

Grosvenor Essay No. 12

Prayer and Spirituality

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Preface

Wasting time in prayer

We might find it hard to make time for prayer, especially where there are lots of other things to be getting on with and prayer is not seeming very useful. Indeed, the Dominican Herbert McCabe says: *prayer is a complete waste of time*. However, it does not follow that we should not pray. It follows that it is good to waste time.

If you know Antoine Saint-Exupery's book *The Little Prince*, about the boy who left his planet because he felt oppressed by caring for an audacious rose, you will probably remember something of the prince's encounter with the fox. The fox asks the little prince, or the little boy, to tame him, and the prince does not know what 'tame' means. The fox explains that to tame somebody is to create ties with them, and that once you have tamed them they become special to you; not just another fox, or just another little boy, or just another rose among 500 000 roses, but one that has a place in your heart. He adds that until you have wasted time with somebody, you will not have tamed them.

To waste time with somebody, or in some activity, is to be with them for their own sake for pure love or enjoyment. Wasting time is, for example, enjoying a bike ride not because it leads somewhere, and not because it gets you fit, and not even because it is a break from something else, though all of those are true, but enjoying the ride purely for what it is: the love of being on the bike. And, paradoxically, when we enjoy it purely for the love of being on the bike, rather than for some useful purpose, all those other goods follow more fully: we become more fit, and we also get somewhere – perhaps back home - and we truly get a break from our tasks because we have not carried with us on our ride the onerous duty of 'taking a proper break'! Instead, we have managed to forget ourselves.

We know when we have not thrown ourselves fully into an activity because we are still thinking of what is useful about it: for example reading with children because we want to improve their vocabulary, versus reading with children because it is lovely to do that. We know the difference between being with people because it is useful, say because it's our job, which is fair enough, or because we are 'using them', which is not fair enough. Often we think we 'should' do things

that are 'useful', and we might only justify to ourselves our time in prayer if we think it is useful. We might give ourselves useful reasons for praying: 'it will make me feel calmer, clear my head, order my priorities'; 'we ought to pray for those in need, to pray for the church and for the world'; 'it feels like I'm doing something if I'm praying for the things and the people that I'm anxious about', and so on. But we don't fall in love with what is useful. We might be grateful for useful things, because of their utility, but they are just a means to some other end. We fall in love with the things with which we have made ties. The fox says to the little prince: *it is the time that you have wasted with your little rose that makes your rose so special to you.* And he adds: *we become responsible forever for what we have tamed.* He also says: *it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*

Jesus wasted time with us: we are not useful to him. It is pure love, simply for our sake, that he came and spent time, spent himself, on us, and has made himself responsible for us. We are being tamed by him, if we are open to his taming. And if we are open, as the ties grow, it is in our hearts that we know God. We cannot of course tame God, the relationship runs the other way, but if we pray, we are in effect inviting that taming. We welcome God, by the Holy Spirit, into our hearts, and the more that we do so not for the sake of usefulness, but simply for the love of God, the more God's affections become our affections, and the more we can see with the heart.

Making a home, and minding our language

There is beautiful language within the Christian tradition which describes Christ as our guest (e.g. *St Teresa of Avila*), and our *most courteous Lord* (*The Cloud of Unknowing*), waiting to be welcomed into our homes if we make ourselves hospitable to him. The way in which we understand prayer in this Essay is as the movement of God's Spirit through us as we make a home for Christ within us. Prayer is, we might say, God talking to God and including us in this communing. When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, through what we have come to call the Lord's Prayer, he gave us words which we give back to God. Paul suggests in several of his letters that prayer, either in words or in groans too deep for words, comes from God since it is the Spirit of Christ who prays through us: *For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession*

*for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to **the will of God** (Romans 8:26-7); God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' (Galatians 4.6); For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2.18).*

We are conscious of the perils of Sonship and Fatherhood language if it fosters a view of God as male. It would indeed be poor theology to imagine God as constrained by gender. Those rare parts of Christian tradition which speak of God also as mother and use imagery of birth to describe our spiritual flourishing (especially Clement of Alexandria, Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart), help us to break out of constraints of language and thought, and help to free our conceptions of God from the limits of our imagination. Christian narrative, liturgy and art show Jesus' body as doing what female bodies do: bleeding, providing or constituting food, and giving birth to new life. And as theologian Kathryn Tanner points out, the activity of 'generation' seen as proper to the Father in Christian theology in reality *seems much more in keeping with what only women can do: give birth.*¹ At the same time, we have chosen not to unpick the Father-Son language in New Testament depictions of prayer, partly because whilst the maleness of the imagery is not what is important about this language, the sense of relationship is. The relations between the persons of the Trinity is central to the theology of prayer that is expressed in Spirit, Son and Father language, and which we adopt in this Essay. It is inherent to those relations that only the 'Son' can show the 'Father'; and without the 'Son', the 'Father' is not God, but an idol.²

Notions of 'losing oneself', 'dying to oneself' or 'emptying oneself' to make room for Christ, are often used to describe the dynamic of prayer and Christian contemplation. These notions are intentionally dangerous to our sense of self, since it is our false selves that we need to shed. But they can be dangerous in others ways too, as feminist theologians have argued. For example, would it be helpful for a servant-like Martha to think that she needs to die to herself (Luke 10.38-42)? How do we think of self-giving in relation to victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse who have been taught to give themselves to their husbands or priests as they would give themselves to Christ?³ When trust and boundaries of intimacy have been violated, submission is a terrible concept. Inter-feminist debate on this matter

takes us to the heart of what is demanded, given and received in following Christ. ⁴ Probably all of the obstacles that inhibit us from realising our true identity in Christ are rooted in fear, as we protect our fragile selves. Victims of abuse, for example, may fear that the strange places to which prayer can take them are evidence that their soul has been damaged or destroyed.⁵ Balthasar's reflections on Holy Saturday, which depict Christ with us in our abandonment in a state of pure solidarity, can perhaps speak to this fear in a way that promises of light in the darkness or suggestions that there is a spiritual route map cannot.⁶ Forces of fear and violence accompany our fragility. Can we bring these to Christ and allow them to be transformed through Christian practice (including prayer, care for those in need, reconciliatory living, reading of Scripture, the ministry of the sacraments) into forces of light? Would it be helpful to Martha, who is readily given to service, to think that she needs to empty herself? 'No' and 'yes'. 'No', not if attitudes of servility are part of Martha's false sense of herself. Martha may have poor self-esteem, or a low sense of self-realisation, accompanied by a somewhat violent way of serving, which Jesus encourages or provokes her to change. She may have a sense of herself as one who serves, which is false in at least two ways. First, if the service is resentful, it will not feel like service to those whom she serves. She may even use her service as a way of claiming power over or manipulating those she serves. Second, if her core identity is one of service, she would feel threatened to lose that identity, even though she is destined to find her deeper and true identity in Christ. So 'yes,' there is a sense of self to which Martha could profitably 'die'. Her form of service is precisely and paradoxically the obstacle preventing her from truly receiving Christ as the guest that he wishes to be in her home and in her heart.

‘Spirituality’

The concept of ‘spirituality’ within Christian understanding traditionally refers to the new spirit-filled life made possible by Christ abiding in us, and we in Christ (John 15.4). For the early Church, spirituality was that which was made possible through baptism. To be baptised was to be re-born in the spirit:

The deeper meaning of baptism for Christian existence involved on the one hand a death of the 'old person,' that is, of the way in which personal identity was acquired through biological birth; on the other hand it involved a birth, that is, the emergence of an identity through a new set of relationships, those provided by the church as the communion of the Spirit.⁷

This understanding of ‘spirituality’ seems on the face of it to be miles away from a more private sense of ‘spirituality’ that people have today. For the early Church, spirituality was the new spirit-filled life made possible by participating in the body of Christ – that community of reformed relationships made by Christ, which we call the church. The human orientation towards the divine was therefore something fundamentally public, something shared with others, whereas today we might think of spirituality in terms of private experience or inner states of consciousness, and not really open to view.

However, talk of spirituality has become public and even institutional outside of the Church. In healthcare, in prisons, in the Armed Forces, and to some extent in education and in business, there is an increase in the idea of spirituality as an essential component of ourselves, and of how our personal and social lives intersect. ‘Spirituality’ in these contexts tends to mean being aware of and nurturing:

- our values
- our connectedness especially with others, but also with nature, and perhaps music and art
- our sense of purpose in life, or what gives us meaning

Therefore many institutions encourage personal awareness of spiritual resilience for the sake of our wellbeing. They may promote work around values, connectedness and purpose, and use spiritual fitness questionnaires to help people gauge how they are feeling.⁸ They may also promote spiritual practices such as yoga or, more

commonly, mindfulness meditation. Their purpose in promoting mindfulness is not only to help people to feel calm as a way of managing stress and anxiety, but also to increase productivity and develop leadership skills (hence the interest from business), and improve convalescence rates. There is, then, a public or social face, to secular searches for spirituality, and the benefits are on view with the help of scientific research. For example, consequences of mindfulness meditation are being scientifically tracked, and are shown to include changes in the brain in *regions involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking*.⁹

Should we understand spiritual practices such as mindfulness as part of a generic human spirituality, of which Christian spirituality is just one expression? A Christian vision of our lives being made new by the Spirit of God within us is radical, in that it concerns the very roots of our identity as being recast in Christ. On another level, which neither confirms nor contradicts that vision, scientific evidence of changes to the brain suggests that we can indeed be reformed physically, neurologically, and therefore emotionally and socially, by practices that promote stillness and compassion.

In this Essay we have decided to learn more about mindfulness meditation from within its own Buddhist heritage, and to consider strands within Christianity of similar meditative practice. We are keen to anchor an understanding of meditation within these contexts, not least because there is wisdom within these longstanding traditions to guide practitioners through both consolation and desolation. Mindfulness sessions can take people to difficult places for which they may not be prepared, and some people have reported negative effects of anxiety, depression and dissociation as a result.¹⁰ We are grateful to Sr Candasiṛī, formally an Episcopalian and now a Buddhist nun, for giving us insight into Buddhist mindfulness teaching. We are aware of a number of Christians, including the contemplative Thomas Merton and the theologian Paul Knitter, who have felt their Christianity to be returned to them in a deeper way by what they have learned from the meditative practice of Buddhists. We are also aware of the work of Mark Williams, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Oxford, and an Anglican priest, who has developed much of what is now taught worldwide as cognitive-based mindfulness therapy for treatment of depression, anxiety and suicidality.

It is currently quite common for people to describe themselves as SBNRs, which stands for 'spiritual but not religious', or as 'nones', to mean the 'none' part of 'all faiths and none'! Christians who are used to a liturgical tradition or a regular pattern of prayer can sometimes prejudge SBNRs as shopping around, unable to settle for anything, 'flakey,' over-individualistic, or looking for a frothy spirituality. However, it is often the case that such spiritual seekers are willing to undertake rather rigorous spiritual practice. They will give themselves to a substantial daily discipline, often rising early in the morning to do so, and they are looking for this discipline to direct not only their inner lives but also how they treat their bodies, what they eat, how they relate to animals and the environment, and how they can grow in compassion in a fraught and violent world. Another way to say it is that they show something of the logic of the early Church: that to be Spirit-filled is to live in a certain way, with public and social outworkings. The diligence with which various spiritual seekers devote themselves to spiritual practice and expect it to affect not only their inner calm but their outward carriage, is part of what inspires Christians to rediscover the breadth and depth of their own traditions of prayer.

This Essay puts forward a Christ-centred and Trinitarian theology of prayer: as Christ is welcomed to live within us, the Spirit groans and speaks through us to the Father. Christian insights will find some parallels in other traditions, including being embraced by a reality larger than oneself, dying to oneself and so finding one's true self. We do not expect to put Christian beliefs to one side whilst discovering those parallels, and we would not ask those of other traditions to put their beliefs to one side either. Rather, by working with the integrity of Christian belief, we discover what it means to go deeply into our own tradition, whilst we can also learn from others as they go into theirs. Poignant commonalities exist at the depth, which is where we discover that God is our ground.

Outline of the Essay

The Essay begins by situating us specifically within our Scottish Christian heritage, and the Anglican tradition, before considering spirituality in relation to our formation and calling. We move from 'formation and calling' to 'prayer and social action', as the inward and outer call are wholly interwoven. The Eucharist provides the catalyst for our offering of ourselves, and our being sent out in to the world. We consider prayer in the pattern of the Eucharist, and in other acts of public worship. From there we take a particular focus on intercessory prayer: how it is offered in public worship, and questions it raises about our relationship with God. We end the section on intercessory prayer by wondering about parallels with prayerful and meditative traditions outside of Christianity, as we note current popular trends in eclectic spirituality. We recognise that increasingly people are familiar with spiritual practices of more than one tradition, and that many identify as 'spiritual but not religious'. We have invited a Buddhist practitioner to help us understand mindfulness meditation within Buddhist teaching, and we offer Christian responses to Buddhist insights, which include Christians rediscovering their own heritage of contemplative practice. We end with a discussion of religious experience, which one might think of as something to pursue through prayer or spiritual life. The final part of the Essay recasts religious experience within a consideration of God's purposes. It counsels against pursuing religious experience for its own sake, and gives reasons why religious experience, like prayer and spirituality, is never simply a private matter but always has a public outworking.

We hope that the Essay is accessible without readers feeling obliged to look at the endnotes. The notes are there for anyone who would like to follow up particular references. There are rather a lot them, and we hope they are not a burden.

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The Scottish Christian Heritage

If we understand 'spirituality' in the widest sense to be the exploration of those real but non-physical values which are universally accepted by those of all faiths and none as enabling human beings to find meaning, purpose and hope in their lives (such as peace, justice, forgiveness, love, joy, and healing), then it clearly antedates Christianity. Near the Galloway coast in southern Scotland, a few miles west of the town of Gatehouse of Fleet, there are two Neolithic monuments, known today as Cairnholy I and II, and dating from around 3800 BCE. These are generally agreed to be chambered tombs, burial places, although they may well have had other uses too. They are Stone Age monuments, created at a time when people clearly felt it important to devote time and care, and considerable labour, into turning material things into something else – clay into pots, stones into axes, places in the landscape into monuments – itself a profoundly spiritual enterprise. Recent archaeological research has noted how the great majority of chambered tombs in the lands bordering the Irish Sea, of the same age and design as those at Cairnholy, were carefully situated so as to provide views both of nearby hill summits and of the open sea. Why? We can only speculate. Hill and mountain summits may well have been seen as holy places, associated with worship, or at the very least as places which connected us with wider and distant horizons. The sea may well have had a similar significance: the discovery of part of a jadeite axe at Cairnholy, which certainly originated in the Alps, suggests that travel by sea was an established practice even in Neolithic times: Scotland was already in active contact with neighbouring lands.¹¹ And to show such costly reverence to the dead in a subsistence economy was perhaps in itself a way of defying the power of death, and pointing to a greater reality beyond it.

There are far more spectacular prehistoric monuments in Scotland than Cairnholy; and many of them too were positioned with direct views of mountain summits and the sea – such as the Uamh an Ard Achadh (the Cave of the High Field), an Iron Age burial site on Skye with direct views of the towering Cuillin peaks, or the Neolithic Tursachan Chalanais (Callanish Stones) on Lewis overlooking the seawaters of Loch Ròg (Roag) with the Great Bernera hilltops visible in one direction and the lofty peak of Clisham in another. These, and many like them, are marginal places, where sea and land, earth and

sky, this world and the next, encounter one another: remote today from large population centres, they may in prehistoric times have been important meeting places (the presence of the Iron Age Dun Cul Bhuirg fort on Iona suggests that it too was populated long before Columba first went there). They may serve to remind us that those who lived in what we now call Scotland many thousands of years ago were themselves concerned with making connections, seeking meaning in the face of the mysteries of life and death, and in some profound yet ultimately mysterious manner finding it in the interface between landscape, sea, sky and creaturely existence. We are not the first civilization, nor are we likely to be the last, to live and work and die in this land and make it our own: we are stewards, as they were, of what is entrusted to us, and supremely of the gift of life itself.

The earliest inhabitants of Scotland, as of other Atlantic territories, came to be known as Celts. In 1921 D.H. Lawrence wrote, *Nothing is more unsatisfactory than our conception of what is Celtic and what is not Celtic. I believe there never were any Celts as a race...*¹² Recent scholarship is divided on this matter.

However, it is virtually impossible to provide evidence that those described, for example by the Greek historian Herodotus as Celts (κέλται), who were living by the Danube in the fourth century BCE, have anything beyond the vaguest connection with those described by the Roman Julius Caesar as *Celtae*, who were basically the inhabitants of what we now call France, let alone with the then inhabitants of the British Isles. There may indeed be some linguistic connections between those who lived along the Atlantic seaboard, from south-west Iberia to the Hebrides, but it is not easy to make much of this; and the cultural and artistic continuities between these so-called 'Celtic' peoples (a term which was not used to describe them until the eighteenth century) reflect as much their shared indebtedness to the wider cultures of Europe and the Mediterranean as anything distinctively their own. Thus, for example, the widespread use of 'interlace' (often called 'Celtic knotwork') in early 'Celtic' art – possibly a device designed to ward off evil spirits – is found in the early Christian era in countries as far apart as Egypt and Ireland.¹³ We have already noted the discovery of jadeite from the Alps in the Neolithic site at Cairnholy; the hoard of sophisticated gold Iron Age torcs [neck jewellery] discovered at Blair Drummond near Stirling in 2009 also reflects both local and Mediterranean influences.¹⁴ Christianity seems

to have arrived in Scotland during the second century CE as a result of the Roman invasions, which in turn must have further strengthened connections between Scotland and the rest of Europe.

So perhaps it is wiser to look for enduring themes in early Scottish Christian spirituality, many of which will be found elsewhere as well, rather than to argue for some kind of distinctively 'Celtic' tradition, which may well prove to be anachronistic.¹⁵ For example, many have argued for some kind of distinctively Celtic Christian spirituality that offers a more positive view of the natural world, or a more Pelagian view of human nature, in contrast to a supposedly negative Augustinian view of both. In fact there is a great deal of positive theology about creation and human nature in the writings of Augustine, just as there is plenty of emphasis on sin and fallenness in the spirituality of early Irish and Scottish Christians.¹⁶ At the same time, it is perfectly true that during the nineteenth century, with a new search for national identity on the part of the Scots, Irish and Welsh, the idea of a distinctively Celtic culture and set of values grew dramatically; and even though in Scotland much of this growth was founded on a romanticised view of the past (exemplified in Walter Scott's novels), it undoubtedly did foster a renewed awareness of (and reverence for) Scottish history, cultural traditions, archaeology and (above all) landscape.

Thus in 1831 James Logan produced *The Scottish Gael; or, Celtic Manners, as preserved among the Highlanders*, which contained vivid descriptions of the *luathadh*, or process of fulling cloth, and of the 'waulking songs' which accompanied it, and which were later collected and edited;¹⁷ and in 1900 Alexander Carmichael produced the first instalment of his *Carmina Gadelica*, which may have been coloured by Carmichael's tendency to romanticise and archaïse the songs he set down, but which unquestionably fostered a new awareness of how early Scottish Gaelic spirituality drew upon a deep sense of the presence of the holy in the midst of the mountainous and sea-girt topography of the Highlands.

So what themes can we identify in the spirituality of early Scottish Christianity, which in turn may have influenced and enriched the spiritual life of the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC)? It seems appropriate to begin with devotion to Christ.

In the flat landscape of the Solway estuary, in the far south of Scotland, one of the greatest monuments of British religious art lies concealed in a seventeenth-century parish church, after a heroic Presbyterian minister, Henry Duncan, rescued it in 1802 in order to protect it from the iconoclastic destruction that some of his more extreme fellow-Presbyterians were seeking to wreak upon it. The Ruthwell Cross dates from the early eighth century. It is not only a preaching cross at a time of widespread illiteracy: it embodies a highly sophisticated theological programme, together with extracts (written in runes) from an Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*, which movingly describes Christ mounting the cross to overcome the powers of evil, and the cross in effect bowing down to present the body of Christ to his followers. The various representations of Christ (the crucifixion, Christ healing the blind man, Christ standing on beasts (perhaps in the wilderness), the risen Christ with Mary Magdalene) portray not a suffering saviour so much as a compassionate yet heroic victor, triumphing over the powers of evil, albeit at infinite cost. The fragile eighth-century church will have looked for *assurance* (a word to which we shall return) that God in Christ had won the victory over evil and chaos, and that life lived in his service could have meaning and hope.

A similar presentation of Christ appears six centuries later in the opening lines of the priest and makar William Dunbar's poem on the resurrection:

<p><i>Done is a battell on the dragon blak, Our campioun Chryst confoutet hes his force; The yettis of hell ar broken with a crak, The signe triumphal rasis is of the croce The divillis trymmillis with hiddous voce, The saulis ar borrowit and to the blis can go, Chryst with his blud our ransonis dois indoce: Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.</i></p>	<p>Done is a battle on the dragon black, Our champion Christ has confounded his force The gates of hell are broken with a crack, The sign triumphal raised is of the cross The devils shriek with hideous voice, The souls are rescued and to the bliss can go, Christ with his blood our ransom doth endorse: <i>Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.</i></p>
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This reverence for Christ as victor over the demonic powers will have had a powerful resonance during centuries when life for many was nasty, brutish and short. It also connects with some aspects of post-

Reformation Scottish Calvinist thinking. The formidable Covenanter Samuel Rutherford (1600-61), minister of Anwoth in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and later professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews, wrote an influential treatise entitled *Lex, Rex* in which he argued that, whilst God creates kingship and ordains monarchy, the people must consent, and a king cannot rule without that consent.¹⁸ He went on to declare: *We deny the king to be the head of the church. We assert, that in the pastors, doctors, and elders of the church, there is a ministerial power, as servants under Christ, in his authority and name to rebuke and censure kings.*¹⁹

Christ, not Charles I, was the true king, an argument unlikely to commend itself to royalists, although Rutherford was only repeating what was said in the 13th-century Declaration of Arbroath, which describes Christ as the ‘king of kings.’

But there are other, more intimate, dimensions to the way Scottish Christians conceived of and related to the figure of Christ – especially, though not only, among women writers and poets. The early nineteenth-century Gaelic poet Anna NicEalair (Anna MacKellar) drew on the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs to express her own experience of being ravished by Christ’s love:

‘S ann a thug thu dhomh do ghaol Fo dhubhar craobh an aiteil; Is co-chomann do ruin Ann an gàradh nan abhall.	In fact, you gave me your love in the juniper tree’s shadow, and the fellowship of your desire In the garden with trees of apples. ²⁰
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There are many other ways in which Scottish Christians have approached Christ. William Dyce’s c.1860 painting ‘Man of Sorrows’ depicts Christ in the bleak landscapes of the Highlands during the infamous clearances, just as the Glaswegian artist Norman M. MacDougall’s 1910 oil paintings in the reredos of the Episcopal Cathedral at Oban represent the Pietà and the Ascension envisaged in a West Highland setting. In the twentieth century, the Skye poet Cairìona MacDonald speaks of Christ as ‘Fear a’ Bhàta’, the ferry-man who will take her and other believers across the ocean of death.²¹ And, in one of his many fine hymns, John Bell, a Church of Scotland minister and member of the Iona Community, addresses the suffering Christ:

*Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
Survive to hold and heal and warn,
To carry all through death to life
And cradle children yet unborn*

In Reformed Calvinist spirituality, a central implication of the saving work of Christ is the assurance of being both saved and loved. In a letter written in 1637, Samuel Rutherford wrote

Worthy Sir, I beseech you in the Lord to give your soul no rest till ye have real assurance, and Christ's rights confirmed and sealed to your soul. The common faith, and country-holiness, and week-day zeal, that is among people, will never bring men to heaven. Take pains for your salvation...Look into those depths (without a bottom) of loveliness, sweetness, beauty, excellency, glory, goodness, grace, and mercy, that are in Christ; and ye shall then cry down the whole world...²²

And in another letter from the same year he describes what it means to be assured of Christ's love:

Christ inquired not, when He began to love me, whether I was fair, or black, or sun-burnt; love taketh what it may have...Alas! I can speak nothing of it, but wonder at three things in His love: - First, freedom. O that lumps of sin should get such love for nothing! Secondly, the sweetness of His love...And, thirdly, what power and strength are in His love! I am persuaded it can climb a steep hill, with hell upon its back; and swim through water and not drown; and sing in the fire, and find no pain; and triumph in losses, prisons, sorrows, exile, disgrace, and laugh and rejoice in death...²³

Rutherford may have had in mind a text from the Song of Songs here (*I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem*); but whether he did or not, this text gives some sense of the subversive nature of Scottish Calvinist spirituality at its best: the most low-born in society can become royalty through assurance of the saving love of Christ. Rutherford trembles on the edge of traditional Catholic Christian mysticism when he reflects on Jesus' injunction in the Gospel of John to *abide in me, and I in you*: O sweet communion, he writes, '*when Christ and we are through-other [mixed up with each other], and are*

*no longer two!*²⁴ Later Reformed writers, perhaps especially the nineteenth-century Church of Scotland minister and theologian John McLeod Campbell (1800-72), insisted that (as Charles Bell puts it), *one cannot believe savingly without at the same time being assured of God's love.*²⁵ Essential to his theology is the notion of participation: for him, one cannot partake of the benefits of Christ's work apart from participation in his person. And, even more importantly, Campbell insisted, against strong opposition from within the Church of Scotland (which led to his being deprived of his living), that Christ died for all and not simply for the elect: *the person who limits the love of God to some, has actually denied that there is love in God at all, for it would not be love, but mere partiality or caprice.*²⁶

This is no academic point. It makes possible a willingness to face life even in the midst of despair and suffering, simply because of a sense that you are loved. The Glasgow writer and social activist Bob Holman writes movingly of what this might mean in practice in the life of a twentieth-century Glaswegian called Carol:

*The SWD [Social Work Department] had taken away all my confidence. At times I could not talk, I would just break down. I started to believe in God for selfish reasons at first. He was the only one who I could talk to and did not say bad things to me. God listened and gave me strength.*²⁷

Another significant theme in early Scottish Christian spirituality is devotion to the saints. Despite the fact that many early saints' lives display a formulaic character, and that the cult of particular saints may well say more about the political and religious preoccupations of later generations than about the saints themselves, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that a deep sense of the presence and intercession of the saints has been a continuing and significant dimension of Scottish Christian spiritual life. Adomnán's life of St Columba, written a century after the saint's death in 597 CE, contains the following charming story about an incident that took place shortly before the saint's death, in the monastery on Iona which he had founded:

After this, the saint left the barn, and made his way back to the monastery. Where he rested halfway...(for he was weary with age)..., behold, a white horse came to him, the

loyal work-horse which used to carry the milk-pails from the booley [cattle-pen] to the monastery. It approached the saint, and - strange to tell - put its head against his bosom, inspired I believe by God for whom every living creature shows such understanding as the Creator bids; it knew that its master would soon be going away so that it would see him no more, and it began to mourn like a person, pouring out its tears fall freely in the saint's bosom and weeping aloud with foaming lips. The servant seeing this started to drive off the weeping mourner, but the saint stopped him, saying: 'Let him be! Let him that loves us pour out the tears of bitterest mourning here at my breast. Look how you, though you have a man's rational soul, could not know of my going if I had not myself just told you. But according to his will the Creator has clearly revealed to this brute and reasonless animal that his master is going away.' So saying, he blessed the horse his servant as it turned away.²⁸

On first reading, this story might suggest some kind of reverence for animals as surpassing that of human beings; and indeed the story of Balaam's donkey in the Book of Numbers may well have been in Adomnán's mind when he wrote this. But the main point he is seeking to convey is surely the holiness of the saint, a holiness which was so palpable and attractive that animals could perceive it even when human beings failed to do so. Yet paradoxically that holiness is the fruit of an austere monastic life, an ascetic pattern of Christian spirituality which Columba brought with him to Iona from Ireland. And Columba's holiness is powerful: Adomnán's life is full of vivid miracle stories which exemplify this, describing the saint as driving out demons, converting Pictish rulers, healing the sick, and overcoming the powers of nature. For early Scottish Christians, the saints were invisible but real companions, keeping them company and protecting them in a landscape alive with both natural and supernatural forces. Devotion to St Andrew seems to have been fostered by Pictish Christians of eastern Scotland, while the Gaelic speaking west preferred St Columba: it is worth noting that neither of them was born in Scotland, and that the eventual triumph of St Andrew as the country's patron saint further served to deepen its links with continental Europe.

Devotion to the saints has remained embedded within Scottish spirituality, notably (though not exclusively) within the Roman Catholic tradition: we will explore later its significance within the SEC. The statue of Our Lady of the Isles (Moire ro Naomh nan Eilean) in South Uist is a striking and prominent landmark, standing 30 feet high on the western slope of Ruabhal (Rueval) hill, at an altitude of 170 feet. But it is much more than that. It was built on the initiative of the local parish priest in 1957-8, as a protest against government plans to turn much of the island into a huge missile testing range, which would have destroyed much of the island's culture, language and way of life. It was designed by the Scottish sculptor Hew Lorimer (a student of Eric Gill), who gave the Madonna the face of a local island woman and portrays her holding her infant child aloft. In the end the Ministry of Defence's plans were drastically scaled down. But the statue is still believed to keep watch over those travelling by sea nearby. This sense of Christ with his saints protecting his people and praying for their well-being is a significant inheritance from early Scottish faith and practice.

Closely linked with devotion to the saints are the twin themes of penance and pilgrimage. The practice of penance as a public act of contrition for sin goes back to the Bible, for example to the reaction of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's preaching (Jonah 3:5), and to the practice of the early Church of restoring sinners to full membership after the performance of an appropriate penance.

In his life of St Columba, Adomnán tells the story of a layman called Librán, who had both killed a man and later broken an oath and as a result embraced the monastic life and made a penitential pilgrimage to Iona, whereupon Columba assigned him a seven-year penance in a monastery on nearby Tiree: after he had completed his penance the saint advised him to return to his native Ireland to ask for release from the person to whom he had sworn his oath.²⁹ Early Irish and Scottish Christians took sin with the deepest seriousness: it required both a public penance and an appropriate act of restitution if it were to be forgiven. To embrace the monastic life was to devote oneself to a life of penance not only for one's own sins but for those of others too; and serious sins might well attract as a penance a pilgrimage to a holy place (such as the penitential community on Tiree referred to above), or a period in exile. It is worth noting too the importance of spiritual guidance or direction, as with the advice St Columba gives to Librán: the early Irish saying *anyone without a soul friend (anamchara) is like*

a body without a head was attributed to St Brigid (or Brigit) of Kildare.³⁰ Spiritual direction is another important dimension of early Scottish spirituality, frequently (though not always) linked with the confession of sin.

The pervasive sense of sin's destructive capacities, together with the unmerited gift of forgiveness mediated through Christ's sacrifice, remained an enduring dimension of Scottish Christian spirituality. Here for example is a Gaelic prayer from the early sixteenth-century *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, compiled by Seumas MacGiogair (James McGregor), vicar of Fortingall and dean of Lismore Cathedral, and described as a prayer for deliverance from sin by Muireadhach Albanach (Murdoch the Scot):

<p>A bhi an cridhe Mhic Dhe, peacach mar mi mòr an sgeul, Mise d'a gun d'fhuair a nis, crois losa Criosd air mo bheul; A losa Criosd sean de'd mhos, mod ha chos 'us mod ha làmh, Agus seansa mise de'd dheòin, eadar fhuil, 'us shal, 'us chnàmh. Nior sguireas deanamh uilc, do chion mhòr mo chuirp a ni, A chaisrig gun robh thall, air mo cheann 'us air mo chridhe. Rath mis a mhoir fhir bhinn, gach bròn mu'n d'fhuair le mi, Sul fa 'n deachaidh mi fo'n fhoid, gun robh romham gach ròd reidh.</p>	<p>That there should be in God's Son's heart A sinner like me, how great the tale, And that there should to me be given, On my lips to have the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, sanctify as thou art wont, My two feet and my two hands, Sanctify me of thy good will, Even my blood, and flesh and bone I never cease committing sin, Because that my body loves it well; May consecration come from afar, Upon my head and on my heart. Glorious great One, save thou me From every grief which me has seized, Ere I'm laid beneath the turf May my way be plain and smooth.³¹</p>
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Pilgrimage also remained a significant dimension of spiritual life, practised widely during the Middle Ages, either as an act of penance or in search of healing, and almost always to a holy place associated with a saint: the shrine of St Andrew at Kilrimont (later renamed St Andrews) was already popular by the tenth century, and the shrines of St Ninian at Whithorn and St Duthac at Tain were also very popular during the medieval period. Bede, who credits Columba with preaching the Word of God to the Northern Picts, credits Ninian with preaching to the Southern Picts long before. Ninian whose estimated dates are 360-432, was the son a Cumbrian Chieftain and convert to Christianity. He received his training in Rome, was consecrated bishop

in 394, and appointed an apostle to his native land. He returned to Britain where he founded the community of monks at Candida Casa, the 'White House' (Whithorn); built in 397 and the first recorded Christian church in Scotland.

The practice of pilgrimage was rediscovered in the twentieth century: the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes at Carfin, in the Roman Catholic diocese of Motherwell, was established in 1920 after a group of local parishioners went on pilgrimage to Lourdes. Many of its builders were local miners put out of work during the 1921 coal miners' strike. It soon became a major centre for (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic) pilgrimage, and now attracts some 70,000 pilgrims annually. At first this attracted opposition and the Corpus Christi procession there was banned in 1922 on the grounds that it infringed the 1829 Catholic Relief Act, which forbade the parading of Catholic clergy in public when wearing vestments. Nor was pilgrimage something restricted to Roman Catholics. In the mid-1930s George MacLeod, minister of Govan Old Parish Church, conceived a vision of a restored Iona community combined with a ministerial training scheme based on the island, and the restoration of the abbey as a 'Laboratory School of Christian Living where large numbers will come to pray and confer.'³² MacLeod's own distinctive view of St Columba, a combination of 'Celtic' romanticism and social justice, coloured his vision. But the restored Iona Community has remained a vital dimension of what might be called contemporary Scottish Christian spirituality, and a compelling centre of ecumenical pilgrimage. It has also played an important role in nurturing a new kind of community-based Christian spirituality, which was intended to be a model for such communities across the globe. The rule for members includes daily prayer, mutual accountability for use of resources, and a commitment to working both locally and globally for peace and justice.

Two other aspects of early Scottish Christianity are worth briefly noting. The first is reverence for Scripture. The singing of the Psalms in particular characterised early monastic spirituality: Adomnán describes the mellifluous nature of St Columba's psalm singing (which could be heard from a distance even though he did not sing loudly);³³ and the singing of Psalms was among the most common penances meted out during the early medieval period. In post-Reformation Scotland, the practice in Gaelic-speaking areas of a precentor 'reading the line' (originally to enable non-literate worshippers to learn the

words) followed by the slow, and often ornamental, choral singing of the Psalms themselves remains the staple ingredient of Hebridean Presbyterian worship. A deep reverence for the prayer of the Psalms is evident in the hymns and liturgies of the Iona Community, perhaps in particular the psalms of lament. The tradition, found so often in the Psalms themselves as well as in other Old Testament texts such as Lamentations, of bringing both the individual and the community's questions and doubts and turning them into prayer is itself rooted in Israel's belief in a covenant relationship with its God: in other words, it was precisely because Israel believed it was loved unconditionally that it felt free to challenge God when things went wrong – exactly as a child who had felt similarly loved would do. The language and character of lament is found throughout early Irish and Gaelic poetry and song; and its recovery forms an essential part of any healthy Christian spiritual life, since without it we are deprived of bringing before God many of our deepest questions and dissonances.

Reverence for the Scriptures in general was of course a fundamental dimension of all Presbyterian preaching and worship; and a balanced emphasis on both hearing and reading the Bible is characteristic of Scottish Episcopalian liturgy as well. The eighteenth-century Episcopalian priest and theologian John Skinner concludes one of his letters by declaring that

Upon the whole, such is the veneration which the Episcopal Church of Scotland has ever shewn for the Holy Bible, even with all the defects incident to translation, that, in common with the venerable church of England, it has always esteemed the public reading of the sacred books to be a most necessary and most beneficial part of worship, and does not fail to recommend to the people the private reading of these books, without prejudice and partiality, as the primary means of religious edification.³⁴

The Introduction to the Church's *Daily Prayer* states: *This Order of Daily Prayer is designed to allow Scripture to stimulate and to express worship of the God of whom Scripture speaks.*³⁵ A special place is given to the recitation of the Psalms, and we are rightly reminded that these should be sung wherever possible (since *psalmos* means a song or piece of music): in *Daily Prayer*, the opening rubric states that 'psalms and canticles...are intended to be recited slowly, quietly and

reflectively, so that they may become part of us and give voice to our own prayer.'

The other aspect of early Scottish spirituality worth noting is the sanctification of time. The keeping of Christian festivals is frequently referred to in early medieval documents; and some of this observance is distinctively Scottish. Thus Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* collection includes songs and hymns to mark Hogmanay and other festivals such as Michaelmas and May Day, all of which show a striking intertwining of spiritual awareness with immediate and natural concerns – as in the opening of the 'May-Day Prayer' from Benbecula:

*Mary, mother of saints and holiness,
Our calves in the stall and our litters bless;
Let no hurt or hatred come to us near,
Drive all the ways of wicked men from here....*³⁶

Equally distinctive is the observance of the Sabbath, which of course became a major theme of Scottish Reformation preaching, although it is arguable that it was the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century which brought it to the fore. It is worth noting that this became a matter of lively theological debate in nineteenth-century Scotland, centring on the progressive views of Norman MacLeod (1812-72), the distinguished minister of the Barony Church in Glasgow. He argued, against much opposition, that the Jewish Sabbath (and the Fourth Commandment which insisted on its observance) was not binding on Christians, for whom Sunday was a holy day, a day of rest and worship; that the keeping of Sunday as a special day was a matter of evangelism and pastoral care rather than of legislation, and that since the Church had a particular responsibility to care for the poor in Glasgow it should therefore call for public parks and galleries to be open for them on Sundays.³⁷

The Anglican Heritage

It is within this rich and diverse context that we can best approach the spirituality of the SEC. Anglicanism is a strange creature: originating out of the destructive miasma of the English Tudor king Henry VIII's demand for a divorce, it grew slowly from a semi-detached branch of the sixteenth-century Catholic Church into a fully-fledged global communion. Its spirituality represents a striking fusion of Catholic and Protestant traditions, together with distinctive emphases of its own. As a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, the SEC has maintained a long, close and not always comfortable relationship with her larger sister south of the border. The figures from the 2011 census speak for themselves: over twice as many Scottish Anglicans describe themselves as 'Church of England' as those who describe themselves as 'Episcopalian' or members of the SEC. Yet it was not founded from the Church of England; and it may well offer a distinctive ecclesiology which could represent one way forward for the wider Anglican Communion – for example, in avoiding archbishops and seeking to model a more collegial style of episcopal leadership.³⁸ The spiritual (as well as the juridical) identity of the SEC finds expression in its Code of Canons, one of which declares that 'the Sacrament of Baptism is the full rite of initiation into the Church, and no further sacramental rite shall be required of any person seeking admission to Holy Communion' (Canon 25). This provision, which in turn allows Confirmation to become an opportunity for the public profession of someone's return to faith, or renewal in faith, may also have much to contribute to the wider Anglican Communion.

One of the Communion's greatest theologians, Richard Hooker, drew on the covenant relationship of God and Israel to articulate a distinctively Anglican sense of the church being there for the whole people, not simply for those of one (or any) faith:

*In a word, our estate is according to the pattern of God's own ancient elect people, which people was not part of them the commonwealth, and part of them the Church of God, but the selfsame people whole and entire were both under one chief Governor, on whose supreme authority they did all depend.*³⁹

It follows that, for Hooker, public prayer takes precedence over private inasmuch as a *whole society of such condition exceedeth the worth of any one*.⁴⁰ Moreover, the devotion of others inspires us when our own flags.⁴¹ This strongly corporate emphasis on the role of the church as existing to serve the whole people clearly arose out of a peculiarly English political situation; and part of its spiritual legacy is a kind of grovelling sycophancy in the face of royalty that sits uneasily with twenty-first century sensibilities. Yet the SEC, along with other branches of the Communion, has taken that sense of the primacy of common prayer and applied it to the different Scottish context, as can be seen in the 1929 Scottish Prayer Book: in that book, Hooker's stress on the inseparability of church and people finds expression, in the Prayers and Thanksgivings, in the prominence afforded to the distinctively Scottish celebration of New Year, as well as in prayers for those engaged in the fishing industry and in industrial life generally, for universities and schools, and for choirs, among many others.

There are other ways in which a distinctively Anglican tone can be discerned in the SEC's liturgical formularies. Claud Broun has noted how the Order for Holy Communion stands at the physical centre of the Scottish Prayer Book – and is also its spiritual centre.⁴² The Grosvenor Essay *The Shape of our Church* declares that *embedded in the canonical provisions of our church is a fundamental Anglican perspective – that it is the common prayer of God's people which best enshrines and so also sustains our common belief*.⁴³ This is a crucial dimension of Anglican spirituality: the refusal to separate theology from spirituality, doctrine from piety: we do our best theology on our knees. The Scottish Episcopalian John Skinner further stresses the inclusive nature of our worship: all should attend public worship since we are *invited to pour forth the voice of supplication before the throne of the Most High, for all* – not just for our own private needs. And he continues by describing the church at worship as *a conjunct brotherhood, 'storming heave'* (as some of the old Fathers express themselves) with the united artillery of prayer and praise; or, in our Saviour's own language, *taking it by force*.⁴⁴ He criticises Presbyterian worship as being almost entirely left to the Minister *without so much as the concurrence of an amen from the people assembled*;⁴⁵ elsewhere he criticises Roman Catholic worship for being incomprehensible to most people since it is (or was then) recited in Latin, and hence argues that there is *a striking similarity between the prayers which the Romish priest utters in an unknown tongue, and*

*those extemporary effusions in which the others [the Presbyterians] so much delight.*⁴⁶ This is the polemical language of an earlier age; but it does serve to underline the distinctive contribution of Anglican common prayer and worship as holding together head and heart, and as offering prayer for all the world with both passion and thoughtfulness.

In an Anglican perspective, then, personal holiness is inseparable from public worship, and authentic spiritual growth is rooted in active membership in the local expression of the Body of Christ. Canon 17 of the SEC's Code of Canons explicitly requires every ordained person to say morning and evening prayer daily, either publicly or privately, *unless hindered by sickness or other urgent cause, and to provide opportunity for those who may wish to come to them for spiritual counsel and advice or absolution.* The Schedule of Variations at the end of the Prayer Book includes a form of private confession and absolution, emphasizing that this is not required of every church member, *but only that [everyone] be honestly assured in his [or her] own conscience of his [or her] duty in this matter, and that in all things everyone should follow and keep the rule of charity.* And the Code of Canons also stresses that it is the responsibility of both clergy and individual vestries to *make appropriate provision for the nurture in prayer, Bible-study, doctrine and Christian living of the members of that congregation* (Canon 28).

Devotion to the saints, and the sanctification of time, became and remained an enduring dimension of the spirituality of the SEC. In 1510 Bishop William Elphinstone of Aberdeen published the Aberdeen Breviary, a kind of national breviary containing readings to be used on the feast days of over eighty Scottish saints.⁴⁷ Claud Broun has pointed out that the 1929 Scottish Prayer Book begins with the Calendar of Saints – we are not alone when we pray: *when you step into the Prayer Book, as it were, you step into the presence of the saints, our friends to be admired, followed, loved and greeted* – like entering an Orthodox church.⁴⁸ It also contains an impressively catholic (in the literal sense of universal) list of saints' days which not only included many Scottish saints to be found in the Aberdeen Breviary, but also saints from both eastern and western Christendom, including St Francis of Assisi, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Basil of Caesarea and others. The beautiful prayer to be found in the order for

the Burial of the Dead in the Prayer Book exemplifies this deep sense of fellowship with the saints:

*O God the King of Saints, we praise and magnify thy holy Name for all thy servants who have finished their course in thy faith and fear, for the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, and for all other thy righteous servants; and we beseech thee that, encouraged by their example, strengthened by their fellowship, and aided by their prayers, we may attain unto everlasting life; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*⁴⁹

Anglican spirituality, in Scotland as elsewhere, has been immeasurably enriched by both Catholic and Evangelical renewal movements. The impact of the Oxford Movement, not only in enriching liturgy, theology, spiritual life and ecclesiastical architecture but also in giving fresh impetus to ministry among the poor, has been immense north of the border; and many of the largest churches within the SEC today reflect the dynamism and cultural connectedness of evangelical spirituality, which shares much of Anglo-Catholicism's commitment to the poor: back in 1948, George Duncan, of St Thomas' Edinburgh, was challenging his fellow-Evangelicals to give greater priority to issues of social justice and care, following the example of the Old Testament prophets.⁵⁰

Spirituality, Vocation and Formation

Three fundamental Biblical texts might offer a starting-point for an approach to Christian spirituality, and of how that leads to an understanding of vocation and formation. The first is the opening chapter of the book of Genesis, where the spirit (or wind) from God *swept over the face of the waters*, a wonderfully vivid and pregnant image of creation as raw chaos, a kind of watery darkness over which this divine spirit hovers and into which the voice of God speaks, calling into being the different primary stages of creation by speaking into the chaos, and separating one aspect of it from another: light from darkness, sky and earth, land and sea, and so on. On this view, Christian spirituality is that lifelong process by which God, through the agency of the Spirit, speaks into the raw chaos of human lives and experience, drawing forth meaning and purpose by separating and bringing order, and then celebrating what has come to be (*and God saw that it was good*). On this view, too, vocation is always in some sense a call out, a bringing to birth new realities and identities which requires a willingness to *leave home* and step out into a new and unfamiliar world. Thereafter, all the great Biblical accounts of vocation reflect this process: Noah and his family are called out from the apparent yet illusory security of their lives, and summoned to build and dwell in an ark when God calls into question their future – as God will do later on with the people of Nineveh through the reluctant but hugely effective preaching of Jonah. Abraham (or Abram as he then was) is called out of his home at Ur when God tells him to *go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you* (Genesis 12:1), inviting him to set forth without knowing where he was going, as the Letter to the Hebrews will later express it (Hebrews 11:8).

The second foundational text for an understanding of Christian spirituality comes in St Paul's Letter to the Romans, where he declares that *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* (Romans 5:5). Here, the anonymous spirit or wind in the opening chapter of Genesis has become something, or rather someone, far more intimate and personal: the Holy Spirit, poured out on the first Christians at the feast of Pentecost and on all subsequent ones at the moment of their baptism. Essential to any authentically Christian spirituality is the assurance that we are loved before we can conceivably do anything to justify or deserve that love.

St Paul continues, in the eighth chapter of Romans, to elaborate two different ways of living: life *according to the flesh* (8:12), which means, not simply material or physical life, but a narrowly self-centred, this-worldly way of living which leads inevitably to death – and life *according to the Spirit* (8:4), which means all of life seen and lived in the perspective of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This kind of life is made possible by the presence of the Spirit that *dwells in you* (8:9) – the Greek word for ‘dwells’ (οἰκεῖ) comes from a word meaning ‘house’ or ‘home.’ The Holy Spirit makes his or her home in us, the sign and pledge of God’s unconditional love, adopting us as God’s children (Romans 8:14-17), and inviting us to hear and receive God’s call, and to grow in the new life of the Spirit.

Yet hearing and receiving that call will be costly, as we have seen, since it requires a willingness to leave home; and this brings us to our third Biblical text, which in effect synthesises the first two. In the opening chapter of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus steps down into the waters of the Jordan river and is baptised. It is precisely at this moment of stepping out in faith, of leaving home, that *he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him* (Mark 1:10): the mysterious wind of Genesis 1 has become the lifegiving Spirit of Romans 8. And Jesus hears a voice addressing him: *you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased* (Mark 1:11). It is this assurance of being unconditionally loved (an assurance which millions in our world never receive because no one ever tells them how much they are loved), which enables Jesus to go out, driven by the same Spirit, into the wilderness. His vocation and formation have begun, and they will lead him to the Cross. Christian baptism assures us of that same unconditional love, and invites us freely to make our own Christ’s call, to live according to his Spirit, and to be changed into the likeness of Christ, in order to become the unique people we are called to be. That formation too is costly, demanding of us not a straightforward process of psychological growth but a denial of self and a taking up of our cross in obedience to Christ. What that means in practice is not ours to determine: for, although Christian vocation is always in some sense a call out, it is no heroic solo journey: rather it is a call to leave our comfort zones and find, by becoming members of the Body of Christ, a unique and hitherto unimaginable identity as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ. St Paul instructs the Philippian Christians to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will*

and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). But we do not and cannot do this on our own.

Hence the importance of the Church. The holy and humble Alexander Jolly, Bishop of Moray from 1798 to 1838, wrote: *the great and general means of salvation, to which all the instrumental duties of holy living may be reduced, are Baptism and the blessed Eucharist.*⁵¹ The Orthodox bishop and theologian John Zizioulas, who lived and worked for many years at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, expresses with prophetic clarity how the church, and our participation in it, can become a sign of that fullness of life to which God in Christ calls us all. In the church, and supremely in our sharing in the Eucharist, we belong

*as members of a body which transcends every exclusiveness of a biological or social kind. The Eucharist is the only historical context of human existence where the terms 'father', 'brother' &c lose their biological exclusiveness and reveal...relationships of real and universal love.*⁵²

But the Church, as revealed in the Eucharist, is not only *assembly* - it is also *movement*, a progress towards all that we are created and redeemed in order to become.⁵³ Hence Zizioulas' visionary and yet challenging conclusion:

*In the Eucharist the church becomes a reflection of the eschatological community of Christ, the Messiah, an image of the Trinitarian life of God. In terms of human existence this mainly means one thing: the transcendence of all divisions, both natural and social, which keep the existence of the world in a state of disintegration, fragmentation, decomposition and hence of death. All cultures in one way or other share in this fallen and disintegrated world, and therefore all of them include elements which need to be transcended. If the Church in its localization fails to present an image of the Kingdom in this respect, it is not a Church.*⁵⁴

Prayer and Social Action

There is a thread of holiness running through the Old Testament that considers that a righteous person can only be righteous if they are part of a righteous community. This fruitful integration of personal and communal life receives a new focus in the New Testament, or new covenant, where baptism and Eucharist are the actions and sacraments that make the new community, the Body of Christ. The Eucharist in particular is the place where our prayers and their outworkings come together, as we bring offerings to God and are sent out again into the world. The movement of bringing and sending, coming and going, dying and rising, confessing and giving thanks hopefully form a complete whole, though we know that we are a work in progress, and wholeness is on the horizon rather than fully realised at present.

Taking and offering, blessing, breaking and sharing are crucial components of the Eucharist. What is offered? We offer our money. We offer ourselves. We offer the bread and the wine. Yet if that offering comes from the exploitation of the poor, then the words of Sirach confront us – *to offer a sacrifice from the possessions of the poor is like killing a son before his father's eyes; bread is life to the destitute and to deprive them of it is murder.* (Ecclesiasticus 34:20-21).

The gifts of bread and wine are laid on the table and we pray that they may indeed become for us the body and blood of Christ. They are offered and blessed, dedicated, given in service to the highest calling of God.

The gifts are shared in table fellowship. That table includes the saints and those who have gone before; it includes too all our sisters and brothers throughout the world. Yet the sharing is very limited. In the Kingdom each would have enough and none would have too much. The German theologian Ulrich Duchrow makes the point like this:

Sitting around the table for the Lord's Supper are twelve Christians. Eight of them are coloured and four white. On the table there is rice, chicken and vegetables. Three whites (for there is a minority among the whites who are poor) and one coloured (a member of their country's elite) start the meal by taking all the chicken, most of the vegetables and

most of the rice. All that remains for the other 8 are some unequal portions of rice and some leftover vegetables, so that some of them remain hungry. After the meal the remains from the plates of the four rich people are thrown away. The rich also have wine with their meal; the others only a small sip from the little chalice.⁵⁵

The Eucharist is the foundational prayer of the church, the body of Christ. It is inconceivable that members of the Body should share in the Eucharist through space and time, should acknowledge the presence of Christ with them in the Eucharist – through bread and wine, through priest and people – and then go out to ignore the needs of the other, refuse hospitality to the homeless and the refugee or to prepare to maim and kill their fellow Christians.

Yet in Scotland we are part of a country that is doing much less than its fair share in responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. We are also part of a country that possesses weapons of mass destruction with a conditional intention to use them. These weapons are based in Scotland. The use of Trident would kill and maim thousands of people immediately, and many more through longer term radiation and the real risk of a nuclear winter. We live in a society that puts many resources into preparing for violent ways to try and resolve conflicts and few into peace building and training for non-violent conflict resolution. Yet in the Eucharist the peace is offered one to another in the name of the Prince of Peace.

So penitence is crucial at the Eucharist; consciously coming into the presence of God in the awareness of how far we fall short of being the kind of people that God wants us to be and of the shortcomings and faults in the society and the world that we are offering to God. Michael Ramsey writes, *Within our confession of our sins there will come sins of attitude or complacency or idleness of thought. We are not sinning if we are unsure of the answers to hard questions. We are sinning if we do not think or care. All this is part of a ministry of reconciliation.⁵⁶*

Intercessory Prayer is asked of us also, and is often like a mirror. We begin by asking God about something, or praying with someone on our hearts or sharing a concern with God. We end by being challenged to see how we can be a channel of the love of God towards that person the situation.

Prayers for peace and justice in the present world can feel a hopeless and futile gesture. Awareness of the needs of others can be disabling rather than an incentive to action. Feelings of guilt or helplessness can lead to disengagement or denial. Yet the saving grace of God is enough to overcome all sin – cosmic and corporate, structural and personal. And God's promise is that all will be reconciled to God. Christians are called to be signs of God's reconciling action, but that is a road which involves suffering, endurance and perseverance. The Eucharist feeds us for that pilgrimage and challenges us to be transfigured, and the wider end in view is far wider than our own personal sanctification.

Any prayer has to be for discernment. Human judgement is fallible and provisional and what one generation sees as obvious to pray for, the next may be cautious about. For example many in the church were deeply sceptical about the introduction of the National Health Service; now it is routine to pray for the NHS in church. Integration between our prayers and action changes the individual's and the church's ability to proclaim the gospel. The greater the congruence between the message being preached, the lifestyle of church members, and the implications of that message for wider society, the more effective it will be.

The church might be said to adopt an 'attic and basement' approach to social change which in many ways neutralises the effectiveness of its stated concern for social justice. In the basement, the ways in which individuals should treat other individuals (love them) is clear. In the attic, the values of the Kingdom are affirmed as values to which all societies should aspire. Church supported projects that concentrate on desirable values fit easily into this model without in any way threatening effective social change. There is a crucial question as to what steps can be taken really to effect change.

There is a place for social action and intermediate proposals at the local level to Community Councils, at the county level to Health Boards and other bodies operating at that level, to the Scottish Government at Holyrood, to Westminster and to the United Nations. More could be done by the SEC at charge and diocesan level (working with other churches and faith communities where possible) to reflect on, for example, what a plan for greater sustainability would look like for their local area. Christians contribute much working through other groups

but perhaps at the expense of making clear why their concerns come from a firm Christian base.

However Christians and the church must always be aware of their fallibility. No programme of demands can be conflated with the Kingdom. Prayer may well change political attitudes and party affiliations. It would be surprising if it did not. But the prayer comes first and God is always the yardstick for our provisional human judgments.

Charles Elliott in his book *Praying the Kingdom* (pp142-144), suggests some ways in which we can become more alive to our prayer 'thy Kingdom come' for society and the world. Christian teaching, both scriptural and in the history of the community of faith is a pre-requisite. People's own stories need to be told and shared, in the recognition that there are many insights into the Kingdom. People can be encouraged to look for and name signs of the Kingdom. There should be a place in the liturgy for naming and affirming mustard seeds and those thirsting for righteousness as well as interceding for victims. Above all he stresses that private prayer is essential to complement corporate prayer and group activity.

To sum up

Prayer, spirituality, mission and social involvement cannot be disentangled. All are part of our pilgrimage and journey towards God, both as individuals and as part of the people of God.

A framework is needed within which Christians can reflect on their experience of prayer/spirituality/mission/social involvement and which will assist in discerning signs of kingdom and considering what intermediate steps would help. As church members we don't have to do everything ourselves – we work with others. Space should be made for such conversations to take place, at national, diocesan and local level. Such conversations could also lead to identifying desirable intermediate steps at the county and local level. These intermediate aims would be based on an explicit connection between Christianity, competent analysis and social action. The issue of climate change is one that lends itself to this approach.

In its membership the SEC has a wealth of resources and knowledge. More can be done on making space for people to use and share this wealth and in so doing deepen both their prayer life and enable the love and concern of the church to be more effective.

As Augustine and Ignatius of Loyola said, we work and act on the assumption that it all depends on us and we pray in the recognition that it all depends on God. The knowledge that the Kingdom is a gift from God and not something that we can achieve by our own efforts is cause for great rejoicing. The recognition that the kingdom is both here and yet to come gives us space and time for celebration in the here and now and to live in the light of the kingdom that is promised. The Eucharist brings all of this together – we are fed and nourished by Christ so that we can be sent out anew into the world: prayer and social action inextricably entwined.

Hand in Hand: Public Worship and Personal Prayer

In group discussions about prayer, I sometimes ask, 'Where do you pray?' People often give answers such as, 'sitting at my window,' 'walking on the hills', or 'travelling on the bus.' But only rarely does anyone say, 'when I'm at worship in church.' When asked about this, people say that they do pray in church, but that first response seems to reflect our tendency to separate personal prayer and public worship. The result of this separation is that opportunities for growth are lost, since, I believe, personal prayer and public worship need and nourish each other.

Some years ago the liturgical scholar Keith Irwin⁵⁷ illustrated the relationship between liturgy, prayer and spirituality by using a diagram containing three concentric circles. The smallest yet most central circle was 'liturgy.' Its place signified its centrality in the Christian spiritual life; it also said that liturgy should be understood as a component of prayer and of spirituality, not just related to them. The next circle in size was 'prayer.' Its position showed how liturgy relies on and should lead to other kinds of personal prayer, and that participation in the liturgy relies on these other forms of prayer. The largest of the concentric circles was 'spirituality.' Liturgy and prayer are parts of spirituality but spirituality really means living the Christian faith in all of life, with liturgy and prayer as central elements, but not its totality.

Exploring these relationships is what this essay will attempt briefly to do. It will ask, first, how liturgy shapes personal prayer, and secondly how personal prayer informs Christian liturgy. Then it will explore two examples which offer models of connection between corporate and personal prayer: the Psalms, and Taizé.

Worship and Prayer

Liturgical prayer has traditionally been regarded by many Christians as a foundation for personal prayer. Generations of Anglicans, for example, have found that the collects of the Book of Common Prayer have provided a resource for their own prayers. Human beings are not born knowing how to pray, but learn how to do this from others. For Christians who are called by Baptism to be members of the Body of Christ, liturgy - the experience of worshipping with other members of the Body using forms of common prayer - provides models of

language and understanding which we can take into personal prayer. Not only does it assist us in giving shape to our own petitions, desires, fears and gratitude, but it also gives us a means of approaching God when our own resources have run out and our ability to voice our concerns has deserted us. As well as language, we may also take away from worship a sense of transcendence, or of God's redeeming love, which then becomes part of our inner landscape and leads naturally into times of thanksgiving, wonder and adoration. Or a particular word or phrase from Scripture, prayers, or hymns may have stayed with us, so we continue to reflect on it and let it become part of our own praying.

C. S. Lewis called this process of personal appropriation 'interinanimation.' As he disclosed to his fictional friend Malcolm,

Mental images play an important part in my prayers. I doubt if any act of will or thought or emotion occurs in me without them. ... The wave of images, thrown off like a spray from the prayer, all momentary, all correcting, refining, 'interinanimating' one another, and giving a kind of spiritual body to the unimaginable, occurs more, I find, in acts of worship than in petitionary prayer.⁵⁸

But, in addition to language and imagery, liturgy can provide a theological framework (or, better, safety-net) for personal prayer. As the Methodist writer, Neville Ward, says, *Christians need the liturgy to reintroduce them to what the Church considers prayer rightly to be, and to save their private prayers from sentimentality, self-centredness and superstition.*⁵⁹ There are at least three ways in which liturgy may do this.

Firstly, it helps us to focus our spirituality on God and on Jesus Christ. 'Spirituality' is often used today in the sense of that which inspires or animates people and gives them a sense of meaning and purpose beyond the physical facts of everyday living. When Christians speak of 'spirituality,' however, they understand something more than this - the inspiration and animation they have found from the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it helps us to understand that Christian prayer, the variety of ways in which we speak and listen to God and experience the

presence and guidance of God, is made possible only by the working of the Holy Spirit. We are formed in this belief in a variety of ways, but one of them is the experience of liturgical worship. Praying together that God may *cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit*,⁶⁰ we learn one of the foundations of Christian spirituality, that worship and prayer are not an attempt to get God's attention; nor are they something we do for God. Rather, according to St Paul, worship and prayer are God's work for and among us: '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.' (Romans 8:26). So the first principle of a liturgical spirituality is the recognition that all prayer, both personal and corporate, is God's work, God's activity in human beings.

Thirdly, it helps us to see that Christian prayer participates in the coming of God's kingdom of justice, love and peace. The spirit of the liturgy is ultimately an eschatological spirit, and Christian prayer, for the same reasons, is in its essence eschatological, a looking toward and an experience of the kingdom of God. As Romano Guardini says, writing in 1918 a book which was to influence the 1960s liturgical reforms of Vatican II, *In the liturgy the soul learns to move about a wider and more spacious spiritual world*.⁶¹

This is supremely true, of course, of the Lord's Prayer, a basic model for Christians praying alone or with others, and which has always served as a doxological expression of Christian faith. In the early church, for this very reason, it was reserved as the particular privilege of the baptised. *As one of the most holy treasures of the church, the Lord's Prayer, together with the Lord's Supper was reserved for full members, and it was not disclosed to those who stood outside*.⁶² As a summary of the meaning of Christian prayer, and as Christ's own model of prayer given to his disciples, the content of the Lord's Prayer is eschatological. It envisages a future kingdom, a final and sufficient feeding of all creation, a universal declaration of forgiveness and liberation from evil.

This eschatological understanding of all prayer has always been present in the Orthodox tradition, and is a major theme in contemporary Orthodox reflection on liturgical spirituality. Alexander Schmemmann, for example, deals with the relation between past and future in the celebration of the Eucharist in particular, and says, *The*

event which is 'actualised' in the Eucharist is an event of the past when viewed within the categories of time, but by virtue of its eschatological, determining, completing, significance it is also an event which is taking place eternally.⁶³ The eschatological nature of worship has more recently become a renewed focus in Western traditions in, for example, the landmark ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which discerns five basic meanings of the Eucharist, one of which is *meal of the Kingdom*.⁶⁴

This dimension of the liturgy as a sacramental realization of the kingdom, what God wants the world to be, points to the eschatological nature of all prayer - personal as well as corporate. It indicates that Christian spirituality based on the liturgy is always paschal and pentecostal, always a sharing in the life of the risen Christ through his Spirit dwelling in us. It realises what mystics like Macarius the Syrian (5th century) or Simeon the New Theologian (10th century) claim, that in the life of Christian prayer there is an inner Easter and an inner Pentecost.

Fourthly, liturgy (from the Greek meaning literally 'work for the people', but better translated as 'public work') is the outpouring of corporate identity. Schmemmann, already quoted above, defines liturgy as, *an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals - a whole greater than the sum of its parts*.⁶⁵ This means that a liturgical spirituality gives us a built-in corrective to the tendency to privatise our personal spirituality. It expands and stretches our awareness because we are acting together as the Church in personal prayer as much as we are in corporate worship, when we say, 'We thank you,' 'We believe,' 'Lord, hear *our* prayer.' The sheer momentum of the liturgy means that our own story is placed in the wider context of the community's response to God, and the wide areas covered by the Prayers of Intercession, for example, gather up our own specific and personal intercessions.

An individual who faithfully prays alone needs the encouragement of knowing that they are before God on behalf of the whole Church and the wider world. In this sense Neville Ward describes private prayer as a 'secondary thing' - *That is not to say that it is not important but simply that it is derivative. It is a continuation of the common prayer of the believing community into the particular life of the individuals who*

*compose it. It is the Church's thanking and offering translated into terms of the individual life each one of us is living.*⁶⁶ A liturgical spirituality implies that Christians should talk about 'personal prayer' rather than 'private devotion,' because it grounds prayer in the understanding that no prayer is really private, just God is never an individual's 'private' God but the One God of all.

Fifthly, liturgy teaches us that Christian prayer is an embodied activity. Many people look at prayer as a mental activity - we praise, we thank, we confess to, and we confide in God, with words and thoughts. And yet, some kind of bodily movement always accompanies our prayers, and a great body of Christian wisdom has long known that while we think or pronounce our prayers, our bodies, too, are at work expressing and shaping our spirituality.

Liturgy recognises and celebrates this as an expression of the Incarnation, the worship of the Word made flesh. It is embodied in physical symbols, actions, movements and sounds, which become the 'body-language' of the mystery of Christ, and it creates a spirituality that is not expressed only by words or thoughts or feelings, but by listening and singing, bowing, standing, kneeling, walking, crossing oneself, opening and lifting one's hands, smelling incense, lighting and extinguishing candles, touching, washing, eating and drinking. All of those embodied acts, performed consciously (but not self-consciously), are themselves acts of prayer.

Because symbols and symbolic actions are a form of language in themselves, the physical, embodied nature of liturgical worship means that it does not have *simply* one meaning which must be apprehended by all without any possibility of moving through the depths of meaning or levels of understanding. Its very physicality contributes to that 'multi-valency' or varied levels of meaning which is such a characteristic of liturgical worship. As Trevor Hart says, liturgical worship is *putting the 'story' or 'text' into play through continuous fresh action ... rather than being measured in terms of the alleged correspondence between some text and a state of affairs lying beyond or outside it.*⁶⁷

Like all other aspects of faith, such an embodied, liturgical spirituality has to be taught and learned, practised and adapted, and above all experienced. Liturgical formation does not happen overnight. It may take weeks and years and seasons of taking part in the rhythms and

rituals of the liturgy before it enters un-self-consciously into a person's life of prayer. We may live through thirty or forty Lents or Easters before something about the season seems like part of the rhythm of our personal life. Making the sign of the cross on one's body, raising one's hands in prayer, or making liturgical responses may not feel natural the first or even the fiftieth time, but over a lifetime practices like these can become as natural as any number of the rituals we regularly enact in our everyday lives. Their language can become part of our language, the way we communicate with each other and with God.

Prayer and Worship

In her widely-read book *Worship* Evelyn Underhill is attentive to the way in which corporate and personal worship need each other.⁶⁸ The individual needs corporate worship in order to avoid *self-interested spirituality*, but, also, corporate worship would be lacking in depth without the prayerfulness of individual worshippers. Just as liturgy is a foundation for all prayer, so the personal, relational, real, particular prayer life of individual people has an effect on the way corporate worship is experienced and practised. The emergence of the Pentecostal or Charismatic tradition in contemporary Christian worship and spirituality has emphasised this, and has affected the experience and expectations of Christians of all traditions, not only in Charismatic churches. People increasingly look for corporate worship that feels like and is an experience, as well as an expression, of prayer. As the Catholic liturgist Mary Collins says, liturgical practice is *moving from self-conscious activity to contemplative participation, rooted in experiences of the mystery of grace*.⁶⁹ And what the Methodist scholar James White says of Roman Catholic worship after Vatican II could equally be said of other Christian traditions, *People were beginning to grasp the difference between praying at Mass and praying the Mass itself*.⁷⁰

Personal prayer may positively influence liturgical practice in a number of ways. Firstly, it encourages an approach to corporate worship as a sacred space in which many things can happen for different people at different levels. In worship, as in personal prayer, 'being' is as important as 'doing.' We are offering our best to God, while, at the same time, surrendering ourselves into the flow of the liturgy and resting in what Romano Guardini calls its 'deep reposefulness'.⁷¹ This

is partly because, in order to be a vehicle for the expression and transformation of all kinds of human desires and hopes, liturgy has to be able to move people with very different psychological needs and issues, to be sufficiently wide and rich in its psychological resonance that people can find different things in it, according to what they need.⁷² Liturgy is pastoral because it is in its nature more expressively doxological than doctrinal, more mystery than magisterium, and uses symbolic language that is multi-valent, operating at several levels at the same time.

For example, baptismal waters bear witness to death and life, to boundaries and going beyond limits, to power and placidity. Bread and wine signify nature and nurture, brokenness that yields wholeness, possession, and sharing. This enables different individuals to imagine and to participate, and for corporate prayer to be both a celebration and an experience for people at different places in life and in faith.

Secondly, awareness of the importance of personal prayer helps liturgy to avoid serving merely any particular programme of the institutional church, such as education or evangelism. It is not that liturgy does not teach or proclaim the gospel, but this is not what liturgy is for. Like personal prayer, liturgy is the encounter between God and people, and what happens in this encounter, or what results from it, cannot be managed or predicted.

Thirdly, it asks those who plan or lead liturgy to make room for the active but prayerful participation of worshippers. If liturgy is hurried or casual, it tends to hinder any corporate, contemplative encounter with God. Surveys of worship in local congregations sometimes reveal frustrated comments about a lack of times of silence. Moments of silence need to go with the flow of the liturgy and require sensitive handling, so that the congregation understands what is happening. But there is an increasing sense among many worshippers that the words and actions of corporate worship work best when they arise out of, and return into, a shared experience of silence or stillness.

Citing a sermon which reflected on a need for greater awareness of this, Angela Ashwin writes, *Many church people live under huge pressures, we don't help them if our worship is crowded and busy too, full of reminders of things they ought to do, issues to be tackled, events to attend. Our liturgy needs to take us up into its own spaces. It needs*

*to give us ladders on which we can ascend into the heights of heaven and descend into the depths of ourselves.*⁷³

The example of the Psalms

From its roots in Judaism, Christian tradition has practised daily prayer since its earliest days. What became the 'daily office' of Morning and Evening Prayer, together with the other 'hours' of the day, has been used by Christians as common prayer, especially in religious communities, parishes and cathedrals, but it has also served as a basis for personal prayer. The 'office' is a way of linking corporate and personal prayer using a simple liturgical form. Using the daily office says that we become part of the voice of the whole church as we pray it, even when we are physically alone, and the themes, prayers and readings of the liturgical year become part of our personal prayer in a concrete way.

The central and most evident feature of the 'daily office' is the Psalms, used according to various patterns or cycles. In this way the Psalms have always been part of the corporate and personal spirituality of Christians. Calvin called the Psalms God's pharmacy for a healthy spiritual life. Luther said that in the Psalms we look straight into the heart of the saints. He also said, *The one that starts praying the Psalms seriously and regularly, will soon send the other, easy, (personal) pious little prayers on vacation and say, Ah, it is not the power and the fire that I find in the Psalms.*⁷⁴

The spirit of the Psalms is a creative mingling of the personal and the corporate. This reflects the experience of those who use them, finding themselves in corporate worship reflecting on their personal reality, and in personal prayer recalling the community that shares that reality. They express raw personal reality and emotion - proud, angry and self-righteous, together with but also agonising, lamenting and pleading, but they are also the songs of a faith community. This combination is why some contain a transition from 'I' to 'we,' (e.g. Ps. 122.1-2 and 123.1-2), some start with 'me' and conclude within community (e.g. Ps. 22), and others express deep personal longing for community (e.g. Ps. 42.5 as fulfilment of 42.3).

Stereotyped definitions of liturgy and spirituality fail when we see them being expressed side-by-side, as they are in the Psalms. False

distinctions between personal and corporate prayer, historical and eschatological, content and contemplation, this worldly and other worldly prayer are seen to be no longer adequately expressive of the understating which they embody. The Psalms are an example of how a subjectivist and individualist spirituality finds its way back into community, and how a rigid, objectivist liturgical practice needs to open itself to the experience of personal faith. Corporate and personal co-exist so frequently in the Psalms that commenting on them leads Dietrich Bonhoeffer to say, *Only in fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in fellowship.*⁷⁵

The Example of Taizé

One of the primary goals of the Taizé Community has been enabling people to find a way to experience personal prayer in the context of corporate worship. To accomplish this purpose, liturgies are created using simple chants, few words, and significant times of silence. The intention is to ensure that all present can be actively engaged in the prayer.

The repetitive nature of the sung chants enables participants to participate, and to find that they can be personally present to God through the public prayer of the gathered community. It is the repetitive nature of the music that serves the common prayer and the personal prayer of each participant at the same time. In the Jesus Prayer, Eastern Christians may use a type of personal prayer comprised of a few words repeated over and over again. Western Catholic Christians may use the Rosary in a similar way. In the chants as practised at Taizé, what once mediated individual prayer is now experienced as means of praying with others. This complementarity between private and communal dimensions of prayer at Taizé offers a practical example of how the two can and should be integrated in other traditions of Christian spirituality.

Conclusion

If liturgy is the life-blood of the church, spirituality is its breath. In our churches many people want to deepen their personal experience of prayer as well as to engage more fully and creatively in corporate worship. There is an urgent need for renewal of the personal

spirituality of worshippers, and for a deeper awareness that liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharist, is a foundation for all Christian prayer.

In the end, what we are seeking to renew is not prayer, whether personal or corporate, but our whole life in Christ. Liturgy and prayer are part of God's work of renewing this in us, as Alexander Schmemmann writes, *In themselves, liturgy and prayer are not renewal, for they are above and beyond the category of renewal. But if, as we all feel and believe today, we need a renewal, then we must rediscover them as its source and condition.*⁷⁶

Intercession: Some History and Practice

Intercessory prayer is part of the earliest evidence we have for Christian liturgy, having its origins, most probably, in the Jewish *berakoth*. By the evidence of the earliest reference, found in Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, intercession was part of the common prayers concluding the *synaxis*, that is the office of readings and prayers that precedes the celebration of the Eucharist. Justin, with reference to prayers offered after baptism, speaks of offering up *sincere prayers in common for ourselves, for the baptised person, and for all other persons wherever they may be.* (*Apology* 1.65). With guidance from the medieval office of Prone (employing intercessions for the people in the vernacular while the canon, in Latin, was recited silently), continental reformers like Calvin, Bucer and Hermann offered substantial prayers of intercession between the sermon and the Eucharistic Prayer, which is the pattern we largely follow today, although Cranmer and thus the English Prayer Book put intercessions after the Offertory, and SEC liturgies of 1764 – 1929 after the prayer of consecration.

Intercessions in the Eucharist

These appear to have been a slightly later development. The *Apostolic Tradition*, an early treatise rediscovered in the nineteenth century, includes no intercessions in the Eucharistic Prayer. Other ancient liturgies do include them within the Eucharist, though it is most likely that they originate in the *diptychs*, that is the practice going back to the reading by the deacon of the names of those who had brought an offering of bread for the Eucharist. Given that such offerings were vicarious, made on behalf of the departed, to the names of the living were added the names of the departed beneficiaries of the offerings. From this grew the custom of offerings for people still living (e.g. godparents on behalf of their godchildren who were still catechumens). Later still the names of martyrs and saints for whom thanks should be given were added.

But what of the theological rationale of the intercessory prayers in the anaphora? In the words of W. Jardine Grisbrooke, *To remove all intercessory prayer from the memorial of Christ's one all-sufficient sacrifice cannot but obscure the fact that we can offer this like any other prayer, only as members of Christ, redeemed through that*

sacrifice, and in the power of that sacrifice. Thus such prayer assumes the co-inherence of all redeemed humanity in Christ, a powerful argument for intercession within the Eucharist itself. In the words of Alexander Schmemmann, ... *before we partake of the heavenly food there remains one last, essential and necessary act: the intercession.*' For as Christ *'ever liveth to make intercession* (Hebrews 7.25), so we, as his Body, cannot help accepting his intercession as our own. In the Eucharist, having laid aside all earthly care in the glory of the messianic banquet, at the same time we recover the world in its deepest reality, a truth constituted in intercession as a necessary preparation for communion.

The Litany

The Greek word *λιτή* (litḗ), usually found in the plural, means a 'prayer' or 'entreaty' and is commonly found in the language of Greek drama from Sophocles to Euripides. The later word *λιτανεία* (litaneia) is something like an 'entreating'. As a prayer of petition and response it is not, thus, exclusively Christian, its earliest form in Christian liturgy, with the response *Kyrie eleison*, dating from the late fourth century in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Evidence of its development in the West is sketchy though (as recorded in both Lactantius and Eusebius) its form was remarkably similar to the pagan supplications of the Roman soldiers. It was the Syrian Pope Sergius I (687-701) who imported from the East the Litany of the Saints which supplanted all earlier forms and contains clear intercessory elements. It was this form that migrated to the Irish *Stowe Missal* of the early 8th century, down to the Sarum Processional and through this route to Cranmer's Litany in 'our native English tongue', based on the Sarum Litany of the Saints. It was described by the great liturgical scholar F. E. Brightman (*The English Rite*) as 'one of the magnificencies of Christendom.'

The Divine Office

Evidence for its use in the divine office dates from the end of the 4th century. The practice of concluding each office with a series of suffrages can be dated as far back as the Rule of St. Benedict (c. 526 CE).

Intercessions and Liturgical Revision

Liturgical revision of the Eucharist since Vatican II has generally shown a return to the intercession of the *synaxis* and a suppressing of intercession in the Eucharist itself (as in the 1982 liturgy). The practice is often for the laity to offer the intercessions – sometimes using the forms suggested (as in 1982) but often with almost total freedom with the assumption that the intercessions can be offered by anyone without adequate training or instruction.

Some practical comments

The purpose of these brief reflections is merely to indicate the complex history of intercessory prayer in the Church and its theological precision. Far more could be said, but this is offered as a plea that much more serious attention is given to the nature and purpose of intercession within both the Eucharist and the Daily Office, and that better training and order be given to those entrusted with leading the intercessions in our public worship. A few practical points might be made.

1. Greater attention should be given to the theological nature and purpose of the intercessions. There is a fatal tendency to regard intercessory prayer as a kind of bullying of God, having reminded him of the needs of certain people or situations. Intercession is not a *request* to God for his attention and action, but an *offering* to God of ourselves, of those for whom we care and of the world.
2. Intercession should not therefore be a kind of condensed form of the week's news. It is rather a brief gathering of all things before God, and a participating in the intercessions of Christ himself 'who ever liveth to make intercession' (Hebrews 7:25) Intercession is a recognition that we truly see the world *sub specie aeternitate*, that is, 'under the aspect of eternity', or 'from the perspective of the eternal'.
3. Intercession is offered to God – it is not an exhortation of the people. As far as possible it should avoid the phrase, 'Let us pray for.....' Rather it should begin with something like 'We offer to you and to your care.....'

4. In our 1982 liturgy the intercession of the *synaxis* is part of a careful narrative that takes us finally to the Great Thanksgiving as our sacrifice of praise. Beginning our worship in the praise of the Gloria, we listen to Scripture and hear it expounded, we make our creedal and common confession of faith, we offer our prayer of intercession for the world and its people, we confess our sins, we make peace with our neighbours. Then we can truly begin....

Making sense of intercession?

We need not think that we should get our ideas of God right before deciding whether or not to pray. It is really the other way round, as the Dominican Herbert McCabe said: *The way we understand God is as 'whatever makes sense of prayer.'*⁷⁷

Of the many forms of prayer - thanksgiving, praise, contemplation, confession – one that is particularly hard to make sense of (to make sense of God in light of) is intercession, or worse still, petition. We may even feel that these sorts of prayer are less than respectable, because they involve asking God for things. 'Petitionary prayer' is where we present desires to God, and 'intercession' is specifically made on behalf of others. Both petition and intercession seem to come under the umbrella of what is known as 'impetratory' prayer; 'impetrate' is a theological term meaning to obtain things by request. But the reflection above on offering intercession at the Eucharist warns us against seeing intercession as a '*request* to God for his attention and action', and casts it instead as '*an offering* to God of ourselves, of those for whom we care and of the world'.

So are we or are we not to ask God for things? We would seem to be encouraged to do so through our Scriptures, but we can struggle to see how doing so makes sense.

Quandaries

The logic behind impetratory prayer is that God gives us some things not only as we wish, but because we wish and ask for them.⁷⁸ The point of impetratory prayer is to achieve those things by prayer which God gives because of prayer.

But many quandaries arise from the claim that God gives some things because of prayer:

- God does not need to be persuaded to give us good things, for presumably God is beneficent;
- God does not need to be told what is going on, for presumably God already knows;
- God does not need to be empowered by our prayers, for presumably God is all-powerful and God's purposes will not be frustrated;

- God will not be changed by our prayers, for God is changeless, and if God were not changeless then God would be wavering rather than constant in perfect goodness
- God anyway cannot be changed by prayer, for God is timeless

For example, why would God withhold good things, and make the healing of suffering, the sanctuary of refugees, the cessation of war, the end of famine, or the conversion of lives dependent on people's prayers? Would that not be arbitrary, and also inefficient?

The good of relationship

There is a possible response, which goes like this: it may not be that God withholds good things unless there is prayer, but that God has ordained from all time that some things will be brought about through prayer. And why would God do this? Because by building this into the way of the world, God builds up relationship with us, which is itself a good.

This is the most consistent, classic response within Christian theology, to the conundrums as expressed above (though we have not shown the huge amount of debate that exists around these subjects). It does not sit well with some current trends in theology which see God as changing in response to us, and God's plans as subject to the risk that creation might go its own way. Rather, it preserves intact a classical view of God as changeless, timeless, all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good. We might on the face of it think that we could have a better relationship with a modern, changeable, more seemingly responsive God. However, there would be no guarantees in this modern view of God's enduring goodness, faithful presence, or ability. The classic view, by contrast, allows that God is eternally present to us in all our moments, and that God's goodness is not temperamental or subject to flux in the way that our goodness is vulnerable to storms of passion. The classic view is not of a God who sits aloof and does not care, but rather of a God who is able constantly to care, or to care with constancy. It is the God we invoke when we pray 'that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting life, may rest upon thine eternal changelessness', and to whom we can sing *O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

The classic response, as we are presenting it, can make sense of passages such as this from Luke 22, in which Jesus tells his disciples what is to happen, but acknowledges that it will not happen without struggle, and that prayer is part of that struggle:

You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brother. (Luke 22.28-32)

In this passage, Jesus is the one offering prayer directly to the Father. We are considering that Jesus, by his Spirit, also offers prayers through us, and that God regards it as good that we be involved in praying for things. We are suggesting that God makes us co-agents in the unfolding of God's purposes, and that we have a genuine responsibility to be responsive to God's will for the world, in the sense of making ourselves open to the Spirit of Christ and the will of God. In other words, intercession is both a request to God and an offering of ourselves, in one and the same action. It is part of the wider activity by which we become who we truly are by the grace of God, and in which we are not passive but in fact might be working rather hard! As the Apostle Paul expresses it:

I am the least of the apostles...But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Corinthians 15.9-10).

Our freedom and God's freedom

However, the question now arises as to whether we have genuine freedom and responsibility, if the path of events anyway unfolds according to God's timeless plan. Are our prayers set for all time, in which case how are we free to pray or not pray them? This question provokes another question, about the true nature of freedom: are we free if we can choose whether or not to pray; or are we free when we can pray God's will with genuine desire, without obstacles getting in

the way? It is arguably a Christian notion that we are only truly free when we find our freedom in Christ, and are set free from false attachments that tie us to our 'old selves' (Ephesians 4.22-4). If we accept this, then perhaps we can accept that part of the virtue of God ordaining that some things are brought about by prayer, is the way that we are trained, or tamed by God. As we pray through our struggles and learn obedience (which means 'deep listening') our ties with God grow, and we come increasingly to share God's affections.

So now we are proposing that:

- God ordains for all time that some things are given in response to prayer
- This is so because God considers it good to be in relationship with us through prayer
- Our freedom is intact if we understand that we find our true freedom by being set free by Christ, such that Christ lives in us and the Spirit prays through us

Have we thereby said enough to make sense of intercessory prayer? Perhaps so, but if we are finally to accept that it reflects well rather than badly on God that some things are given because they are prayed for, we will want to be convinced of the deep goodness of our praying relationship with God. And so we return to where we began, and see prayer as that dynamic in which, by losing ourselves, we find God, or are found by God, at our centre. Rowan Williams writes: *To act from [our] centre is to give God freedom in the world, to do the works of God.*⁷⁹ This would suggest that all prayer, and not just intercession, is necessary in order for God to act, because all prayer is a surrender of the self and a making room for God.

One more question: is God's action thereby to be identified directly only in the lives of those who pray (and indirectly in how they then live in the world)? Or does the self-surrender that makes room for God in those who pray, mean that God can also act in the lives of others and in the world? Jesus' prayer to wrest Peter and the Apostles from Satan would suggest yes. There is plenty of scope for reflecting further on this, in relation to the interconnectedness of all things, the freedom God enjoys when we act from our centre, and God's choice to work though creaturely as well as divine love.⁸⁰

Christian theology teaches that prayer is God's Spirit speaking in and through us back to God (Galatians 4. 4-7, Romans 8.26-7, Ephesians

2.18). If in prayer, God speaks to God, most of the quandaries regarding intercession are changed. We no longer need to consider that we somehow inform God, or influence God, or empower God. God is the instigator of prayer. The remaining quandary is why God should choose to go via us, to which we can perhaps only say that God does so for the sake of relationship with us.

Finding God, ourselves and others at the depths

A conviction behind this essay is that the deeper we go in the tradition in which we are rooted, the more likely the depths discovered will speak to the depths of other traditions.⁸¹ This mirrors what happens in prayer itself. Augustine said, *I know less of myself than thou dost know. I beseech Thee now, O my God, to reveal to me myself also, that I may reveal to my brothers my weakness.*⁸² He found God plumbing the depths of his soul, and realised that what is revealed at the depths is what can best be shared with others. The depth within us, while being less accessible than our superficial levels, is not thereby less communicable, for deep speaks to deep.⁸³ The classic image of a wheel with hub, spokes and outer rim, is often used in Christian contemplation to convey how we find our common life in God at the hub of the wheel, because this is where we all connect. Christian belief is that we find our true selves in Christ and the life of the Trinity. We pray by the Spirit, to the Father, through the Son, whose spirit of Sonship is within us (Rom 8.15), and whose prayers, as the risen Christ, support ours. Without some such theology, the notion of communing with God can barely be developed. Trinitarian emphases also help us to avoid being transactional or individualistic in our accounts of prayer. Prayer is not for wresting some good out of God, nor merely for conforming our lives to God's, but is for sharing in the life of God and with one another in God.⁸⁴ In the next section of the Essay we will hear some examples of how Christians have been deepened in their understanding of their life in God through being alongside practitioners of other spiritual traditions.

The Plural Context of Contemporary Spirituality

For many people of faith, the practice of dialogue with those of other faiths has become such a fundamental part of the religious landscape that it becomes easy to forget what a recent, and, indeed, contested phenomenon it is. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council's short declaration on The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*,⁸⁵ is as recent as 1965 and it could be argued that this statement of commitment to inter-faith dialogue was prophetic even then. It is important to note, however, that much of what preceded *Nostra Aetate* in the realm of inter-faith encounter had a very particular character. Some of the most innovative and far-reaching approaches to this dialogue were in the area of spirituality. If we look to Henri le Saux or Bede Griffiths with Hinduism in India, and to Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle or William Johnston with Buddhism in Japan, we see an extraordinary degree of encounter at the level of spiritual practice and mystical theology from the 1930s onwards.

This movement was perhaps most eloquently presented to a wider Christian audience by Thomas Merton, whose encounters with Buddhism and Taoism in the 1950s and '60s changed both his outlook on other religions (his early comments on Buddhism were not appreciative!) and, more compellingly, on his own Christian faith and practice (his early comments on his native Anglicanism were not appreciative either!). As one example of this, Christopher Pramuk's study on Merton's Christology, *Sophia, The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* shows the considerable impact of Merton's engagement with Buddhism on the way he understood the Cosmic Christ.⁸⁶ The language of Wisdom allows him to talk of Christ in a way that is universal. But what is significant is that his encounter with the thought world of Zen Buddhism allows him to draw out aspects of Christian thought that might otherwise have remained hidden for him, in this case, the *Sophia* language of Russian thinkers such as Sergei Bulgakov.

This same pattern can be seen the extensive spiritual writings of Irish Jesuit, William Johnston, who lived in Tokyo from 1951 until his death in 2010. Johnston's encounter with Zen Buddhism was not always untroubled. He started out on a path of full training in a Zen tradition which had proved hospitable to many Christians, including his Jesuit colleague Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle. However, he could not sustain this

training because he clashed with his teacher over his continued use of Christian forms of meditation in times of silence in the temple.⁸⁷ Johnston continued to have a very fruitful dialogue with Zen for the rest of his life, and this dialogical approach allowed him to state clearly that, like his Zen Buddhist friends, he remained committed to his own spiritual path while being radically open to learn from the experiences of those who followed other paths.

For Johnston, many of the key areas of learning for the contemplative Christian in dialogue with Zen were in the practice of meditation. In particular, he drew heavily on the teaching of Zen Buddhism in relation to posture, breathing, energy and the use of the *koan*, a paradoxical statement used in meditation to open up new levels of consciousness and understanding. He also saw the importance of this dialogue for the exploration of mystical theology. For example, he reflected on Buddhist insights into Philippians 2:5-11 which speaks of the self-emptying of Christ. He saw significant connections between Buddhist notions of emptiness (*sunyata*, or the *mu* of Zen) and the apophatic theology of St John of the Cross with the repeated '*nada*' of his experience of the unknowable God for whom we long in love.⁸⁸ In practical terms, Johnston saw that this touched on a Christian's approach to simplicity of life and to self-forgetting in prayer.

If William Johnston found that he could not give himself fully to a sustained participation in rigorous Zen training, other Christians have indeed found this possible. Alongside the dialogical approach of Johnston, the more recent phenomenon of 'dual belonging' can be seen in someone like his friend and fellow Jesuit, Robert Kennedy. Kennedy is both a Catholic priest and a Zen teacher in the same tradition as Enomiya-Lassalle. His writings have a different character from those of Johnston, as they draw on the lived experience of two religious paths. It could be said that his dialogue is expressed within his own person rather than between him and another person. The fruit of this inner dialogue can be seen in such works as *Zen Gifts to Christians*, where he suggests that *the goal of Christianity is to move us from a notional understanding of the truth to a vital experience of it in our lives today. I believe interfaith dialogue can help us achieve this goal.*⁸⁹

Kennedy is not alone in adopting both Christian and Buddhist spiritual practices and insights. Shirley du Boulay is well known as the

biographer of significant figures in 20th century Christian spiritual exploration. Her books on Bede Griffiths and Henri le Saux, for example, show her ongoing fascination with inter-faith spirituality.⁹⁰ But when it came to her own spiritual journey, du Boulay found that she had to part company with the Christian church.⁹¹ She continues to practise Zen Buddhism while retaining an affection for her Christian origins. All the same, she insists that 'dual belonging' is both possible and normal in religious life, particularly at the level of popular adherence and practice. Although she does not consider this to be a new phenomenon she does think that the fluidity in modern religious life is a newly dominant characteristic. In terms of her own painful parting from the Christian church, she cites two main reasons: that the church has failed to meet her spiritual needs, preferring instead an insistence on doctrinal fixity; and that the church has tolerated the abuse perpetrated by those in positions of trust.

'Spiritual But Not Religious' – Secular Spiritualities

As a spiritual seeker in the 1960s and '70s who found a home in the Christian church, only to leave it for a more practice-based spirituality, Shirley du Boulay represents a significant strand in contemporary Western culture. She might even describe herself as 'spiritual but not religious (SBNR)'. Ursula King offers a broad survey of this new feature of Western spirituality in *The Search for Spirituality, Our Global Quest for a Spiritual Life*. She describes how the relationship between religion and spirituality has, for many in the West, become inverted, with religion now seen as a subset of spirituality.⁹² Indeed, many religious people will find their non-religious friends surprised when they talk of spirituality, as if this category were largely unknown in traditional religious settings.

For those in the West (and perhaps increasingly in other developing parts of the world) who are unafraid to speak of their spirituality and its practices, there are aspects of that spiritual expression that will feel very familiar to those within religious traditions. Contemporary non-religious spiritualities (and it is important to speak of these in the plural) will, for example, take seriously the need for their exploration of meaning, connection and growth to make sense of their life experiences as they grow and face significant personal change. They will often be keenly aware of the ecological dimension of spirituality and of its embodied nature. They will engage with the imagination and

the subconscious and will often have a sense of the importance of self-transcendence as a route to growth and fulfilment (King, p. 14). Some will have a strong emphasis on the political or peace-making dimensions of spirituality. There will also often be 'belief' aspects of these secular spiritualities that form around areas such as the nature of the human person, the sacred, community and the afterlife.⁹³ Many will engage with visual, musical and literary arts and give a prominent place to aesthetic dimensions of spirituality and ritual. There are also elements of this new non-religious approach to spirituality that are less familiar to traditional religious expressions of the spiritual life. These new spiritualities are usually eclectic, pluralist, highly individual and dependent on no 'external' authority. While some individuals who self-define as SBNR will be highly disciplined in their personal spiritual practice, this discipline will often be self-imposed and self-motivated rather than in the context of an ordered religious framework with inherited patterns of practice, or with reference to a recognised teacher or religious leader. I will return to this question of authority in due course.

SBNR Challenges to Christians

We have already remarked how the encounter between different faiths can bring to the surface aspects of one's own religious tradition that had not been previously obvious. It is also the case that religious people might look to those who practice a secular spirituality to shed light on their own spiritual path. The focus on practice, or the disciplined, embodied expression of spirituality is an area I have already touched on in relation to Buddhist-Christian encounter, but it is no less significant in this area of dialogue. There are those who do not describe themselves as religious but will happily undertake a week-long silent retreat that would appear ascetically demanding to the most rigorous of Christian retreatants, or who make time for daily meditation with a higher level of seriousness and commitment than many of the traditionally religious. There is also, perhaps, a humility in seeking a spiritual path that does not claim universal validity which can challenge some more aggressive forms of Christian exclusivism. Additionally, secular spiritualities are generally optimistic about the innate capacities of the human person and this may challenge Christians, for example, to rediscover aspects of traditional theological anthropology that speak more positively about the goodness of what God has created. Finally, the recognition of the fragility of our

ecosystems has contributed to much more 'earthy' spiritualities both within and beyond traditional religious communities.

There has been a tendency among Christians to disparage aspects of the SBNR phenomenon as shallow and narcissistic dilettantism, but it may be that a more deliberate and generous dialogue would prove fruitful for all participants. For Christians, there is the opportunity to rediscover less obvious aspects of our own spiritual traditions. There is also the opportunity to gain insights about aspects of contemporary life and thought that are essential for a religious community seeking to address its cultural context in a creative and respectful way. For those engaged in a secular spiritual path, there is the opportunity to learn from the deep wisdom of a long tradition of spiritual endeavour as it continues to be expressed in a living community which also has deep roots in the wider intellectual, artistic and social fabric of our societies. Christian tradition might also offer insight into the benefit of committing oneself in trust to one particular spiritual path, and to do so in company with others in a community that can offer both support and a level of mutual accountability.

But there is one less comfortable area of critique that has particular significance for those who have turned away from Christianity in preference for a more individual spiritual path. I have already hinted at this in introducing Shirley du Boulay's spiritual story: it is the way the Christian church has used and abused its position of power in societies where it has been historically dominant. Linda Mercadante explores this issue in depth in her book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*.⁹⁴ Although her interviewees from those who self-define as SBNR are all in a North American context, the general thrust of her findings rings true for the somewhat different religious ecology of contemporary Scotland. The picture is complex amongst Mercadante's interviewees who have, either overtly or casually, turned their back on Christianity. Most had not experienced abuse in the churches to which they had belonged but had repudiated Christianity in part because of perceptions of its theology as tending towards an understanding of God as wrathful and manipulative, which they see in turn as mirrored in a hierarchical and abusive church.

Conclusion

A dialogue with this group of contemporary spiritual seekers challenges Christians in the secular West to consider the points of contact they offer to people looking for meaning and purpose in life. Would it be possible to offer more practice-based, experiential opportunities to engage with the good things that a faith tradition such as ours has to offer without condition or a prior commitment to Christian belief?⁹⁵ Can the churches take seriously the theological critique of the exercise and understanding of power and authority offered by those who have turned their back on them? Can Christian spiritual traditions benefit from being open to a demanding and generous level of dialogue with the spiritual traditions and practices of other world faiths? It is quite possible that steps like these will allow the Christian churches to grow in confidence in their own spiritual traditions and practices, enabling them to present a faith that is demanding and life-giving, that speaks directly to the challenges of the age in a voice that is both ancient and new, assured and humble, practical and profound.

Mindfulness – putting it in its place

Ajahn Candasiri, author of this section of the Essay, was born in Edinburgh and grew up within the Episcopal tradition of Christianity. After graduating from St Andrews University she was introduced to meditation through the practices of Sufism. This led on to a deep interest and commitment to the contemplative tradition of Christianity and also a study of the Kabbalah (the Jewish mystical tradition). In 1977 she met Ajahn Sumedho, an American born Buddhist monk recently arrived in London after ten years' training in Thailand with Ajahn Chah. After receiving teachings from him, she began seriously to consider entering monastic training at the newly established Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in West Sussex. This was in 1979; then in 1983 together with the three other women who she had been in training with, she took the higher ordination with Ajahn Sumedho as preceptor. Since then she has been active in the establishing of monastic communities at both Chithurst and at Amaravati Buddhist Monasteries and in teaching both in the UK and internationally. In October, 2011 she moved to Milntuim Hermitage in Perthshire where a secluded residence is being established for nuns of her tradition.

One of the reasons I became a nun in this tradition was the discovery that the Buddhist teachings and way of practice are excellent tools for cultivating both understanding and inner well-being. These seemed to be fundamental ingredients for any kind of meaningful service to humanity. I had spent some years working as an occupational therapist in the field of mental health, and it had become clear that my own inner uncertainty and anxiety were hampering any attempt at guiding others towards a state of inner balance. I realised that I needed to find and implement strategies for curing for my own difficulties before attempting to help others with theirs; the longing for others to be well was simply not enough.

There is a story in which the Buddha uses the simile of an acrobat and his assistant.⁹⁶ On being instructed by her master to watch out for him, the assistant retorts: *'But that won't do at all, master! I need to watch out for myself, and you need to take care of yourself. That is how we*

shall succeed in our act.' The Buddha then goes on to explain that the way we take care of ourselves is by developing the mindfulness in all dimensions of our life; naturally, this supports everyone around us. Additionally, he points out that when we cultivate qualities of kindness, harmlessness, patience and sympathy towards others we, ourselves, also derive enormous benefit.

I had struggled for quite a number of years with my own inner demons (jealousy seemed to be the biggest, ugliest and most humiliating). I had practised different forms of meditation and, eventually, had come across the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths. These truths are, firstly, that there is suffering; secondly, that this suffering has a clear cause or origin; thirdly that there is the ending of suffering; and the fourth, there is what is called an 'Eightfold Path' that leads to the ending of suffering. I found this teaching both reassuring and immensely encouraging. While it's clear that for many, there will be ageing and the pain of sickness; and death – our own and that of those we hold dear – awaits us all, the understanding that comes about through developing the path, enables a sense of deep peace and acceptance. The view that something has gone wrong or that, somehow, things should be otherwise can be laid aside. What a relief! One of the factors of the Eightfold Path is right or perfect mindfulness, and there are detailed instructions on how this can be developed. I quickly became convinced that within these simple teachings lay the answer to all of life's problems. In later years, when people would ask questions : about dealing with fear, sickness, bereavement, anger or any other difficulty, the short answer that would always arise in my mind was: 'what's needed is mindfulness'!

Perhaps what is needed now is an explanation of this word, 'mindfulness'. The word used in pāli is *sati*.⁹⁷ Other translations include, self-possession, lucidity of mind, and alertness. They all point to the quality of being totally present and clearly aware. Mindfulness comes seventh on the list of factors in the Eightfold Path, and it occurs in a number of other lists that comprise essential teachings of the Buddha. It is the first of the qualities of the enlightened mind, and comes as the central, balancing quality among the attributes known as 'the five spiritual faculties' and 'the five powers', where it oversees the balancing of faith and wisdom, energy and focus. There is also the phrase, '*sati sampajañña*' which is often translated as, 'mindfulness

and clear comprehension'; these are necessary elements for any wholesome, or skilful, speech or action.

Let's look more closely at the Eightfold Path. The factors usually appear as a list:

1. *Sammā ditthi* - right view/understanding
2. *Sammā sankappa* - right intention
3. *Sammā vācā* - right speech
4. *Sammā kammanta* – right action
5. *Sammā ājīva* – right livelihood
6. *Sammā vāyāma* – right effort
7. *Sammā sati* – right mindfulness
8. *Sammā Samādhi* – right focus/concentration

This path is described as the Middle Way; it is a way of balance between the extremes of excessive asceticism and sensual indulgence. The symbol that is most commonly used to depict it is a wheel with eight spokes. For me, this underlines the importance of seeing it as whole. The factors of the path are interdependent; they work together, rather than as a sequence or as separate autonomous elements. We can see that there is a link between how we live in the world (speech, action and livelihood) and our state of calm and inner balance (effort, mindfulness and focus, or concentration). Having a mind that is calm and collected allows clear seeing into the nature of phenomena – specifically, causality, and the impermanence and impersonality of conditions. Such insight stimulates an inclination to further 'wellness' or harmony both in our own minds and also in the world 'out there' (understanding, intention). Having said this, it is interesting that the Buddha stressed the supremacy of the first factor, *sammā ditthi* – right or perfect view:

*Just as the dawn heralds and foretells the rising of the sun,
so right view heralds and foretells the penetration to the
Four Noble Truths according as they really are.*⁹⁸

Right mindfulness comes in the section relating to collectedness of mind. However, it is intimately linked with all other factors of the path. This can be clearly seen by considering examples of what might be termed, wrong mindfulness. Great mindfulness is necessary when robbing a bank; and killing someone, deceiving someone or sexually

exploiting someone, may also employ a considerable degree of mindfulness. However, this would be ‘wrong mindfulness’. If the underlying intention is ‘wrong’ – to hurt or to take advantage of another being, and the resulting activity of body or speech is ‘wrong’, this is unlikely to lead to a peaceful happy heart. The factors of the path are not in balance.

There are two verses in the *Dhammapada* (a well-known collection of short sayings of the Buddha) that point clearly to the significance of intention in any undertaking:

‘All states of being are determined by mind. It is mind that leads the way.

Just as the wheel of the oxcart follows the hoof print of the animal that draws it,

So suffering will surely follow when we speak or act impulsively from an impure state of mind.’

And...

‘...As surely as our shadow never leaves us

So well-being will follow when we speak or act with a pure state of mind.’ (Dhammapada Verses 1. 2, Ajahn Munindo’s version).

Having established its place in the context of the Eightfold Path, I would now like to refer to a discourse, the *Satipatthāna Sutta*,⁹⁹ which is the classical ‘how to’ teaching that the Buddha gave on establishing presence, or mindfulness. I find in these guidelines a wonderful response to such questions as: ‘*How do we enter that place, of presence, of quiet knowing – particularly if our lives are full of distractions, responsibilities and confusing emotional reactions?*’... It can be so easy to know how we should respond to different situations, yet how often do our uninvited emotional reactions make living up to those ideals seem completely impossible?

The discourse describes four foundations: the body, feelings, the mind itself, and mind objects. These aspects of our everyday experience are, undeniably, ‘present’. They can be contemplated in a meditative process, or while engaged in activities throughout the day. Wherever we go, whatever we’re doing, whether we’re alone or with others, they are available to attune to – whereas the remembering, planning or imagining activities of our minds generally lead us away from the state

of presence. I find it interesting that the Buddha says that developing these foundations is the only way to *'the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering of the right path and to the realisation of Nibbāna.'*¹⁰⁰ I imagine that some will be struck by the similarity of this passage to Jesus' statement, *'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one cometh to the Father except through me.'* When we consider Jesus as a perfected being who is totally present, at one with Truth, we can appreciate that there is, perhaps, no contradiction.

In my own practice I have found that the body is the most accessible of the foundations to work with. It is solid, tangible and definitely present, so that at any moment I can shift my focus – from a train of thought, or emotional state – to the body. I can notice the feeling of pressure on my body as I sit on a chair or the floor; I can notice the feet touching the ground as I walk. I like to focus on my feet in walking meditation; they are a very long way from the head, where all the thinking happens!

There are many ways of developing mindfulness of the body. We can try these out on our own and find which is most effective; bearing in mind that conditions change, and what is helpful under one set of circumstances may not work at all in another. As well as contemplating posture: whether we are sitting, standing, walking or reclining, we can also bring awareness to any activity we are engaged in: eating, drinking, bathing, going to sleep, waking up, stretching are all mentioned in the discourse. Also encouraged are contemplation of the nature of the body: seeing it simply as the four elements that comprise it (earth, water, fire and air); viewing it in terms of its different parts (skin, bones, blood, sweat, tears and so on); and, most importantly, recognizing its mortality. The contemplation of death, that of our own body and also the bodies of others, is strongly recommended in order to generate a clear understanding of impermanence and to arouse a wholesome concern to make the best use of what remains of our human life span.

Perhaps the best known practice focused on the body is meditation on breathing in and out. It is widely recommended both within the Buddhist context and also in other religious traditions. The gentle rhythm of the body breathing can be linked with a prayer, as in the use of the Jesus prayer, a mantra or even just a simple reminder spoken

inwardly from time to time: 'here' with the in-breath, 'now' as we breathe out – or some other word or phrase that can be an anchor for the awareness. Of course, the mind will wander, so great patience, persistence and humility, together with a kindly sense of humour are indispensable; for this practice, although simple, is certainly not always easy.

I have found that it's really important to find ways of feeling glad about our practice, rather than trying to adhere rigidly any particular structure, which can be immensely frustrating. It's good to remember that the Buddha presented his teachings for our welfare and happiness, to support us in liberating the heart from suffering; it was not to engender a sense of unhappiness or failure! So when introducing these breathing exercises, I encourage people simply to enjoy the process of breathing in and out. The in-breath can energise the whole body, the out-breath can help us to relax, as we put down our burdens of anxiety and enjoy a moment of calm. I also encourage people to be curious and to take an interest in something that we usually we don't even notice, our preferred focus being the more exciting thoughts or emotions. It's a discipline, an act of renunciation, to keep turning away from what is fascinating to us and to let the awareness rest gently with the breath: happening here, happening now ...

The awareness of feeling comes second on the Buddha's list of foundations for mindfulness. 'Feeling' in this context is somewhat different from the way the word is often used in English: 'She hurt his feelings', 'I'm feeling hungry, happy, sad etc.'. Here, 'feeling' refers simply to the pleasantness or painfulness of an experience. With a pleasant feeling – whether of mind or body – we tend to want more of it, to make it last as long as possible; with unpleasant feeling it's the opposite: we want to get rid of it as quickly as possible. There are also feelings that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant; with these, the tendency is to ignore or dismiss them as being unimportant. Then, when they become unpleasant or painful, there can be an unconscious shifting to re-establish the neutral feeling state – as when sitting or standing we can change posture or shift our weight without any awareness of that response of the body to the arising of an unpleasant feeling.

We can, however bring feeling into awareness. We can be mindful of it, noting: this is unpleasant feeling; that's a pleasant feeling, this is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. With practice we discover that we can stop the mind's reactivity and rather than reacting instinctively, can choose to stay present, even with an unpleasant feeling. When we do this, our response to it can come from a place of wisdom and clarity of mind, rather than the (perfectly understandable) desire to get rid of, or change it immediately. In this way we avoid the '*I can't stand another moment of this!*' mentality that creates stress and can lead to so much regrettable speech or action. Interestingly, Ajahn Chah used to comment that, in fact, it's easiest to be mindful of unpleasant feeling.¹⁰¹ When things are pleasant we tend to get lost in our enjoyment of them – until they change, and we experience the unpleasant feeling that arises when our desires can no longer be satisfied!

The casual ignoring of neutral feelings can be counteracted by paying careful attention. In fact for most people much of life is quite neutral so paying attention, being mindful of neutral feeling, can enliven us in unexpected ways.

In contemplating the mind itself, or consciousness, we can see it in terms of the mental climate. There are times when the view out over to the hills from the hermitage where I live in Glen Artney is totally obscured by dense mist. At other times it's bright and sunny, or there can be a dank chill in the air, or a brisk breeze. In the same way, the different moods of the mind can be experienced with the ever-shifting states of consciousness. Sometimes, it feels broad and expansive; at others, it may be experienced as completely contracted around the memory of some real or imagined hurt. Looking into explanations or trying to justify any particular state – whether it be cheerful and positive, or depressed, sad or irritable – can take us round and round in circles; it can also take us far away from being present. However, as soon as we establish awareness, that thinking stops.

While the mood itself is without words, it can be helpful to anchor the attention with a label. 'Glum', 'grumpy', 'bright and cheerful' are labels that I have found useful in my own practice for supporting mindfulness of the state of consciousness. Then we can observe it change. The change may be sudden as when a sharp retort or challenge makes the consciousness contract, closing down like a sea anemone under

threat; or it may happen gradually as we are attending to the ordinary activities of our day. For me, seeing consciousness change in this way was what opened the door to an appreciation of the selflessness of conditions. Over the years I had grown used to identifying with such states; I'd see myself as someone who was jealous, proud, angry or sad. Being able to observe the mind itself simply as ever-changing conditions of consciousness, enabled me to let go of the idea of myself as a fixed someone who needed some kind of major adjustment in order to be OK. Gradually, I came to appreciate that often that very desire to adjust or deal with these states can be a kind of holding on, it makes them solid. Whereas, with mindfulness, it becomes possible to just witness, and allow change; it's very natural. Just as the weather in Scotland is changing all the time, so it is with consciousness – ever-shifting; sometimes, slowly, gently, sometimes dramatically.

Finally, mind objects: mind is a bit like a room that at times, can be full of people, furniture, and all kinds of things; at other times, it can be quite empty. Things come and go in the mind, usually without invitation. Often it's the ones that we most dislike and want to get rid of that seem to persist, while those we love are all too quickly gone. In the Satipathāna Sutta different techniques for establishing mindfulness around mind objects are presented. One is to deliberately bring into consciousness specific teachings that can be used to direct awareness to certain aspects of our experience. For example, there are teachings on what are called 'the five hindrances' (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation or doubt). Bringing mindfulness to their presence means that, rather than remaining in a state of struggle or being overwhelmed, we can apply a suitable antidote. The different senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking) and their objects also provide a wonderful alternative focus for when the mind is agitated by thoughts of what needs to be done, or is thrown off balance by some disturbing event. The fragrance of flowers, incense or fresh air; the warmth of the sun; the dappled light in the forest; the sounds of wind or rain or of someone's voice can all effectively support the establishment of mindfulness – as can the contemplation of the miracle of their existence and functioning at all! These strategies all use deliberate thinking to bring about the contemplation of aspects of our experience that we can discern for ourselves right now.

Another approach is to bring awareness to the thoughts in our mind. It can take a while to appreciate that this is possible, so strong is the habit to identify and to believe what they tell us, without the slightest question. Our abbot, Ajahn Sumedho, would often say: 'Don't trust the thinking mind, it can be a real liar!' Instead, we can bring mindfulness to thoughts, listening to them without judging or repressing them, and without becoming absorbed in the flow of what they're telling us. We can patiently listen to all of them; including the commentary about me: how good/bad I am; how well/badly I performed; whether this or that person likes or approves of me; whether I'm OK or not. The inner critic can go on and on, so learning how to establish mindfulness around the thinking of the mind can be incredibly liberating. It can free us from that constant need to judge and to try to measure up to all the expectations we have of ourselves. Eventually, instead of always being at the beck and call of that inner critic, we become free to offer our lives to Dhamma (the Truth) or to God, Allah, the One – whatever term we find meaningful.

For many years that has been my aspiration and I still marvel at having found a means to enable it. To perfect mindfulness is, clearly the work of a lifetime. However, it is possible, gradually, step by step - and it can be a joyful endeavour. Whatever our faith tradition, we can employ these simple teachings that the Buddha described in such detail over 2500 years ago. They can support us in discarding what is harmful, and in developing a kinder, more loving relationship with ourselves, each other and indeed with all sentient beings for the welfare and happiness of all.

Christian Meditation Practices

Through a complex series of developments throughout the 20th Century, Western Christianity has gradually been rediscovering its many approaches to contemplation and meditation. One of these developments has been the dialogue between Christianity and Eastern religious traditions such as the Buddhist approaches described by Sister Ajahn Candasiṛī. What follows is a response to her Buddhist insights from a Christian point of view. Alongside this dialogue, the practice of disciplined Christian spirituality through retreats, spiritual direction and rules of life has been moving out of the cloisters into the lives of ordinary Christians for at least a century. This means that Christians have been adopting approaches to prayer that are inspired by Eastern practices or rediscovered from Christian practices previously only known to monks and nuns. In churches shaped by the European Reformations, this rediscovery is all the more remarkable, given the considerable hostility to monastic forms of Christian life in the early centuries of those reforming movements.

One very good example of this developing Christian spiritual landscape is a book of '*Christian Exercises in Eastern Form*' written by the Indian Jesuit, Anthony de Mello.¹⁰² He divides his exercises into three groups and this taxonomy gives a useful categorisation of some of the main strands of contemporary Christian approaches to meditative prayer. The first grouping he calls 'awareness' and this corresponds most closely to the approaches to meditation that have more recently become known in the West as 'mindfulness'. These exercises include awareness of the body's sensations, of the breath, of sounds or of the thoughts that pass through one's consciousness. The second he calls 'fantasy' and these exercises are most closely related to the imaginative methods of prayer known from Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. His final set of exercises, called 'devotion' are prayers more consciously focussed on Christ and having a more overt theological content, such as *lectio divina* and the Jesus Prayer.

Origins

De Mello's first grouping, 'awareness' draws on a long tradition of Christian prayer which has its origins in the spiritual teachings of the earliest Christian hermits in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts from the 4th Century onwards. In the introduction to his translation of some of the sayings of the desert fathers and mothers (the *Verba Seniorum*),

Thomas Merton drew attention to the concept in Christian ascetical tradition that most closely resembles the notion of mindfulness – ‘*purity of heart*’ – a clear unobstructed vision of the true state of affairs which leads to a state of *quies* or ‘rest’ which was *simply the sanity and poise of a being that no longer has to look at itself because it is carried away by the perfection of freedom that is in it*.¹⁰³ (Merton, 1960, p. 8)

This Desert tradition gave rise to two streams that fed into the ascetical traditions of the Christian East and West. In the East, that stream would lead to the developed spiritual insights and practices of the Hesychast movement with its ‘prayer of the heart’, the Jesus Prayer. This stream draws deeply on the Desert tradition’s emphasis on ‘watchfulness’ as the way towards purity of heart. This is a way that seeks freedom from ‘the passions’, distracting thoughts and deep-seated attachments that cloud our spiritual vision and hold us back from full human maturity. It is well represented by writers whose work is included in that vast compendium of Hesychast spirituality, the Philokalia. St Hesychios is a typical example:

*‘Watchfulness is a spiritual method which, if sedulously practised over a long period, completely frees us with God’s help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions.’*¹⁰⁴

It is the repetition of the name of Jesus that is the primary ‘method’ for guarding one’s heart against the passions and the later, more developed tradition combined this with exercises involving the control of one’s breathing.

In the West, the practical teaching from the early Desert tradition found a home in the Rule of St Benedict. By the 14th Century, the more speculative aspects of this teaching, as represented in the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, a 6th Century Syrian monk with Neoplatonic leanings, are combined with its practical dimension in the English work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.¹⁰⁵ This offers both a method of prayer using a short, repeated prayer-word, and a theology of contemplation that describes the ultimate purpose in the Christian spiritual life as union with God in Christ. In common with the Eastern traditions, this gives the Christian practice of meditative prayer an identity distinct from other approaches to mindfulness – it is fundamentally relational

and theological. It may lead to self-realisation but its *concern* is the knowledge of God in love. Therefore, many Christian writers have seen the ascetical practice of ‘watchfulness’ as preparatory to the gift of ‘infused contemplation’ rather than an end in itself.¹⁰⁶ Aloysius Pieris SJ undertook a significant study of how this focus on love and relationality in Christian spirituality compares with a primary Buddhist focus on ‘wisdom’ or insight in his work, *Love Meets Wisdom*.¹⁰⁷ He concludes that, while each may start at one of these poles, each also moves towards the other pole – Buddhist insight results in compassion, Christian love results in true knowledge.

Contemporary Practice

These streams of influence from the early Christian experience of solitude and struggle in the desert have coincided in recent years with the contemporary emphasis on mindfulness as a therapeutic practice, an emphasis that owes much to the work of Mark Williams, a professor of clinical psychology and an Anglican priest. The result is a rediscovery of Christian practices of non-verbal prayer, contemplation and meditation. The Eastern practice of the Jesus Prayer, for instance, has been known in the Anglophone West for many decades through the writings of Lev Gillet, with the subsequent interest in the writings of the *Philokalia* leading to a considerably richer understanding of the Eastern traditions than had been previously evident. Among the most notable examples of the rediscovery of the Western streams of this tradition are the teachings of John Main and his followers, the ‘Centring Prayer’ of the Cistercian monk Thomas Keating and the Irish Jesuit, William Johnston, all of whom also had an active interest in Eastern, non-Christian forms of meditation.¹⁰⁸ All of these approaches are based on a method of silent prayer, sometimes using a prayer-word and sometimes focussed on the breath, which seek to foster inner peace, self-awareness, openness to God and, therefore, openness to others. In keeping with their desert origins, these methods are aimed at simplicity of heart and freedom from distracting thoughts. They are simple, not esoteric teachings and often draw on scriptural words, phrases and images. They aim to orient believers towards the God in whom they place their faith and to open them up to the enlivening of the Holy Spirit. These words from John Main offer a useful summary:

The essential context of meditation is to be found in the fundamental relationship of our lives, the relationship that we have as creatures with God, our Creator. But most of us have to take a preliminary step before we can begin to appreciate the full wonder and glorious mystery of this fundamental relationship. Most of us have to get into touch with ourselves first, to get into a full relationship with ourselves before we can turn openly to our relationship with God. Putting this another way, we can say that we first have to find, expand and experience our own capacity for peace, for serenity and for harmony before we can begin to appreciate our God and Father, who is the author of all harmony and serenity.¹⁰⁹

John Main's teaching has been disseminated through the World Community for Christian Meditation (wccm.org) which has a network of local groups of meditators who use his mantra-based approach. The organisation also sponsors work to promote the benefits of meditation in the field of mental health and in specific contexts such as schools and prisons. William Johnston promoted the practice of shared meditation in groups including Christians and people of other faiths or none.¹¹⁰ These examples suggest approaches to Christian traditions of meditation which, although seen by their promoters as fundamentally Christological in their orientation and goal are, nonetheless, accessible to and of benefit to those who do not share this religious context. In that respect, this practice is close to the availability of Buddhist-based mindfulness techniques for those who do not commit themselves to the Buddhist way.

Martin Laird, an Augustinian priest who teaches at Villanova University in Philadelphia, gives an excellent overview of these Christian practices in his work, *Into the Silent Land*¹¹¹. His practical outline of a method of contemplative prayer follows these six steps:

1. *The first is to adopt a stable posture, take a deep breath with the exhalation being slightly slower than usual and then allowing the breathing to continue normally.*
2. *Then, one combines a prayer word or words with the breathing so that word and breath become one.*

3. *Letting one's attention rest gently on the breath-combined-with-word, one maintains a vigilant attentiveness to the present moment.*
4. *When distractions occur – and this is almost inevitable – one simply brings the attention back to the prayer word, thus establishing a habit of bringing the attention back to the present moment.*
5. *With practice, the breathing becomes deeper, slower and more abdominal. This results in greater calmness.*
6. *Sometimes, practitioners can experience an inner resistance to this approach, which may be an indication of a desire for control. This practice, over time, allows one to let go of such controlling tendencies in trust.¹¹²*

Other writers advocate a similar approach without the use of a prayer word and focussing only on the breath (de Mello, 1978). The approach advocated by the World Community of Christian Meditation recommends a four syllable prayer word, Maranatha, with one syllable uttered internally on each inhalation and exhalation (Main & Freeman (Ed), 2002). William Johnston, with his extensive dialogue with Zen Buddhism, is particularly attentive to bodily posture, abdominal breathing and an awareness of the body's energy (Johnston, 1988).

Summary

Christians have access to practices of meditation or 'watchfulness' that closely parallel those of Buddhism. They are simple practices that require, nonetheless, repetition, commitment and guidance to be most fruitful. They are practices that foster inner peace and heightened awareness through the mastery of our turbulent minds and, for the Christian, this prepares the way for a fuller knowledge of and love for the God in whom we put our trust.

Religious Experience and Mysticism

Introduction

Something we might expect from prayer or a spiritual life is 'religious experience'. But what on earth do we mean by 'religious experience', and can it ever be right to pursue it? The following discussion helps us with these questions by distinguishing two types religious experience. On the one hand, there are ordinary 'religious experiences', which we could conceive in a broad enough way that we could all be said to have them. Indeed, 'religious experience' can become our way of experiencing the world, if we become disposed to seeing God in all things. On the other hand, there are rare, mystical or 'rapturous' experiences that some people undergo. In neither case, should religious experience be pursued in its own right, as that would be to treat it as something for its own sake, which is distorting and could have harmful consequences for individuals and for society. Rather, religious experience always speaks of the purposes of God, and to comprehend this we must neither chase nor focus on the experiences themselves, but instead to think about God's good purposes for us in this life and the next. In both cases, the ordinary and the 'rapturous', religious experience has a public outworking, and so cannot be said to be simply a matter of private or inner states of consciousness.

Two types of religious experience and two objections

Religious experience is often understood in terms of a direct encounter with the supernatural or transcendent that exceeds the possibilities of normal human experience. Two main kinds of direct religious experience are often identified:

- a. those that occur while the senses are more or less intact. For example, we may sense God's presence as we observe a sunset or some other natural phenomenon, or while at prayer.
- b. so-called 'mystical' experiences, which entail an awareness of God or of supernatural states of affairs, or a sense of pure empty consciousness, that precludes and suspends ordinary sense perception, and seemingly transports the subject into another realm, and possibly out of the body.

There are two main objections that are commonly levelled against accounts of religious experience:

1. Religious experiences are personal or subjective. Since they are not publicly verifiable, at best, and may be the product of insanity, delusion or hallucination, at worst, it follows that they fail to count as evidence for the reality of the divine object of experience, to say nothing of the authenticity of the experiences themselves.
2. Religious experiences cannot necessarily be linked to any specific understanding of God, even though many accounts of religious experience purport to defend a Christian conception of God.

In response to these objections, we can offer a wider definition of religious experience that relates it to ordinary human experiences, and furthermore enables us conceive of our whole lives as means of enjoying religious experience. This kind of account can be derived from the thought of the great medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas.

‘Ordinary’ Religious Experience

While many accounts of religious experience begin with a discussion of the experiences themselves, Thomas Aquinas’ account starts from the conception of God. According to Aquinas, God always completely is what God is: the highest good that exceeds and in that sense presupposes the possibility of all goods; unconstrained by space, and the finitude that accompanies it; and unconstrained by time, and the necessity of developing in time.¹¹³ God is neither like nor unlike the objects of human knowledge and cannot be reduced to or conflated with them. In Aquinas’ terms, God is simple.

When this insight shapes our way of thinking about ordinary things, it can have a highly significant effect. For example, it can correct our tendency to regard present circumstances and attainments as the be-all and end-all of human existence; a tendency we have because we are constrained by space and time.

The first and most fundamental way in which we tend to attribute inordinate significance to ordinary realities concerns the primary object of human knowledge, namely, the self.¹¹⁴ In the absence of any sense of a supreme good, we can over-estimate the worth of the self,

for example by developing a hubristic self-image or excessive sense of personal ability, importance or entitlement. Alternatively, we may under-estimate the worth of the self, and have a deficient sense of personal ability, importance or entitlement, or have false humility.

At the most basic level, the knowledge of God as the highest good affords resources for rectifying these extremes, because it contests the underlying pride that human beings can transcend normal human limits in terms of their powers or capacities, and should be treated as worthless if they fail to do so. An excessive sense of self-worth might lead a person to pursue inappropriate areas of work and inquiry, and a poor self-image might produce lethargy with regard to exercising and even identifying personal abilities, for instance, but the knowledge of God provides accountability to come to terms with, and make the most of, the finite capacities all human beings have, no more, no less.

In that sense, the knowledge of God as highest good can shape a person's whole sense of direction or indeed vocation in life, informing the daily activities that correspond to this sense. At the same time, knowledge of God makes a significant difference to the way ordinary activities are undertaken. Indeed, it has the power to check the skewed perspective on reality that results from over or under-estimating the value of such goods as relationships, education, power, possessions, fame, and so on.¹¹⁵ Knowledge of God fosters instead the balanced perspective that makes it possible to appreciate and engage with such goods in ways that are true to what they are. This means that we can live in a way that is consistent with the integrity of things, and with our own integrity, which is what Aquinas would consider moral living.

So the knowledge of God corrects notions about what is true or good that would have sprung from a false understanding and love of the self, whether excessive or deficient. Arguably, the knowledge of God also provides the tools to assess evils that befall us, as it helps us evaluate all things, namely, through the lens of the belief that no temporal circumstance is absolutely decisive for human happiness. In that sense, the knowledge of God makes it possible to bring something valuable, to wit, the good of a morally virtuous life, even out of experiences, which would otherwise detract from value or goodness of life.

Our argument is that it is possible to experience God indirectly, through the things that are considered in the light of the knowledge of God's supreme goodness. This indirect knowledge or experience of God comes by way of recognising the difference that belief in God makes to the way ordinary realities, including the self, are perceived. In that sense, the experience of God is not a separate form of experience, but the formality or framework in which ordinary experiences are pursued. With continued practice, therefore, it may eventually become possible to form a relatively consistent habit of operating under the formality of faith, such that ordinary and religious experience become wholly interchangeable; we see all of life in the light of God. According to Aquinas, striving to perceive all things in the light of God gradually predisposes a person ultimately to see God's very Self in the life to come, in much the same way that seeing the world in brighter levels of sunlight adjusts the eyes to the brilliance of vision in broad daylight.¹¹⁶

Casting all human experiences as possible religious experiences, renders religious experiences public. After all, decisions about how to act, and desires to act in certain ways, can be shared with others. This is true even in cases where individuals have reached the same decisions and cultivated similar desires, such as around having or not having children, through different life experiences. Religious experiences on this account are subject to scrutiny and therefore cannot be criticised (according to objection 1. above) as purely subjective encounters with God.

In Aquinas' account, moreover, the God in question is not just any God, but the God of Christian faith, which makes it possible for him implicitly to refute objection 2. as well. For the one supreme or highest good is by definition unknowable, unless God chooses otherwise. While we can argue for God's existence through inferences from the natural order, Aquinas acknowledges that such inferences remain merely speculative apart from the self-revelation of the God who alone can know himself in full.¹¹⁷ On this basis, Aquinas insists that God cannot be conclusively known apart from the Incarnation of God in Christ.¹¹⁸ The doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity are essential to a full explanation of the nature and knowableness of the God that is encountered through religious experience. That is not to invalidate the religious experiences of those who affirm the reality of God or the transcendent without acknowledging God as Incarnate or Triune. But

it is to suggest how the link is to be made from religious experience to the Christian God.

Most importantly, by defining religious experience as potentially mediated through all kinds of ordinary experience, this account affirms the ordinary experiences of ordinary religious persons as experiences of God.

'Extra-Ordinary' Religious Experience

Is there any room in this account, then, for a direct experience of God? At first glance, Aquinas' thought may seem to exclude the possibility of such an experience, since he emphatically contends that human beings are unable to attain knowledge except on the basis of sense experiences, and God is not a sense object.¹¹⁹ Aquinas holds that the direct knowledge of God is largely unattainable in the present life. The knowledge of the world in light of the knowledge of God, and direct knowledge of God, are mutually exclusive, in much the same way that it is impossible to look at the light of the sun, and look at things in its light, at the same time.¹²⁰

On this basis, Aquinas further argues that only two things could transport the mind outside of the senses so as to give rise to direct religious or mystical experience, or what he calls 'rapture'.¹²¹ One cause would be insanity or delusion, which debase or corrupt the integrity of nature. Another possible cause would be God, elevating the human mind to a state towards which it is ultimately ordered. While Aquinas recognises that this elevation might be supposed to violate human nature, because it is not normal in this life, and is not possible for human beings operating of their own accord, he insists that no violation occurs, precisely because rapture is consistent with the integrity of human nature in its final form.

Though such raptures—much like miracles—exceed natural possibilities, Aquinas does not see them as unnatural strictly speaking, because they bestow upon human nature blessings for which it is predisposed, but which are presently out of reach apart from an act of special divine intervention. Raptures are nonetheless extraordinary, and so Aquinas explains them with reference to the supernatural end of human nature, which creates a sort of 'loophole' through which direct religious or mystical experiences may occur in the present life.

As examples of such experiences, Aquinas speaks of the way the mind may be elevated *to a vision in the imagination...as happened to Peter and to John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse*.¹²² Thus, he acknowledges a form of direct religious experience in which something like extra-sensory perception, if not sensory perception itself, is still active, and serves as the means through which God conveys a message to an individual about something they should do or how they should live. For instance, Peter's vision, recounted in Acts 10:9-22, helped him know how Christians should reckon with all that Israel previously would have regarded as 'unclean'. Likewise, John's vision led him to write the book of Revelation, which seeks to prepare readers for the end times. In less grandiose terms, a sense of God's presence in prayer or during the vision of a sunset may bring peace in the midst of tumultuous circumstances or a new sense of direction or refreshment for life.

In addition to these types of experience, Aquinas explains, there is another in which the mind is transported out of the senses and beyond all that it can think or imagine to a purely intellectual vision of God. In his understanding, this sort of mystical vision occurs when *the understanding sees God through his essence*, as in the example of St Paul, who was transported into the 'third heaven' where he presumably saw nothing but God. In the course of describing Paul's experience, Aquinas notes that the Apostle saw God only in passing, by contrast to the blessed in heaven, who see God as a matter of permanency, or without qualification.¹²³ On his account, the reason for the fleeting nature of this encounter had to do with the fact that Paul *was not enraptured to become blessed, but to be a witness of beatitude*.¹²⁴

While celebrating the Mass in 1273, Aquinas himself received such a vision, as a result of which he described all his work as 'straw', and ceased to write another word until his death three months later. On a much earlier occasion, St Benedict of Nursia enjoyed a vision of the whole world gathered under one brilliant beam of light that later helped him see how to address the enormous challenges the Church faced following the fall of the western Roman Empire, not least by founding of the Benedictine Order.¹²⁵

As these examples indicate, direct religious experiences are for Aquinas means to an end rather than ends in themselves. They must

have positive practical implications for the person who has the experience and thereby for human society, which can be observed and judged openly as rational and consistent with human flourishing.

For this very reason, we are not encouraged to pursue direct religious experiences in their own right, for that would suggest a world-abnegating desire to experience God alone, which is ironically incongruent with the purposes of a God who intervenes in natural affairs only to affirm and enhance the natural life of his creatures. Such escapism, as it were, in turn renders individuals vulnerable to confusing their own heightened emotions or imaginations with religious experiences that only God can grant. In other words, it increases the chances of experiences, and human lives organised around and as a result of experiences, that are the product of insanity, hallucination, or sheer human fabrication, rather than divine intervention. 'Rapturous' experiences can have an outright negative effect on those enraptured, and through them, on others, if they are pursued as the main or only means of knowing God. That is not to rule out the possibility of 'traumatic' raptures, such as were experienced by St John of the Cross, for instance. But it is to affirm that any 'dark night of the soul' needs to be judged in terms of whether it brings about repentance leading to renewed life—thus enhancing life in the real world rather than causing a loss of contact with it. To this end, Aquinas situates direct religious experience (raptures) within the larger context of ordinary religious experience, which makes it possible to determine whether the rapturous experiences are consistent with the divine purpose of enabling human beings to embrace fully the life God intends for them in the world. So we see that even in respect of what might seem like the most private of inner experiences that could be considered in a discussion of prayer and spirituality, the proper way to consider and weigh these experiences is in terms of the collective or public goods that they yield.

Some questions for reflection

Are there people, or words, images, or other things, that help you to pray? If so, can you say what is helpful about them?

How does prayer make a difference to the world?

Do you sit, stand or kneel in particular ways to pray? Do you think that posture makes a difference to how you pray?

Is the Church, or your local church, good at practising what it prays? How could we do better? What practical steps might we take?

How do you feel about spiritual traditions that are not Christian?

Have you learned anything about prayer and spiritual life from outside of Christianity?

What do you find difficult about prayer, and what do you most enjoy about it

Suggested reading

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourzoh, *School for Prayer* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970).

Mae Elise Cannon, *Just Spirituality: How Faith Practices Fuel Social Action* (IVP, 2013).

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- ³ Some helpful resources: Beth R. Crisp, *Beyond Crucifixion: Meditations on Surviving Sexual Abuse* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010); Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Westminster John Knox, 2009); Barbara Glasson, *Spirituality of Survival: Enabling a Response to Trauma and Abuse* (Continuum, 2009).
- ⁴ For example, the debate between Daphne Hampson and colleagues in Hampson et al, *Swallowing a Fishbone: Feminist Theologians Debate* (SPCK, 1996).
- ⁵ Beth R. Crisp, ‘Spiritual Direction and Survivors of Sexual Abuse’, *The Way* 43/2 (April 2004): 7-17.
- ⁶ E.g. Dermot Power’s reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar, in ‘The Holy Saturday Experience’, *The Way*, <http://www.theway.org.uk/back/38Power.pdf>
- ⁷ John Zizoulas ‘The Early Church Community’ in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* ed. McGinn, Meyendorff and Leclercq, Crossroad, 1987, p. 28
- ⁸ Such questionnaires are offered within the forces and within some healthcare settings to aid self-assessment or supportive conversation. They typically enquire about the extent to which at any one time, the person is: ‘Engaged in life’s meaning/purpose; Hopeful about life/future; Makes sound moral decisions; Fully engaged with family, friends, and community; Able to forgive self and others; Respectful of others; Engaged in core values/beliefs’. These indicators are taken from a Spiritual fitness questionnaire used by the United States Navy Chaplain Corps (current since 2012).
- ⁹ <http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/stressedtozest/2011/09/six-recent-research-papers-mindfulness-outcome-reviews-brain-changes-self-com>, accessed 23 March 2016.
- ¹⁰ See some personal stories, for example, in ‘Is Mindfulness making us ill?’, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/23/is-mindfulness-making-us-ill>
- ¹¹ For this subject, see especially the work of the archaeologist Vicki Cummings, and in particular her *A View from the West: The Neolithic of the Irish Sea Zone* (Oxbow, 2009).
- ¹² DH Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, 1921, Penguin ed. p. 83.
- ¹³ Martin Goldberg, ‘At the Western Edge of the Christian World, c. AD 600-900’, in *Celts: Art and Identity*, ed. Julia Farley and Fraser Hunter (London: British Museum and National Museums Scotland, 2015), esp. pp. 184 and 202.
- ¹⁴ See Fraser Hunter, ‘Powerful Objects: The Uses of Art in the Iron Age’, in Farley and Hunter 2015 pp. 93-4.
- ¹⁵ For this subject, see especially Ian Bradley’s *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

- ¹⁶ For a major recent exploration of the more positive aspects of Augustine's view of creation and of human nature, see David Vincent Meconi SJ, *The One Christ: St Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Catholic University of America Press, 2013).
- ¹⁷ See the Introduction to *Hebridean Folksongs III: Waulking Songs from Vatersay, Barra, Spouth Uist, Eriskay, and Benebecula*, ed. J.L. Campbell (Clarendon, 1981).
- ¹⁸ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex, or, The Law and the Prince*; London: John Field, 1644 (available online at www.portagepub.com): see esp. q.4, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ *Lex, Rex*, q.42 p. 388.
- ²⁰ From Donald E. Meek (ed.), *Caran an t-Saoghail: The Wiles of the World: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003, pp. 270-1).
- ²¹ Cairtìona NicDhòmhnaill (MacDonald), *Na Bannan Gràidh: Laoidhean* (The Bonds of Love: Hymns); Stornoway Religious Bookshop, 1987, pp. 47-8.
- ²² Rutherford, Letter 190 (to Robert Brown of Carsluith), pp. 374-5.
- ²³ Rutherford, Letter 130 (to John Kennedy of Ayr), p. 255.
- ²⁴ Rutherford, Letter 7 (to Lady Kenmure of Anwoth, 1630), p. 47.
- ²⁵ Bell 1985 p. 190. Bell notes that 'Campbell's doctrine of assurance... is not based merely upon his doctrine of atonement, rather, both of the foregoing doctrines are based upon, and unfolded from, his doctrine of God as discerned in the light of the incarnation' (ibid. p. 189).
- ²⁶ From one of the sermons of John McLeod Campbell, quoted in Bell 1985 p. 183.
- ²⁷ Carol, quoted in Bob Holman, *Faith in the Poor* (Lion Publishing 1998) p. 39.
- ²⁸ Adomnán, *Life of St Columba* III:23.
- ²⁹ Adomnán, *Life of Columba* II:39.
- ³⁰ See John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1938, repr.1990), p. 29.
- ³¹ *The Book of the Dean of Lismore* pp158-9 and (Gaelic) p. 121.
- ³² Quoted from Ron Ferguson, *George MacLeod* (1990), in Bradley 1999 p. 181.
- ³³ *Life of St Columba* I:37.
- ³⁴ John Skinner, Letter 37, in *Theological Works of the Late Rev. John Skinner* (Aberdeen: Chalmers, 1809), vol.1 pp. 438-9.
- ³⁵ *Daily Prayer* p. 2.
- ³⁶ Quoted in G.R.D. McLean's *Poems of the Western Highlanders from the Gaelic* (London: SPCK, 1961), p. 309.
- ³⁷ See Douglas M. Murray, 'The Sabbath Question in Victorian Scotland in Context', in *The Use and Abuse of Time in Christian History*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Studies in Church History 37); Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002, pp. 319-30.
- ³⁸ See *The Shape of our Church* p. 22.
- ³⁹ Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (in *The works of...Mr Richard Hooker*, (3 vols., ed. J.Keble, Oxford UP, 1841), VIII:1:7, vol.2 pp. 493-4.
- ⁴⁰ *Of the Laws...* V:23:1, vol.1 p. 512.
- ⁴¹ *Of the Laws...* V:23:2, vol.1 p. 512.
- ⁴² Broun 1999 p. 6.
- ⁴³ *The Shape of our Church* p. 25.
- ⁴⁴ John Skinner, Letter 36, p. 418.
- ⁴⁵ John Skinner, Letter 36, pp. 415-6.

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- ⁴⁶ John Skinner, Letter 37, p. 427.
- ⁴⁷ See Bradley 1999 pp. 87-8.
- ⁴⁸ Claud M. Broun, 'The Story of the Scottish Prayer Book' (Scottish Prayer Book Society, 1999), pp7-8.
- ⁴⁹ *The Scottish Book of Common Prayer* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p456.
- ⁵⁰ See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), p264.
- ⁵¹ Alexander Jolly, *The Christian Sacrifice in the Eucharist*, Aberdeen 1831, quoted in *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, ed. Rowell, Stevenson and Williams (Oxford University Press, 2001), p344.
- ⁵² John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (1985; UK ed. Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), p60.
- ⁵³ See *Ibid.* p. 61.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 254-5.
- ⁵⁵ Quoted in Charles Elliott, *Praying the Kingdom* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p. 140.
- ⁵⁶ Michael Ramsey, *Be Still and Know: A Study in the Life of Prayer*, p. 110.
- ⁵⁷ Keith Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1984).
- ⁵⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964) 86.
- ⁵⁹ J. Neville Ward, *The Use of Praying*. (Epworth, 1967) 15.
- ⁶⁰ *Collect for Purity*, Scottish Prayer Book 1929, Scottish Liturgy 1982, and many other Anglican liturgies, orig. from the Mediaeval 'Sarum Rite'.
- ⁶¹ Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Crossroad, 1998, orig. pub. 1918) 51
- ⁶² Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (SCM, 1967) 85
- ⁶³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975) 57
- ⁶⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. (Geneva, WCC, 1982) 13ff
- ⁶⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988) 25
- ⁶⁶ J. Neville Ward, *The Use of Praying*. (Epworth, 1967) 14, 13
- ⁶⁷ Trevor A. Hart, "Introduction: Art, Performance and the Practice of Christian Faith," in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Stephen R. Guthrie (Ashgate, 2007), 1-9 (4).
- ⁶⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship*. (Eagle, 1991. Originally published 1936)
- ⁶⁹ Mary Collins, *Contemplative Participation*. (Liturgical Press, 1990)
- ⁷⁰ James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today* (Liturgical Press, 2003) 114
- ⁷¹ Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. 94
- ⁷² Robin Green, *Only Connect: Worship and Liturgy from the Perspective of Pastoral Care* (Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1987); see also Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*. (Fortress Press, 1987) and William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*. (Abingdon Press, 1979).
- ⁷³ Sermon quoted in Angela Ashwin, *Spirituality and Corporate Worship*. *Worship*, (75.2, 2001) 124

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- ⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*. 18
- ⁷⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Prayer, Liturgy, and Renewal*. (Greek Orthodox Theological Review, 1967) 16
- ⁷⁷ *God Matters*, London and New York: Mowbray, 1987, p. 217.
- ⁷⁸ Freidrich Heiler, *Prayer*, London: 1958, p. 253.
- ⁷⁹ *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell, 2000), p. 12.
- ⁸⁰ See Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).
- ⁸¹ Cf. Nicholas Adams' account of scriptural reasoning, in *Habermas the Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 242.
- ⁸² Augustine, *Confessions* X, 37.
- ⁸³ Cf McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 172-3.
- ⁸⁴ Kelly S Johnson, 'Praying: Poverty' in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. By Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Blackwell, 2004), pp. 225-36.
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- ⁹⁶ Samyutta Nikāya V 19 (9).
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- ¹¹¹ *Into the Silent Land, The Practice of Contemplation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006.
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- ¹¹⁵ ST, II-I.2.1.
- ¹¹⁶ ST, I.12.
- ¹¹⁷ ST, I.1.1: ‘Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.’
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- ¹²¹ Aquinas, DV, 13; ST, II-II.175.
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- ¹²⁵ Gregory the Great, *The Life of St. Benedict*, 2.35.