once had when enquiring from a social services agency about possible housing for homeless families. She sat for two hours until finally she introduced herself to one of the workers. The worker apologized for letting her wait, explaining he had thought she was ‘just one of the clients’.

Interpersonal and Impersonal Relationships

One key to the Spiritual Exercises in particular, and to Ignatian spirituality in general, is the relationship between the director and the directee, even though the Spirit is clearly the ultimate director. Human contact plays an important role, in a way that stands in stark opposition to the impersonal activities of Positive Psychology. Both Ignatian spirituality and the exercises of Positive Psychology depend for their effectiveness on the individual’s long-term commitment. But Positive Psychology often lacks any interpersonal teaching component; it can easily become, literally, a programme of self-help. Its proponents clearly intend to reform the general practice of psychology, and to enhance therapeutic relationships by encouraging a focus on the

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positive and by stressing what is going right rather than what is going wrong. But the fact that Positive Psychology is disseminated to a considerable extent through the internet, with automated responses being given to people through websites, distances it from traditional therapeutic practices, let alone from Ignatian spirituality. Moreover, because Positive Psychology is often not dependent on an interpersonal therapist-client relationship, it can be difficult to assess its possibilities and its impact.  

**Ignatian Spirituality and ‘Flow’**

One of the founders of Positive Psychology likens the notion of ‘flow’, as defined within Positive Psychology, to features of Ignatian spirituality. The Spiritual Exercises aim to ground individuals in the acceptance of God’s creation and graces, and to train people to recognise the movements of the Spirit as God is inviting them to fuller forms of life and relationship. What marks out an individual as a Christian in the spirit of Ignatius is a sensitivity to moments of consolation and desolation, a growth in true discernment, and hence an absolute openness to the will of God.

Within Positive Psychology the claim has been made that the early rapid organization of the Society of Jesus, facilitated in part by the Spiritual Exercises, exemplifies a ‘shared optimal experience’ or ‘flow’. For Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, ‘flow’ occurs when,

... all the contents of consciousness are in harmony with each other and with the goals that define the person’s self.  

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14 The following disclaimer appears on the ‘Reflective Happiness’ website: ‘The Happiness Building Exercises have been demonstrated in the scientific literature to relieve depressive symptoms and to increase happiness, but the Reflective Happiness Exercises or Program are NOT a therapy for depression, nor are they a substitute for therapy or for medication. All scientific demonstrations of effectiveness are statistical. This means that the large majority of people benefit, but some people may not. Your privacy will not be invaded. Your responses are privileged and private.’ (http://www.reflectivehappiness.com/Happiness/Program.aspx)

15 ‘This is the condition we have called psychic negentropy, optimal experience, or flow. It obtains when all the contents of consciousness are in harmony with each other and with the goals that define the person’s self.’ (Isabella S. Csikszentmihalyi ‘Flow in a Historical Context: The Case of the Jesuits’, in *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies in Flow in Consciousness*, edited by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella S. Csikszentmihalyi [New York: Cambridge UP, 1988], 232-248)

Csikszentmihalyi first reported the concept of ‘flow’ in 1975 while studying boredom and anxiety, and since then he and his colleagues have undertaken detailed scientific study of ‘flow’-like experiences.  

The concept of ‘flow’ emerged from interviews in which people described optimal experiences in terms of the metaphor of being carried along in a current. Csikszentmihalyi lists eight components of enjoyment within the ‘flow’ experience:

(1) the task is challenging and requires skill;
(2) we concentrate on what we are doing;
(3) the task has clear goals;
(4) the task provides immediate feedback;
(5) there is effortless involvement;
(6) we have a sense of control;
(7) our concern for self disappears;
(8) the sense of duration of time changes as hours feel like minutes.

Can we regard the Spiritual Exercises, and the daily Examen, as means to increase personal openness to experiences of ‘flow’? Might ‘flow’ allow one to be more open to the movements of the Spirit? Perhaps, for all that there are major differences between Ignatian spiritual ministry and the training offered by Positive Psychology, one can speculate that Ignatian disciplines may enhance the possibility of ‘flow’-like experiences, and that there are parallels between these and the secular techniques of Positive Psychology. Perhaps, too, there are affinities between ‘flow’ and the increase in felt experience of the theological virtues, faith, hope and love, that lies at the foundation of Ignatian consolation.


18 Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.
Gratitude, Secular and Spiritual

It also seems that Positive Psychology and Ignatian spirituality can learn from each other as regards the understanding of gratitude. Several years ago in this journal, Jesuit psychologist Charles Shelton offered a psychology of gratitude within the context of the Spiritual Exercises. In so doing he warned against the over-idealization of gratitude. Shelton reported three constituents of any experience of gratitude emerging from a survey of more than a hundred people:

- Someone offers a gift: the recipient may be under some obligations or duty, but the sense of gift goes somehow beyond this;
- The one who receives the gift interprets the giver’s altruistic motives correctly;
- The gift triggers positive feelings in the one receiving, and often leads them, in their turn, to offer a further gift—either back to the giver or onward to some third party.

On this basis, Shelton suggests that gratitude is a ‘self-renewing dynamic of gift and goodness’ and ‘that gratitude is the giving away of goodness’.

In a later piece, a contribution to Psychology of Gratitude, a Positive Psychology book, Shelton reflects as a psychologist on gratitude specifically within the context of an Ignatian retreat. He reports that his psychological training, combined with an understanding of virtue ethics, helps him to be alert to an over-idealizing gratitude. He writes:

I have witnessed retreatants concluding their retreats with a fresh perspective on the world in which everything is viewed as a gift for which the person feels gratitude. However, such optimistic exuberance sometimes covers up or gives an overly optimistic interpretation of issues needing to be addressed, such as personal pathologies that are often are crippling, relationships that are unhealthy, or naïve perceptions of a complex world that need reappraisal.

Psychological understanding of a positive emotion such as gratitude can serve to promote a healthy and questioning realism about spiritual experiences.

Practical Considerations and Applications

Positive Psychology speaks of 'enabling institutions', and religious spirituality—or religion—can be clearly considered as one of these. Equally, the positive emotions and character traits of Positive Psychology correspond only in part to the traditional Christian virtues, or to the gifts of the Spirit. How far can we go towards regarding Ignatian spirituality as a Christian expression of Positive Psychology, and Positive Psychology as a secular version of Ignatian spirituality?

We have noted how a psychological understanding regarding a positive emotion such as gratitude can enable us to ground our talk and experience more fully in reality. Could Positive Psychology’s insights regarding other positive emotions help us in a similar way, informing spirituality without trivialising it or introducing a conflict? Conversely, could some features of Ignatian spirituality, such as the Examen, enhance the development and expression of positive emotions and ‘Signature Strengths’? These are questions worth researching. There are rich possibilities here for character development, mental health, and spiritual formation.

Let us imagine, for example, a person engaged with Positive Psychology who also practises the Ignatian Examen. Sensing similarities between the Positive Psychology practice of reviewing the day through gratitude and the Ignatian practice of the Examen, the person experiments with recollecting the day based upon the use of his or her ‘Signature Strengths’. Perhaps the person takes the ‘Signature Strength Questionnaire’, and achieves high scores in one ‘Core Virtue’—let us say (1) Wisdom and Knowledge—and in particular regarding ‘Signature Strength’ (1): Curiosity and Interest in the World. Perhaps the profile includes two ‘Signature Strengths’ in Core Virtue (6) Spirituality and Transcendence: (18) Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, and (24) Zest/Passion/Enthusiasm. As the person uses the questionnaire to become aware of these ‘Signature

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21 Available at http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/.
Strengths', he or she can reflect upon the day's activities in terms of personal use of these gifts. The individual can recall moments in the day when these 'Signature Strengths' allowed 'flow', be grateful for the others who have helped, and recognise God's presence throughout the day, even when, and perhaps especially when, there was no personal 'flow'.

By using Positive Psychology's ideas in the context of the Examen, this person can perhaps more readily identify the use or non-use of personal psychological gifts and spiritual charisms. The Examen's focus on spiritual movements is enriched by an explicit attention also to personal psychological strengths. And of course the same interaction can occur when it comes to unfreedoms, weaknesses and sinfulness. Though it is important never simply to confuse grace and nature, they remain inseparable; indeed, grace builds on nature.

Equally, we need to bear in mind all that has been said about Christian spirituality's ambivalence regarding the simple pursuit of happiness, and its discouragement of a preoccupation with personal self-development. One might regard Positive Psychology as encouraging a form of Pelagianism, the belief that the self can form and reform its nature without recourse to the grace of God. Moreover, a Christian sense of the reality of moral evil may lead us to qualify Positive Psychology's implicit assumption that whatever happens in life allows for the experience and expression of positive emotions and strengths. If Christians appropriate Positive Psychology,
they must nevertheless remain open to the paradox of Christ’s message, to the claim that the surrender of personal fulfilment proves to be the truest teleology. ‘Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’ (Matthew 10:39)

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22 Portions of this paper were delivered at the Loyola College-APA Division 36 Religion and Spirituality Conference, Columbia, Md, USA, 3 March 2006, and at the Conference of the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science, University of Pennsylvania, Pa, USA, 5 June 2006.
IN THE FOREWORD TO HER 1994 BOOK, Conjugal Spirituality, Mary Anne Oliver tells us how her interest in the history of Christian spirituality grew while she was doing doctoral studies. She read the lives of the saints and their own writings; she became familiar with the standard works on spirituality; she talked to many monks and spiritual directors; and lived with various religious communities. As time went on, her picture of Christian spirituality broadened, but at the same time she also noticed a disturbance in herself. This was because the Christian tradition seemed almost completely to ignore a dimension of life which for her was very significant: married life, the relationship between a husband and a wife. She writes:

… I began to realise that from my perspective, spirituality as recorded in writing and as taught by the Churches and their representatives was lacking. It was the whole of spiritual history and theology that was warped—not untrue, but somehow slightly out of focus for me. It finally dawned on me that for thirty-odd years I had lived in one intimate partnership, a fact of tremendous significance to my being and to my spiritual life, yet the couple in tradition was virtually nonexistent as a theologically and spiritually significant unit. When mentioned at all, it was either quickly dissolved into its two constituent parts or assimilated into a familial or communal group. I finally came to the simple realisation that spirituality as written and taught is basically celibate and/or monastic, and I am not.¹

This rather disappointed realisation was the beginning of a quest, out of which came both Mary Anne Oliver’s book and a specific

project to develop a marital spirituality. In her book, Oliver rather takes the tradition to task. If most Christians in history have been married, then surely, among the well-trodden spiritual paths arising from celibate experience, there must also be at least the odd trace of a spiritual ‘path for two together’:

And traces there were, here and there, enough to reconstitute a kind of hidden, underground current in the history of the Church, a kind of marginal, ill-defined movement which bubbles to the surface now and again ….

It was in the middle of the twentieth century that this current began to appear in a more regular and consistent form, to the point that we can now see ‘something of its shape and direction’.

It is likely that many Christians—especially married ones—will agree with this analysis and welcome Oliver’s project. Indeed, they may well have the sense that she is saying something that they themselves have long sensed, but have not had the courage or the resources to express. What follows is an attempt to sketch out what such an alternative, genuinely marital, spirituality would look like.

Model 1: Second-Class Devotion

If we go back to older terms such as ‘devotion’, ‘piety’, ‘asceticism’ and ‘mysticism’—nowadays we tend to use the word ‘spirituality’ to replace all of these—we can see that they referred to a list of religious attitudes and practices that were supposed to be binding on all (Catholic) Christians. Whether you were the Pope, a bishop, a priest, a monk, a religious sister or one of the ‘simple faithful’, you were meant to draw on this heritage of cultic practices and exercises of devotion for your spiritual life in a way that was suited to your possibilities and your situation in life. Moreover, there was also a clear distinction to be made: on the one hand, there were those who could, by virtue of a special vocation such as religious life or the priesthood, dedicate themselves to such practices intensively, professionally as it were; on the other hand, there was everyone else, the ‘simple faithful’ who had daily duties of another kind, and for whom therefore only a reduced form of the spiritual life was practicable. The greater number of Christians—and certainly the married—fell into this latter category.
Within such a framework, the most you could speak of was 'piety in the married life'; there was no such thing as a 'piety of marriage'. There obviously were, then as now, different sorts of piety, but what distinguished them from each other was either different kinds of foundational inspiration and style (Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian and so on), or particular theological stresses (eucharistic devotion, Marian devotion, or devotion to the Sacred Heart). But there was no scope for a specifically marital devotion. Married people were simply 'lay people' when it came to Christian devotion because of their state in life. As such, they were less competent in spiritual matters than the 'professionals' to be found in the churches and the convents. One construction of marital spirituality, one that is still present, at least in our folk-memory, involves this rather negative set of associations, this idea that married life is somehow second-class.

Model 2: Spirituality within Marriage

During the twentieth century, we progressed beyond this image. We shifted from 'devotional life' to 'spirituality', and our underlying conception of the spiritual life also changed. Vatican II broke with the idea of a two-tier Church. It abandoned any sense of an absolute contrast between office-holders and the faithful at large, any idea that the spiritual life was the preserve or special competence of one group within the Church. Instead it worked with the biblical idea that there is one people of God, and clearly stressed that there are no specialists when it comes to the life of faith; rather, all the baptized are called equally to lead a life of holiness.²

This shift was grounded in a changed way of thinking about the Church itself, and a consequent reconfiguration of the relationship between the Church and the world. If you regard 'the world' not as a profane realm marked off from the sphere of the sacred but rather as the place where most Christians live and act, then you are saying that all human ways of life and fields of action can become places of salvation. The Council fathers explicitly warned against setting up a divide between the sacred and the secular. Faith was inextricably bound up with the world of work and with life in society. There was a

² See, for example, Lumen gentium, nn. 11, 39-42.
great deal more to religion and spirituality than liturgical observance and keeping a few moral norms.3

Such talk represented a decisive turning away from ideals of piety according to which religion was something primarily interior, a matter of subjective experience and of individuals keeping the moral rules. For the Council, spirituality amounted to a way of life in which faith gave shape and direction to human life as a whole, and it was therefore something more than explicitly religious practice. It was everyday life—personal, professional, social, political, cultural—which became the place where Christian faith, and therefore also Christian spirituality, had to be practised and observed.

‘Marital spirituality’ in this context means ‘the practice of the faith within the framework of marriage’. This represents a decisive move beyond the first model we looked at, informed by the Council’s enriched understanding of Christian marriage. This way of thinking has become common, and it is exemplified in the following text that was distributed recently in a German diocese:

What makes a marriage Christian finds expression not only at the altar rails on the wedding day, but also—and much more so—in how the partners shape their life together on the basis of faith in God and of a life shared with the Church …. For a Christian marriage, therefore, there needs to be a consciously and jointly willed cultivation of the faith; there has to be formation and regular practice. This religious depth is also one of the places where the creativity proper to love manifests itself as it enriches the partners’ life together. All this occurs most easily where both partners are at home with a shared faith in God within the same Church. When wives and husbands pray together, for example, or with their children or their friends, this is far more than a mere exercise of devotion. When a married couple celebrate the Church’s year with its feasts and liturgies, and observe Sunday as ‘the Lord’s day’, this is a means through which parents and children grow together in faith. A shared way of life becomes a shared path of faith; the partners share also this religious side of their lives, the hope they have, the sources from which they draw

3 See, for example, Gaudium et spes, n. 43.
strength. The family, the marriage, becomes a domestic Church, where Jesus Christ is present amid everyday routine.\footnote{Bishop Joachim Wanke, in a pamphlet produced by the diocese of Erfurt in 2003: Ehe wagen: Ein Plädoyer für das Ehesakrament, 18-19.}

The phrase used here, ‘a consciously and jointly willed cultivation of the faith’, could well count as a brief definition of marital spirituality, and it reflects the advances that have been made. In the first place, faith is being linked to the life-situation of the couple: formation and practice should generate a culture of faith appropriate to their particular circumstances. Secondly—and this is something new—the personal faith of each of the partners is something that can be shared with the other, with the result that the path of faith becomes something that they can undertake as a couple. All this represents something of an innovation in the history of Christian spirituality. Perhaps there is some precedent for it in what is called ‘spiritual friendship’, but it is only in connection with sexual relationships that it finally enters official church theology.

But does even this account of the matter fully meet the criticisms raised by Mary Anne Oliver? This way of thinking still simply presupposes traditional church practice, and tells married couples to integrate existing religious forms and practices into their family lives together. But these practices come from life-contexts that are quite different from those of contemporary marriages and families; it may be unrealistic to expect them to work easily in such circumstances. In the end, does this standard post-Conciliar rhetoric allow any room for saying that marriage in its own right generates a distinctive form of Christian practice, and therefore has a distinctive spiritual significance of its own? We need to move beyond even this renewed understanding that has become standard in the post-Conciliar period, and develop a third model, one which conceives the relationship between faith and marriage in a fundamentally different way.

\textbf{Model 3: A Marital Faith}

At least in outline it should be clear enough how this new model needs to be different. The previous model started by saying that faith of a conventional ecclesial kind should shape and inform married life just
as much as it does every other sort of Christian life. What we need to do now is to show that there is a distinctive Christian spirituality generated by the experience of the marital relationship. Married life gives rise to a particular style of faith, of the quest for God, of encounter with God, and of the sense of salvation. Married people and celibates experience these realities in different ways; moreover, these differences affect what the practice of faith amounts to.

Only by adopting such a model will we arrive at the kind of understanding of marital spirituality that Oliver and others have in mind when they criticize conventional spiritual concepts and practices as inappropriate for married couples. We need to see married life as genuinely a place where people can experience ‘a life generated by and filled with the Spirit’, and thus recognize its proper place of honour in the Church.¹

Again we have a shift that we could not envisage were it not for leads given by Vatican II. Vatican II broke with a tradition of seeing marriage primarily in juridical terms, as a contract aimed at begetting children, and instead presented marriage as centred on the partners’ mutual love. In so doing, it opened the way for a fruitful twofold renewal of the theology of marriage. Firstly, the relationship between the partners came to be the centre of attention, and to be invested with a theological significance unimaginable previously. Secondly, the deeply rooted reserve within the Church regarding sexuality, which in the conventional mindset had closed off any access married people might have had to a true spiritual life, became less powerful. Thus, for


² Gaudium et spes, nn. 47-52.

But the question arises as to whether these developments in theology alone are enough to justify the claim that a real move forward has been made from our second model. If we say that the marriage relationship is the basis out of which faith develops, is this anything more than the simple converse of the idea that faith should inform married life? Are we really saying anything substantially different?

The fact that there is indeed something new here only becomes clear when you place what is being said within the context of the history of Christian spirituality. It is not simply that married people are being regarded as bearers of a genuine Christian spirituality in a way that Roman Catholics, at least, have never imagined before; it is also that this spirituality is quite different from that of the monk or the celibate because it comes out of the married way of life, which is rooted in a relationship with a partner. Perhaps history does give us some precedents, but nevertheless something different is happening when we regard a marital relationship as a legitimate and adequate basis for a distinctive way of living out Christianity.

\textbf{Features of a Christian Marital Spirituality}

The next step is to sketch out in some detail how a spirituality rooted in marriage differs from the models of spirituality we have inherited. The marriage relationship involves areas of human life ignored in the average history of Christian spirituality. Indeed, these areas have often been seen as trials or hindrances in the spiritual life. Let us look at three examples.
Christian spirituality has been decisively shaped by two specific ways of life: that of the so-called Desert Fathers, the hermits who withdrew from ordinary human civilisation in the third century; and that of monks living in stable communities, as their way of life developed first in the East, and then—from the early medieval period onwards—in the West, with major consequences for culture more generally. Initially, these two forms of life may appear to be opposites: one is solitary; the other is communal. Nevertheless, their origins and their development have been closely related: monasticism in community developed historically out of the eremitical form, and, as the tradition developed, its candidates were allowed to embrace the eremitical state only after a long period of testing in a community setting.

Both these forms are marked by a fundamental orientation that has become typical of Christian spirituality. Both are about the individual person seeking God and following Christ in and through the subordination of their own ego to the divine command. One version involves renunciation and asceticism; the other centres on obedience to the Abbot and on due consideration for other members of the community. But not even the communal version sees the interpersonal relationships between the monks in community as itself of any special spiritual significance.

Throughout the centuries, Christian mysticism has offered many variations on a fundamental theme: the encounter with God involving a retreat, a leading into the soul’s interiority. Teresa of Avila compares the soul vividly with an ‘interior castle’: the human person has to progress through its various rooms before becoming united with the Triune God in the most central chamber. For John of the Cross, too, the enlightenment which God gives to the soul is found only in the darkness of one’s own interiority, in a state where one has attained complete detachment.
For Francis of Sales, the daily surrender to God, the loving union with His will, takes place in the ‘apex of the soul’, where the heart finds the inner peace it needs for prayer.

Today, too, this fundamental pattern is very familiar to us. It depends on the assumption that the individual is most likely to find God in an interior experience of prayer or meditation, or else when communing with nature. The experience is a solitary one: it can, at most, be shared subsequently with a spiritual director. A community of like-minded people may provide some favourable conditions for such an experience, but never the fundamental material through which God is encountered.

It seems natural to suppose that a genuinely marital spirituality requires us to attribute an essentially different value to relationship as such. This is not to say that the monastic ideal is based on a tendency or desire to run away from interpersonal relationships—to say that would be false and exaggerated. And, obviously, successful relationships require autonomous individuals who can bring their individual faith-history into the relationship and continue also to have their interior experiences of God in solitude. Nevertheless, a spirituality suited to couples must work from the assumption that there is a Christian experience of faith nourished specifically by the experience of relationship. The relationship as such can have spiritual significance.

The US theologian Richard Gaillardetz sees a fundamental feature of Christian spirituality in the instinctive desire human beings have to be with each other and live together. Indeed, nothing of what is being said here should seem strange, given that Christianity presents God as a being in relationship, a being whose essence is communication. If God’s self-gift to humanity, culminating in Jesus Christ, extends to our relational lives, then one can ‘quite justifiably regard the question about how love is to be cultivated as the central question of Christian spirituality’. But to say this suggests that any approach to marital spirituality conceived according to the monastic ideal has now become quite unviable, in that it removes a significant part of married people’s

8 Gaillardetz, A Daring Promise, 23-24.
experience from the realm of spirituality and represses its spiritual significance.

**Sex and Virginity**

Since its beginnings, the Church has operated with a contrast—not always a happy one—between celibacy and marriage. A recent dictionary of spirituality sums up the background well:

Marriage appears more as a test than a creative means towards salvation. Admittedly it is presented as essentially good, but in the form in which it is lived out historically it is has been corrupted by sin. In comparison with celibacy, it is a less Christian way of life. Married life and the marriage act have no intrinsic value: they can be excused by invoking the 'goods of marriage' (children, fidelity, indissolubility of the bond), and justified only in terms of the 'purposes of marriage' (the begetting of children, control of the fleshly desires which arise when sexuality is lived in an uncontrolled way, the fulfilment of marital duty).

In the renewed theology of marriage that has developed since Vatican II, this view has been corrected in a way that no one now disputes. Sexual love is now seen as something having a religious and spiritual significance, and Pope John Paul II stressed in his official teachings that the mutual self-giving of husband and wife is expressed also in their sexual relations. Nevertheless, celibacy 'for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 19:11) is still presented in comparative terms as the more radical and hence the higher form of Christian life. An indication of this is a quotation from John Chrysostom that appears not only in John Paul II's *Familiaris*

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consortio but also in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a text which may affirm marriage, but which regards celibacy as something higher.\textsuperscript{11}

Sexuality and *eros* are at the basis of the marital relationship, both physically and psychologically, and have their inalienable place there. Christianity has spent much time naming and denouncing the destructive powers opposed to God that can make use of our sexuality. To some extent, it has been following the Old Testament in this respect, with its rejection of the cultures surrounding Israel that developed sexual cults conflating the sexual with the divine. But, at the same time, it has neglected another aspect of the biblical testimony, according to which sexuality is a gift of God, one that—at least for the second creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b-25)—opens human beings up to relationship and in so doing makes them fully human for the first time. We need to hope that a renewed spirituality of marriage can help us find a realistic, but nevertheless fundamentally positive, way of relating to sexuality.

*Sacral Spaces and an Everyday Holism*

Conventionally, Christian spirituality is marked by a withdrawal into private interiority, which is taken to be its proper sphere—an interiority contrasting with what happens in everyday life. Hence we imagine that the spiritual life in the proper sense requires its own consecrated space, so that our relationship with God can have its distinctive place. Something similar occurs when it comes to time: we have a liturgical year and times set aside for daily prayer; we demarcate privileged moments from the general flow.\textsuperscript{12} But this kind of demarcation cannot happen at all easily within the life of marriage and the family, in which everyday reality makes constant demands.

Any truly contemporary spirituality, especially a marital spirituality, will need to engage with everyday reality more intensively than has been customary hitherto, and to discover precisely there its sphere of operation. It has become common for both scholarly and more popular...

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\textsuperscript{11} John Chrysostom, *De virginitate*, 10:1; see *Familiaris consortio*, n. 16, Catechism, n. 1620: ‘Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be particularly good. It is something better than what is admitted to be good that is the most excellent good.’

\textsuperscript{12} One influential scholar categorizes spiritualities in terms of their *Sitz im Leben*, of their fundamental material, and of the ways in which they organize space and time: Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002 [2000]), 11-17.
writers on spirituality to speak of ‘the spirituality of everyday life’. It is now quite standard for works on spirituality to discuss how we shape our lives, how we take our decisions, how we function in our jobs and how we relate to other people, notably our spouses. And there are plenty of resources for developing such a vision in biblical and church tradition, such as the Ignatian ‘finding God in all things’, or Vatican II’s encouragement towards a secular piety.

But closely related to this point is something else, which we might describe by using the trendy word ‘holism’. There are tendencies in modern society towards an ever greater compartmentalisation of the different spheres of life. The call to holism is a call to move beyond mere acquiescence in this fragmentation, and instead to develop a self-understanding which recognises that it is one person who lives in all these spheres, and which honours the connections between them.

In a recent US study of young adults, 94% claimed that their first criterion for choosing a marriage partner was that the person in question should be a ‘soul mate’—someone on the same wavelength, someone with whom there was an affinity of soul. The researchers speak of a yearning for a ‘spiritual’ quality in relationships. There are problems here, no doubt: such expectations regarding marriage are too high given the trends at work in modern society. But nevertheless it is significant that human relationships appear as fundamental when these young people are thinking about how to cope with life and its everyday pressures. A spirituality of marriage adequate to today’s needs will need to connect the desire for a stimulating and life-giving relationship between soul mates with the reality of how relationships often work out from day to day.

**Parameters for a Marital Spirituality**

If what has been said so far is correct, it is a mistake to try to develop a marital spirituality simply drawing on the spiritualities developed by celibates in monastic contexts. We need rather to start from the rich potential for spirituality hidden in marital relationships as such. With this in mind, I would like to end by suggesting some parameters within

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13 For a representative list, see Waaijman, *Spirituality*, 14, n. 14.

which the quest for an authentic marital spirituality should be conducted.

Closeness to Experience

It is unrealistic to expect that marriage partners will just take over the role in Christian spirituality hitherto assigned to religious and to celibate priests. A spirituality proper to lay people, and especially to married people, will be growing in a different soil and will therefore bring forth different fruits. The soil is the whole range of what the couple experience together: daily routine, moments of intimate exchange, the taking of decisions about the life they will be leading together. There is no need for anyone to go in quest of this reality; in each marital relationship it is immediately there to be seen. The only question is how it can be developed so that it becomes something significant for faith and for the spiritual life. Or, to put it another way: how can the Spirit be discovered within this reality, the Spirit who makes the couple co-workers and friends with God?

Closeness to the Church

If we are talking about a new form of spirituality, this does not mean a rupture with the Church's tradition of faith; it can only grow out of that tradition. One simple reason for this is that human experience always needs to be interpreted, to be set within a wider context, and must therefore draw on pre-existing categories. Those wishing to discover the spiritual significance of marital relationships will need to reach back into the Church's treasury of religious expressions and narratives—otherwise the religious dimension will remain inaccessible to them. Whatever marital experience suggests will need to be developed, shaped and evaluated with the help of resources from this tradition. Otherwise, we will all too easily create a marital spirituality in line with our own wishes and projections—something that will not deserve the name of 'Christian',
and in which we will be encountering our own idols rather than the living God.

Devotion in Everyday Married Life

Marital relationships are primarily human realities; their links with the divine are not self-evident. It is only if one learns to read and interpret them in a special way that their religious and spiritual significance becomes clear. Biblical narratives and church tradition give us many examples of how others have learnt to read their ongoing experience in a spiritual way, and of how this process has led them to significant conclusions. But this does not absolve us from the task of undertaking a similar search ourselves. We need to discover when, where and how that deeper meaning is emerging in our own relationships—a meaning that makes them not only sources of earthly happiness but also places where God is working our salvation.

One of the necessary conditions for a marital spirituality is a kind of openness in the partners that one might describe as attention, consideration, or even—to use a religious word—devotion or devotedness. We need to stop for a while and break off from our routine in order to become more aware of a relationship’s deeper spiritual dimension. This kind of attention or devotion might occur in a number of ways.

Let us begin by thinking about time. Christian spirituality has traditionally observed a range of feast-days that cut across our everyday routine and are marked off as special. The Church’s calendar specifies Sundays and some special Solemnities; in monastic life, there are fixed times of prayer that are part of the opus Dei and form the day’s high points. In a marital relationship, however, special times are relatively infrequent—at least once the relationship has moved beyond the early stages. Everyday routine dominates, not just in external circumstances but in the relationship itself. If this is so, then there may well be a need for marital ‘devotions’—practices that aim quite deliberately to cut across the routine passage of time at special points, to enable the partners to renew and confirm their relationship together. One might think of a nice meal together in a restaurant, or of having sex, or of holding a serious conversation in order to sort out a conflict. The New Testament speaks of a kairos: the rich opportunity, the right moment. For the Bible, a kairos is always a time when God’s
dealing with humanity become visible as time passes. One might apply this idea to God’s appearance within the relationship of two partners.

From time, we can move to space. The Christian spiritual tradition makes use not only of privileged times but also of privileged spaces: convents, churches and sanctuaries. The marital and family space, however, is the home, the place where life plays itself out in all its dimensions, including dimensions which do not seem all that holy. Vatican II did not hesitate to see an ecclesiological significance in the home and to speak of the ‘domestic Church’. Considerable creativity and effort are needed if that formula is to correspond with reality. But the recognition of real family space as God’s space cannot be a matter of setting up a dedicated prayer room in the home, for then it is no longer family space at all. What might be helpful would be to designate a particular place within the sitting room or the dining room—the dining table or a group of chairs—where the partners can occasionally sit with each other, and in this special space allow another dimension to make its way into their relationship.

Then there are also symbols and rituals. In their regular routine, couples often use specific signs and rituals that remind them of the basis of their life together: the love they give each other. Greeting each other with a kiss, saying goodbye with a hug, eating together, sharing memories of a journey or of how they have coped with a difficult situation—such things, assuming that they remain genuine and have not degenerated into mere formalities, are not just relics of some previous happiness. Rather, they enable the partners to keep their love alive, as something with energy and sparkle. At such points something breaks into the monotony of our routine—something that reminds us, rather like the sacraments and rituals of official religion, of the deeper basis of our life together, and enables us to draw once again on this source.

These are just a few suggestions about what it might mean to speak of marital spirituality and about how it might flourish. Marital spirituality needs its ‘devotions’, just like conventional Christian spirituality. But married couples will need to find new forms if they are

For Vatican II, the family is the domestic Church

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to develop further the spiritual tradition of which they are the bearers, and to discover in new ways the Spirit of God present in their relationships.

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THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

An Interchurch Marriage

Ruth Reardon

Martin and I would not have married—indeed we were unlikely ever to have met one another—had it not been for the calling of the Second Vatican Council by Pope John XXIII in January 1959, on the final day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

I was living in Belgium and was visiting a house called the Maison St Jean at Louvain. This had been built by Lucien Morren, a professor at the University, and his wife, Hélène. With no children of their own, they had decided to make a home for some twenty or so overseas students; they also offered hospitality to far more. The Morrens were committed ecumenists. I remember the excitement of that Sunday afternoon when we heard of Pope John's announcement. At supper, we drank wine. This only happened on students' birthdays, or when there was some other reason for special rejoicing. We were rejoicing because we knew that the Council was to have something to do with Christian unity, although nobody knew quite what.

Our Backgrounds

The Church of England wanted to discover the thinking behind this amazing development. One of the methods chosen was to send a number of young Anglican priests to Louvain for a year, to study theology in the graduate Schola Major, and to pick up as much information as possible about current theological trends. This could not be done in England; in those days relations with the Roman Catholics were overseen by the Church of England Council for Foreign Relations. The priests who were sent each had to keep a diary that would be personally read by the Archbishop of Canterbury. At the beginning, the placement of these young priests was to be kept secret, because there might be strong objections from some Anglicans—and, indeed, from some English Roman Catholics. Rather than being
incarcerated in one of Louvain’s many residences for priest students, they were housed in the Maison St Jean, although they lunched regularly at one of the ecclesiastical colleges. Martin was the second priest who came to Louvain, for the academic year 1960-1961.

His predecessor was a jolly extrovert, an entertaining participant in the life of the house. Martin was quieter, with a deep ecumenical spirituality in the Abbé Couturier tradition. This humble priest from Lyon had founded the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the years between the two World Wars, and thus fostered the ‘spiritual ecumenism’ that Vatican II was later to designate ‘the soul of the whole ecumenical movement’.1 In 1960, Couturier was better known in England among Anglicans than among Catholics. Martin had been study secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Cambridge. He had visited Greece, and spent some time at the Orthodox seminary at Halki. He was a participant in the winter course at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, at Bossey near Geneva, in 1955-1956.

When he set out the reasons for his application to go to Bossey, he said that his principal hope in applying was ‘to experience in community as intensely as possible the scandal of the divided Church’. There were of course no Roman Catholic students at Bossey in those days. Louvain widened his experience. In between he had been at Cuddesdon Theological College before becoming a curate in Rugby. The great excitement of the 1960 Week of Prayer at Rugby was Catholic involvement, in the person of Fr Henry St John OP. The prospect of Vatican II had opened up new ecumenical horizons, and Martin was happy to be asked to go to Louvain for a year on behalf of the Church of England. He thought he had been asked to go because there was no danger of his becoming a Roman Catholic.

I was also happy to be in Louvain. I had been brought up in a devout Baptist home, and intended to be a missionary in Africa from about the age of five. I had been opened up a little to ecumenical perspectives by my parents’ involvement in the Religion and Life initiative during World War II. Later I represented Baptist students at the First British Conference of Christian Youth (Bangor, 1951). In

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1956 I became a Roman Catholic. I did not have any formal instruction; instead I went through a long process of discussion with Fr John Coventry SJ, following a talk he had given to the college Student Christian Movement on the development of dogma. I was fortunate in that a fellow postgraduate had contacts with French Catholicism. She introduced me early on to the Abbé Couturier tradition of spiritual ecumenism, and in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 1957 I organized daily prayer for unity in the college. Before the end of the year I was living in Belgium, however, and this was very congenial. I was working for the Institute of Race Relations on the history of what was then the Belgian Congo. Later I was to have the opportunity of doing Religious Studies at Louvain.

**Meeting One Another and Getting to Know One Another**

Martin arrived in September 1960. By then I had been living at the Maison St Jean for a year: the Morrens thought it would be good for their Anglican guests to have a native English speaker in the house who knew something about ecumenism. Martin and I were soon drawn together. Over the next few months we discussed at length the insights Martin was gaining from lectures in the Schola Major; he was amazed at the openness of some of the theology he heard. Martin used to say later that I exaggerated his anti-Catholicism in those days, but I remember feeling on the defensive quite often. A month after his arrival he recorded ‘a long and illuminating discussion of Authority in the Church with Ruth Slade, who became an RC from the Baptists 5 or 6 years ago’. He was surprised to find that I too knew something about the creative theology that he was just discovering, and that I could talk about a doctrine like the Immaculate Conception in terms that made some kind of sense to him. I was never anti-Anglican, but had a deep nonconformist suspicion of Establishment. We enjoyed our lengthy and intense discussions, came to respect each other’s integrity, and liked each other’s company. We started praying Evensong together sometimes—I think it was a kind of ecumenical gesture on my part to
reciprocate Martin’s presence at Mass (which he was surprised to find was not as difficult as he had expected) and at Compline (in which the whole household joined). But it was not until the following January, when the two of us were asked, together with an Orthodox student, to prepare a service for the Week of Prayer, that we realised as we worked together that something else had happened. We were in love.

It was a terrible shock. We were dismayed. A few years earlier Martin had dissuaded a friend of his from marrying a Roman Catholic. When I became a Catholic I had assumed I would become a religious—probably an enclosed nun devoted to praying for Christian unity. Catholics were known to be good at praying for unity, although in those days they didn’t seem able to do anything about it. I had visited a number of communities, but had never felt a strong enough call actually to enter a novitiate, and by now I had discovered that even laywomen could play a part in promoting unity. I had thought of doing this as a member of a lay Benedictine community. I had not closed my mind to the possibility of marriage, but nevertheless a mixed marriage seemed out of the question, not something even to be considered. When I went, in some trepidation, to tell Mme Morren what had happened to us she was left speechless for what felt like five minutes—a very unusual occurrence. ‘What, in our house?’ I was relieved not to be sent away, and the three of us agreed that nobody else should get to know of it.

**Loving One Another**

Falling in love is always a gift, but in this case it was hardly a welcome one. Whatever were we to do with it? Yet there was delight as well, and awe and wonder. Marriage seemed totally out of the question. We were well aware of all the problems. Mixed marriages were strongly discouraged by both our Churches; even those committed to ecumenism could not see them as anything but a problem. Martin could never have promised to bring up his children as Catholics (and anyway, what if I died when they were young?—I agreed it didn’t make sense). Similarly, the idea
that I should promise to try to 'convert' Martin offended my ecumenical sensitivity. Both these promises were absolute requirements of canon law for a mixed marriage to be recognised as valid. The situation seemed impossible. Yet we had the sense that we deeply wanted to throw in our lot with one another and spend the whole of our lives together. We also wanted this gift somehow to be fruitful for the coming together of our Churches. Living in Belgium, we were very aware of the welcome that Cardinal Mercier had extended to Lord Halifax and Abbé Portal at the beginning of what developed into the Malines Conversations:

In order to unite with one another, we must love one another; in order to love one another, we must know one another; in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another.  

Well, we had met one another, we had got to know one another, and now we loved one another.

**Love and Unity**

Might we both commit ourselves to an ecumenical community? Since his Bossey experience, Martin had been interested in the idea of such a community. His sense was that it was only if divided Christians could live, pray and work together that they would really be able to understand one another from the inside. A young American Methodist minister studying in Louvain for a year had brought news of discussions about the possibility of an ecumenical order among students at Yale. Martin had organized a small meeting in London in early January 1961, so that he could talk with people in England about the 'interim fellowship' that had been set up at Yale. A variety of ideas had been pooled, with very different kinds of communities envisaged, but no concrete plan. It was rather nebulous.

Martin and I were both sufficiently steeped in the tradition of the Abbé Couturier to know that the road to Christian unity must include suffering, the way of the cross. I have a little card in Martin's even handwriting dated April 1961: on one side there are some thoughts illustrated by a design he had asked his mother to embroider on his

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2 Curtis, Paul Couturier, 48.
ordination stole a few years earlier, and on the other there is a prayer we had written for daily use.

The reflection reads:

The cross is neither the beginning nor the end of life, neither the centre nor the circumference of love. The beginning, centre and source is the love of the Trinity in Unity. The end and circumference and summing up of all things is a ring, the unity of all in the love of God, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The cross then cannot be of our own choosing, for God is at the centre of it; nor can we seek it as an end, for the end is the unity of love. There are two tests, then, of whether the cross is the true cross, whether it is the one God has chosen for us: its creative source must be the reconciling love of God; its end must be the reconciling of all to God. If it is the true cross, running all along it will be the reconciling grace of God, giving us the ministry and power to be the servants and apostles of His unity, the procreators of His love.

And the prayer runs as follows:

Father, we have given ourselves absolutely to you, and you have given us utterly to one another. Deepen and strengthen our love and unity through your Holy Spirit. Lead us along the way you have chosen for us—which the sin of man has made into the form of a cross. Hold ever before us the vision of the unity of all in the love of God, that we may fight to the last against the devil and all that divides us. Draw us closer to the source of our love and unity, that we may become closer to one another and more fruitful channels of your creative and reconciling love for all mankind; till we come to the source and end of all, are taken down from the cross, and are raised from death to share in the marriage supper of our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When, much later, we added a version of this prayer to a little pack prepared by the Association of Interchurch Families, among other changes the devil in person was removed, and 'man' had become 'human'.

A Proposal

At the end of the summer term Martin returned to parish work in Rugby, and I went home to Bath for the vacation. We travelled up and down the Fosse Way on our scooters; we discussed and pondered and waited. We wrote to one another regularly once I had returned to
Louvain. The future was very unclear, but increasingly it seemed to us that it should be a future together. A strange idea was simmering in our minds and hearts. But by the end of 1961 we were far enough forward in our thinking to write it down.

Entitled "Mixed" Marriage: A Concrete Case, it took up two and a half sides of foolscap. We looked at marriage in terms of both companionship and procreation. We began with companionship:

In this companionship of two baptized Christians, founded on their common faith in Christ and on their fellowship in the Holy Spirit, it is the vocation of each partner to help to bring the other to perfection in the love of God.

Thus marriage between Christians of different communions, which have much to learn from one another, could 'contribute to the understanding and healing of the divisions of Christendom', since,

... understanding can only be achieved by sustained personal contact between individuals. The companionship of marriage provides such contact in the highest degree.

It would need to be expressed in common prayer and worship:

Mixed marriages themselves seem to be a form of communicatio in sacris. Intercommunion is clearly impossible in present circumstances. However, it would seem to be essential not only to pray together privately but also regularly to attend one another's public worship.

The problems raised by procreation, however, seemed intractable. 'One has a more direct responsibility for the religious belief and behaviour of a child than for those of a spouse.' Quite apart from any canon law, we could not envisage the three most obvious possibilities when it came to bringing up children: all as Anglicans, all as Roman Catholics, or dividing the children between the Churches. 'There is therefore a fourth possibility: a virginal marriage. This seems justifiable in Roman Catholic theology.' (We had done our homework
—I remember finding that someone had written a thesis in Paris on the question of whether the marriage of the Virgin Mary to Joseph was a true marriage. I wrote about the possibility of seeing a copy, only to be told that one had been deposited in the University of Louvain.) It also seemed canonically justifiable, for in the canon law of the time marriage was defined,

... by mutual consent, not by the act of bodily union. By this consent, each of the partners gives and receives the marriage right (ius in corpus) perpetually and exclusively. However, if the spouses have a good reason for doing so, and, while recognising themselves fully and voluntarily orientated towards procreation as one of the ends of marriage, they can renounce for a time or for ever the use of their right to the marriage union.

The next paragraph of our paper was crucial to our understanding:

It can be noted that there is an analogy between an unconsummated marriage and the inability of the two possible spouses to receive communion together. If reunion between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion comes in their lifetime, they would be happy to consummate their marriage. If not (as does not seem humanly possible, although with God all things are possible), they would live their marriage with a sense of its eschatological significance, looking forward with longing to the marriage supper of the Lamb and the final consummation of the union of God and His people.

On the Anglican side, it seemed to Martin to be essential to receive episcopal permission, and to recognise that renunciation of the use of the marriage right would be the direct result of a combination of circumstances. If these changed, the marriage should be consummated.

There remained on the Roman Catholic side the question of whether Martin would be expected to make the canonically required promise about children (which he did not feel he could do, even a hypothetical one). We also had to think about the relatively secondary question of the wedding: would Roman Catholic and Anglican clergy be able to officiate at the same ceremony?
Waiting and Wondering

In January 1962 Martin started his new work in Sheffield as the first full-time Secretary of a city Council of Churches, financed by all the Churches. Between Easter and Christmas I spent most of my time nursing my mother while she was suffering from terminal cancer. It was a year of waiting, wondering and asking advice of a small number of trusted people. I took a dim view of the advice that, if we committed ourselves to a virginal marriage, we should ‘make sure enough people know of your intention, in case you want to get an annulment later’.

My mother’s advice (she had early detected a propensity to a martyr complex in my make-up) was better: ‘If you do decide on this kind of marriage, don’t ever feel sorry for yourself’.

Later we got to know an Italian couple who married around this time. The Catholic had married without a dispensation so that his Waldensian bride would not have to make a promise about the children, but it had also been agreed that the marriage would be regularised immediately afterwards by the Catholic Church (with no promise involved). Nobody suggested that to us, and I think it would have shocked our Anglo-Saxon sensibilities at that time. We had written in our document that:

… what is quite clear … to both of them is that Christian unity cannot be furthered by disobedience to church authority; and so any solution they find must be fundamentally acceptable not only to their own consciences but also to their respective ecclesiastical authorities.

We always kept our respect for church authority, but later came to understand that obedience is a much more complex reality than we thought then. We realised that norms written by Italians should be applied according to Latin principles.

For us, however, it was the late summer of 1963 before we came to a decision that, so far as we were concerned, God was calling us to marriage, and we were ready to go ahead and apply for a Catholic dispensation and for Anglican permission. In November I went in fear and trembling to Archbishop’s House in Malines and had a difficult interview with a cleric. He was very discouraging about the idea of a virginal marriage, and I came away depressed, feeling certain that we would not get a dispensation. But then a letter came. ‘To my surprise',
wrote the cleric, ‘Cardinal Suenens is very sympathetic to your proposal’. With great pastoral sensitivity, the Cardinal decided that Martin need make no promise about the upbringing of any children we might have, although at the time this was an absolute requirement of canon law. Even if the Cardinal accepted our intention, he could not be expected to be confident that we would not change our minds later. But in lieu of a promise, Martin wrote a statement explaining his position, and also saying he would do nothing to cut me off from my Church, and the Cardinal was satisfied. Later we were to learn that 'going beyond the law is not necessarily going against it'. Nobody ever suggested that I should make any promise. Eventually Cardinal Suenens said that he would give us a dispensation to marry in any case, but asked us to see Cardinal Heenan before we married, since we would be living in England. He felt this was a matter of courtesy on his part.

When Martin gave a Cardinal Heenan Memorial Lecture at Heythrop in 1990, he recalled our lunch with Cardinal Heenan at Ware in Easter Week of 1964. The Cardinal had expressed his hope that we would have children. He courteously but firmly suggested to Martin throughout the meal that the solution to all our problems would be for him to promise that his children would be brought up as Catholics, and perhaps for him to become a Catholic himself. This would not be too difficult, since Anglicans and Catholics were already so close—Catholics just believed a little bit more. Then the whole family would belong to the one true Church.

We went to see Martin’s bishop. He talked with us at length, and said he would like to pray about it. Next day Martin received his letter. ‘Not only do I think that you may get married; I think you should get married’, he wrote.

So we married in the year that the Second Vatican Council passed its Decree on Ecumenism. Our wedding took place in the chapel of the Maison St Jean, in a ceremony in which Catholic and Anglican priests both shared. In England at the time, this would have been impossible, although it is standard practice now. Earlier in the morning, we had been present together at both Catholic and Anglican eucharistic
celebrations. We had waited a long time, and it had been a difficult decision; but we were sure of our vocation. Later we found that this was true of many other interchurch couples. Precisely because families and Churches had made such difficulties, these couples had been led to make mature decisions to marry that could not be shaken, whatever the problems that lay ahead.

The Experience of Marriage

We had come to our married spirituality through spiritual ecumenism. We wrote it into our rings: inside the one Martin gave me was the inscription *That they may be one*, and inside the one I gave him *That the world may believe*. For many interchurch couples it is the other way round. They come to a commitment to Christian unity because of their commitment to one another in marriage. In the end it is fundamentally the same thing. We are called to weave together our baptismal lives by sharing in the same love with which Christ loves the Church—the love with which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit. That is the only way to our unity. Everything that furthers our unity—between married partners or between Churches—is an expression of that love. Everything that hinders it is an obstacle to the free flowing of that love. But, paradoxically, it is by overcoming such obstacles that we put ourselves in a position to receive that love and unity.

Both in our married relationship and in our Churches’ relationship, we came so often to see that things which at first appeared to be mutually contradictory were in the end either complementary or even different expressions of the same reality. We began to learn not to try to shape the other in our own image. When we hurt one another, we learned to forgive and to be reconciled. There were amusing moments. I was a member of the Roman Catholic Ecumenical Commission for England and Wales, set up after Vatican II. Martin was a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s newly established Commission on Roman Catholic Relations. An informal meeting was arranged between the two bodies. At this gathering somebody tried to introduce us to one another!
Growing into Unity

There were exciting developments in the 1960s for mixed marriages. Vatican II had changed the climate. Its decrees on religious liberty and on ecumenism meant that the conscientious responsibility of the other Christian partner for the religious upbringing of the couple’s children had to be respected by the Roman Catholic Church, as had the ecclesial community of which the partner was a member. It was clear that change was coming when, in 1966, *Matrimonium sacramentum* said that difficulties over the promises made by prospective mixed marriage partners were to be referred to Rome. Research soon told us that where this was done, a dispensation was granted provided that the Catholic partner promised to do their best for the Catholic baptism and upbringing of all the children. No promise was asked of the other Christian partner. The dispensation was given even in cases where it was clear that the children would in fact be brought up in the community of the non-Catholic partner.

Relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches were changing by leaps and bounds. The Anglican–Roman Catholic Preparatory Commission raised great hopes. There was considerable confidence at the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches that the Roman Catholic Church was likely to become a member of the Council before the next Assembly. In Britain, the British Council of Churches–Roman Catholic Joint Working Group seemed set to prepare the way for Catholic membership of the BCC. Local Councils of Churches were admitting Roman Catholics into associate or full membership, and the excitement of this gave a renewed impetus to local ecumenism. Liturgies were changing in a way that made ordinary Christians feel much closer to one another.

It was in this climate of ecumenical hope that a daring new thought came into our minds. Clearly *Matrimonium sacramentum* envisaged only the case in which the Catholic partner might not be obliged to insist on the Catholic upbringing of the children because of special circumstances, so they would be brought up in the other Christian Church. Normally the Catholic partner was supposed to ‘win’, as it were; sometimes, however, there might be reasons for the other partner to do so. But the way was also left open for another possibility—one which gave greater weight to the joint responsibility of the two partners and even opened up new ecumenical perspectives.
This was a particularly exciting development that came out of our experience of being married, of being committed to one another in love, of seeking the truth together, and of worshipping in both our churches week by week. We came to see that perhaps a child could come into this unity that was growing and deepening between us all the time—however fragile and limited—and be brought up in both our church communities. Maybe a child would only have to opt for one or the other on leaving home. We went back to some of those who had advised us before our marriage. In January 1968 we floated the idea of dual upbringing in One in Christ, a Catholic ecumenical review that I was editing at the time, and asked for and received many responses. To our delight, a child psychologist, a Sister of Notre Dame, said that she saw no psychological problems that would arise for children brought up in this way. What would matter for them would be the unity and integrity of their parents. Moreover, why, she asked, should they not continue in both Churches? They might never need to opt for one or the other. That possibility was something that had not occurred to us.

Our son was born on the very day in 1970 that a motu proprio from Rome was published on mixed marriages. Martin sat by my bed writing a commentary on it for The Times. It announced what seemed a revolutionary change in Roman Catholic discipline: no longer was a promise needed from the non-Catholic partner regarding the Catholic baptism and upbringing of the children. The obligation was simply that the Catholic partner was to do all that he or she could in that regard. Rome was acknowledging that both parents in an interchurch marriage are responsible for the religious upbringing of their children, and that a decision on how this was to be done should not be enforced unilaterally.

**Marriage and Eucharist**

Before our son was born we had had the experience of eucharistic sharing in the Catholic Church, something that had seemed to us totally out of the question in 1964. In 1968 we received communion together at a Eucharist celebrated by a staff member of the Secretariat
for Promoting Christian Unity; the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had already allowed an American Presbyterian bride to receive communion at a Nuptial Mass in Italy. In 1969 we were on a Greek island where the Catholic priest came by boat to celebrate for a small congregation on Saturday evenings. We could only speak with him in French. ‘Do you believe in the Holy Eucharist?’ he asked Martin, and on receiving an affirmative answer welcomed him without reservation.

The strong link between our eucharistic sharing and our sexual union always seemed very important to us. Both were expressions in this world of our participation together in the love of the Father for the Son, of Christ for the Church, of our love in the Spirit for one another. Marriage and the Eucharist both also point forward to the final consummation: the union of all in the love of God.

Now that Martin has died after forty years of our marriage, I wear both our rings. They remind me, not only that Martin has not abandoned me, but also that I remain committed not to abandon the work to which we were called together in this world, both in our family life and in our Churches. He is alive in Christ interceding for me, for our children and grandchildren, and for the unity of all. Marriage is for this world, but the love and unity between us is a participation in God’s own love, and is therefore eternal. One day I too will be called to the fuller knowledge of that love in our Father’s house.

Martin and Ruth Reardon were founder members of the British Association of Interchurch Families in 1968. There are similar associations in other parts of the world, and an international network has been formed. The Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families held near Rome in 2003 adopted a paper, ‘Interchurch Families and Christian Unity’, following an international process of drafting and consultation co-ordinated by Martin. It is obtainable in booklet form from info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk.
IN 1995 LARS VON TRIER, the gifted and controversial Danish film director, drew up a series of ‘ten commandments’. Along with his colleague Thomas Vinterberg, von Trier proposed to make a new kind of film. He entitled his ten commandments ‘the vow of chastity’ because he wanted to return to purity in film-making. He sought to get away from reliance on high-tech gadgets; and by stripping away all the layers of ornamentation that had become the norm in cinema, he hoped to arrive at the unadorned truth. In hindsight, von Trier’s famous vow looks more like a clever publicity stunt than a serious commitment, especially since he has long since relaxed it.

Over 150 years before von Trier’s vow of chastity, another brilliant and infuriating Dane, also from Copenhagen, opted for a life of celibacy. This was just a year after his high-profile engagement to a woman whose beauty would not have looked out of place in the greatest of Hollywood movies. The Dane in question was Søren Kierkegaard; Regine Olsen was his fiancée. I want to ask four main questions here: why did Kierkegaard choose celibacy? How did he cope with it? What did he get out of it? And what can we learn from his story?

To an external observer, Kierkegaard’s choice of celibacy must have seemed more than perplexing. After all, the match in the making appeared ideal: it was a case of the Beauty meets the Brain. Both came from the upper middle class, Regine’s family being more solidly established in Copenhagen than that of Kierkegaard. His father had been born in extremely poor circumstances on the barren heaths of Jutland, but had speedily gone from rags to riches in the years after he moved to the capital as a boy. The moment of their engagement billowed with drama, though it was soon deflated by the events that followed. Kierkegaard met Regine in front of her house. She let it drop that there was no one at home, which he boldly (for 1840) took as an invitation to go inside. For a few moments they stood uneasily in the

The Way, 45/4 (October 2006), 89-106
living room. She became fidgety and restless, at which point he invited her to play the piano for him, as she often did. She sat at the piano and played, but his mind seemed elsewhere. Suddenly he picked up a music book, closed it forcefully, and flung it on the piano, exclaiming, 'O, what do I care about music; it is you I seek, for two years I have been seeking you'.

For all his assiduous seeking of Regine, Kierkegaard became convinced he had made a dreadful error the day after the engagement. In order to extricate himself, he concealed the intensity of his love under a surface veneer of flippancy and even cruelty. But her keen intuition enabled Regine to see through the deceptive façade. She may not have been his intellectual match, but she was more perceptive than Kierkegaard or posterity gave her credit for being. He encouraged her to give him up, and she refused. More than half a century later, Regine shared these memories with her good friend Hanne Mourier. These conversations were written up and the text was approved by Regine before being deposited in the Søren Kierkegaard Archives. Regine’s reflections display a deep affection for Kierkegaard. She claims that she did not want the engagement to end because she was concerned that this might reinforce his strong strain of melancholia. She also, surprisingly, remarks that, despite her love for Kierkegaard, she did not actually envisage him as a husband:

That you one day should marry Kierkegaard was actually quite foreign to your thoughts; the thought occurred to you quite briefly and only once; but you loved him and were captivated by his spirit.

Too often, commentators overlook Regine’s own pain, treating her as little more than a foil for Kierkegaard’s towering genius. She suffered in this painful relationship at least as much as Kierkegaard did. Her heroine, the famous fifteenth-century martyr Joan of Arc, had to hold her own not only against the military onslaught of the English but also

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against the more insidious attack of learned theologians. Regine, for her part, had to endure activities of dubious theological value during her engagement to Kierkegaard. Each week, for instance, she patiently listened to her fiancé reading aloud to her a sermon from Bishop Mynster of Copenhagen, the primate of the Danish Church.

Kierkegaard suffered too. In his journals he describes the torment of having to treat her cruelly in order to shake her off, all the while hiding his deep love for her. The unhappy outcome was poignantly summed up by his sending her a withered rose, which was soon followed by his returning her engagement ring. But Regine refused to budge—‘she fought like a lioness’.

Eventually he had to call it off himself.

Søren Kierkegaard’s engagement to Regine Olsen lasted little more than a year (September 1840 to October 1841), yet its after-effects lingered for a lifetime. The emotional upheaval took its toll on Regine. She became ill for a long period afterwards. Being a woman in nineteenth-century Denmark, her whole status was inextricably linked to marriage. Luckily, she did get well again: as Friedrich Nietzsche, another prophetic nineteenth-century thinker, realised, that which does not kill us makes us stronger.

Regine survived, and in 1847 went on to marry Frederik Johan Schlegel, her first love, a gentleman who had patiently and devotedly waited for her to get over her broken engagement with Kierkegaard. The Schlegels even kept up with Kierkegaard’s writings, and often read aloud to each other from his books in the evenings. In March 1855,
Frederik Schlegel was appointed Governor of the Danish West Indies. On the day of their departure, Regine made sure to greet Kierkegaard briefly on the street, bid him farewell and wish him God’s blessing. Regine was never to see Kierkegaard again. Nevertheless, she never forgot him. Regine died, a widow, in 1904 at the age of 82, and her contemporary and friend Raphael Meyer⁴ said of the final years of her life:

She had a simple youthful longing to see her Fritz again, and yet she repeated with sincere conviction Kierkegaard’s words to her: ‘You see, Regine, in eternity there is no marriage; there, both Schlegel and I will happily be together with you’.⁵

After the breakup, Kierkegaard spent his nights crying in bed but tried to appear light-hearted and nonchalant during the day. He left for a semester of study in Berlin, where he attended the lectures of the German Idealist philosopher Schelling, unknowingly sitting in the same lecture hall as the young Karl Marx. He arrived back in Copenhagen in the spring of 1842 and a year later his book Either-Or was published. This became his most well-known contribution to the Danish Golden Age, as the rich cultural and artistic period in which Kierkegaard lived was christened.

The book contained a long and infamous section entitled ‘The Seducer’s Diary’, which was intended to confirm to the Danish public that he had been, and still was, a reprobate for walking out on Regine. It demonstrated the lengths to which Kierkegaard was prepared to go in order to sacrifice himself for her sake. The ‘Diary’ is suggestive, heartless and cold: it tells how the seducer clinically deploys his intellectual powers to attract young women, only to abandon them once they are ready to offer him everything.

For him, individuals were merely for stimulation; he discarded them as trees shake off their leaves—he was rejuvenated, the foliage withered.⁶

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⁴ Raphael Meyer was a librarian and man of letters. He had known Regine since she was a child, and decided to write down her reminiscences after Regine, two years widowed, asked him to do so in 1898.
⁵ Kirmmse, Encounters with Kierkegaard, 42.
But despite such elaborate fabrications, Kierkegaard never stopped thinking of Regine. She was never mentioned in his books, yet much of what he wrote had hidden meaning especially intended for her. He made the unconditional resolve to pray for her every day of his life. Despite the heartbreak, his failed engagement was the making of Kierkegaard as a writer in the service of God and Christianity.

**Why Kierkegaard Chose Celibacy**

Kierkegaard did not choose celibacy for the sake of austerity or abstemiousness. There is no moral value in remaining unmarried for those reasons alone; in fact, to refuse to marry on such grounds is highly questionable. Kierkegaard himself made this point in a passage which also generalises somewhat unfairly about the Middle Ages:

> The error of the Middle Ages was to regard poverty, the unmarried state, etc. as something which in and for itself could please God. This has never been Christianity's understanding. Christianity has recommended poverty, the unmarried state, etc. so that by being occupied with finite things as little as possible, men could all the better serve the truth.  

Commentators are agreed that there was certainly a judgment about moral value involved in Kierkegaard’s refusal to marry. In his magisterial *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Joakim Garff argues that Kierkegaard’s writing counts among the main reasons for the break-up. ‘He wanted to be an author, not a husband.’ Alastair Hannay likewise highlights the seminal importance of Kierkegaard’s authorship, although he also recognises an underlying religious motivation.

To sacrifice marriage for the sake of one’s vocation as a writer can be a good thing. But Garff tends to overemphasize the importance of writing in Kierkegaard’s life. Certainly Kierkegaard loved writing and was an incredibly productive author, expending a great deal of ink in a short period of time. Most of his books were written in the seven years between

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7 *Papirer*, X² A 181; JP, 2608.
9 Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 204.
10 Hannay uses a phrase that echoes Kierkegaard’s own words, calling it ‘the collision that had made him a writer’: Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 389.
1843 and 1850. Writing was a passion for Kierkegaard; but it was not the whole story. There was more to him than just a writer, gifted and brilliant though he was. Kierkegaard’s celibacy was animated by his faith commitment. This religious motivation was above all incarnated in his writing, although he also seriously considered becoming a pastor in the Danish Lutheran Church on several occasions.

The hypothesis that Kierkegaard’s celibacy may have been inspired by his faith generally gets short shrift from scholars. When they do entertain the possibility, they generally relegate it to the status of a subplot. Most of them attribute Kierkegaard’s celibacy not only to his writing, but also to a deep sense of unease about sexuality, and/or to the domineering influence of an authoritarian father.

There is no doubt that his father had an enormous influence upon him. However, the constant recourse to Kierkegaard’s sexual hang-ups, and the appeal to Freudian and similar categories to explain them, have become a tired cliché in Kierkegaardian studies. Kierkegaard’s sexuality has been the object of the most complex and far-fetched conjectures. His intense emotional life is more transparent and more revelatory despite his own elaborate attempts to cultivate an air of secrecy around it. He focused on his inner world of feelings because he found it difficult to get involved in the give-and-take of

12 For instance, Garff also attributes the renunciation of Regine to the repressive shadow of Kierkegaard’s dead father. In the context of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous work Fear and Trembling, published two years after the break-up with Regine, Garff focuses on the knife that Abraham planned to use to sacrifice Isaac, linking it forcefully with Kierkegaard’s own father: ‘he [Kierkegaard] was painfully reminded of his father, because it was he who had cut him off from natural immediacy’ (Garff, Søren Kierkegaard, 260).
real relationships. He delighted in drawing attention to himself, and sought to intrigue people but defied them to understand him. He wanted people to know about him, but was not sure he really wanted them to know him. He drew energy from being misunderstood. When it came to marriage, he concluded that to initiate Regine into his tortuous inner life would be more than she could bear. He had become so habituated to his own labyrinthine self that he could endure life without her, keeping her present in his thoughts and imagination.

But being the person I unfortunately am, I must say that I could become happier in my unhappiness without her than with her ....

Even though he always looked back on the break-up with Regine as the loss of his perfect love, he also knew that God’s call to celibacy was the path that actually led him to a deeper love. Through this call he transcended his self-absorption. He came to see that the realisation of his calling was a direct result of the demise of his engagement with Regine:

A young girl, my beloved—her name will go down in history with mine—in a way was squandered on me so that in new pain and suffering (alas, it was a religious conflict of an unusual kind) I might become what I became.

Regine too knew the true motivation for the end of their engagement, as her later conversations with Hanne Mourier clearly confirm:

Kierkegaard’s motivation for the break was his conception of his religious task; he dared not bind himself to anyone on earth in order not to be obstructed from his calling. He had to sacrifice the very best thing he owned in order to work as God demanded of him: therefore he sacrificed love ... for the sake of his writing.

Although these conversations took place forty years after Kierkegaard’s death, the opinion Regine expressed in them is not the result of idealizing the past. In a letter addressed to Kierkegaard’s nephew

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13 Papirer, X A 149; JP, 6472.
14 Papirer, X³ A 168; JP, 6642.
15 Kirmmse, Encounters with Kierkegaard, 36-37.
Henrik Lund from the Danish West Indies in September 1856, less than a year after the philosopher’s death, Regine wrote of,

... God, to whom he sacrificed me—whether it was due to an innate tendency toward self-torture (a doubt that he himself had) or whether it was an inner call from God (which I believe has been demonstrated by time and by the results of his actions). 16

Kierkegaard did not choose celibacy because he lacked love for Regine. Along with his father, she was the most significant person on earth in his eyes. Neither did he do so as a way of dismissing the value of marriage. Like any sane Christian, Kierkegaard was aware that marriage is one of the highest of human values, blessed in a special way by God. While he allowed his aesthetical alter ego to rail against it in the first volume of Either-Or, this was in order to confirm the emotional immaturity of a fictitious character. In Either-Or, part 2, Judge William, a man of proven ethical worth, praises marriage as ‘the most intimate, the most beautiful association that life on this earth provides’. 17 To despise marriage in order to embrace celibacy would be unchristian, since marriage is a normal way of seeking God. Towards the end of his life Kierkegaard condemned marriage with a puzzling bitterness, but these vitriolic remarks do not represent his overall view. In general he endorsed marriage, although he did not accept that it was the only way to serve God:

Christendom is in dire need of an unmarried person to take up Christianity again—not as if there was something objectionable in marriage, but it certainly has come to be highly overrated. Getting married has finally become the highest and truest earnestness. But this is not Christian. You are permitted to marry; Christianity blesses it; but never forget the place for the more decisively religious persons. Otherwise, to be consistent, one would have to object to Paul on the grounds that he was not married. 18

16 Kirmmse, Encounters with Kierkegaard, 51.
18 Papirer IX A 237; JP 2600.
How Did Kierkegaard Cope with Celibacy?

Religious celibacy entails a total, direct and exclusive self-giving to God. It means giving oneself fully, body and soul, to the Lord. Kierkegaard managed to cope with celibacy because he wanted to live with this undivided dedication, even though he was never able to forget Regine and never wanted to do so.

Despite the fact that Kierkegaard himself took the initiative in breaking off their engagement, he could never quite come to terms with the fact that Regine got married to someone else. In breaking up with Regine, Kierkegaard begged her to forget him; but from then on he spent the rest of his life indirectly reminding her through his writing that she remained the only woman he had ever truly loved. The fact that Kierkegaard never fully got over this broken engagement is not in itself a sign of imbalance. It may even be a sign of mental health not to be totally at ease with the choice of celibacy. Kierkegaard directed that when he died all his earthly belongings should be handed over to Regine.

To: Reverend Dr [Peter Christian] Kierkegaard

To be opened after my death.

Dear Brother:

It is naturally my will that my former fiancée, Mrs Regine Schlegel, should inherit unconditionally what little I leave behind. If she herself refuses to accept it, it is to be offered to her on the condition that she act as a trustee for its distribution to the poor.

What I wish to express is that for me an engagement was and is just as binding as a marriage, and that therefore my estate is to revert to her in exactly the same manner as if I had been married to her.19

Regine and her husband Frederik (Fritz) declined this offer when Kierkegaard died, in November 1855, at the relatively young age of 42. It was not simply on account of their geographical distance from Denmark (they had recently established themselves in St Croix in the Danish West Indies); they were also far from accepting Kierkegaard’s equation of engagement and marriage.

19 Kirmmse, Encounters with Kierkegaard, 47-48.
Essentially Kierkegaard found the resources to cope with celibacy through his love of God. God was not just a passion alongside others for Kierkegaard, but the absolute passion of his life, a passion that transcended any human one. How did Kierkegaard's passion for God arise? The origins of any such feeling are mysterious, but we can surmise that Kierkegaard's religious upbringing and his relationship with his father played decisive roles. He also underwent a profound conversion experience in May of 1838. These elements seemed to crystallize in his relationship with Regine. The 'erotic collision' with Regine was also a robust encounter with God: ‘in every one of my collisions there is a collision with God or a struggle with God’. 20 This crystallization, happening both through the engagement itself and through its unravelling, led Kierkegaard to discern the depth and direction of his passion for God. The power of this passion was such

that its claim upon him surpassed even the insistent and pleading claim of Regine.

Kierkegaard did not experience this passion as cerebral or disembodied, although he often came across to others as someone who was too intellectually ponderous to partake of the simple joys of life. Despite appearing publicly cold and formal, he occasionally described the relation between the person of faith and God in erotic terms. For instance:

> The dialectical contradiction must be maintained in such a way that it is uncertain whether he is closed up solely because of an erotic love affair with God, or out of pride toward men.

Kierkegaard seemed to realise that his celibacy was also a way of living his sexuality. He believed he could express his sexuality in his relationship to God. By using the phrase 'an erotic love affair with God', Kierkegaard manifested an understanding of eroticism in the spiritual context that was much more expansive than a purely biological or physical understanding: an eroticism that was neither genital nor generative in nature. This wider conception of the category of the erotic is confirmed by Kierkegaard’s use of it in referring to the mystery of the Incarnation:

> The Incarnation is very difficult to understand because it is so very difficult for the absolutely Exalted One to make himself comprehensible to the one of low position in the equality of love (not in the condescension of love)—in this lies the erotic profundity, which through an earthly misunderstanding has been conceived as if it had occurred unto offence and degradation.

Although Kierkegaard was certainly not without hang-ups in the area of sexuality, his reflections upon it display at times a more holistic understanding than one might expect from a man of his epoch. As we have just seen, he found a place for sexuality in the personal relationship of the human being with God and in the Incarnation. Moreover his view of sexuality was not always as restrictive and stereotyped as some commentators contend. This more generous view

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21 Papirer VI A 47; JP 5810.  
22 Papirer IV A 183; JP 2402.
of sexuality is reflected in the fact that he ascribed an intellectual as well as a physical component to it. Concerning men and women in antiquity, he wrote:

In the relation between man and woman, the sexual, there was no place at all for the intellectual; the woman was too inferior for that, too inferior in man's opinion, at any rate, as is the case throughout the Orient.  

Not all of Kierkegaard's accounts of eroticism were positive, however. Its portrayal in 'The Diary of the Seducer' is cold and chilling. Although the seduction recorded in the diary is abandoned before it reaches a physical conclusion, it shows that eroticism, even without a coercive sexual act, can be calculating and cruel, manipulative and misogynistic.

Kierkegaard's celibacy was nourished by love, above all the love of God. The security of God's love for him was reinforced in prayer. We know something about Kierkegaard's prayer-life since many of his prayers appear in his diaries and religious works.

Father in heaven! You loved us first. Help us never to forget that you are love, so that this full conviction might be victorious in our hearts over the world's allurement, the mind's unrest, the anxieties over the future, the horrors of the past, the needs of the moment. O grant also that this conviction might form our minds so that our hearts become constant and true in love to them whom you bid us to love as ourselves.  

**Love of Neighbour**

Kierkegaard's celibacy was undertaken for the sake of his vocation as a writer and thinker in the service of God and of Christianity. Thus, it was not the expression of a privatised faith, one pursued solely to realise his personal sanctification. Through writing for a universal audience, his love took on vast horizons and became large enough to be all-embracing, but without ever losing sight of 'the single one', the ideal individual reader to whom all his writings were addressed. Always

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23 *Papirer X* A 536; *JP* 3965.  
24 *Papirer IV* B 171; *JP* 3394.
implicit in this idea was the woman who had been the single one for him personally.

Of course, there was always the danger that Kierkegaard’s celibacy could have degenerated into a cocooned and isolated bachelorhood. But there is documentary evidence to show that this did not occur. On the contrary, because of his celibacy Kierkegaard remained open to a world much larger than himself. And this was not simply by virtue of the Christian purpose that informed his writing. In his day-to-day existence, Kierkegaard also placed himself at the service of others.

In his 2004 study *Kierkegaards København*, Peter Tudvad gives a stirring example of Kierkegaard’s loving availability to others, and in so doing he corrects a widespread and erroneous perception. Frederik Christian Strube was an Icelandic-born carpenter who moved to Denmark and married a native of Copenhagen called Elisabeth, with whom he had two daughters. Accorded to the prevalent opinion among scholars, Frederik Strube was understood to be Kierkegaard’s carpenter, and Elisabeth his cook. But Tudvad has shown that the couple were not in fact servants of Kierkegaard; rather he was their benefactor, housing the entire Strube family with him for a period of four years from 1848 until 1852. During that time Strube had to be hospitalised because of mental illness, and it was probably owing to Kierkegaard’s intervention that the senior consultant at the Royal Frederik’s Hospital received Strube there. Otherwise he would have had to go to Sankt Hans Hospital in Roskilde, where it would have been more difficult for his wife and children to visit him. It is not easy to play host to an entire family for any length of time, never mind for four years. Had Kierkegaard been a married man, it would have been even more complicated. He would have needed to negotiate with his wife, perhaps to take his own children’s feelings into account, and also to consider such practical matters as the amount of space required. And had Kierkegaard been a self-centred bachelor, he would not even have considered taking in the Strube family.

The Reward

By choosing celibacy a person voluntarily renounces the opportunity to flourish through and with a partner in marriage. But at the same time they expect fulfilment to come from God, hoping that undivided love for God will be enriching in an unexpectedly generous way.

The pain of sacrifice and the hope for reward are splendidly articulated in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous work Fear and Trembling. In this work of lyrical genius the reader is invited to accompany Abraham and his son on the harrowing three-day journey that led to Mount Moriah, where Isaac was to be sacrificed. Fear and Trembling is also about Kierkegaard’s journey with Regine, not to the marriage altar, but to the altar of renunciation, at which he was asked by God to offer the one he loved more than anything else in this world.

Like Abraham, Kierkegaard did not fight against human opponents; instead, he wrestled with the living God. When a human being struggles with God, a moment comes when that person is invited to say yes to God and no to self. This is an exceptional situation because the individual is not rejecting something that is bad; on the contrary, they are saying no to something so full of life that sacrificing it seems like certain death. The greatness of Abraham was to believe that his sacrifice would not end in death. This was not a matter of comforting himself with the thought that he might rejoin Isaac in a better afterlife. Abraham’s impossible hope was for this life. He believed he would have his son back on this earth, in his own arms and at his own side.

Kierkegaard did not hope to receive Regine back in this life, though he knew they would be together in eternity. But he did hope for something extraordinary from God. He hoped that by dedicating his life to the gospel he would receive back a hundredfold. And, as his life unfolded, his faith and hope were answered. The reward was not without suffering but, despite his troubles, he could still marvel with gratitude at what God was accomplishing in his life. In a journal entry of 1850 he wrote:

> In a certain sense I, again, was squandered in the cause of Christianity; in a certain sense, for, humanly speaking, I indeed have not been happy—O, but still I can never adequately thank
God for the indescribable good he has done me, so infinitely more than I expected.\textsuperscript{27}

Even on his death-bed Kierkegaard was fundamentally at peace. His closest friend, the pastor Emil Boesen, who visited him faithfully as he lay dying in the Royal Frederik’s Hospital, wrote down what Kierkegaard said to him:

Suddenly, I understood it. What matters is to get as close to God as possible ... greet everyone for me, I have liked them all very much, and tell them that my life is a great suffering, unknown and inexplicable to other people. Everything looked like pride and vanity, but it wasn’t. I am absolutely no better than other people, and I have said so and have never said anything else. I have had my thorn in the flesh, and therefore I did not marry and could not accept an official [ecclesiastical] position .... I became the exception instead.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Can We Learn from Kierkegaard’s Call?}

Kierkegaard experienced a divine call with a specific purpose. His God-given vocation was to cajole and provoke a nominally Christian nation, nineteenth-century Denmark, towards true Christianity. First he had to explode the myth that the bland way of life embraced by his contemporaries was the same as Christianity. He portrayed their worldview from within, showing how it consistently led to dead ends and disappointment. And he presented people with the true Christian message in all its purity and integrity.

Kierkegaard was abundantly endowed with the means he needed to realise this end; and he was aware that he had the gifts of great intelligence and outstanding literary skill. The fact that he carried out his calling with so much passion shows that he was convinced of its value and urgency. He came to see relatively quickly that living this call meant making significant and costly sacrifices in his life—most of all giving up the possibility of a married relationship with Regine Olsen.

\textsuperscript{27} Papirer X³ A 168; JP 6642.
\textsuperscript{28} Kirmmse, Encounters with Kierkegaard, 123-124.
Kierkegaard was conscious that he was an exception in many respects, including that of his celibacy. He did not seek celibate followers. However he did feel that in the Denmark of his day marriage had become overrated. And so he felt that his contemporaries should reconsider the merits of a celibate way of life. Kierkegaard’s example shows us that, although it is not always possible to plan a celibate life in advance or to work it all out beforehand in our heads, we can nevertheless live it. He himself famously noted that life is lived forwards and understood backwards. Important decisions often only make sense after the fact.

Kierkegaard’s celibacy was neither understood nor appreciated by the Danish people. He did not live in a country that valued religious celibacy, and so there was no possibility of his being carried along and supported by any significant cultural current. And since he had not taken public vows, the commitment required of him was all the greater. In the present era, when the value and relevance of celibacy are seriously questioned and it is often presented as a poisoned chalice rather than a healing gift, Kierkegaard’s example can be inspiring. Despite all the difficulties, he did not give up.

At a personal level, we have seen that Kierkegaard’s celibacy for the kingdom did not come without struggle and resolve—although it was also accompanied by grace. Yet Kierkegaard was not perturbed by the pain and anxiety that celibacy entailed. He was convinced that human existence necessarily involved tension and Angst. We can learn from Kierkegaard that it is not always possible to resolve our problems into a happy-ever-after synthesis, and that this fact is not threatening. We may not be perfectly personally integrated, but we can nevertheless live healthy and celibate lives.

We live in a world where sex is often idealized, and idolized, as the ultimate mystery, both daunting and fascinating: mysterium tremendum et fascinans, in the phrase that Rudolf Otto used to describe the experience of the holy. Although not many people declare sex to be holy, they still feel that, if they cannot have sex, they are not fully human. This is a big lie that is uncritically accepted by many as an important truth. They are convinced that without sex they will be condemned to impoverishment emotionally and in their relationships. Unfortunately the stereotypical view of Kierkegaard has been that he led a humanly diminished life because of his renunciation of married love.
I hope to have shown that Kierkegaard’s life was not so hopelessly problematic. He expressed his love through the labour of writing in the service of Christianity, as well as through other acts of Christian love carried out in daily life. He found fulfilment in his calling; he believed in the value of his writing; and he was convinced that posterity would acknowledge and vindicate him. Kierkegaard’s example, in which celibacy was lived as part of a life that included suffering but also provided lasting satisfaction, invites us to recognise that the denial of some of our deeply felt desires can allow even more profound longings to bloom and flourish.

I began by referring to the contemporary Danish film director Lars von Trier. And I finish by invoking another Danish director, one of the greatest film directors of all time, Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968). In 1927 Dreyer completed a sublime film in France about Joan of Arc—who happens also to have been Regine Olsen’s heroine. *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* is one of the purest cinematic experiences that exists. Uncompromising and beautiful, it unfolds in complete silence, yet it speaks more eloquently than most talking movies. This film,
whose actors are free of make-up, unpeels the layers of superficiality that occlude the soul.

Kierkegaard, the author of *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, was aiming for the same single-minded and unvarnished purity so lucidly incarnated in Dreyer’s *Joan of Arc*. His choice of celibacy helped him in this quest. It unearthed something fundamental for him, something too rich to understand fully, yet fulfilling to live. What was initially a burden became an invitation.

THE FUTURE OF CITIES is one of the most critical spiritual as well as economic and architectural issues of our time. The city is now the context where for the majority of humanity ‘the practice of everyday life’ takes place, either constructively or destructively. The growth rate of cities urgently requires that we give attention not merely to design and planning but also to deeper questions of meaning and purpose. Any attempt to address the complexities of the city needs more than a mechanical approach. The challenge is how to relate city-making to a vision of the human spirit and what enhances it.

Cities enable or disable ‘place identity’. The sense of place is a category of human experience with a strong impact on how we see the world and situate ourselves in it. Most contemporary thinking about ‘place’ in philosophy, history, the study of religion and the social sciences emphasizes that it involves a dialectical relationship between physical location and human narrative. We not only live in the world; we also live with a sense, implicit or explicit, of what the world means. In other words, the ‘world’ that surrounds us is not merely raw data. However the world can no longer be seen as a mosaic of separate cultures, nor is ‘place’ any longer as simple a concept as Enlightenment thinking would propose. Technology and rapid travel have increased the number of global connections. Cultures that previously seemed homogeneous are revealed as plural and implicated in issues of power. In short, ‘place identity’ nowadays embraces a range of associations from the local ‘home’ or neighbourhood to a single ‘global community’. In a world of multifaceted place identity, city-making increasingly needs to attend both to what might be called ‘micro-place’ (satisfactory homes and effective neighbourhoods) and to ‘macro-place’ (meaningful expressions of wider connections).
Our environments are active partners in the conversation between location and the geographies of the mind and spirit that create ‘place’. Place involves human narrative and memory, which are embedded in a location, including deeper narrative currents that absorb the stories of all who have lived there. It is therefore appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. A hermeneutics of place continually reveals new interpretations in the interplay between physical environment, memory, and specific people at a particular moment.

Precisely because ‘place’ involves narrative, it is not surprising that it is often contested. We only have to think of Jerusalem, claimed by Jews and Palestinians and sacred to three faiths. In deconstructing modernity’s belief in objective, ‘absolute’ place, postmodern critiques assert that definition is power. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s analysis of place also reminds us that systems of spatialisation are historically conditioned—not merely physical arrangements of things but also patterns of social action and routine, as well as historical conceptions of the world. The metanarratives of the people who hold power take over the public places they control in such a way that, however altruistic their agenda, the history of such places often becomes a story of dominance and repression.

At a basic level, environment shapes the human spirit. Conversely, our understanding of what enhances the human spirit shapes the environments we construct. If cities are to be places that reinforce a sense that human life is sacred rather than merely locations for organizing human life, they must embrace all of its dimensions—functional, ethical and spiritual. First, we need somewhere to pass effectively through the stages of life and reach our full potential. Second, we need places where we belong to a community. Third, we need cities that continue to facilitate a fruitful relationship with the natural elements. Last, we need environments that offer access to the
sacred (however we understand it)—or, better, relate us to life itself as sacred.

We need to build into cities what is precious to us. In particular, cities have always been powerful symbols of how we understand and construct community. Modernist ‘design rationalism’, which divides cities into zones for living, working, leisure and shopping, fragments the rituals of daily life. The result is zones that are dead and dangerous when they are emptied of activity, such as some city centres at night or suburban neighbourhoods by day. Zoning demands the separation of areas by distance and by clear boundaries. This substantially increases the need for travel and generates more stress and more pollution.

In broader terms, this differentiation into discrete areas reflects a kind of secularisation of Western culture. There is no longer a centred, let alone spiritually centred, meaning for the city. It becomes a commodity, parcelled into multiple activities and ways of organizing time which are matched by the multiple identities of its inhabitants. Overall, cellular urban design undermines a unified sense of existence and bypasses shared, humane places of encounter. New domestic ghettos are increasingly protected against sterile public space that is treated unimaginatively and abandoned to violence and vandalism.

Cities represent and create a climate of values that implicitly defines how we understand ourselves and gather together. There are four aspects of cities that urban planning must take seriously. First, the two Latin concepts of the city as urbs (a physical place, the buildings) and as civitas (people and their life together) are interdependent. Second, urban issues are never purely practical. For example, transport obviously involves management, investment and strategy. However, the balance of private and public transport also highlights how we relate individual choice to the ‘common good’. Third, cities have always been complex realities. We cannot separate planning technology from people, the local from the global, or a sense of place from increasingly mobile lives. Finally, while there is no way back to the relatively compact city of pre-modern Europe, cities and their development must nevertheless critically embrace their past if human desires for the future are to be effectively grounded.
Christianity has sometimes been accused of an anti-urban bias. Certainly the Scriptures get off to a tricky start. The Book of Genesis seems deeply gloomy about cities. Cain, symbol of human pride and violence, is portrayed as the founder of the first city, Enoch—an alternative to God’s Garden (Genesis 4:17). Later, the people of Babel seek to replace the authority of God (Genesis 11:1-9), and Sodom and Gomorrah become classic symbols of corruption (Genesis 19). In the light of these texts, the modern French Protestant thinker Jacques Ellul suggests that ‘the city’ stands for a refusal of God’s gift, and for humanity’s desire to shape life autonomously. Thus ‘God has cursed, has condemned the city instead of giving us a law for it’.1

Yet, there are other, positive biblical images of the city in the Jerusalem tradition, for example in the Book of Psalms. God is enthroned in the sanctuary of Zion (Psalm 9); the city becomes a living reminder of God’s power and faithfulness (Psalm 48), and is described as the house of God (Psalm 122). In the Jerusalem tradition the city is intended to express the peace of God. Those who live in the city are required to share God’s peace with one another (Psalm 122:6-9). Turning to the New Testament, in the Gospels, Jerusalem is the focal point and climax of Jesus’ mission. The cities of the Roman Empire become the centre of Christian mission in the Book of Acts, particularly in the strategy of the Apostle Paul. Christianity rapidly became an urban religion.2 Most striking of all, on the very last page of the New Testament (Revelation 21), the new holy city of Jerusalem, perfectly harmonious and peaceful, is made the image of the final establishment of God’s kingdom.

However, the apparent ambivalence of the Judaeo-Christian tradition towards the city provides ammunition for the American sociologist Richard Sennett when he blames Christian theology in part for contemporary urban decline. Sennett argues that Western culture suffers from a division between the private and public realms. ‘It is a divide between subjective experience and worldly experience, self and

city. This separation, according to Sennett, is based on our unacknowledged fear of self-exposure—interpreted as a threat rather than as life-enhancing. Sennett suggests that city design has increasingly reflected this separation. Sennett’s main theological target is St Augustine’s *City of God*, which he takes to be a classic expression of the triumph of an inner spiritual ‘world’ over the physical city. Sennett argues that Christian theology denies the true value of the outside world, and by doing so has underpinned the way that Western culture doubts the value of the diversity so characteristic of public space. While much that Sennett says about Western urban culture is astute and important, I suggest that his interpretation of Christian attitudes to the city and his understanding of Augustine are unbalanced.

True, Augustine says at the start of *City of God* (Book 1, Preface) that the earthly city is marked by a ‘lust for domination’. However, this is essentially a critique of late Imperial Rome, his urban paradigm. Again, the true ‘city’ for Augustine is the community of believers destined to become the City of God. He is rightly suspicious of any attempt by even Christian Emperors to suggest that their commonwealth is the perfect *polis*, let alone the Kingdom of God on earth.

Yet, the majority of Augustine scholars are clear that he does not deny the status of the secular realm or of the human city in particular. We need to distinguish between the ‘profane’, which takes on the negative connotation of whatever is contrary to the ‘sacred’, and the ‘secular’, which is simply the world of ‘this age’, space and time, the here and now. We also need to distinguish carefully between Augustine’s ‘earthly city’ (the *civitas terrena*, realm of sin) and the

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political realities of state and human city. The secular realm, for example the state or the human city, is a neutral ‘space’ where the spiritual reality of ‘the city of God’ and the counter-spiritual reality of ‘the earthly city’ coexist and contend, like the wheat and tares, until the end of time. Augustine, while far from indifferent to the moral foundations of society and the city, defended a legitimate place for the secular realm within a Christian interpretation of the world as the theatre of God’s action and of human response.\(^4\) Indeed, some commentators suggest that the vocation of the human city was to strive to become a trace of the civitas Dei. According to this view, while Augustine was neither city planner nor political theorist, he nevertheless effectively redeemed an urban culture in crisis by using the city as his image of heaven.\(^5\)

**What Are Cities For?**

Cities have always had the capacity to create a diverse community and to be places of innovation and creativity. However, our current attempts to reflect on cities and our response to them must absorb radical changes which originated with the industrial revolution but have accelerated since 1945. First, there is the sheer size and rate of expansion of cities. Second, the increased mobility and flow of life within them calls into question any simple notion of place identity. Third, we must acknowledge the increasing plurality of the communities and cultures to which their people belong. Fourth, any large city has a global reach and is involved in a multiplicity of connections with other cities and communities throughout the world. What are cities for? They are clearly no longer defences against attack, or essential for commercial production. In the future, if cities are to have meaning, this will be in fulfilling the wider requirements of human culture. There needs to be greater reflection on the civilising possibilities of cities. They have a unique capacity to focus a range of creative energies because they have an unparalleled ability to combine differences of age, ethnicity, culture and religion, and also to balance plural community and anonymity. Some twenty years ago, a Church of

\(^4\) For an updated defence of a positive view of ‘the secular realm’ in Augustine, see Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 2006).

England commission produced a controversial and influential report on the state of Britain’s cities: *Faith in the City*. Now a new report, *Faithful Cities*, has been published by the Commission on Urban Life and Faith, which combines representatives of several Churches, including two Roman Catholics, one a bishop, with those of other faiths. A question raised throughout the report is: what makes a ‘good city’? Words and phrases used in this context include ‘active’, ‘diverse’, ‘inclusive’, ‘safe’, ‘well-led’ and ‘environmentally sensitive’. The good city needs an ‘active civil society’; it ‘values its inhabitants’ and offers ‘opportunities for all’; it ‘attracts wealth creators’, but also ‘shares its wealth’. It is big enough to be viable but small enough to be on a human scale. In sum, it is where people do not merely exist but truly belong. The good city enables human aspirations to be productive rather than repressed or limited to self-indulgence.

Fundamentally, the good city is centred on people rather than just on planning. There is a growing preoccupation, even beyond religious circles, with the ideals of civic life and, indeed, with what might be called a secular spirituality of the urban. A number of commentators concern themselves with the nature of ‘urban virtues’ for the twenty-first century. For example, in *Civic Spirit: The Big Idea for a New Political Era*, Charles Leadbeater promotes the notion of ‘mutuality’, based on the recognition of diversity. This demands ‘renunciation’ (giving up the absolute claims of individual choice in favour of social cohesion) and requires us to value restraint as a virtue, ‘a counterintuitive view in consumer society’ as Leadbeater notes. In the United States Eduardo Mendieta (influenced in part by Christian theology) writes of ‘frugality’ as the key urban virtue. The influential British architect and government advisor Richard Rogers has been a notable proponent of person-centred architecture and planning. His concept of ‘open-minded space’ has ethical and spiritual resonances. This multi-functional space has a variety of uses in which as many people as possible become participants. It contrasts with the dominance of ‘single-minded’ space, predetermined by planners and prioritising efficiency. ‘Open-minded’ space needs to be accessible physically,
intellectually and spiritually: in its design, it should evoke freedom and inclusivity rather than the opposite. Other ethical-spiritual values, such as memory, desire or aspiration, and a sense of the sacred, find a place in the writings of the international planning guru Leonie Sandercock.

The Hospitable City

Yet, to speak of the ‘good city’ as a spiritual issue we need a more developed vision of the human spirit and of what enhances it. Christian spirituality is concerned with what we love most deeply, with our desire fundamentally to encounter and respond to God. So, in the cities of today, can Christian spirituality contribute to the enhancement of urban dreams? Faithful Cities suggests that a critical spiritual issue in the modern city is the need to push beyond ‘tolerance’—that catchword of liberal societies which tends to suggest the passive magnanimity of the powerful towards those less favoured—and promote the more challenging biblical theme of ‘hospitality’. Hospitality implies a real relationship with those who are different, and the risk that we may be moved out of our comfort zone to be changed in the encounter.

In this context, the report refers briefly to hospitality in the Rule of St Benedict (Chapter 53). To develop the reference a little, the Rule states: Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur (‘All guests who arrive are to be received as Christ’). But the Rule goes on: ‘for he himself will say, I was the stranger and you took me in’. Christ is the stranger. This implies a deeper theology of hospitality than merely giving food and board to a passing guest. Commentators have regularly noted the word omnes—emphasizing the importance of inclusiveness and its particular link to strangeness, or as we might say, ‘otherness’, in contrast to the familiarity of those who are ‘like us’. The second word, supervenientes, ‘those who arrive’, underlines the point even more. It suggests those who ‘turn up out of the blue’—not merely those who did not write in advance, but those who are a surprise to us in broader terms. Close to the surface here is the understanding that Christian

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9 Richard Rogers, Cities for a Small Planet (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), especially 167-168.
disciples are not to be choosy about the company they keep. And *hospes* is a nicely ambiguous word that can be translated as ‘stranger’ as well as ‘guest’. The former sense is reinforced by the Rule’s reference to Matthew 25:35. And finally, *suscipiantur* is literally ‘to be received’, but its deeper meaning is ‘to be cherished’.

I would suggest that, in our contemporary Western cities, the notion of ‘hospitality’ should be supplemented by an even sharper concept, ‘solidarity’. Theologically, this notion derives implicitly from much of Catholic social teaching and appears explicitly in liberation theology, for example in the writings of the Dominican theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. Solidarity is a great deal more than a purely political slogan. It is a moral imperative based on a belief in the fundamental unity of humanity rooted in the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Communion of Saints, and demanding a profound conversion of heart and a conscious commitment to the quest for ‘the common good’ as an essential ethical virtue.

The Human City and Ignatian Spirituality

In thinking about a Christian response to the complexity of the public realm and of contemporary cities, the Ignatian spiritual tradition may also offer some useful pointers. So, for example, in the opening Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises* (Exx 23), Ignatius promotes a kind of Augustinian vision of the neutrality of the secular realm. Here, ‘the earth’ and ‘created things’ are not irrelevant or simply the realm of sin, but rather gifts of God to help us fulfil our purpose and identity. However, their value is not absolute and so the Ignatian virtue of indifference (make use of created things but only in so far as they direct us towards our destiny) underlines the importance of not confusing contingency with ultimate reality. In the contemplation on the Incarnation (Exx 101-109) retreatants are invited to see the world as the Trinity does—as a mixture of good and bad—but most importantly to realise that from all eternity the gaze of God is redemptive. In one of the great classic meditations in preparation for...
an Election, The Two Standards (Exx 136-148), Ignatius uses the image of the spaces outside two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, where Christ Our Lord and Lucifer each gather their followers. Superficially, the contrast may appear to be between the Kingdom of God and the material order. However, the conflict is actually between two different ways of 'being in the world'—or, for our present purposes, of being engaged with the human city. Importantly, the key temptation that Ignatius presents is not that of the secular realm as such but of an attachment to the 'empty honours of the world'. By the end of the Exercises the retreatant has hopefully been moved to a fundamentally positive evaluation of the world of time and space. In the Contemplation for Attaining Love (Exx 230-237) the retreatant is invited to love and serve God ‘in everything’ (Exx 233), to experience God dwelling in creatures and God working on our behalf ‘in all created things on the face of the earth’ (Exx 236).

A spirituality of urban living necessarily engages with the ‘practice of everyday life’. Maurice Giuliani, one of the first to theorise the modern revival of the Spiritual Exercises in daily life, reminds us that for Ignatius Loyola a ‘spiritual exercise’ meant anything that opens us to receive the grace of God. If our notion of a spiritual exercise is confined to explicitly religious practices, such as extended prayer, there is a problem for those who desire to engage profoundly with the public world. Giuliani suggests that ‘attentiveness in faith’ should extend to God’s self-disclosure in every moment. This does not imply that simply doing our everyday tasks is automatically a ‘spiritual exercise’. However, the generality of everyday life is a potential context in which God’s spirit may be explicitly experienced, resistances may be overcome, discernment may take place, life-directing choices may be made, and commitment may be deepened. Thus our activities in the public realm and our commitment to build the ‘good city’ may be transformed into genuinely spiritual exercises. Christians must cultivate a contemplative attentiveness to the city so that transformative encounters with God can occur in and through our immersion in everyday life and then feed back into transformed responses to people and situations.

Following this thought, one of the most interesting Christian thinkers on the city is a French Jesuit, the late Michel de Certeau (1925-1986). The degree to which he continued to be influenced by Ignatian themes in his later writings has yet to be carefully analyzed.
However, there are certainly striking echoes. De Certeau defended the ‘practice of everyday life’ (the title of two volumes of his essays) against the secular utopianism of much urban theory, and the needs of people against totalitarian planning. As for Augustine, for de Certeau the human city prefigures a mysterious Heavenly City—hence his rejection of utopian visions such as those of Le Corbusier in which the city itself becomes a secularised ‘salvation’ produced by the social engineering of highly regulated city planning. In his essay ‘Walking in the City’ de Certeau expressed one of his favourite themes: ‘resistance’ to systems that leave no room for difference and transgression. The ‘weak’, in this case those who actually live in the city rather than plan it, find ways to make space for themselves and to express their self-determination.

In his later writings, de Certeau also sought to respond to the question of how Christianity might address a world no longer dominated by the Church. In ‘The Weakness of Believing’ he settled for ‘lived practice’, a provocative notion of presence-in-the-world expressed in the classic themes of discipleship (following) and conversion (change). The believer bears witness by following the way of Jesus faithfully, being changed and provoking change in others. Building on this thought, spirituality in the city is essentially seeking to live out the ‘story of Jesus’ so as to highlight a way of being differently in the world. De Certeau’s dispersal of Christian discipleship into ‘the practice of everyday life’ seems to be a radicalisation of his original commitment to Ignatian spirituality and its theme of ‘finding God in all things’. For him, it is now the empty tomb that is the primary symbol of Christian discipleship. And therefore, discipleship is not a matter of settling down, but rather a risky journey (de Certeau explicitly used the phrase ‘a way of proceeding’, derived from the Jesuit Constitutions), a practice that subverts our human tendency to set fixed boundaries. ‘Boundaries are the place of the Christian work’, he says, ‘and their displacements are the result of this work’.
City-Making and the Sacred

The design and the life of the pre-modern European city underlined the importance of memory, of an ethics (even a spirituality) of city life focused on ‘the common good’, in turn related to a desire for ‘the good life’, and a sense of ‘the sacred’. While it is impossible to hark back to such pre-modern visions, I believe it is nonetheless vital to recover a sense that a city can somehow be ‘sacred’ to its inhabitants.

Conventional interpretations of the sacred frequently reflect, at least implicitly, the approach of the great historian of religion Mircea Eliade. One of the problems with his viewpoint, however, is that it separates the sacred (the ‘wholly other’) from everyday action and experience. The ‘profane’ for Eliade is everything that lies outside what is explicitly dedicated to the sacred. Such a viewpoint evacuates the outer, everyday, public world of sacred meaning. However, another Christian way of viewing the world—as gift of God’s creation and as revelation of divine presence—suggests that no part of the world can be inherently profane, although it may be profaned by human actions. In such Christian thought ‘the sacred’ may be articulated in a variety of ways, of which the spatial structures and social organization of a city provide an important example. The idea of ‘the sacred’ in the city introduces a critical note of ‘otherness’ (in Christian terms, it introduces the divine Other) and so underlines that what is centrally important about urban life is more than the mere enhancement of the individual self. In this sense, an important element of the re-enchantment or resacralisation of urban life must be bound up with the recovery of a sense of the ‘common good’ in the challenging environment of today’s diverse, plural and global cities.

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The title may seem a strange one. Ecology normally involves discussing the environment in economic, social and—above all—political terms. What has prayer got to do with it?

Before I respond in any greater detail, let me quote a few sentences from a letter I recently received from a young monk, a Cistercian and therefore a Roman Catholic, written the day before his final profession. He is describing the place where his monastery is located:

It’s a place of great silence and quiet for my heart—quiet that I link not so much with the liturgy but to how nature surrounds the abbey so marvellously, so peacefully. The azure reflections from the pine forest, its sandy and dusty pathways, the pools and marshes with their mystical air—these biological realities form the setting for my life of intimacy with the Lord. This landscape, this territory is dear to me. In my own way I’m a ‘lover of the place’—amator loci—as they used to call the first monks of Cîteaux. I feel like a new incarnation of Van Gogh in monastic life.

Van Gogh, the famous Dutch painter, made any landscape that his brush touched shimmer with colour and light. And the same goes for the monk—his contemplative gaze can light up a secret fire within which God is revealed.

In what follows, we will begin by looking at how for Scripture, from the very beginning, nature is a gift from the creator God. Moving then to the theme of prayer, we will look at how both Eastern and Western traditions, as they build on Scripture, connect one particular, relatively advanced stage in the spiritual life with a certain kind of experience of nature. In the final section, we will look at how this spiritual perception of nature incorporates itself into the movement of salvation history, and draws the prayerful person into what we might call an ‘ecological priesthood’. 
Within the Bible, it is in the prayers that we find the most lyrical evocations of nature, particularly in the Psalms. There the beauty of nature is hymned into prayer, and thus the Creator is glorified: Psalm 104, for example, evokes the Creator’s activity:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys … giving drink to every wild animal ….

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use ….

May the glory of the Lord endure forever. (Psalm 104:10, 11, 14, 31)

The Psalmist has followed the Priestly writer’s account of creation in seven days that we find in Genesis 1; indeed the two authors may have been contemporaries. In the Genesis narrative, the loving regard of the Creator sets a kind of seal on each day’s activity: ‘God saw that it was good’. The narrative culminates in the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. Moreover, they are entrusted with a particular mission:

‘… have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. … See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.’ (Genesis 1:28-29)

Such lyrical evocations of nature’s beauty recur throughout the Old Testament. The Wisdom literature deserves a special mention here, notably the brilliant account of creation that we find in Sirach 43. Or take this passage, almost on the threshold of the New Testament, in which the author addresses God:

… the whole world before you is … like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground. But … you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made …. For your immortal spirit is in all things. (Wisdom 11:22-12:1)

If it is indeed the case that a trace of the Creator, His incorruptible spirit, is present in all His works, then these become, each in its own way, mirrors reflecting Him. This idea is already implicit in the
discourses of Job and of his friends; it will be developed by St Paul, who will draw from it the conclusion that the pagans are to be reproached for not having recognised God in the splendours of His creation:

Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature ... have been understood and seen through the things He has made. (Romans 1:20)

Within nature, then, there are 'signs' latent, just as in history. And not all can interpret them, as can be seen from Jesus' rebuke to his contemporaries:

‘When it is evening, you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.” And in the morning, “It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.” You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.’ (Matthew 16:2-3)

The 'signs and wonders' punctuating the earthly life of Jesus indicate that the pace of history is quickening, that a new stage is beginning. And Jesus is announcing further signs, signs that will likewise appear 'in the sun, the moon and the stars', signs heralding 'distress', a cataclysm that will shake the world and the powers of heaven (Luke 21:25). 2 Peter 3 is quite explicit:

... in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. (v.13)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be consumed.\(^1\)

The waiting referred to here is something characteristic of Christians; it shapes their particular way of life, even to the rhythm of their prayer. So the author can write:

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of

\(^1\) v. 10; NRSV 'disclosed', following another manuscript tradition.
which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? (vv.11-12)

Within this kind of apocalyptic vision of creation, one may admire the beauty one finds now, but one is also aware of a secret force working through it, and pushing it towards a radical transformation that will take place after an apparent cataclysm. And this attitude is self-evidently Christian, representing a quite distinctive approach to nature and its resources. The disciple of Jesus may be enmeshed within nature, but at the same time is also looking beyond to a culmination that cannot yet be described, only evoked through the inspired Biblical images.

Two sayings of Jesus bring out this fundamental ambivalence in the Christian attitude towards the world. When the disciples invite him to admire the beautiful stones of the Temple, Jesus tells them that the day will come ‘when not one stone will be left upon another’; it will all be thrown down (Luke 21:6). But when the same disciples ask him to name when this destruction will happen, Jesus suggests that they take as their inspiration the beauty they can find in nature:

‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.’ (Luke 21:29-31)

All things are destined for destruction. Nevertheless, new life is already burgeoning through what seems to be simply the end; a new spring is promised. Even as nature is destined to disappear, it conceals within itself a mysterious force for renewal.

Not everyone can discern the signs of the approaching Kingdom—far from it. Discernment is the disciple’s prerogative, the fruit of a special and privileged gift:

‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that “they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand”.’ (Mark 4:11-12)

Most of Jesus’ parables are borrowed from nature: the seed, the wheat, the darnel, the mustard seed, the harvest, the fig tree, the treasure hidden in the field. But the images both reveal and conceal: they
conceal the truth for those without understanding, and reveal it to those for whom it is given.

**Creation and the Experience of Prayer**

What do spiritual writers make of these biblical traditions as they try to indicate how believers can grow spiritually? Particularly after the fourth century, they distinguish several stages in the awareness of creation and the Creator. The words they use vary with their cultures and their languages, but one can easily see that they are talking about the same experience. Most of the time, they list three stages that I shall call—with a little oversimplification—exterior awareness, interior awareness and spiritual awareness.

The first, exterior awareness, is what we acquire through the natural use of reason. Within its scope falls the science that studies all created things, naming them, analyzing them, studying the relations between them. It produces people of learning, true scientists, people developing ever more refined forms of knowledge.

For its part, interior awareness consists in a deeper perception of beings, involving the link they have with God and God’s providence by virtue of their carrying the image of God within themselves, and of
their charge to bear God’s message to us. It is above all the Greek Fathers, following a line marked out by Evagrius of Pontus, who have analyzed this awareness that presupposes a more purified form of vision arising from a special gift of grace. For them, there was a contemplation or beholding, that revealed the true nature of things, the nature they had before the Fall, their logos, their internal rationale or message that secretly reflects the creative Word.

Most people lack this kind of penetrating awareness, and do not even realise it. Rather caustically, Symeon the New Theologian speaks of them as the ‘living dead’, who ‘think as irrational animals’:

> It is possible to live without living;  
> it is possible to see without seeing,  
> to hear without hearing.²

Such people live only in their heads—heads which are cut off from their hearts. They get lost either in distraction or in abstraction—the awareness of the general scientific nature of things that is ultimately only on the surface. In comparison with the interior knowledge of things according to God, this is just, for the Fathers, ‘delirium’—an illusion which only grace can heal.

How can it be that most people, indeed most Christians, lack this interior awareness? The answer is a simple one: the passions always present in the human heart, passions which the Fathers evoke through the images of a fog enveloping us, or a veil covering our eyes.³ It is for this reason that we need to live in self-denial, in a certain asceticism—not in order to suppress the passions, but to contain them, and to turn them towards the spiritual purposes for which they were originally created in God’s design. So Evagrius:

> The spirit [nous] which has divested itself of the passions and which sees the spiritual aspect of things does not truly receive any

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³ So Maximus the Confessor, Questions to Thalassios, 49: ‘the veil is the illusion produced by the senses, fixing the soul’s attention on the surface appearance of sensory objects, and barring the passage to their spiritual realities’.
more the images which arrive by means of the senses; but it is as if another world has been created by its awareness …

This is the world of truth, the world of nature according to God, the world discovered by the purified eyes of the heart as if they were creating it. For Maximus the Confessor, people who see in this way are responding to the vocation entrusted to them by God at their own creation: the unification within themselves of the material creation and the spiritual creation. For through all that is merely material, they are perceiving God’s profound intention, and through that awareness in turn unifying the whole world with God.

There is, then, a bold vision of creation and of its link with God, and one that does not exclude humanity—quite the contrary. It is through this ‘interior knowledge’ that humanity comes to true self-awareness, ‘of what it is according to its spiritual nature’. We find this idea as early as Antony the Great, whose letters contain a summary of this vision. If we know ourselves, then we know at the same time the other creatures whom God has called into being from nothingness; we are also made aware of the divine salvific design of all that God has done for His creatures. But, above all, self-awareness culminates in the knowledge of God. Gregory of Nyssa likens the soul to iron. If a whetstone is used to remove rust from iron, what was previously black ‘will shine and glisten brightly in the sun’. Similarly, when human beings are purified, they behold themselves as the image of God, and thus by extension God’s own self: ‘the archetype in the image’.

However, this task to which God has destined the human person extends further: to a liturgical ministry. When we recognise God in God’s creatures and in ourselves, our goal is the praise of God, the giving of thanks to God. We are coming now to the theme of prayer, because one of the fruits of this ‘interior’ knowledge is precisely that it shoots forth in praise and thanksgiving. Again it is Maximus who brings out the connection. When the saints look upon nature, they are not attached to matter in the way that we are—their concern is rather

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to find multiple ways of praising the God who appears everywhere and in all things.\textsuperscript{7}

The Christian sensitive to ecology thus becomes a person of prayer and praise. So Maximus can add that ‘humanity gathers up the spiritual \textit{logoi} of things as creation’s gifts to honour God’.\textsuperscript{8} This same Christian also becomes committed to what I have dared to call \textit{ecological priesthood}: the offering to God on creation’s behalf of the divine traces concealed in creation. Maximus indeed goes so far as to compare three different stages of interior awareness with the three degrees of sacramental priesthood:

He who anoints his intellect for spiritual contest and drives all impassioned thoughts out of it has the quality of a deacon. He who illuminates his intellect with the knowledge of created beings and

\textsuperscript{7} Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Difficulty 10}. A scholarly English translation of the whole text can be found in Andrew Louth, \textit{Maximus the Confessor} (London: Routledge, 1996), 94-154.

\textsuperscript{8} Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Questions to Thalassios}, 51.
utterly destroys false knowledge has the quality of a priest. And he
who perfects his intellect with the holy myrrh of the knowledge
and worship of the Holy Trinity has the quality of a bishop.\footnote{Maximus the Confessor, Centuries on Love, 2:21. Translation from The Philokalia: The Complete

Simeon of Taibouteh,\footnote{This author is, unfortunately, largely unknown—he lived in the seventh century and was a
contemporary of Isaac of Nineveh. I am grateful for help in his regard from Ysabel de Andía.} in the course of a commentary on Denys,
gives an especially full account of this contemplative attitude which, as
it focuses on creation, discovers realities within it that others do not
perceive. For Symeon, this contemplative attitude is a ‘spiritual
contemplation which goes beyond nature’:

Everything visible which others see in material fashion, this person
sees from now on spiritually [gnostically] in their understanding,
through spiritual contemplation. In the interior of their
understanding: they walk, in and through their thoughts, across the
whole creation: the worlds that once were and are no more, as well
as those which are here, the years of the world and their events …
along with the changes that affect all creation. All these realities
that others see materially, the spiritual person [the Gnostic] sees
spiritually [gnostically] …. They do not look at plants as a farmer
would; they do not think of roots as medicines. But everything they
see with the eyes of their body they meditate on secretly, in the
interior of their understanding, as an aid to spiritual contemplation.
This contemplation … activates and explores the force secretly
hidden in all realities, working in them in incomprehensible
fashion. The understanding … is thus enlightened in such a way
that it is no longer able to see a material reality without seeing
immediately … the providence of God that is hidden, secretly at
work within.

Such people see still further. In and through bodily realities, they
can divine the existence of incorporeal beings, in other words the
angels:

They see in an immediate and secret way their order and their
hierarchy, their motions and the modulations of their joyful ‘Holy,
holy, holy’. And the person imitates them in so far as their
capacities permit, with the help of God.
The vision of creation draws the person into the praise which the angels offer unceasingly to God:

Here grace comes to take them under its shadow … and they sense the glorious mysteries which will never cease, flowing over the person by this Father who is the source of all lights, shining, attracting the person towards the hidden likeness of His secret goodness.

Symeon then breaks off from Denys’ text to explain how it is that something of God is present in all creatures. This he calls ‘the divinity which is in us’:

It is divine providence which maintains everything, divinises everything, illuminates everything—by its perfect goodness it penetrates everything and sustains everything; it enflames everything with a fire of desire for unity with the divinity that is the source and origin; it draws one above all things, this providence which is more exalted and higher than everything that finds its delight in communion with it. For this divinity which is in us … has been sown into the foundations of all that is created, and works there in a way that is not delimited. In fact it is written: ‘In Him we live, we receive our movement, and we exist’.

It is also something of God in us which,

… mysteriously gives us the courage to recognise and grasp our divinisation. … In fact, God has fixed in all natures of things, whether immaterial, material or inanimate, something which comes from the good which is beyond all good and beyond all being … so that, thanks to this goodness which is implanted in all natures, we desire and aspire ardently to the love of the One who is good beyond all good …. For … this good being which is beyond all goodness … lives in all without delimitation, beyond word or ideas. All nature desires Him and aspires ardently after Him, thanks to the goodness which is at work in it so that we all aspire to Him.

This limpid text beautifully summarises the doctrine of the traces of God in creation, traces that the sensitised spiritual vision of the believer can discover. The discovery is so convulsive that Evagrius can describe it—as we have already seen—in terms of a new creation
brought about by the spiritual person’s own self. Such a person rediscovers the ministry of mediation between the material and spiritual universe that was Adam’s before the Fall. By virtue of his double constitution, Adam linked matter and spirit, a ministry which Christ, the new mediator and the new High Priest, restored to humanity through his Incarnation. It follows that everyone who prays has become a minister of this new ecological liturgy, because, as Symeon of Taibouteh puts it, humanity is the link between the heaven and earth:

Person of discernment, know that you are the image of God and the knot that holds the whole of creation together: the realities of heaven and those of the earth. When you bow your head to adore and praise God, all creatures of heaven and earth do this along with you; but when you omit to adore and praise, all creatures reproach you and set themselves against you, and you fall from grace.

It is easy enough to glean from monastic tradition other examples of this respect for creation and for a certain attachment to it. Athanasius’ Life of Antony tells us that the hermit,

… inspected the land around the mountain, and finding a small, suitable place he ploughed it; and having abundant water from the spring, he planted it.

Bernard tells a postulant that he will discover much more,

… labouring amongst the woods that you ever will amongst books. Woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any master.

Hildegard of Bingen, his contemporary, asserts that the first thing she will do when she arrives as Abbess in a monastery is to plant a tree beside the door of her cell that can be her consolation and her best

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11 Evagrius, Kephalaia gnostica, 5: 2.
friend. Bruno, in his letter to Raoul le Verd, speaks poetically of the landscape surrounding him in Calabria:

… the hills which gently rise above all around, the secrets of the shady valleys where the rivers flow in abundance, the streams and their sources … the watered gardens, the trees with their abundant variety of fruits.

Then we have Francis of Assisi with his canticle of the Sun, not to speak of the countless consecrated ascetics who befriended animals: Jerome feeding his lion; Seraphim of Sarov with his bear; a contemporary North American hermit living in Norway feeding a snake that lives under the floor of his cell.

Ancient and modern sources converge here. But perhaps we can leave the last word to Symeon of Taibouteh, who tells us that the moment will come when the person seeing the Creator in the creation,

… will no longer be able to see the humble and limited realities of nature, because they are completely intoxicated with the beauty of God hidden within nature.

‘Ecological Priesthood’

As we have already seen, there is nothing naïve about this Spirit-led prayer of praise. Such prayer is well aware that the beauty through which God’s splendour shines is destined one day to disappear, or to be transformed through a crisis which the Bible evokes through images of ultimate catastrophe. ‘Interior knowledge’ of the creation is thus provisional and limited. Even when it is possessed in the highest degree by virtue of a rare grace of the Holy Spirit, it is still knowledge ‘through a glass, darkly’ (1 Corinthians 13:12):

The knowledge of creatures, however sweet it may be, is only ever the shadow of true knowledge …. It nourishes the spirit while waiting until the spirit can receive a contemplation that is higher.\(^\text{14}\)

The reference here is to ‘spiritual contemplation’ of God’s own self, something which excludes any image, whether sensory or mental.

\(^{14}\) Isaac the Syrian, Letters, 4.
When he speaks of it, Isaac the Syrian describes it as a stupor, ‘taking the form of flashes within one’s thought’, with the immediate result that ‘the heart explodes with joy’. Isaac expresses a confidence that we can suppose to reflect his own experience:

I know someone not far from here, someone who occasionally tastes something of these flashes. Even if this kind of intuition leaves him immediately, the upsurge of joy and its savour extend for a long time; when the flash is extinguished, the sweetness that comes to him from it remains for a long time diffused within him. Even his body relaxes … and the sweet joy produced by the stupor at the culminating point leaves its trace in the palate of his understanding. It becomes easy for him thus to scorn the temporal world, since hope from this point on is consoling him in the face of the weariness caused by the present day world that has become so alien to him.¹⁵

Here, then, is our contemplative. At the beginning, he was in love with the creation. But now he has transcended it, and passed mysteriously into a Beyond where he is being given a gift of tasting God more directly, and of which he retains a very sweet aftertaste in the palate of his heart. There is thus a transition between the contemplation of God that takes place through creation and the one that moves beyond creation. It is here that, according to the ancient wisdom of the Church, one finds the prayer that today we might designate ‘ecological’.

Moreover, the rhythm of this prayer seems akin to that of salvation history—a history which, as we have seen, begins with creation, but moves inevitably forward until we make the transition to ‘new heavens and a new earth’—a transition marked by universal upheaval. Prayer is anything but a haven of peace and gentleness. It includes experiences of void and moments of temptation. Again, the ancient authors use images from nature to evoke these: the ‘nights’ of John of the Cross; the ‘droughts’ of Francis of Sales or Fénelon; the winters of Isaac the Syrian, ‘that allow the seed hidden under the earth to rot and develop itself, through the changing, violently shaken winds’:

The labours which people of God endure … serve to illuminate what is hidden in the seeds. The ordinary appearance of a seed at

the time of its sowing belies ... the splendour of the varied and glorious colours which will cause it to rise and be seen outside, the splendour that will make it the wonderful vesture and ornament of the very earth that earth has let it develop in its bosom.

Moreover, the experience of dryness in prayer can be likened to that of the seed that has to rot and die in the earth before it can bring forth its fruits.

Such an ordeal is a necessary part of the learning process, one that is always painful, towards the essential condition for prayer: humility. Drawing an entirely ‘ecological’ analogy, Bernard hymns the mystical benefits of what he calls ‘the valley of humility’, the humid valleys where the Cistercians love to settle. He sees in them ‘the fertile place to which the waters flow as they descend down the craggy mountainsides’.  

Ruusbroec copies the image, but adds another feature to what has been called the Cistercians’ ‘mystical geography’, once again an ecological feature. He notes that the slopes of a valley reflect the light of the sun towards the bottom, and thus enhance its effect:

Now understand: when the sun shines its rays and its light into a deep valley between two high mountains, and the sun then stands in the zenith of the firmament so that it may shine on the bottom and on the ground of the valley, three things happen there. The valley becomes lighter with the reflection from the mountains, and it becomes more heated, and it becomes more fertile than flat level land.

Something similar happens, it is claimed, when the humble heart places its unfulfilled desires before Christ, because, says Ruusbroec, God’s generosity cannot be contained—it has to open out almost in spite of itself:

Then this valley, the humble heart, receives three things: it becomes brighter and more illuminated by grace, and more heated in charity, and more fruitful in perfect virtues and in good works.  


Whatever we make of these images—winter, night, valley—the person of prayer is in this way taking up not only the exterior rhythms of nature, the succession of the days and seasons, but also a spiritual dynamism that runs deeper: the movement from the creation as it is now towards the transition into the new creation. The movement is painful, and the pain has its effect on the prayer. It is marked both by ‘the sufferings of this present time’ and by a new life viewed only from afar, even when, as Paul puts it, these sufferings ‘are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us’. It is worth hearing the whole passage from Romans 8, because it is particularly enlightening for our subject here:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God .... We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. (Romans 8:19-24)

The groans run through the whole of creation. A few verses later, Paul will link these groanings to the sighs of the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit engenders in the hearts of those who pray:
Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit … (Romans 8:26-27)

Prayer thus takes up the waiting and the groaning of all creation, and these groans are echoed by the sighs which the Spirit brings forth in the heart of our prayer. A few verses earlier, Paul has revealed something of the secret of one of these sighs, affirming that it is the same Spirit which makes us cry ‘Abba, Father’, bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.\(^\text{18}\)

There is another biblical image which is worth underlining here. Speaking of creation and the end of time, Paul speaks of the tension here in terms of giving birth—something which is inevitably painful, but nevertheless surrounded with a very intense, though hidden, joy. Jesus himself had used this image in speaking of the catastrophes that would occur before the end of the world:

> When a woman is in labour, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. (John 16:21)

The image applies as much to the trials that will come at the world’s end as to the trials that come with serious prayer. They cannot be escaped, and one must not run away. Through them we will enter into a joy quite unlike anything else.

It is in these terms that we must understand the ministry or priesthood of prayer to which 2 Peter seems to be alluding. To readers becoming impatient because the Day of the Lord seems to be delayed, the author affirms once again that it will indeed most certainly come ‘like a thief’. The heavens will break open; the elements will dissolve; the earth will be consumed. What the author recommends is ‘leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God’. The formulation here is significant: the life of holiness and godliness, in other words of prayer, is not just a way of waiting for this transformation of the world; it can also be a means by which the transformation is hastened, a way of working along with the secret

\(^{18}\) Romans 8:15-16; compare Galatians 4:6.
Prayer and Ecology

dynamism of salvation history as it progresses, slowly but surely, towards the ‘new heavens and a new earth’ (2 Peter 3: 9-13).

2 Peter here converges with another saying of Jesus, from his own discourse about the end of the world. The time of the end is unknown; Jesus tells us to stay awake and not to fall asleep. But he also makes it clear that the tribulations at the end of the world will be alleviated for those who have remained faithful to him:

And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. (Mark 13:20)

Prayer hastens on the end of the world—but it also makes the end more bearable, easier to cope with, and it enables us to come through the experience safe and sound. This is one final aspect of ecological priesthood: it is at the service of the creation’s progress in this present time, and of its transfiguration in the new world.

This new world, so the Fathers tell us, is already present among us in mysterio—by that they mean a presence that is very active, but at the same time veiled in signs that only the prayer of a spiritual person can detect. It is in this sense that we can say that prayer ‘transfigures’ creation—secretly, but in very truth. Fr Lev Gillet, speaking of the prayer of Jesus, affirms that this prayer is an instrument or means of transfiguration. The prayer that we speak helps us to transfigure the whole world, even inanimate nature, in Christ:

The material universe murmurs Jesus’ name in secret … and it is part of each Christian’s priestly ministry to express this aspiration, to pronounce the name of Jesus over the elements of nature: the stones and the trees, the flowers and the fruits, the mountain and the sea. This ministry enables the secret within things to be fulfilled, and to respond to this long, mute, unconscious waiting. We can transfigure the animal world as well. Jesus, who proclaimed that no sparrow is forgotten by the Father … did not exclude the animals from his generosity and his gracious influence. Like Adam in Paradise, we are to give a name to all the animals. Whatever name science gives them, we will invoke over each of them the name of Jesus, rendering to each of them their original glory that so often we forget, and recalling that they are created and loved by the Father in Jesus and for Jesus. But it is above all in relationship to other human beings that Jesus’ name enables us to exercise a ministry of transfiguration …. Our ministry is a specific, effective
means of transfiguring people in their deepest, divine reality. These men and women we come across in the street, in the factory or at the office, and especially those whom we find irritating or uncongenial—let us move towards them with the name of Jesus in our hearts and on our lips. Let us pronounce this name (which is their true name) over them ... by our silently recognising and adoring Jesus imprisoned in the sinner, the criminal, the prostitute, it is as if we release not only our Master but also his jailers. If we see Jesus in each human being, if we speak the name of Jesus over each human being, we will move through the world with a new vision .... And so, in so far as this lies within us, we will transform the world.19

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19 Writing under the pseudonym, ‘A Monk of the Eastern Church’, in *La prière de Jésus* (Monastery of Chevetogne, 1963), 79-81. An English translation has been made of this text (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987).
ANIMALS AS GRACE

On Being an Animal Liturgist

Andrew Linzey

BARNEY WAS A REFUGE. Abandoned, he subsequently found a home at the local animal sanctuary. It was there that we first met him. His shaggy hair, dark brown eyes, and exuberant temperament endeared him to the Linzey family. ‘There goes the woolly rocket’, we would say as he raced before us on long walks. So glad was he to have a home that when any of us opened the front door he would pin us to the wall and lavish his affection upon us. He had, I recall, very large paws, and made ample use of them when he wanted our attention. Still, he gave us much more than we gave him.

One day he began to have fits, and an incurable neurological problem was diagnosed. Euthanasia was the advised course of action. The result was devastating for the whole family. Here was a dog badly treated by the world, yet, much as we loved him, we could not save him from suffering and premature death. We elected to bury him in the garden. As we stood around the open grave, I fumbled to find some appropriate words of parting.

But there were no prescribed words. The physical neglect that Barney had suffered was paralleled by a spiritual neglect as well. The Churches had really nothing to offer—and nothing to say. The Christian heritage of 2,000 years of spirituality and scholarship has produced only liturgical silence over the deaths of millions of members of other species, even those who share and enrich our lives. A tradition that has countenanced the blessing of cars and houses has never even registered a pastoral need in relation to the death of companion animals.

Struck by the existence of this lacuna, I was determined to do something. I phoned up my publishers and said that I wanted a break from my publishing commitments to complete a book on animal liturgy. They obliged with a contract. ‘Should only take a month or so’,
I foolishly commented. In fact, it took as long as six and consumed a whole summer. It was an agonizing process. It was all very flattering to be thought a pioneer but, in reality, I felt more like a scavenger in a wasteland. Some of my friends judged the project distinctly eccentric.

What was the problem then that I sought to address? Quite simply: the invisibility of animals in Christian worship. Christians currently worship God as though the world of animals does not exist. Contrary to some of the psalms, praise has become an exclusively human-centred affair; animals hardly get a look in at all. Behind this is a deeper impoverishment, or rather blindness: the sense that God the Creator is not much concerned with animals. If we neglect them, it is because we are representing traditional versions of divine negligence. But to maintain such a position is increasingly problematic once it is fully understood that God is the Creator not only of the human species but also of millions of other living things. Can the God who nourishes and sustains the entire created universe really only be interested in one species? ‘An exclusive preoccupation with human well-being is beginning to seem distinctly parochial.’

Allied to that is the question of the flesh. Traditional Anglican and Roman Catholic theology, it is sometimes boasted, is strongly incarnational. If this is true, it is odd that many clergy and theologians still have not grasped the spiritual significance of our relations with other fleshly creatures. It is worth pausing to reflect why the most ‘fleshly’ (at least in theory) religion of all has difficulty in celebrating animals, even in recognising them as proper objects of moral solicitude.

The doctrine of the incarnation teaches us, at least theoretically, to take the flesh seriously:

[Human beings] will thus come to realise that the originality of Christianity consists in consecrating their everyday lives through the Incarnation, and not in attempting to live in a world that is supposed to be holy but which is in fact artificial and out of contact with reality.

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1 Unknown source cited by Robert Runcie, ‘Theology, the University and the Modern World’, in *Theology, the University and the Modern World*, edited by P. A. B. Clarke and Andrew Linzey (London: LCAP, 1988), 20; original emphasis.

This everyday world which we claim has been consecrated by the incarnation is populated also with other creatures. ‘There is something distinctly odd, even perverse, about an incarnational theology that cannot celebrate our relations with other creatures’, I groaned. Even more despairingly,

I am getting a little tired of theologians who are eager, sometimes over-eager, to see incarnational resonances within almost every area of human activity (art, music, poetry, dance) but who look with astonishment that our relations with animals might be an issue worthy of spiritual, nay incarnational, concern.³

Christian theology is still deeply threatened by talk of animals, as if by taking their interests seriously we dethrone our own. Indeed, one theologian was recently foolish enough to state his fear dogmatically: ‘The root of the case for animal rights lies there. Its advocates do not believe that [humanity] is unique.’⁴ But this fear-projecting theologian clearly hadn’t read my works which defend both animal rights and human uniqueness.⁵ For some people, some things can’t be true no matter how much evidence to the contrary.

Perhaps some Christians are simply frightened of displays of emotion towards animals. Some clergy, I know, look askance at celebrations of inter-species fraternity, arguing that they pander to sentimentality. ‘People love animals’, says Geraldine Granger, the eponymous Vicar of Dibley in the British TV sitcom, justifying her intention to hold an animal service. ‘People also love food-mixers’, replies the

³ Linzey, Animal Rites, 15.
⁵ For example, Andrew Linzey, Christianity and the Rights of Animals (London: SPCK, 1987).
straight-laced churchwarden, David Horton, ‘but there are very few of us pressing the Archbishop of Canterbury for a special communion for the Moulinex Magic-Master’.  

But there are obvious differences between food-mixers and animals. The chief one is that animals are God’s creatures. The point is an obvious one, but behind it lie weighty theological insights. Animals were created alongside us, according to Genesis 1, on the sixth day of creation. They are blessed by their Creator. They are given their own space in which to live and flourish. Their life, nephesh in Hebrew, is God-given. The God who creates also enters into a covenant relationship with all living beings. Given these insights, it is only appropriate that humans should experience a sense of fellow-feeling with other sentient species. And this is most keenly felt by people who care for them and keep them as companions. Some animal services, I accept, can make their prime focus little more than a celebration of childish emotion. But, as I get older, I am less censorious about ‘childish emotion’. Vincent Van Gogh once remarked that in order to love God one needs to love ‘many things’:

> Love a friend, a wife, something, whatever you like, and you will be on the right way to know more about it . . . . But one must love with a lofty and serious intimate sympathy, with strength, with intelligence and one must always try to know deeper, better, and more. That leads to God, that leads to unwavering faith.

The bottom line is that many people love their animals and dare to think that God does too.

When people speak of ‘sentimentality’, what they often have in mind is that certain emotional responses are inappropriate, and some may be. This attitude is reinforced by the rather prim line of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: ‘One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons’. This almost

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6 Richard Curtis and Paul Mayhew-Archer, The Vicar of Dibley: The Great Big Companion to Dibley (London: Michael Joseph, 2000), 84. I acknowledge my indebtedness to these fine writers who have helped put both Dibley and animal services on the map.


8 Catechism of the Catholic Church (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 517, para. 2418. In order to understand this odd comment, one needs to appreciate that for centuries it was standard Catholic teaching that one had no duty to love animals—a view which stemmed expressly from St Thomas
suggests that there is only a limited amount of love in the world so we should not waste it on animals. How can this be reconciled, one wonders, with the extraordinary love of other creatures displayed by many Catholic saints? Can the emotional rationing proposed coexist with Christ-like generosity?

But emotional response, even if it is a worthy beginning, is not enough. There are big theological questions that should be addressed. Although clergy are often reticent about giving them voice, many ‘ordinary’ worshippers have grasped them: if God loves and cares for creation should not the species uniquely made in God’s image demonstrate that same loving care? If our power over animals is not to be its own self-justification, should not the example of moral generosity—of lordship expressed in service—glimpsed in the life and example of Jesus be the model for the exercise of our own ‘dominion’ over other creatures? Far from being ‘made for us’, is it not truer, and more adequately biblical, to say that humans are made for creation—to act as servants and guardians of what God has created? Animal services can, at best, provide a platform to say important theological things about animals: to express the need for a sense of wonder and awe at divine creativity; for an appreciation that God delights in differentiated being and that we should delight in it too; and, not least, for a penitential recognition of the human hubris and greed that results in animal abuse.

There are also many, largely unmet, spiritual needs. People who keep animals have often made an elementary but profound discovery: animals are not machines or commodities, but beings with their own God-given lives, individuality and personality. At their best, relations
with companion animals can help us to grow in mutuality, self-giving and trust. And yet, these spiritually sustaining relationships often go unrecognised. For many, animals are the ‘significant others’ in their lives. Indeed, one recent theologian has suggested that in these relationships of apparent ‘excess’ we see nothing less than the self-giving of God. ‘I want to suggest that, from a theological perspective that takes pets seriously’, writes Stephen H. Webb, ‘animals are more like gifts than something owned, giving us more than we expect and thus obliging us to return their gifts’. Far from decrying these relationships as ‘sentimental’, ‘unbalanced’ or ‘obsessive’, as frequently happens today, Churches could point to their underlying theological significance as examples of divine grace.

Some view liturgical concern for animals as selling out to a postmodernist, largely secular, sensibility. In fact, blessings for animals are found in the Catholic manual, *Rituale Romanum*, written in 1614, and left virtually untouched until 1952. Moreover, concern for animals as a Christian duty was pioneered by the SPCA (as it then was), whose first prospectus even proposed the funding of ‘periodic discourses’ from London pulpits. Many clergy have not caught up with the fact that the modern ethical sensibility towards animals was largely Christian in origin.

Anyway, I worked away all summer, determined to find the words that the Christian tradition had not said but that (I thought) it had always, deep down, wanted to say. I began, unsurprisingly, with a liturgy for animal burials. What should one say when confronted, as I was, with a dead dog and a hole in the ground? I came to the conclusion that what we should want to say at that poignant moment is very similar to what one already says, and does, when a human being dies.

One should first pray a prayer of thanksgiving, and then commend the life of the individual concerned into the hands of almighty God. I wrestled in my own mind with the theology of hope and came even more firmly to the conclusion expressed without dissent at the Lambeth Conference of 1998 that ‘the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of creation’.

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10 Arthur Broome, ‘Prospectus of the SPCA’, RSPCA Records, volume 2 (1823-1826). I am grateful to the Librarian of the RSPCA for this reference.
11 Lambeth Conference 1998, Resolution 1.8, Creation (a) (iii), cited and discussed in *Animal Rites*, 108. The resolution ‘reaffirms the biblical vision of Creation’, according to which ‘creation is a web of
universe could find space even, and especially, for Barney. Immodestly, I felt pleased with at least some of my efforts, this one especially:

Pilgrim God who journeys with us through the joys and shadows of this world be with us in our sorrow and feel our pain; help us to accept the mystery of death without bitterness but with hope. Among the shadows of this world, amid the turmoil of life and the fear of death you stand alongside us, always blessing, always giving arms always outstretched.

For this we know: every living thing is yours and returns to you. As we ponder this mystery we give you thanks for the life of (Name) and we now commit him/her into your loving hands.

Gentle God: fragile is your world, delicate are your creatures, and costly is your love which bears and redeems us all. Amen.  

Some people may cavil at the confident notion that animals are redeemed individually. Even among those who believe in animal redemption, there are some who do not believe that animals have the right kind of 'soul' for immortality. Roman Catholic tradition has distinguished between the 'rational' soul, which equips humans for eternity, and the 'non-rational' soul of animals, which perishes after inter-dependent relationships bound together in the Covenant which God the Holy Trinity has established with the whole earth and every living being. It goes on to make three affirmations: (i) the divine Spirit is sacramentally present in Creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect, and gratitude; (ii) human beings are both co-partners with the rest of Creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all Creation; (iii) the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of Creation. This is a remarkably adroit theological statement and deserves to be more widely known. See http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-8.cfm.

Prayers from 'A Liturgy for Animal Burial', Animal Rites, 113-114.

For a helpful survey and discussion of the various models of animal redemption, both individual and corporate, see Petroc and Eldred Willey, 'Will Animals be Redeemed?' in Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics, edited by Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM, 1994), 190-200. My own view is that all sentient beings will be redeemed in a way that compensates them for the injustice and suffering that they have had to undergo. That, I believe, is required by the doctrine of a just God. How precisely that will be done is a matter that I happily leave to the Almighty.
death. But that absolute emphasis on rationality (at least as we understand it) seems inappropriate when we are talking of divine grace. It misses the point. And the point concerns God’s benevolence, not ours. I cannot with certainty look into an animal’s psyche and come to a conclusion about its spiritual status, but I can be sure—as sure as I am of anything—that the merciful God disclosed in Jesus Christ will not let any loved creature perish into oblivion. To deny this gospel of hope to all other species except our own strikes me as an arrogant, mean doctrine of God.

In fact, the idea of cosmic redemption (and, by implication, the redemption of individuals within it) is hardly new. The Logos doctrine, so prevalent during the early years of Christian history, encapsulates it all. Indeed, Allan Galloway in his classic work, The Cosmic Christ, argues that the doctrine of cosmic redemption ‘was at the very heart of the primitive Gospel’.14 Developing precisely that theme, my words of commendation were prefaced by a robust theology of the Logos:

Christ is the first and the last, who transforms all
the Alpha and Omega suffering into joy;
who reconciles and redeems Christ is the first and the last
every form of created life; the Alpha and the Omega;
the source and destiny the Saviour of the Universe:
of all living things; in Christ shall all be made
who bears the wounds of alive.15
all suffering creatures;

But my book did not only contain liturgies for animal burials. It also included services in celebration of animal companionship, services for animal welfare, healing liturgies, new eucharistic prayers ‘for the whole creation’, and forms for the blessing of individual animals. Underlying all these attempts was the need to develop liturgy that helped us celebrate the God-given lives of other creatures. The following are some examples:

14 Allan Galloway, The Cosmic Christ (London: Nisbet, 1951), x. He convincingly argues that much of the cosmic imagery of the New Testament was designed to ‘symbolize all the distortion in the structure of existence’ on one hand, and to assert ‘that the work of Christ is universally effective for all creation’, on the other. The doctrine of the cosmic Christ ‘arose as a necessary implication of the fundamental insights of Jewish and Christian theology’. See pp. 28, 29, 55.
God of the universe
all creatures praise you;
the sun setting on the lake,
the birds flying upward toward
the heavens;
the growl of the bear;
the darting of the stickleback;
the purring of the cat,
the wide eyes of the tiger;
the swift legs of the cheetah,
the dance of the hare;
the lapping of the dog,
the descent of the dove.

God of a thousand ears
the music of your creatures
resounds throughout creation
and in heaven a symphony is
made.

Christ in all things:
in the waves breaking on the
shore;
in the beauty of the sunset;
in the fragrant blossom of
Spring;
in the music that makes our
hearts dance;
in the kisses of embracing love;
in the cries of the innocent.

Help us to wonder, Lord
to stand in awe;
to stand and stare;
and so to praise you
for the richness of the world
you have laid before us.

Large and immense God
help us to know the littleness
of our lives without you;
the littleness of our thoughts
without your inspiration;
and the littleness of our hearts
without your love;
you are God beyond our
littleness
yet in one tiny space and time
you became one with us and
all those specks of dust
you love for all eternity;

enlarge our hearts and minds
to reverence all living things
and in our care for them
to become big with your grace
and signs of your kingdom.
Amen.  

Media Reactions

I expected that Animal Rites would arouse interest, but I was not
prepared for the media roller-coaster that it set in motion. Scores of
journals world-wide focused on the book, ranging from the Washington
Post and Der Spiegel to the Dutch daily Trouw. In addition, the

16 Prayers from 'Celebrating the Creatures: A Liturgy', Animal Rites, 28-30.
17 'Pet's Death Inspires Liturgies for Animals', The Washington Post (3 March 1999). Among the many
other reports (which seemed to go on for a year), both satirical and serious, see: 'They Are God's Best
Friends Too: Ben Fenton on the Theologians Who Believe Heaven Would Be Hell without Dogs', The Daily Telegraph (18 September 1999); Robbie Millen, 'Barking Dogma', The Spectator (18 September 1999); 'Will Your Pet Rise Again? Yes, Some Faiths Say', The Philadelphia Inquirer
Independent gave over almost a page to an extended interview. I spent three weeks either on the phone talking to journalists or darting from one studio to another.

Two reactions predominated. The first was theological puzzlement. Many questioned whether what I was doing made any theological sense, and whether such liturgies were legitimate. A brother of the Society of St Francis at its house in Hilfield, who preferred not to be named, commented:

We like animals. We have several ourselves. But our main interest is in people. Animals were peripheral to St Francis, which many people don’t realise. He was more concerned about people.

The idea that St Francis could be concerned about both humans and animals—as could modern-day Franciscans—obviously eluded him. More seriously, it was a bit disconcerting to discover that a Franciscan brother really had not grasped that the gospel that St Francis preached was about the love of God the Creator, which sustains all living beings—not just the human ones. Not all reaction was hostile. The Tablet managed a fairly serious news announcement, and the liturgical journal of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales managed some mollifying comments:

These prayers are serious and carefully compiled. There is much merit in them as regards liturgical structure and general style. They are not maudlin or sentimental.

Pretty amazing, I thought. Then came the final paragraph:

19 ‘Nee, de doop voor dieren is niet nodig’, Trouw (4 August 1999), 12.
21 ‘For Pets We See no Longer’, Church Times (29 January 1999). There was also a page in the same issue devoted to an interview with Margaret Duggan, ‘Talking of Animals’, 12.
But is there any justification for incorporating specific animal liturgies in our worship? Animals may well have souls, but they are not immortal souls, and animals are not part of the salvific and sacramental economy in which humans are incorporated. Matthew 6:26 and 12:12 makes it clear that God cares for animals, but he values humans much more. Regretfully we must conclude that most of Professor Linzey’s interesting liturgical texts are misconceived and inappropriate. They would assuredly not get past the Congregation for Divine Worship!23

It is not the fact that my texts did not win their approval that is vexing (that would have been too much to expect), but the theological reasons stated for their disapproval. ‘Not part of the salvific and sacramental economy’ sounds weighty until one pauses to reflect that the Logos is the origin and destiny of all creaturely things, as many patristic writers have affirmed. How can animals not be part of the salvific economy if the Logos is the source of all life, as John’s Gospel makes clear: ‘In him was life’ (1:4)? What sense does it make to affirm God as the Creator of all but as the redeemer of only the human species? After all, the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms quite unambiguously that the ‘world was created for the glory of God’, and that ‘the ultimate purpose of creation is that God, who is creator of all things, may at last become “all in all”, thus

simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude’. ‘All in all’ strikes me as difficult to reconcile with any ‘economy of salvation’.

The second reaction was ridicule. To some the whole idea of liturgically sanctioned concern for animals was something akin to a divine joke. That well-known and respected writer A. N. Wilson offered one of the more exuberant satires:

We’ve been agonizing for some time about whether to have Percy baptized. It is difficult to subscribe to the old orthodoxies. On the other hand, if no one in future gets baptized, the Church will die out. Do we really want Chartres Cathedral and the parish churches of England to become mere museums? And then there is the question of Percy himself. While I might feel shy about saying the creed, how can I know what is passing through his little head? …. It is a relief to discover, then, that the Rev. Professor Andrew Linzey of Oxford University has published a series of ‘Animal Rites’. There is not, as it happens, a form of Baptism for Dogs. For that, one would have to turn to Firbank’s immortal Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli. But there is a form of Swearing a Covenant with a Companion Animal …. Such a ceremony would definitely help me to be more tolerant of the little fellow, a dog whose flatulence, halitosis and insatiable greed sometimes make him a difficult life-companion …. I shall remember it when Percy howls in the middle of University Challenge for no obvious reason. Professor Linzey has done much to correct the absurd anthropocentric view of the world which has formed so much Christian theology.

There were also, however, some thoughtful and interesting reviews which showed that the authors had understood what I was trying to do. All in all, it was clear that the book had touched a nerve. This was evidenced by the scores of letters and phone calls from those who had recently lost animals they loved, and who were struggling to make sense of their loss. Many of them were deeply heartened to find a priest who actually thought that their situation merited concern, even

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24 Catholic Catechism, 69, paragraph 294. I accept, however, that the Catechism tends towards a very human-centred view of redemption, which I think is the result of a failure to grasp the significance of the Logos doctrine at this point, see 68-76. It quotes Bonaventure, for example, on how God created all things ‘not to increase his glory but to show it forth and to communicate it’ (68-69), but fails to acknowledge that Bonaventure saw all creatures as icons of Christ: ‘for every creature is by its nature a kind of effigy and likeness of the eternal Wisdom’ (Bonaventure, The Soul’s Journey into God, translated and introduced by Ewert Cousins [London: SPCK, 1978], 77).

sympathy. Some of the letters were in fact heart-rending. Despite the bruises, I was glad that had I put up with ridicule to be of some small help to those who felt pastorally abandoned. In addition, I was pleased that some had seen a connection (however garbled the reporting) between the Word made flesh and people’s actual lives with other fleshly creatures.

**Animals Make a Mess**

‘But animals make a mess’, it is objected. Whenever I hear that, I am reminded of the view of Albert Schweitzer, who likened the history of Western philosophy to that of a person who cleans the kitchen floor—only to find that the dog comes in and muddies it with paw prints.\(^{26}\) Animals do make a mess of human-centred theology. Despite some organizational difficulties (usually very minor), the bringing of animals into church has a deep symbolic importance—one that is seldom lost on the human participants. It symbolizes the inclusion of the animal world in the very place where so much theology has excluded them. It also provides a practical glimpse of creation in praise.

And the noise? Well, what is a dirge to one person is birdsong to another. In fact, I am usually astonished at other creatures’ sense of place, but when interactive barking does takes place, I remind my hearers that if St Francis of Assisi could preach to the birds, Andrew Linzey can be heckled by dogs.\(^{27}\)

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