

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE

# ALIVE IN GOD

A CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION



BLOOMSBURY

# ALIVE IN GOD

A Christian Imagination

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE OP

BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM  
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM and the Diana logo are  
trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2019

Copyright © Timothy Radcliffe

Timothy Radcliffe has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and  
Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

For legal purposes the acknowledgements on pp. 409–10 constitute an extension  
of this copyright page. Every reasonable effort has been made to trace copyright  
holders of material reproduced in this book, but if any have been inadvertently  
overlooked the Publisher would be glad to hear from them

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior  
permission in writing from the publishers

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for,  
any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given  
in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher  
regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have  
ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication data has been applied for

ISBN: TPB: 978-1-4729-7020-6; ePDF: 978-1-4729-7023-7;  
ePub: 978-1-4729-7022-0

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
and sign up for our newsletters

'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.'

Deuteronomy 30.19

'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

John 10.10

'Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather fear that it shall never have a beginning.'

John Henry Newman

'As I try and understand how life works – and why some people cope better than others with adversity – I come back to something to do with saying yes to life, which is love of life, however inadequate, and love for the self, however found. Not in the me-first way that is the opposite of life and love, but with a salmon-like determination to swim upstream, however choppy upstream is, because this is your stream.'

Jeanette Winterson

# CONTENTS

## IMAGINATION

- |   |                                    |    |
|---|------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Wingless and Three-Legged Chickens | 3  |
| 2 | Choose Life                        | 17 |

## JOURNEYING

- |   |                               |     |
|---|-------------------------------|-----|
| 3 | The Transcendent Adventure    | 35  |
| 4 | A God for Our Aches and Pains | 60  |
| 5 | Initial Skirmishes            | 78  |
| 6 | Growing Up                    | 93  |
| 7 | Sin and Forgiveness           | 119 |

## TEACHING

- |    |                                    |     |
|----|------------------------------------|-----|
| 8  | Teaching: The Dogmatic Imagination | 141 |
| 9  | Impossible Friendships             | 159 |
| 10 | The Non-Violent Imagination        | 180 |
| 11 | At Home                            | 202 |
| 12 | The Ecology of Faith               | 222 |
| 13 | Affliction                         | 241 |

## THE RISEN LIFE

- |    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
|    | Introduction   | 259 |
| 14 | The Spiritual Life: Fresh Air                          | 262 |
| 15 | The Bodily Life: Hallowing the Senses                  | 280 |
| 16 | The Sacramental versus the Technocratic<br>Imagination | 301 |

CONTENTS

17	The Liturgical Imagination: God's Providence	328
18	The Life of Prayer: The Poetry of Hope	354
	Conclusion	378
	<i>Notes</i>	383
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	409
	<i>Bibliography</i>	411

*Imagination*

## Wingless and Three-Legged Chickens

Sitting at dinner with two old friends, committed Christians, we talk about their two children. One is an enthusiastic Catholic, and the second seems to have no interest in religion at all. It is nothing to do with their intelligence or goodness. Both are bright young people who care about justice and want to do their bit for our small planet. It is just that one is untouched by religion, while for the other it lights up the world. I have had conversations with hundreds of parents who blame themselves for not handing on their faith to their children, but for millions of young people the language of faith simply means nothing to them. It is as outmoded as the typewriter. It belongs to another world and speaks another language.

In June 2016 Stephen Bullivant published a report on the state of Christianity in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> The percentage of the population who identified themselves as having no religion, 48.5 per cent in the 2014 census, was almost double that of three years previously, 25 per cent. More people identify themselves as having no religion than as Christian. Britain is rapidly becoming a post-Christian country. The Beatle John Lennon sang: 'Imagine there's no heaven; it's easy if you try.' Ever more people in Europe disbelieve without having to try at all.

In this book I want to explore how Christian faith can make sense to our contemporaries. Believers do not inhabit

a weird fantasy bubble, disconnected from the experiences and aspirations of other people. Because it is about choosing life, the fullness of life, its core beliefs intersect with the hopes and dreams of everyone who wants to live, rather than just survive. Anyone, regardless of their belief (or lack of it), who understands the complexity of being alive, of falling in love, of getting in a mess, of trying to pick one's life up and start again, of facing sickness and old age, can help Christians to make sense of our faith too. Clive James, the Australian critic and poet, does not seem to have religious faith, but his poetry in the face of terminal illness helped me when I lay in bed after operations for cancer, wondering what came next. I absorbed a poem a day with the same regularity with which I took my pills.

I would be delighted if this book opened a door into the Christian imagination for secularists and atheists, and I hope that it will be of some help to Christians. We are all children of this secular age, and its assumptions penetrate the language we speak. I certainly spend more time attending to the secular media than I do reading the gospels. If we can see how everything in Christianity is about being alive, I hope that the faith can illuminate all that we do and are. There need be no chasm between the religious world of a Sunday and the secular world of the weekday.

But the rise of secularism is just half of the picture. All over the globe, religion has an ever more clamorous voice in public affairs, often aggressively. Neil MacGregor claims that 'to an extent rarely seen in Europe since the seventeenth century, faith now shapes large parts of the global public debate.'<sup>2</sup> The Middle East is torn apart by interreligious conflicts; the politics of Israel and Pakistan, both founded as secular states, have become ever more confessional; the Bharatiya Janata Party in India, traditionally a country of religious tolerance, is whipping up a narrow form of Hinduism, and some politicians are calling for the expulsion of non-Hindus; the Buddhist military government

of Myanmar has driven hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims from their country. The Trump administration has sought to ban Muslims from entering the US. Religion is centre-stage in Nigeria, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, China and so on.

Secularism and fundamentalist religion are the squabbling siblings of our age. They fight for dominance of the world. They may appear to be utterly different, each the negation of the other, but they are born of the same womb. Fundamentalist religion always and secularism often have in common a reductionist understanding of reality. We live in an age of fundamentalisms: economic, nationalistic, scientific and religious. The harsh forms of religion we see surfacing all over the world are not the return of the Middle Ages. They are the children of modernity, which is sometimes afflicted by an atrophied literalistic imagination.

John Henry Newman wrote that ‘imagination, not reason, is the great enemy of faith.’<sup>3</sup> He did not mean that Christians should be ploddingly unimaginative. He was blessed with a fertile imagination. Rather, the way that his contemporaries imagined the world did not allow much place for the transcendent.

I do not want to waste time over cumbersome definitions, but I must briefly distinguish three senses in which ‘imagination’ and related words are used. In this book I shall normally use it to mean just the way that someone sees the world. It is the prism through which we view reality. William Lynch SJ wrote that ‘the task of the imagination is to imagine the real.’<sup>4</sup> A baby boomer like me will inhabit a rather different imaginative world from a millennial inhabitant of the digital continent. The world of a twenty-first-century Londoner is different from that of a Mongolian yak farmer. We shall see how the ‘sacramental imagination’ and the ‘technological imagination’ see the world differently.

Sometimes I will use it in the sense of a vivid, exciting vision of the world, one that is imaginative. In this sense, Jesus had

a vivid imagination. His parables catch our imagination. His words make 'our heart burn within us' (Lk. 24.32). Finally, 'imagination' is sometimes used to mean how we imagine things that do not exist, which are 'imaginary'. C. S. Lewis in the Narnia tales and J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* conjure up imaginary worlds: the world that is discovered through the door at the back of a cupboard, and Middle Earth. But these fruits of the imagination can embody profound truths. Tolkien thought of his stories as explorations of his Christian faith. Rather than tediously indicating in which precise sense I am using the word each time, I trust that the context will make it obvious.

#### WINGLESS CHICKENS

Father Adolfo Nicolás, the former Superior General of the Jesuits, believes that the most profound threat to our civilization is 'the globalisation of superficiality', which is a consequence of the triviality of much communication on the social media.

All great civilisations have wrestled with fundamental questions: what does it mean to be human? Wherein lies our happiness? Does our universe have an ultimate destiny or will it drift into meaningless extinction? Ceaseless communication, endless texting not to mention sexting, tend to suppress the exploration of such questions in depth.<sup>5</sup>

This reductionist perception of the world deadens our sense of the transcendent. It shrivels the shared imagination of our culture.

Global politics increasingly are manipulated by simplistic tweets and slogans: 'Make America great again', 'Brexit means Brexit'. President Trump became fascinated by Twitter when he explained in a tweet why he used a knife and fork to eat pizza and was astonished at the response of hundreds of thousands of followers. In such a simple-minded world, virulent forms of religion thrive.

Roger Scruton evokes Mary Midgley's concept of 'nothing buttery':

There is a widespread habit of declaring emergent realities to be 'nothing but' the things in which we perceive them. The human person is 'nothing but' the human animal; law is 'nothing but' relations of social power; sexual love is 'nothing but' the urge to procreation; altruism is 'nothing but' the dominant genetic strategy described by Maynard Smith; the *Mona Lisa* is 'nothing but' a spread of pigments on a canvas, the Ninth Symphony is 'nothing but' a sequence of pitched sounds of varying timbre.<sup>6</sup>

Such reductionism quenches any sense of transcendence.

Flannery O'Connor argued that a 'moronic' review in *The New Yorker* of her story 'A Good Man Is Hard To Find' demonstrated how 'the moral sense has been bred out of certain sections of the population, like the wings have been bred off certain chickens to produce more white meat on them. This is a generation of wingless chickens, which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said God was dead.'<sup>7</sup> She believed that our contemporary culture deadened our imagination, so that a sense of the transcendent was lost. How can we give back wings to the earthbound chickens of our time?

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* describes a mother who has been abducted and imprisoned in a garden shed, eleven feet by eleven, where she has a child, Jack. Jack has never known anything but the shed. All that he can see of the outside world is through a small skylight and on the television screen. He grows up thinking that everything he sees on the television, everything outside the shed, is unreal, made up. All that exists is 'Room'. But one day his mother explains to him that outside the shed there is a vast colour-filled world, which she misses. Jack says: "You actually lived in TV one time?" "I told you, it's not TV. It's the real world, you would not believe how big it

is." Her arms shoot out, she's pointing at all the walls. "Room's only a tiny stinking piece of it."<sup>8</sup> One day he escapes and slowly discovers the beauty and immensity of the world outside 'Room'. This story is, of course, evocative of one of the great myths of Western civilization, Plato's allegory of escape into the real world from the cave with its shadows.<sup>9</sup>

The imagination is the door through which we escape the confines of any reductionist way of seeing reality. William Blake wrote: 'May God us keep/ From Single vision & Newton's sleep.'<sup>10</sup> Any artist or creative person, anyone with a sense of the ultimate questions that face human beings, can be our fellow escape artists, our allies in the breakout.

In his poem 'Skylight' the Irish poet Seamus Heaney describes how his wife wanted to make a skylight in the roof of their cottage. He resisted. He loved 'its claustrophobic, nest-up-the-roof effect':

But when the slates came off, extravagant  
 Sky entered and held surprise wide open.  
 For days I felt like an inhabitant  
 Of that house where the man sick of the palsy  
 Was lowered through the roof, had his sins forgiven,  
 Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.<sup>11</sup>

For Heaney, poetry summons us to richer, more humane ways of existing: 'Unroofed scope. Knowledge-freshening wind' and 'ozone freshening your outlook/ Beyond the range you thought you'd settled for.'<sup>12</sup> It blows open holes in the narrow confines of any narrow perception of the world. Often poets see their task in terms of opening doors and windows, letting in fresh air and welcoming strangers. Here is Czesław Miłosz:

The purpose of poetry is to remind us  
 How difficult it is to remain just one person,

For our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
And invisible guests come in and out at will.<sup>13</sup>

Science can be our ally in this endeavour. Albert Einstein was a supremely imaginative thinker: 'Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.'<sup>14</sup> Robert Gilbert, professor of biophysics at Oxford and an Anglican priest, describes science as 'spirituality in overalls',<sup>15</sup> in complementarity to Jennifer Yane's claim that art is 'spirituality in drag'!

When Charles Darwin visited the Brazilian rain forest as a young man, still a religious believer, he was touched by the sublime: 'Twiners entwining twiners, – tresses like hair, – beautiful lepidoptera, silence – hosanna ... Sublime devotion the prevalent feeling.' But with his growing atheism came the weakening of his sense of radiant beauty. Nick Spencer noted that 'Darwin's sensitivity to the sublime withered as he grew older. He lamented in his autobiography that after the age of 30 he could no longer enjoy poetry, pictures or music.'<sup>16</sup> He relaxed by lying on his bed while his wife read to him from light romantic fiction, the Victorian equivalent of Mills & Boon.

So it is not science that undermines the religious imagination. Paul Kalanithi was a brilliant young neurosurgeon at Stanford University, but he had also studied English literature and philosophy, so he was trained both as a scientist and in the humanities. At the age of thirty-six he discovered that he had cancer, and this was eventually to prove terminal. As he wrestled to understand what he was living, and faced his approaching death, he found that science was not enough: 'Science may provide the most useful way to organize empirical, reproducible data, but its power to do so is predicated on its inability to grasp the most central aspects of human life: hope, fear, love, hate, beauty, envy, honour, weakness, striving, suffering, virtue.'<sup>17</sup>

He returned to the practice of his childhood faith while in no way renouncing his confidence in science within its own proper domain.

Many scientists are devout believers. Copernicus was a practising Catholic, a canon and a member of a Dominican lay fraternity, and it was a Belgian Catholic priest, Georges Lemaître, who first proposed the Big Bang theory. What stifles 'eternity in the human heart' (Eccl. 3.11) is the delusion that all truth is scientifically verifiable, plodding literalism.

In Zoë Heller's novel *The Believers*, Rosa struggles to recover her ancestral Jewish faith:

Was it not possible that her objection to the mikvah sprang from a failure of imagination? An inability to appreciate metaphor? She was always accusing the Orthodox of being literal minded about Torah; maybe it was *she* who was guilty of literal mindedness ... Perhaps believing was like poetry in this regard. It required a delicacy or subtlety of mind that she had yet to attain.<sup>18</sup>

I would argue that belief is not only like poetry; it is always poetic, even though all poetry is not theistic.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus remembered that their hearts burned within them as the stranger they met on the road interpreted the scriptures to them (Lk. 24.32). We have a chance of igniting the hearts of our contemporaries if we offer a richer language. A young priest in Kraków called Karol Wojtyła was a poet and a playwright. When Cardinal Wyszyński was looking for a new auxiliary bishop, he did not want Wojtyła, whom he thought to be a dreamer, a man with his head in the clouds. Wyszyński sought someone to fight the Communists with political savvy. The Communists were in favour of Wojtyła for exactly the same reason. But Wojtyła believed in 'the theatre of resistance' or 'the poetry of resistance'. The only way to

oppose the flat ideology of Communism was by enriching the imagination of the Poles, giving them beautiful words.<sup>19</sup> When Poles could again imagine a radiant world, the shabby world of Communism would implode. This happened when he was elected Pope John Paul II and addressed words to the nation that helped to bring down the Iron Curtain.

St Augustine says that teachers should communicate with *hilaritas*, so as to provoke delight in their students.<sup>20</sup> *Hilaritas* is usually translated as ‘cheerfulness’, which suggests that we should liven up our teaching with a few jokes to stop the people going to sleep. I sometimes do that myself. But *hilaritas* here is more like exuberance, ecstatic joy. *Hilaritas* carries us out of ourselves. This is the exhilarating joy that is characteristic of Orthodox Judaism and perhaps of all great faiths. A fifteenth-century Sufi imam, Mullah Nasruddin, said: ‘I talk all day, but when I see someone’s eyes blaze, then I write it down.’<sup>21</sup> This is what Ronnie Knox called ‘the glow of assent.’<sup>22</sup> Israel’s encounter with its God is renewed when Moses sees the burning bush in the desert and says to himself: ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up’ (Exod. 3.3). Look at the words: blaze, burn, glow.

So an awakened sense of the transcendent goes with freeing our minds from the trivialization of contemporary culture, its tendency to be reductive and simplistic. This is what O’Connor is evoking with her talk of wingless chickens.

### THREE-LEGGED CHICKENS

Shigeto Oshida, a Japanese Dominican, told us also to beware of ‘the third leg of the chicken.’ This is the abstract concept of a chicken leg that is neither the left leg nor the right, but a mere chicken leg in general: ‘When “the third leg of the chicken” begins to walk by itself it is disastrous!’<sup>23</sup> Language needs to be rooted in the gritty particularity of things, keeping our feet firmly on the ground of lived experience. Preachers talking about love or

freedom in general become remote from the messy business of loving another person, so that their words become vacuous.

When Oshida gave retreats, especially for chubby bishops used to the sedentary life, he enjoyed sending them to plant rice in the paddy fields, impervious to their protests about backache. He wrote: 'A farmer who works hard from dawn to dusk knows that a grain of rice is not his product, a thing made by his own effort, but something given to him by God. He must offer the grain of rice to God who is hidden but who gives everything. He must say "This is yours"'<sup>24</sup>

The wingless chicken fails to take off. It cannot ascend to the transcendent. The third leg of the chicken is too abstract to descend into the complexities of actual experience. These may seem to be contradictory failures, but they are not. For the infinite is revealed through what is particular.

The third leg of the chicken belongs to what William Lynch called 'the univocal mentality': 'This mentality wishes to reduce and flatten everything to the terms of its own sameness, since it cannot abide the intractable differences, zigzags, and surprises of the actual. It is, therefore, impatient, rigid, inflexible, intolerant, and even ruthless.'<sup>25</sup> Nicolas Steeves writes that 'to imagine is to enter into the real with its colours, sounds, a touch, a smell and a taste which emerge more alive and life-giving.'<sup>26</sup>

Robert MacFarlane noticed that a new edition of the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* had dropped these words: 'acorn, adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture and willow. The words introduced to the new edition included attachment, block-graph, blog, broadband, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and paste, MP3 player and voice-mail.'<sup>27</sup>

The point is not that we should become grumpy old fogies complaining about modernity and the destruction of rural life, but that we should attend to the real world in all its

glorious physicality, for it is here that we encounter God and each other. St Thomas Aquinas liked to quote Aristotle, that fingertip philosopher: 'Nothing is in the mind if not first in the senses' ('Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu'). In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot wrote: 'If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart-beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence.'<sup>28</sup>

So a Christian imagination opens us to the transcendent by being attentive to the particular, the individual. We believe in the God who is utterly transcendent, beyond all our literal words, and who yet became one of us, a particular Jewish individual. Our only image of God is of a first-century Jew hanging on a tree.

Christ died  
 On this hill  
 At a time's turn  
 Not on any hill  
 But on this hill.<sup>29</sup>

Our encounter with the divine always passes through the finite. Our unimaginable God became flesh and blood. In this, again, we can be helped by the poet and the scientist, as by the gardener and anyone who keeps their eyes open. Gerard Manley Hopkins delights in the complex texture of creation:

Whatever is counter, original, spare, strange;  
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
 With swift, slow, sweet, sour, adazzle, dim;  
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
 Praise him.<sup>30</sup>

In an episode of the television series *The West Wing*, Josh Lyman, Deputy Chief of Staff, deals impatiently with a delegation from

NASA when they request funding for a manned expedition to Mars. His imagination is shaped by budgets and voting patterns. He dismisses the request impatiently. Their priority should not be getting to Mars but keeping off the front pages of newspapers, constantly criticized for wasting the taxpayers' money. But one of the scientists takes him away from the night glare of Washington. He looks through a telescope for the first time at the planets in their beauty and the astonishing spectacle of an exploding galaxy. His imagination is transfigured.

Donna, his assistant, struggles as usual to understand what is going on. He becomes almost poetic as he tries to share what he has glimpsed:

Voyager, in case it's ever encountered by extra-terrestrials, is carrying photos of life on Earth, greetings in 55 languages and a collection of music from Gregorian chants to Chuck Berry. Including 'Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground' by '20s bluesman Blind Willie Johnson, whose stepmother blinded him when he was seven by throwing lye in his eyes after his father had beat her for being with another man. He died, penniless, of pneumonia after sleeping bundled in wet newspapers in the ruins of his house that burned down. But his music just left the solar system.

The sight of the radiant beauty of the stars liberates his mind from its abstract calculations so that it soars with poetry and music.

It is unsurprising that the great prayers of the Church for the last one and a half millennia have been poems. For hours every day we sing those old Israelite poems, the Psalms. We need poetry to keep vibrant our sense of the transcendent and resist the seduction of a utilitarian culture. It is exultant, vibrant poetry, also sometimes violent and even barbaric. It boils over with praise of the divine and descends to the life of particular,

complex characters such as King David, God's beloved and a murderer and adulterer. We celebrate little Zion, whose gates 'the Lord loves more than all the dwellings of Jacob' (Ps. 87.2). Several times a day some of us interrupt whatever we are doing and go to sing poetry to remind ourselves of where we are finally headed and to refresh our imagination so that we may glimpse intimations of the journey's end.

#### NOTHING HUMAN IS ALIEN TO CHRIST

So one reason for the loss of the faith of our ancestors is a particular culture, what Lynch calls 'the univocal mentality', the simplistic world of tweets and slogans, which dulls our sense of both the transcendent and the particular. The wingless chicken of O'Connor and the third leg of the chicken of Oshida evoke the banality of much contemporary language. If we do not look downwards and immerse ourselves in the delightful complexity of our world (think of the 350,000 species of beetle already identified!), how shall we look upwards and glimpse infinity?

In the renewal of our religious imagination we need the help of creative people whose eyes are open. Simon Tolkien compared such people to gold prospectors who catch the glint of a tiny piece of gold in the mud.<sup>31</sup> A Christian imagination recognizes in the ordinary, hints of ultimate meaning and a promise of final fulfilment. Human beings are not, as Stephen Hawking asserted, 'chemical scum on an average-sized planet, orbiting around a very average-size star, in the outer suburb of one of a million galaxies'.<sup>32</sup> We are summoned to an encounter that will fulfil all our hunger for some plenitude of meaning, which embraces all the small ways in which we make sense of our lives.

The Roman playwright Terence said: 'I am human, and I reckon nothing human alien to me.'<sup>33</sup> For Christians, nothing human is alien to Christ. Every attempt to grapple with the fundamental questions of our lives – how to love, how to be

just, how to be free, how to face suffering and death – helps us to understand Christ, the one who is most human of all.

Jesus said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as the crisis of his death approached: ‘How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!’ (Mt. 23.37). In Christ, God is gathering all things into one. As after the Feeding of the Five Thousand, everything is gathered up, so that nothing is wasted (Jn 6.12), no scrap of human wisdom or insight should be thrown away.

In a letter to his sister, Rainer Maria Rilke described himself as being ‘like a man gathering fungi and healing herbs among the weeds’; as a poet, his role ‘is to be among what is human, to see everything and reject nothing.’<sup>34</sup> And so, in a very small way, in this book I try to gather up the healing herbs, the insights, which I have found in all sorts of odd places. It is a very small example, I hope, of how in our search to understand who we are and where we are headed, we are indebted not just to fellow believers, of our faith or of others, but to anyone whose eyes and ears are open and who dares to wonder, in both senses of the word.

I am deeply aware of how modest are my resources. I have no literary or artistic expertise. I read the books my friends recommend and mostly watch films on aeroplanes. This is one reason why I put off writing this book, besides the pressures of other commitments. When I was recovering from a bout of cancer, and had to cancel all speaking engagements for a few months, I realized that there was no way of getting out of writing this book and settled down to the task. It reflects my own limitations, of age, wisdom, culture, sex and experience. That is why I call it ‘a Christian imagination’ rather than ‘the Christian imagination’. I hope that it will engage the imagination of some other people too.

## Choose Life

How, then, can Christianity engage the imagination of our contemporaries? I shall focus on one question – there are others – which is both the core of our questing faith and also a preoccupation of all human beings: what does it mean to be alive? John Lennon wrote in his lyric ‘Beautiful Boy’, ‘Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans.’<sup>1</sup> He is not far from John Henry Newman’s warning: ‘Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather fear that it shall never have a beginning.’<sup>2</sup> In Rose Tremain’s novel *Music & Silence*, one of the characters decides that ‘the secret of a successful life is not to die before one’s death.’<sup>3</sup>

Pretty well everything in Christian belief engages what it means to be alive. Jesus said: ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10.10). Irenaeus famously wrote: ‘*Gloria Dei, homo vivens*: the glory of God is a human being fully alive.’<sup>4</sup> This is where our faith can have traction with the imagination of our secular contemporaries who seek to live more fully. This is where we have most to learn and most to teach.

My interest in the Dominican Order was awoken by its motto: *Veritas*, ‘Truth’. As a young man I was goaded by the question of whether the teachings of Christianity were true or not. But my decision to try life in the Order was clinched by

my impression that the brethren seemed to be attractively alive. I took the train to Stroud, in the west of England, to visit the noviciate. I was smartly dressed in a suit and tie, some may be surprised to learn, and was met at the station by two scruffily dressed men who took me straight to the pub, the novice master and his assistant. I was drawn by their humanity and freedom. We could talk about anything. No subject was taboo. They showed me that the vocation I was considering was a life and not a job. It could be a life for me.

The next day one of them talked about how the sacraments bless the ordinary dramas of life: birth and death, food and drink, and sex. God's grace works its liberation deep in the mundane struggles of our humanity. Our faith is earthy, an affair of flesh and blood as well as mind and spirit.

The Cistercian monk Thomas Merton gave his last lecture in Bangkok just before he died, electrocuted in the shower. After the lecture he spoke with a religious sister who asked why he had not tried to convert his hearers to Christianity. His last known words were: 'I think today it's more important for us to so let God live in us that others may feel God and come to believe in God because they feel how God lives in us.'<sup>5</sup> One will only become excited by belief in the one who rose from the dead if one has some sense of what it means to be alive in the first place.

This means facing the tough and complex struggles that all human beings experience in trying to be just and loving, often making a mess of our lives, but hungry for life. Our God became flesh and blood in a first-century human being who lived the painful and joyful drama of being human. If our words remain glib and abstract, the third leg of the chicken, we will not speak of the Incarnation. Pope Francis is urging Catholics to get real! In the slums of Buenos Aires he discovered just how tough it is for people to live, to marry and to raise a family when they have no security of employment, no house of their own, no privacy.

I was immensely influenced in my early years in the Order by Cornelius Ernst OP, who was born in Sri Lanka of a Christian father, of Dutch origin, and a Buddhist mother. He was educated at the University of Ceylon, became an atheist and a communist but was expelled from the party when he refused to give a good review to a book he thought wrong. In 1944 he went to Cambridge to study under Wittgenstein. Eventually he became a Catholic and was received into the Dominican Order. What drew him to the faith was a coherent vision of the ultimate meaning of our human life, but this was never a narrowly religious matter.

Shortly before his death, he wrote in his diary:

Ultimately, I cannot accept the framework of experience demanded and presupposed by the orthodox ecclesiastical tradition. I think that I must face this with consequences I can't foretell. I have another tradition to which I am almost equally respectful – in some ways more so – the tradition of the human heart: novels, art, music, tragedy. I cannot allow that God can only be adored in spirit and in truth by the individual introverted upon himself and detached from all that might disturb and solicit his heart. It must be possible to find and adore God in the complexity of human experience.<sup>6</sup>

Sermons with vague platitudes about loving everyone and being nice do not convince anyone.

Jesus' offer of abundant life is only glimpsed in its beauty if we dare to confront 'the complexity of human experience'. Novels, films, music and painting help us to understand better our own existences, 'living and partly living'.<sup>7</sup> Let us take, for example, recent novels by two contemporary English writers, *Sweet Caress: The Many Lives of Amory Clay*,<sup>8</sup> by William Boyd, and *Mothering Sunday: A Romance*,<sup>9</sup> by Graham Swift. Both

explore what it means to be alive. Boyd's novel opens with a quotation from a historical character who appears in the book, Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau: 'However long your stay on this small planet lasts, and whatever happens during it, the most important thing is that – from time to time – you feel life's sweet caress.'<sup>10</sup> The principal character of the novel, Amory Clay, has a complex life, falling in and out of love, raising a family and being a war correspondent. As the novel draws to its conclusion, she faces the slow destruction of her body by a crippling illness. She sits in a chair with pills given by her GP and a bottle of good whisky, thinking about ending it all.

As she looks back on a rich and dramatic life, she realizes that its 'sweet caress' lies in its complexity. 'My threescore years and ten have been rich and intensely sad, fascinating, droll, absurd and terrifying – sometimes – and difficult and painful and happy. Complicated, in other words.' It is the complexity that has fascinated her: 'Yes, my life has been very complicated but, I realise, it's the complications that have engaged me and made me feel alive.'<sup>11</sup>

In Swift's novel *Jane Fairchild*, a maid at a country house, has an affair with the son of a wealthy family. It is the beginning of a new life. She escapes from the limitations of domestic service, discovering literature, especially Joseph Conrad, and becomes a well-known novelist.

Telling stories, telling tales. Always the implication that you were trading in lies. But for her it would always be the task of getting to the quick, the heart, the nub, the pith: the trade of truth-telling ... It was about being true to the very stuff of life, it was about trying to capture, though you never could, the very feel of being alive.<sup>12</sup>

Jeanette Winterson's autobiography, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, is a hilarious account of her search for what

it means to live. She was twice born, of her lost mother and her adoptive mother, who was an odd sort of charismatic Christian who went on about being born again:

But then I understood something. I understood twice born was not just about being alive, but about choosing life. Choosing to be alive and consciously committing to life, in all its exuberant chaos and pain [...] Living with life is very hard. Mostly we do our best to stifle life – to be tame or to be wanton. To be tranquillised or raging. Extremes have the same effect; they insulate us from the intensity of life. And extremes – whether of dullness or fury – successfully prevent feeling.<sup>13</sup>

Our words must engage with the messy stuff of people's lives, what they suffer and enjoy; otherwise they will be vacuous. They will not reflect 'the Word who became flesh and lived among us' (Jn 1.14) and who invites us to share his abundant life. If we are true to the complexities of people's struggles to keep going, take the least bad decisions, to our fumbled expressions of love, maybe people will sit up and notice what we Christians have to say. We will have authority if we are humbly attentive to the quiet and heroic honesty with which so many carry on living as best they can.

#### SUMMONED TO LIVE

But Christians seem to have an odd idea of what it means to be alive. God says to the Israelites in the wilderness: 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life' (Deut. 30.19). Living is a response to an invitation. Do we dare to say Yes? Benedict Green was an Anglican monk who had had Parkinson's since he was young. Finally it became impossible for him to speak comprehensibly. He sent a circular letter to his friends asking us to pray for him but not to come

to see him. He would no longer be able to say anything. He concluded by quoting the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations: 'For all that has been, thank you. For all that shall be, Yes.'

This 'Yes' is of the essence of being alive. All of the Abrahamic religions share this idea of living as an affirmative response to an invitation to life. Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi, wrote: 'The Biblical verb *likro*, which came to mean "to read", primarily means "to call." The Hebrew name for the Bible, *Mikra*, means a summons, a proclamation ... To understand the Bible you sometimes have to *listen* to it rather than read it.'<sup>14</sup> Several times a day Muslims hear the call to prayer as a summons to live.

In the Bible the existence of every being is a sort of joyful Yes to the Creator:

Let the sea and all within it, thunder;  
The world and all its peoples.  
Let the rivers clap their hands  
And the hills ring out their joy.

(Ps. 97<sup>15</sup>)

'As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people". And immediately they left their nets and followed him' (Mk 1.16f.). Jesus is not offering them a job opportunity, as in Andrew Lloyd Webber's delightful lyric: 'Always hoped that I'd be an apostle. Knew that I would make it if I tried.'<sup>16</sup> This is not the boss offering promotion, an upgrade from fish to human beings. Saying Yes is opening oneself to the adventure of living.

So we are confronted with a fundamental question. Can this idea that living is saying 'Yes' make any sense to our secular

contemporaries, or is it only a religious experience, opaque to those who do not believe? According to Pia, the daughter of Ingrid Bergman, her mother loved the role of St Joan of Arc, a poor peasant girl called by celestial voices to heroic opposition to the English. Bergman was not religious, and yet she believed that, at its deepest, her life as an actress was a sort of vocation, even if she could not name the one who called her. The role of Joan of Arc expressed her feeling that to be alive was to be called for some purpose.

Jeanette Winterson again:

As I try and understand how life works – and why some people cope better than others with adversity – I come back to something to do with saying yes to life, which is love of life, however inadequate, and love for the self, however found. Not in the me-first way that is the opposite of life and love, but with a salmon-like determination to swim upstream, however choppy upstream is, because this is your stream.<sup>17</sup>

Life is not just electricity in the brain and the pulse of blood. It is dynamic and purposeful, like the salmon making its way upstream, bypassing weirs, leaping over falls, going against the stream until it arrives at its place of hatching, lays its eggs and dies. Such a vigorous existence may be in the face of death, but that does not suppress our hunger to live fully now.

If death was a man with a gun  
 don't go waving at him  
 let him come  
 and find you too busy living.<sup>18</sup>

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ends with just such an emphatic 'Yes': 'Welcome, O life, I go to encounter

for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.' This is his Yes to his artistic vocation. All true living has this questing thrust. We are human beings, whose being is a becoming. Surviving is sometimes all we can manage, 'living and partly living', but that is not in the end enough.

Artists often do understand that living is a sort of response to an invitation. We are addressed. David B. Gowler, of Emory University, claims that all great art expects a response, even our consent. 'Mikhail Bakhtin insists that art also includes moral obligation. One of his major works, *Art and Answerability*, begins with the words, "I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life".<sup>19</sup> In addition, as W. J. T. Mitchell notes concerning images of all kinds: "The question to ask of pictures from the standpoint of poetics is not just what they mean or what they do but what they *want* – what claim they make upon us, and how we are to respond."<sup>20</sup> An icon is a painting that looks at us invitingly.

The life of the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke was changed by contemplating the headless torso of Apollo. It was so full of energy and vitality that it challenged him. 'Rather than him looking at it, every part seemed to be looking at him, and giving him the clear, invigorating and disconcerting instruction: "*Du must dein Leben ändern*", "You must change your life."<sup>21</sup>

The Dutch spiritual writer Henri Nouwen experienced his summons in the form of a poster of Rembrandt's painting of the return of the prodigal son:

In the fall of 1983, when I first saw the poster showing the central part of the painting, I immediately felt that I was personally called to something. Now that I am better

acquainted with the whole painting and especially with the meaning of the prominent witness on the right [the eldest son], I am more than ever convinced of what an enormous spiritual challenge this painting represents.<sup>22</sup>

Attending to the invitation of a work of art, a painting, a poem or a piece of music, or the Scriptures, requires an inner silence. We must be still and give the piece time to speak. Jennifer Roberts, an art historian at Harvard, asks her students to choose a painting and then sit in front of it for three hours. She wrote: 'In all of my art history courses, graduate and undergraduate, every student is expected to write an intensive research paper based on a single work of art of their own choosing. And the first thing I ask them to do in the research process is to spend a painfully long time looking at that object.'<sup>23</sup> Most people take a few seconds before arriving at a judgement on a painting and moving on. After a glance, it is liked or not, much as people are friended or unfriended on the internet. But if you want to *see* a painting, you must wait for it to show itself. If you want to *hear* it, you must be silent. When you first look at a painting, the temptation is to locate it in your own terms: Renaissance, Impressionist, cubist, abstract or figurative. It is labelled and so silenced. But if you wait, it will show itself on its own terms. It will teach you its own dialect.

One of my favourite contemporary painters is the Korean Dominican Kim En Joong OP, whose canvases are filled with vivid swirling abstract colours. I was delighted when he gave me one of them for my office in Rome, after I dropped a heavy hint. I proudly led my mother to see it when she came on her annual visit. She looked at it sceptically for a second: 'It looks like your habit after an exceptionally messy breakfast.' It spoke in a language she had not yet learned, like me listening to Chinese.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

One might object that the response that one might give to a picture or even a film is entirely different from the obedience that holy scriptures demand of the faithful. God on Mount Sinai commands: 'You shall have no other God but me; do not kill; do not commit adultery' and so on. On the beach, Jesus commands the disciples: 'Follow me.' There is no room for negotiation. One either obeys or refuses.

A similar obedience is assumed to be demanded inside the Church. Popes, bishops and priests habitually proclaim what the faithful are to do. Often it is like that. Fifty years ago, before it became usual, at Blackfriars we gave communion under both kinds, the host and the chalice. When the formidable Archbishop of Birmingham, George Patrick Dwyer, heard this, he wrote to the prior and commanded that this practice stop. As a community we considered what to do, and the prior wrote to the Archbishop asking if we could meet him to discuss the issue. The reply came back promptly. The archbishop thundered: 'Don't you Dominicans understand obedience? I told you to stop.' Another meeting, another letter to the Archbishop requesting discussion. Finally the reply came back, that we could do whatever we wanted. Anything rather than discussion! Isn't that the obedience of the faithful, whether to the Bible or to God?

But the summons to life in the Christian Bible is rarely an imperious command. It emerges in conversation. Adam and Eve talk with God in the garden after the fall; Jeremiah and Isaiah answer back to God, expressing their fears and reluctance; in Luke's account of the call of the disciples, Peter is alarmed by the massive haul of fish and wants nothing to do with this alarming man: 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' (Lk. 5.8). John's gospel is a series of conversations that lead to decisions, from Jesus' exchange with the sceptical Nathaniel to his words with the nervous Peter on the seashore after the Resurrection.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote: ‘The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us.’<sup>24</sup> The life of God is the eternal dialogue of the Father and the Son in the Spirit. Revelation is God’s invitation to us to be at home in that eternal conversation. Revelation is not about receiving commands from a divine radio station in outer space, with exegetes desperately trying to decipher odd noises, like Alan Turing at Bletchley Park.

Revelation is being taken up into the endlessly life-giving conversation that is God. In this conversation I am addressed and I respond. My life flourishes as I get caught up in conversation with God, released from narrow limitations, my prejudices unknitted and my love deepened. We attend to the words with what the Anglican theologian Ben Quash calls ‘a kind of expectant attention,’<sup>25</sup> rather like one of Jennifer Roberts’s students. We abide with the text, open ourselves to it, question it and let it question us. Christians owe obedience to the Word of God, but this is not a mindless submission. Jesus was perfectly obedient to the Father, but he was not a robotic zombie. True obedience is intelligent, questioning, unafraid to doubt and probe in its search for truth. It is a patient conversation with a text that sometimes feels like a friend but which is often a stranger.

St Paul talks of ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1.5). This seems to imply a submission of the mind, as if one has to renounce the dignity of one’s independence. Most famously there is C. S. Lewis’s moment of conversion:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen [College, Oxford], night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come

upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed.

This seems utterly contrary to the intellectual freedom of which the Enlightenment was so proud. But it is not. When I gave a series of lectures to teachers in Catholic schools in the state of Victoria, Australia, in the summer of 2018, I was given a small CD player so that I could once again listen to music. Later that year I lay on my bed to listen to one of Beethoven's late string quartets. I surrendered to the music. It was a form of profound obedience, in which I opened myself to welcome what it offered. I was obedient to the music's invitation to set out on its path and see where it took me.

Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi, said that 'homo sapiens is the meaning-seeking animal'.<sup>26</sup> When we encounter meaning, our obedience to its promise is liberating. We say Yes. It was in this sense that Simone Weil wrote that obedience was the 'necessary food of the soul', and that whoever is 'deprived of it is ill'.<sup>27</sup> This obedience is a profound attention which accepts that the summons may disturb one's life and take one to some new place. 'Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it'.<sup>28</sup>

The obedience of faith is more like listening expectantly to a Beethoven string quartet than to obeying a police officer. It is a response to the authority of its meaning, which resonates in our meaning-seeking humanity. The believer trusts that the text is a summons to life, but a summons that we analyse, and question. The Dominican theologian Herbert McCabe asserts that 'the notion of blind obedience makes no more sense in our tradition than blind learning'.<sup>29</sup>

When Mary heard the message of an angel, she pondered it in her heart. 'She was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be' (Lk. 1.29). She

questioned: How can this be, since I am a virgin? She does not submit passively. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza imagines the scene:

I uttered myself  
 I claimed my voice  
 I was not afraid to question

I held my ground  
 I made my yes  
 Looking straight into the angel's eyes  
 (any slave girl could have been beaten or raped for less)  
 There was no mastery here  
 Nothing was taken from me  
 Everything was given

Here I am:  
 See me  
 Listen<sup>30</sup>

As Jews have sometimes understood better than Christians, conversations with God can get heated. If they touch the core of your life, it would be odd if they did not sometimes. In an episode of *The West Wing*, President Bartlett, a pious Catholic and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, is furious with God because of the futile death of his secretary. He ends up shouting at God, in Latin! 'Get you to a cross!' He defiantly stubs out a cigarette on the floor of the cathedral. It is only if we freely react to the Scriptures, with all honesty, that we shall have a relationship with the divine that is adult. We shall be released from our little views of God, as the President is liberated from the Jansenism of his Irish Catholic upbringing into a faith that is grown up. If we get angry with God we are engaged, and if we are engaged we may set off somewhere.

This conversation of the community with the Biblical text carries on for centuries. As we listen and respond, generation after generation, we are lured further into its depth. The text is sacred, which means it is inexhaustible. We never master it. There is always more to understand, rather as the interpretation of *Hamlet* is never finished, only infinitely more so.

Think of slavery. Paul wrote that in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 4.28). It sounds as though he is denying the reality of slavery, but in his letter to Philemon he seems to tolerate it. He regards the slave Onesimus as his child, and wants him treated as a beloved brother, but he does not challenge the institution of slavery. It was universal, and society was unthinkable without it. It was not until the time of Bartolomé de las Casas, a sixteenth-century Dominican, that slavery as such began to be repudiated. The words of Scripture are understood with a new depth. The Spanish Dominicans persuaded the Pope to denounce slavery in the encyclical *Sublimis Deus* in 1537. Thereafter every Pope denounced slavery, though to little effect.

But there was still a long way to go. In the nineteenth century Charles Dickens woke us up to the new slavery of the factory, with workers chained to their machines. Today we face the enslavement of women in the sex trade. Human trafficking is a massive industry. Slave markets are again open in Libya. So the Word was spoken once and for all in Jesus, but it goes on echoing, questioning us, challenging us and luring us onwards. The conversation with the Word is unending as through the centuries we learn what it means to say Yes to life. Who knows what new forms of slavery we shall be called to renounce in the future?

St Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not 'Yes and

No'; but in him it is always 'Yes'. For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'. For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen' to the glory of God.

(2 Cor. 1.19-20)

Our first conclusion is that the Christian, indeed religious, understanding of life as a Yes is not a crazy affirmation without resonance with ordinary experience. It is an intuition shared by many people who go on asking ultimate questions and trying to make sense of their lives apart from religious belief. They too know that to be human is to be addressed. This does not mean that we hear strange voices in the night telling us what to do.

People who do not believe can help Christians to understand better what the summons to live means and how we obey in the muddled and messy circumstances of ordinary human life. Any exploration of the complexity of trying to be virtuous, the strain of living with other people and the art of keeping alive a fragile love should stop the Christian in his or her tracks and invite them to get real. I love to read novels and watch films because, besides entertaining me, they bring me down to earth, and Christian truth is of the God who became flesh and blood in our world.

In the rest of the book we shall look at how the gospels summon us to flourish. In the first section, 'Journeying', we will accompany the disciples as they make their way to Jerusalem, struggling to understand the one who has called them, growing up and becoming free.

In the second section, 'Teaching', we will look at the Last Discourse of John. Jesus here teaches the disciples how to embrace the abundance of life. Our society often assumes that doctrine is indoctrination. In this section we shall see how teaching sets free the mind and the heart. We will look at Jesus' teaching on friendship and the renunciation of violence.

We then look at the affliction that swallows up Jesus, the very antithesis of life.

In the final section, 'The Risen Life', we will see how even now we share in the life of the Risen Lord, spiritually, physically, through justice, liturgy and prayer. Christian spirituality is profoundly physical. Ours is a bodily being. The life of prayer orders our lives in hope and expectation. Prayer keeps alive our Yes. There are so many other topics that I could have addressed, but if I were to do so, the book would never be finished. Now let's begin with what was the beginning for the disciples, when Jesus summoned them to follow him and embark on the perilous adventure of becoming alive.

*Journeying*

### 3

## The Transcendent Adventure

If our secular contemporaries see that our faith is an invitation to live abundantly, they might become excited. Most art – novels, films, poetry or whatever – explore what it means to live. Christianity makes people's hearts burn within them, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, if people see that Christianity is not a moral code designed to keep us in order but a vibrant way of life. In all of the Abrahamic religions this begins with us being addressed. I argued in the last chapter that this does not mean spooky voices in the night. Great art summons us; our parents, friends and teachers might do so too. The encounter of Christians with our Lord is not a bizarre event remote from the experience of other human beings. There is at least a lingering sense, even in Western culture, that life is not, as Henry Ford said, just one damned thing after another, but a vocation. Life beckons.

After they are addressed by the Lord, what happens next to the disciples is odd. Jesus summons the fishermen to follow him on an adventure that led them, puzzled and dismayed, to Jerusalem. There they would witness his horrible death, and be propelled thence by the Risen Lord to the ends of the known world. They would leave behind all that gave them identity and a living, and become 'fishers of human beings', a task beyond their comprehension. Often they would wonder who

they were and what it was all about. Following Christ would send them on a terrifying and mortal adventure. They nearly all ended up by being murdered. Daniel Berrigan SJ, the peace activist, loved to say: 'If you want to follow Jesus, you better look good on wood.'<sup>1</sup>

Christianity makes the strange claim that to be fully alive means embarking on a perilous journey that may cost you everything. This is hard for our risk-adverse society to comprehend. Our culture is fearful. Games of conkers must be avoided because someone might get hurt. A supermarket refuses to sell teaspoons to a sixteen-year-old lad, lest they be used as weapons. In universities, students demand safe spaces in which they can take refuge from people who might challenge them. This is what Claire Fox calls 'Generation Snowflake',<sup>2</sup> comprised of young people who believe that it is their right to be protected from anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. The Christian understanding of what it means to be alive is thoroughly countercultural. It ought to have a health warning. Following the Lord of life is a hazardous adventure for which there are no insurance policies. As Herbert McCabe OP loved to say, 'If you love, you will get hurt and possibly killed. If you do not love, you are dead already.'

The word 'martyr' comes from a Greek word meaning 'witness'. Martyrs show us starkly that being alive means being prepared to die. From the beginning of the Church the pursuit of death was condemned. People who blow themselves up in the name of religion are not martyrs. True martyrs show us that being alive is more than merely surviving, for it springs from a love that is greater than death.

So in this chapter we will look at the claim of Christianity that being alive is a perilous adventure. We shall argue that this does not demand that we must all be martyred, though to be baptized is to embrace that possibility. But the real drama of the disciples as they follow Jesus can be lived anywhere, without

leaving your nets behind, because it is the drama of being taken up into the infinity of God's love. We can live that drama in a solitary cell or an ordinary family. But first let us look at the idea of life as an adventure. Does that have traction with our contemporary imagination?

#### LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE

At the fount of the Hebrew and Greek imaginations stand those who depart on adventures, Abraham and Odysseus. It would be interesting to discover how far other cultures also cherish adventure. Think of Li Po, the Tang Dynasty poet, who wrote 'The Hard Journey':

Hard is the journey,  
Hard is the journey,  
So many turnings,  
And now where am I? ...

So when a breeze breaks waves,  
bringing fair weather,  
I set a cloud for sails,  
cross the blue oceans!<sup>3</sup>

Walt Whitman exults: 'Strong and content I travel the open road.'<sup>4</sup> Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize, tells of a man and his son in a dystopian future journeying across a ravaged America, on a quest with an ill-defined goal.<sup>5</sup> It is a bleak story in which the two struggle to cling on to any sense of meaning, and yet they are haunted by God's discreet presence. There are echoes of the Eucharist when food is found in a place like a grave. They board a boat with a name that hints at the Holy Spirit, *Pájaro de Esperanza*, the Bird of Hope. They meet an old and confused man, Ely, whose name echoes one of the Old Testament titles of God.

Whatever the author's intentions, and his name hints at an Irish Catholic heritage, for me it brilliantly evokes the image of life as an adventure from which the shadow of God is never absent. The final words are suggestive: 'In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.'<sup>6</sup> If the adventure that is Christianity could be told well, it would meet the thirst for transcendence that is ever so discreetly hinted at in this powerful story.

Paradoxically the most popular books of the twentieth century are adventure stories that are of Christian inspiration. J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* tell of Gandalf's invitation to Bilbo and later Frodo to embark on an adventure:

*Gandalf:* I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone.

*Bilbo:* I should think so – in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them.

But he cannot resist, and nor can many. *The Lord of the Rings* sold 150 million copies worldwide, and was voted Amazon's 'Book of the Century'.

J. R. R. Tolkien never hid the fact that his stories are religious in inspiration: '*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work, unconsciously at first, but consciously in the revision.'<sup>7</sup> Tolkien's Christian faith was a romantic adventure. He wrote to his son Michael, just before his first communion: 'I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament. There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity and the true way of all your loves upon earth.' Or think of C. S. Lewis's Narnia stories. J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter stories were also inspired by faith: 'To

me, the religious parallels have always been obvious,' Rowling said. 'But I never wanted to talk too openly about it because I thought it might show people who just wanted the story where we were going.'<sup>8</sup>

How is it possible that the most popular works of fiction of the twentieth century retell the Christian adventure at just the same time that Christianity was ceasing to capture the imagination of these same readers? How might we tell the tale of Christ and his apostles so that it once again enthral, as the stories of Bilbo and Frodo, of the children who ventured through the wardrobe door and Harry Potter continue to do?

For most of Christian history it was evident that baptism plunged one into the most dramatic of all stories, which embraced all time. Entering a medieval cathedral, you found yourself embraced by the long story of salvation, embodied in stone and glass. You were liberated from the petty dramas of the market-place outside, from divisions of status and wealth. You went through the great doors of the church, over which usually was placed Christ seated at the Last Judgement, the only judgement that ultimately matters, by the merciful Lord. You were surrounded by images of the saints, our true and faithful community, and enfolded by the drama of the expulsion from Paradise, the Flood, Babel and the Exodus, the birth of Christ, his last days, death and resurrection. You saw one another bathed in the light pouring through the stained-glass windows which illuminated your own story, a sharing in the adventure of God's embrace of humanity.

Every church proclaimed: this is the real drama of our lives, not whether one is promoted at work or gains a lot of money. To be human is to be taken up into the life of God. For most of Christian history, to be alive is to accept transfiguration, divinization, or to reject it. No more exciting story can be imagined. No one could dismiss it as boring. Pope Leo the Great in his wonderful fifth-century sermon for Christmas

reminds his hearers: 'Christian, remember your dignity, now that you share in God's own nature.'

The medieval mystery plays acted out this drama on the streets of Europe's cities. Most were long cycles, taking many days, re-enacting the scenes of our salvation from Adam and Eve to the Last Judgement, often produced by the local guilds of craftsmen. The audience were not just spectators but participants. This was the story of their own lives. The mystery plays included their contemporary concerns, even the latest games. One of the shepherds in the Wakefield mystery play gives Jesus a tennis ball, obviously the latest fashion:

Hail! Put forth thy hand.  
I bring thee but a ball:  
Have and play thee withal,  
And go to the tennis.<sup>9</sup>

Today he might have given Jesus a video game, though perhaps that would be too individualistic an entertainment. The shepherds in these plays were spokesmen for their contemporaries and voiced their grievances. In modernized English they grumbled: 'We are so crippled, overtaxed and overstretched that we are broken by the gentry.' They told crude jokes, complained about their wives and failed to understand the Latin of the angels. So these Biblical plays were dramatic renditions of the lives of their hearers. For them the Bible is happening today, just as Jews celebrating the Passover are participants in the events they remember. They remember, gather into community and place its hearers in a story that encompasses all of humanity. Even in a small village one's life was a participation in a drama that spanned all of time and caught one up into divinity. It was a story that was imaginatively compelling. It gripped the Christian imagination for one and a half thousand years.

## THE DOMESTICATION OF RELIGION

In the sixteenth century, especially in the north of Europe, this cosmic drama began to lose its hold. Martin Luther left the Augustinian friars and settled down to domestic bliss with Katharina von Bora, an ex-nun, in a former monastery, the Black Cloister. The sanctification of the domestic was a wonderful fruit of this new moment, and we have much for which to thank Luther, but Charles Taylor argues that it came at a cost. The great overreaching drama of Christian life, embracing the heights of our joys and the depths of our suffering, faded from the common mind.

Faith, especially in northern Europe, ceased to ask for heroism. What need was there for radical gestures, such as martyrdom or even entering a religious life? Taylor asserts that

if God's purpose for us is simply that we flourish, and we flourish by judicious use of industry and instrumental reason, then what possible use could he have for a Saint Francis, who in a great élan of love calls on his followers to dedicate themselves to a life of poverty? At best, this must lower the GNP, by withdrawing these mendicants from the work-force; but worse, it can lower the morale of the productive. Better to accept the limitations of our nature as self-loving creatures, and make the best of it.<sup>10</sup>

Our ultimate destiny becomes a celestial retirement home, with the servants replaced by angels. Taylor again: 'there is a tendency to conceive of life after death in terms of peace, repose, the reunion with loved ones. The horizon of transformation, in particular in relation to our life here, recedes.'<sup>11</sup> Religion is domesticated both here and in the life to come. Recently a journalist taking down a death notice over the phone understood *Requiescat* to mean 'Requires a cat', a fittingly domestic peace. Faith is no longer setting out on a glorious adventure. It becomes moralised. The

godly life is obedience to the rules. It becomes boring. Novels are invented to offer the excitement that faith no longer gives. If faith is no longer a drama, we must compose other dramas ourselves, though they will never match that of Christ.

As our self-understanding became increasingly individualised, so the drama of the gospels became remote, just something that happened a long time ago. People began to wonder how the resurrection of a dead man two thousand years ago affects them. It would be like a homeless person on the streets reading that someone else has won the lottery. Bully for him, but what good is it to me?

Human happiness is enough, it came to be thought. The ultimate drama of being caught up in God's own life, divinization, infinite love, which had set Christian hearts burning since the beginning, came to seem a mad dream, even inhuman. W. H. Auden's lovely poem 'Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love' mentions the harsh ecstasy of the hermit but in the end settles for the less heroic joy. Mortal happiness is sufficient:

Let the winds of dawn that blow  
Softly round your dreaming head  
Such a day of sweetness show  
Eye and knocking heart may bless,  
Find the mortal world enough.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE PERILOUS ADVENTURE

When people are drifting away from our churches, it is tempting to 'sell' a nice and safe Christianity, not too demanding. Perhaps a gentle spirituality will be more attractive. Light a candle and see where you are on the Enneagram. The summons of faith becomes a tentative suggestion. As Ronnie Knox teasingly puts it:

When suave politeness temp'ring bigot Zeal,  
Corrected I believe to One does feel ...<sup>13</sup>

Such a 'marketing' of Christianity is bound to fail: above all, because Christian spirituality is anything but safe. A tame faith betrays what is at its very heart, which is the adventure of transcendence. Christianity is attractive because it invites us to be daring and give away our lives without condition. It is the doorway to infinity.

Tragically, hundreds of young Muslims from the West, often converted to their new faith in prison, set off for the Middle East to fight for the horrendous death cult Da'esh (often known as ISIS). Surely young people who feel that they have no future and are unrecognized are drawn by the lure of a great adventure that asks of them everything, and promises everything, including seventy-two virgins in paradise. The Caliphate may have collapsed with the fall of Raqqa and Mosul, but as long as young people are without hope, such a deadly summons will continue to seduce.

So Christians must dare to challenge our fearful, risk-averse society, with its stifling multiplication of health and safety regulations and its fear of life. In the sixteenth century missionaries from Catholic orders – Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit, Carmelite and many others – travelled in great numbers to Asia to preach the gospel. Half of them never arrived. They died of shipwreck and disease; they were captured by pirates, suffered martyrdom, and yet they dared to continue, without any health or travel insurance.<sup>14</sup> Today such adventures would be condemned as crazy.

Samuel Mazzuchelli was born into a wealthy Milanese family in 1806. At the age of seventeen he astonished his family by joining the Dominican Order, which was almost extinct in France and Italy, having been crushed by Napoleon. When he was only twenty-two, and not yet ordained, he was sent by the Master of the Order on a mission to the farthest boundaries of the new United States. He founded the Church in the upper reaches of the Mississippi Valley, most of the time entirely alone,

with no other friar within hundreds of miles. He spent months away from other settlers, living with the Native Americans, learning their language. He was there before the arrival of the Irish miners, for whom he built schools and churches that still stand. He was known to them as 'Father Matthew Kelly'. He wrote: 'Let us wake up then, open our eyes in apostolic charity, and if we are called, set out for any place where the work is great and difficult, but where also with the help of him who sent us, we shall open the way for the Gospel.'<sup>15</sup> It was mad to send such an untried young brother alone to such a wild place. May we retain a little of his courage and holy madness.

Think of Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil, born in 1917 to aristocratic French parents. He was drawn to the Dominican Order by the joy of the brethren. He was sent to Cairo, founded the Order's centre for Islamic studies and specialized in the study of Sufi mysticism. Then he was sent to Kabul, Afghanistan, teaching Sufism to young Muslims, living in a house with a crowd of abandoned street children whom he adopted. For years he was the only Catholic priest in the country, 'a guest in the house of Islam'. When the Russians came, he was expelled from the country and returned sadly to France. He wrote, 'I belong to Him [God], and He is free to do with me what He wants. "Your God is a jealous God" ... When He puts His hand on one, it is not always funny.'<sup>16</sup> But when I met him in Paris, old and exhausted, the joy was still electric. He loved the words of a fellow Dominican of the fourteenth century, Fra Angelico: 'The darkness of the world is nothing but a shadow. Behind it and nevertheless within our grasp is to be found joy. In this darkness there is an ineffable splendour and joy. If only we can see them.'<sup>17</sup>

But the heart of this adventure is not travelling to distant and dangerous places. It is being taken up into the infinity of divine love, transfiguration. One can set out on that path without leaving one's home. St John of the Cross, for a time locked up

by his Carmelite brethren, is the poet of this dangerous love affair conducted without having to leave his priory.

Upon a gloomy night,  
 With all my cares to loving ardours flushed,  
 O venture of delight!  
 With nobody in sight  
 I went abroad when all my house was hushed.

In safety, in disguise,  
 In darkness up the secret stair I crept,  
 Oh happy enterprise!  
 Concealed from other eyes  
 When all my house in length in silence slept.<sup>18</sup>

St Thérèse of Lisieux, another Carmelite, born in 1873, was tormented by an unfulfilled longing for martyrdom. She was liberated by the realization that she could live that same great adventure by loving, beginning with her community. ‘Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it’s a universe of its own, comprising all time and space – it’s eternal. Beside myself with joy, I cried out: “Jesus, my love. I’ve found my vocation, and my vocation is love.”’<sup>19</sup> That can sound a bit saccharine, but loving her religious sisters turned out to demand a vast amount of courage, a death and resurrection. I suspect that martyrdom in the literal sense might have been easier!

To be fully alive is to love infinitely. Mortal happiness is not enough. Opening oneself to that infinite love which is God is transformative. A friend of mine, an Oxford scientist, married a bright and sparkling young woman. But the day came when she succumbed to Alzheimer’s, and slowly her memory was lost. She could no longer remember even who he was. When they married, he could never have imagined that his love would mean washing and clothing someone who looked at you with blank, unknowing eyes. Every love is risky.

The Knox brothers, so beautifully described by Penelope Fitzgerald, disagreed about religion, but they shared the conviction, like Mazzuchelli, that one must dare to do what is most difficult. It belongs to our human dignity to attempt the tough challenges, even if one fails. They mocked King's College, Cambridge, which, they believed rightly or wrongly, was then so trapped by tradition that 'one should never do anything for the first time'<sup>20</sup>

There is a certain folly in the Christian idea of being alive, an attraction to the impossible, the infinite, the unbounded. We should refuse to be confined by what the world deems possible and thinkable. The Irish poet Pádraig Pearse proclaimed: 'I have squandered the splendid years which the Lord God gave to my youth – in attempting impossible things, deeming them alone worth the toil. Lord, if I had the years I would squander them again over. I fling them from me.'<sup>21</sup> St Richard of Chichester said: 'What I spent I had, what I kept I lost, but what I gave, I have.'<sup>22</sup>

In one's love of others, one's work, one's daily life, intimations of the infinite are found in doing the utmost, the most difficult. Abraham Verghese, a professor at Stanford University Medical School, wrote a novel about the practice of medicine in Ethiopia and the US, *Cutting for Stone*. In it, Marion Stone, a future surgeon, tells how he discovered his vocation:

We come unbidden into this life, and if we are lucky we find a purpose beyond starvation, misery, and early death which, lest we forget it, is the common lot ... I chose the speciality of surgery because of Matron, that steady presence during my boyhood and adolescence. 'What is the hardest thing you can possibly do?' she said when I went to her for advice on the darkest day of the first half of my life. I squirmed. How easily Matron probed the gap between ambition and expediency. 'Why must I do what is hardest?' 'Because, Marion, you are

an instrument of God. Don't leave the instrument sitting in its case, my son. Play! Leave no part of your instrument unexplored. Why settle for "Three Blind Mice" when you can play the "Gloria"?'<sup>23</sup>

W. H. Auden was haunted by the idea that at the Last Judgement God would recite 'the poems you would have written if your life had been good.'<sup>24</sup> But it is not success that counts. One opens oneself to the impossible, dazzling gift of grace, which propels one onwards, and picks one up when, inevitably, one falls on one's face. Peter and Paul, the twin pillars of the Church, are both, in a sense, great failures – one who denied Christ and the other who murdered the first Christians – but they set out. All one can do is to set out, a tentative, nervous first step. The rest is in God's hands.

#### BEYOND SMALL IDENTITIES

Jesus' call propelled those Galilean fishermen beyond their known world but also beyond any understanding of who they were. They are no longer to be fishers of fish but to be fishers of human beings. Who will they be then? At a turning point of the adventure, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus puts to them a hard question: 'Who do you say that I am?' (Mt. 16.15). Simon answers rightly, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Jesus then tells Peter who he is:

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

(Mt. 16. 17–19)

That is quite a lot to take in! The newly named Peter, 'the rock', is only at the beginning of understanding who is Jesus, but he has no idea of who he is himself. This he will discover as he travels with Jesus to Jerusalem and then to the ends of the world. As yet he is a singularly un-rocklike person. His identity lies ahead. His new name embodies a hope for the future, his destiny. As Abram's new name, Abraham, does too. It means 'father of many', given when he had no children and seemed unlikely to have any.

John writes, in perhaps my favourite text in the New Testament: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1 Jn 3.2). We do not yet know who we are. We become more deeply alive as we are slowly liberated from identities that are too constricting. Terry Eagleton claims that 'it is those who cling to their identities like a drowning man to a piece of driftwood who find it difficult or impossible to die.'<sup>25</sup>

In 2010 a French film, *Des hommes et des dieux* ('Of Gods and Men'), directed by Xavier Beauvois, won the Grand Prix at the Cannes film festival. More than a third of a million tickets were sold during the first five days of its release in France. I saw it in Oxford with a friend of mine, an atheist, though I dare to hope that on good days he may be an agnostic. The cinema was filled with Oxford students and academics. At the end there was total silence, as if it was impossible to break the spell of its story. Everyone waited to see who was the best boy and who had done the hair. I have now seen the film at least five times. Why did this story of a few monks leave so many people utterly spellbound?

It is the true story of a small community of monks living just an hour south of Algiers. They were deeply embedded in the lives of the local Muslim villagers, loving them and loved by them. In the 1990s violence begins to engulf the country, the violence of terrorists and of the army. The Algerian monks slowly discover who they must become. The youngest monk

explodes that he did not become a monk to die. The Prior replies, 'But you have already given away your life.' Just before the end, the Prior says to a monk returning after an absence: 'I think that each of us discovered that to which Jesus Christ beckons us. It's to be born. Our identities as people go from one birth to another. And from each birth to birth we'll end up bringing to the world the child of God that we are.'

The paradox is that, the more they conformed to Christ, the more they become themselves, as Peter slowly solidified into the rock that is his promised and future identity. The fear of many is that to be a committed Christian is somehow to turn into a plastic saint, inauthentic, inhuman, with a fixed smile and a pocketful of pious platitudes. On the contrary: it is the long painful gestation of who you alone are called to be. The less you care about who you are, the more you become yourself.

Thomas Merton said to the novices at Gethsemane Abbey:

What you came here for is to become yourself, to discover your complete identity, to be you. But the catch is that of course our full identity as monks and Christians is Christ. It is Christ in each of us ... I've got to become me in such a way that I am the Christ that can only be the Christ in me. There is a Louis Christ [Louis was his baptismal name] that must be brought into existence and hasn't matured yet. It has a long way to go.<sup>26</sup>

The early Jewish sages understood this: 'When a human being makes many coins from one mould, they are all the same, but the supreme King of kings makes every human being in the same image, yet all are different.'<sup>27</sup>

St Paul was one of the grittiest and most sharp-edged individuals of antiquity, over-sensitive and passionate. There was no one like him. Yet he was the one who wrote: 'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2.20).

Conformed to Christ, he is more himself than ever. So it is with these monks who are each Christ, but utterly differently. Each becomes the unique word that spoke them into existence. And so the adventure of Christianity includes becoming oneself by forgetting oneself. We are liberated from the narrow identities that we have built to fend off others and hold them at bay.

Gregory Boyle SJ works with gang members in Los Angeles. He founded a non-profit organization called Homeboy Industries where they learn basic skills to prepare them for life outside the gangs. When he asked them what they most needed, the surprising answer was the removal of tattoos.<sup>28</sup> One man had 'F \_ you' tattooed on his forehead. Not surprisingly, he found it difficult to get a job. They shed tattoos that represented previous identities – often aggressive ones – binding them to their gangs. To embark on the adventure of their lives, they are liberated from their past as the tattoos are lifted from their skin, unveiling their faces. Gerry W. Hughes SJ was startled when a medical student said to him, 'I don't think that you know who you are.' He pondered this while he walked on pilgrimage to Rome, and decided that 'I am happy not to know who I am':

God is mystery. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are made in the image of God and just as we cannot clearly define God, so we cannot clearly define ourselves. St Augustine prayed, '*Noverim te, noverim me*' 'That I may know you and that I may know myself'. Self-knowing is a process of endless exploration. As everything in creation is essentially related, a clear and complete knowledge of ourselves would be possible only if we knew all things.<sup>29</sup>

This is not to have a vague identity, but one that is open, ready to be enlarged.

In a time of rising xenophobia and populism, when identity – national and ethnic – is fought for ever more bitterly, even

violently, Christianity ought to offer the adventure of liberation from all that holds the other at bay, open to a fullness of identity that always lies ahead. Who we are we do not yet fully know. To thrive and flourish we should not care too much. In raising children, parents discover who they are as parents. I live in a community in which young friars are formed. Every year new brethren arrive and I must discover not just who they are but, again and again and again, who I am with them. Hermit crabs outgrowing their shells are defenceless while they seek a more spacious one; so too we are vulnerable as we leave behind self-understandings that have grown too small. A novice master in the Philippines had a notice on his door, 'I am a work in progress.' We live with provisional identities as we journey. I reflect with amused embarrassment on the posturings of my younger self, trying out new identities, until I began not to care too much who I am.

Every profound relationship unfurls some dimension of one's identity that was hitherto unknown. In Madeleine Thien's novel about Chinese immigrants in the US, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, one of the characters says, 'Don't ever try to be only a single thing, an unbroken human being. If so many people love you, can you honestly be one thing?'<sup>30</sup>

There is a legend 'of a good conversation which a good woman had with Meister Eckhart'.

A daughter [of God] came to a Dominican priory and asked for Meister Eckhart. The porter asked, 'Who shall I say wants him?' She said, 'I do not know.' He said, 'Why do you not know?' She said, 'Because I am neither a young maiden nor a wife, neither a man nor a woman, neither a widow nor a virgin, neither a master nor a maid nor a servant.'<sup>31</sup>

After talking with her, Eckhart said: 'I have met the purest person I have ever seen, or so it seems to me.'

## THE COURAGE OF THE TIMID

So the disciples are invited to follow Jesus and take to the road, not knowing where it will take them. They will have to let go of their old identities and be sent to the ends of the earth where they will die. They are invited to share in the freedom of Jesus and enter into the mystery of the infinite love which is God. Not surprisingly, they and we may fear to set out or lose enthusiasm after a while. When Peter receives the call to follow Jesus, his first reaction, in Luke's account, is to refuse: 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' (Lk. 5.8). When Jesus calls the rich young man to sell all that he has and give to the poor, he goes away sorrowfully (Mk 10.17-27).

Many a convert to Christianity or young person joining a religious order starts boldly on the path to holiness. I was convinced that I would never again have an impure thought! Perfection was just around the corner. I would be as pure as my white habit. After a while, I discovered that I was not much different. It would be a long haul, and it is easy to succumb to less heroic dreams. A member of another religious order said to me, 'We only take one vow, the vow of comfort.' Many marriages start out with the dream of infinite love, I suppose, endless delight in the other, perfect generosity, but for how long? To embark on the adventure of transcendence, to receive the gift of Jesus' freedom and love, requires courage and endurance.

We long for Jesus' freedom and fear it. The Israelites were called out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness, but soon they ached for the comfort of servitude: 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at' (Num. 11.4-5). Freedom is frightening. Fyodor Dostoevsky tells the story of the Grand Inquisitor, who asserts that 'nothing has ever been more insufferable for humanity and society than freedom ... In the end they will lay

their freedom at our feet and say to us: "Better that you enslave us, but feed us."<sup>32</sup>

Throughout its history the Church has both proclaimed Jesus' call to freedom and been afraid of it: afraid of the prophets and nonconformists, afraid of those who ask difficult questions and float new ideas. The Church both produced Liberation Theology and was nervous of it. No wonder we have not captured the imagination of our contemporaries.

Might it be the courage of the timid that moves us most? When fearful people do brave things, we are moved because they are like us, like the whisky priest in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. The Church in Mexico was suffering persecution. Most of the clergy had fled or been imprisoned or killed. This unnamed priest lived scandalously. He had a mistress and a child; he was an alcoholic. As a young priest he had been smug and clericalist. Now he is hunted like a beast, aware of his vast failings, but he carries on ministering to his people. He is captured, imprisoned and on the night before he is to be shot, he is afraid:

Only the brandy, which he finished about two in the morning, gave him any sleep at all. He felt sick with fear, his stomach ached, and his mouth was dry with drink. He began to talk aloud to himself because he could not stand the silence any more. He complained miserably, 'It's all very well ... for saints' and later, 'How does he [the Lieutenant] know it [the priest's dying] only lasts a second? How long's a second?' Then he began to cry, beating his head gently against the wall.<sup>33</sup>

The next morning he is taken out for execution:

He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed

to him, at that moment, that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted – to be a saint.<sup>34</sup>

This frightened man unknowingly points to God in a way that a naturally courageous person could not, hence the title of the book, taken from the end of the Lord's prayer in some ancient manuscripts: 'For *thine* is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory'.

Such fragile witnesses are more challenging than unambiguous heroes, and so saints are sometimes airbrushed of their faults and struggles and made into plaster icons rather than weak human beings, timidly but bravely responding to the Lord. This is what happens without delay to our whisky priest. A young lad is being told by his mother about the martyrs:

'And that one,' the boy said, 'they shot today. Was he a hero too?'

'Yes.'

'The one who stayed with us that time?'

'Yes. He was one of the martyrs of the Church.'

'He had a funny smell,' [whisky!] one of the little girls said.

'You must never say that again,' the mother said. 'He may be one of the saints.'<sup>35</sup>

Hagiography can suck the life out of a saint. When people praised Dorothy Day (the peace activist and founder of the Catholic Workers' movement) and her co-workers, famously she said: 'Don't call us saints. We don't want to be dismissed that easily!'<sup>36</sup>

True courage is not being unafraid. It is not being the prisoner of one's fears. As John Wayne, the star of a hundred

Westerns, said in his homely way: 'Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.' One of my brethren, a Canadian called Yvon Pomerleau, was based in Rwanda, working on development projects. He was out of the country visiting a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when Rwanda descended into chaos and violence. He knew the army was looking for him and yet he returned to Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. One evening soldiers burst into the priory searching for him. The brethren, who were both Hutu and Tutsi (the warring ethnic groups that make up most of the population of Rwanda), were made to lie on the floor and, with a gun placed at their foreheads, were asked if they knew where this Canadian brother was. None betrayed him. He lay on the floor, nervous that he would be betrayed, not by one of the brethren but because he was shaking with fear. That is the courage that points to God.

In the film *Of Gods and Men*, the monks must decide whether to stay or leave. One of the monks says to their Muslim neighbours: 'We are like birds on a branch, birds who don't know if they will fly away or stay on the branch.' The villagers reply: 'We are the birds; you are the branch. If you leave, we lose our footing.' The monks decide to stay, knowing that it will probably cost them their lives.

Here, as so often, the more challenging adventure is to stay put rather than to flee. When so many have fled Iraq, often for good reasons, I admire my Iraqi brothers and sisters who stay. This is a sign of their trust in the Lord who promises 'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Mt. 28.20). The bravest act may be to stay in a relationship that is faltering, to stay faithful to a friend who has been disgraced or to stay in a job that does not earn much but which serves the community. We may even need the courage to stay in the Church when, with its failures and betrayals, it has become a source of shame and scandal. Staying put may be the bravest thing. The Desert Father Abba

Moses famously said: 'Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.'<sup>37</sup>

When, Christian, the prior of the community portrayed in *Of Gods and Men*, calls a community meeting, he is convinced that the community must stay, but the others are afraid. One of the monks protests that they did not elect him to decide things by himself. Another protests: 'What happens if they come to the monastery? Will we let ourselves be killed quietly?' The Prior replies: 'That's a risk, yes. But we have been called to live here, in this country with these people who are themselves afraid too. We are going to live with this unknown fate, yes.' Christophe, the youngest monk protests: 'But I did not come here to participate in a collective suicide.' We can identify with these monks because they profess a faith that they are afraid to live. They have assented to follow their Lord, who calls them to face death, but when the crunch comes, they hold back, as we might. I was more touched by the gradual assent of the timid monks than by the unhesitating courage of the Prior. I was not like him, but I might be like them. It is a heroic adventure for ordinary people who stagger to their feet and limp onwards or, if it's necessary, stay put. They were beatified on 8 December 2018 in Oran, Algeria.

#### EVOLUTION

A final word: Christianity lost its hold on the popular imagination when it ceased to be the cosmic drama of God and humanity, stretching from Creation to the Kingdom. The faith of many contracted to the story of the individual and the hope for no more than a mortal happiness. We lost the plot. The cosmic story came to be told in scientific terms, from the Big Bang to a dead and cold end. If Christianity tries to engage the imagination of our society with a cosmic story of God's love affair with humanity, how will that interact with the other, scientific, story that nearly all Christians accept?

Paradoxically our contemporary culture has both a reduced sense of time – the ‘Now Generation’ – and a narrative that stretches forward and backwards billions of years. Might not science help the Christian imagination to open itself once again, to the *longue durée*?

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

(Ps. 8. 3–4)

We live for the ‘now’, with an attention span hardly longer than a goldfish, but inhabit a vast story which goes back 13 billion years. The red blood in our veins contains iron born in the stars. The Oxford theologian and scientist Arthur Peacocke wrote that ‘every atom of iron in our blood would not be there had it not been produced in some galactic explosion billions of years ago and eventually condensed to form the iron in the crust of the earth from which we have emerged.’<sup>38</sup> The very substance of our bodies is unimaginably old.

Might not Christianity in turn enlarge the scientific imagination by claiming that the dynamic emergence of complex life and consciousness that evolutionary theory plots does not end in a burned-out universe but finds a fulfilment beyond the grasp of science? If we are, as the character in Boyd’s novel thought, nothing more than ‘a certain type of ape on a small planet circling an insignificant star in a solar system that’s part of an unimaginably vast expanding universe’, does anything have any meaning at all? Is life, as Macbeth asserts, but a tale, ‘told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing’?<sup>39</sup>

Evolution helps us to understand better the dynamism of being alive in a story that spans billions of years. Therefore, the Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson argues in her book

*Ask the Beasts*, Christians ought not to be afraid of theories of evolution. Darwin helps us to understand the energy inherent in the evolution of our planet, with its astonishing capacity for new forms of life. We Christians can embrace evolution and place it in a more spacious narrative that does not compete with it, or subvert it, but gives it a more profound meaning than it can articulate by itself. All this vibrant creativity is headed somewhere, a fruition beyond all our words. Like the disciples setting off after Jesus, the whole of creation is on the way to more than we can say.

Every time we recite the Creed, we profess our faith in the Holy Spirit, 'the Lord and Giver of life.' Johnson writes: 'The Latin word translated as Giver of Life, *vivificantem*, shines a spotlight on the dynamism that is intended. The Spirit is the vivifier, the one who quickens, animates, stirs, enlivens, gives life even now while engendering the life of the world to come.'<sup>40</sup> And 'God's creative activity brings into being a universe endowed with the innate capacity to evolve by the operation of its own natural powers, making it a free partner in its own creation.'<sup>41</sup> The history of the cosmos is not just one chance mutation after another, but the adventure of emerging life, transcending limitations and attaining a richer flourishing. 'True becoming entails that nature surpass itself, attain a greater fullness of being, reach an inner increase of being proper to itself ... and does this not by adding something on but from within. God made the world this way, conferring on creatures an extraordinary capacity for becoming more.'<sup>42</sup>

So the Christian story deepens our understanding of creation's potent capacity for novelty and the transcendence of limitation. St Paul hints at this in his Letter to the Romans: 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8. 22-4).

Science helps us to understand the 'how', the astonishing capacity of nature to be new, to evolve the eye and the ear, the entangled interdependence of everything, and Christianity gives a glimpse of the 'why', the point of everything. This is entirely compatible with Aquinas's understanding of how God's providential grace works within our nature: 'Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.'<sup>43</sup> Grace is at work, not with an external mechanistic causality, but in the unfolding from within of unexpected life, always more. 'Behold I make all things new' (Isa. 43.19). My adventure is a small participation in the adventure of creation.

In conclusion, the disciples on the Galilean beach receive the summons to a great and perilous adventure. It is an invitation to take part in the love affair of God and humanity. Ultimately, I believe that in every human heart lurks the desire for a love that is infinite, even divine. If we are bold, faithful to this radical call and resist the temptation to 'market' a timid and safe Christianity, we may touch the imagination of our secular contemporaries who, like us, thirst for life.

This bold adventure of faith sometimes asks us to embark on new ventures and sometimes, like those monks in Algeria, the courage to stay put. Wisdom lies in knowing which. It carries us beyond what is familiar, beyond any small inherited or constructed identity. Who we are has yet to be revealed. As we accompany the disciples as they walk with Jesus, we shall learn more about what it means to be alive: imaginatively, emotionally, mentally and spiritually alive. I will not attempt to explore every way in which faith summons us to live fully, since such a book could never be completed. The first thing that his disciples discovered about Jesus is that he was something quite ordinary in that society, a healer.

## 4

### A God for Our Aches and Pains

So the disciples set out with Jesus, but initially they are not caught up in a great drama. The early days of their calling are relatively ordinary. They accompany him as he heals the sick and expels demons. Healers and exorcists were familiar figures in first-century Palestine. The one whom Christians will come to acknowledge as 'True God from true God' does not raise an army or proclaim political reform. Instead he wanders around responding to people's ailments. He begins to preach (Mk 1.38), but people want healing, and so that is what he does. He cures Simon's mother-in-law so that she could serve their meal.

His first words on meeting the sick often are 'What do you want?' He asks the leper, 'Do you want to be healed?' (Jn 5.6), and when blind Bartimaeus fights his way through the crowd to grab Jesus' attention, Jesus asks him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mk 10.50). He does not cure people so as to make disciples. Usually, after the cure, he tells them to go home. He cures them because they ask for healing so that they may get on with their ordinary lives. Healing is not part of a recruitment drive for his new community.

Isn't this a bit of a let-down? In the last chapter I claimed that Christian discipleship was embarking on the adventure of transcendence, the journey into the infinite love which is God. So why does it all begin almost prosaically, a man curing people

of sickness and disease? But for the Christian imagination, the infinite always draws near to us in the finite. God became flesh in a particular person, a Jew from an unimportant backwater. It is fitting that the one who offers the fullness of life first appears on the scene modestly offering what most bothers people, the aches and pains that inhabit ordinary life.

William Lynch uses the image of the fish to illustrate why the Christian imagination is grounded in the finite: 'It must breathe its air (the infinite) through the water (the finite); if it should pursue its goal more directly, the process of abandoning the water to get to the air would end in agony and death.'<sup>1</sup> So God first tiptoes onto the scene, answering ordinary needs. Our imagination is raised to the heavens by being brought down to earth.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
 And Eternity in an hour.<sup>2</sup>

The American art historian Thomas Mathew argues that one of the reasons why Christianity converted the Roman Empire was because Christian art gave us a startling glimpse of a God who really had become near to us in our sufferings:

Those images in the catacombs, those dazzling mosaics shocked because God was brought close. He showed himself a god of the 'little man,' a 'genuine grassroots' god ... a caring god, concerned if you were losing your sight or bent with arthritis, or suffering menstrual problems ... Suddenly God was *seen* walking among his people, touching, stroking, comforting, pressing his warm and life-giving hands on them ... This was a radically new power, and the competition had nothing to match it.<sup>3</sup>

Preaching on the text 'Even the hairs of your head are all counted' (Mt. 10.30), one of my brethren described delousing the lice-ridden scalps of street kids in Glasgow, hair by hair. God counting the hairs on our heads, an ever easier task in my case, is an image not of useless divine omniscience but of the infinite tenderness and patience of his care. Nothing is too small for his attention.

When we say the petitionary prayers during the Eucharist, we may feel as if we are beseeching the help of a remote deity who is surely concerned with much more important things, natural disasters and violent wars. Why bother God with our tiny concerns? But in the gospels he is the one who longs to hear what's on our minds: 'What can I do for you?' In her song 'What if God Was One of Us', Joan Osborne longs for God to be ordinary:

What if God was one of us?  
 Just a slob like one of us  
 Just a stranger on the bus  
 Trying to make his way home.

But there has always been an ambiguity about having a God who is ordinary. Shouldn't gods be remote figures, grand and distant? In the seventeenth century people were shocked by Caravaggio's *Madonna di Loreto*, because the peasants who worship Jesus in the arms of his mother have dirty feet and old torn clothes.<sup>4</sup> When Max Ernst exhibited his painting of Mary spanking the baby Jesus, public indignation was so explosive that the painting was hidden away for years. This was not because people considered spanking to be scandalous form of punishment – it was the accepted form of discipline then – but because God was portrayed as an ordinary child, one of us. It is easier to live with a God who keeps his distance and does not breathe down our necks. Intimacy with God is too disturbing. Like Peter, we may be tempted to say, 'Go away

from me' (Lk. 5.8). Get back to heaven and leave me alone. Job complains, 'He will not let me get my breath' (Job 9.18).

Christians have longed to enjoy God's proximity. The Franciscans in the thirteenth century popularized the crib, a devotion that brought God close to those who were poor or homeless. Margaret Kempe had visions in which she made Mary 'a good hot drink of gruel and spiced wine' to comfort her after her son's crucifixion.<sup>5</sup> But sometimes we push God back into heaven. As the disciples soon discover, if one lets God get too close, before long he will be upsetting one's life and involving one in alarming adventures.

#### CHRISTIANITY'S CARE OF THE SICK

Being a disciple first included caring for the sick. How can we preach God's offer of divine life if we do not bother about ordinary human living? The evangelist Luke may well have been a doctor (Col. 4.14), and his gospel is filled with healings. After Pentecost the Church's mission is also launched with a healing, of the man born lame (Acts 3.1-10). Christians in pagan Rome astonished their contemporaries by the courage of the martyrs and their care of sick people who were not Christian.

During the terrible plague of AD 260, when a third of the population died, Dionysius, the Bishop of Alexandria, described in his Easter letter what an impression this made on people:

Most of our fellow Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.

The best of our brothers and sisters lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen and women winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.<sup>6</sup>

He relished contrasting this with how the pagans behaved: 'At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape.'<sup>7</sup>

Hospitals were a Christian invention, erected by St Samson in Constantinople and St Basil, the Bishop of Caesarea. The word comes from the Latin *hospes*, which can mean both a guest and a host. The sick were guests but also, as representatives of Christ, hosts. The Rule of St Benedict says: 'Before all things and above all things care is to be had of the sick, that they may be so served as if they were in very deed Christ, because He Himself said: "I have been sick and ye have visited Me."<sup>8</sup> Throughout the history of the Church this care has ranked 'before all things and above all things'. Choosing life first means caring for those whose bodies and minds need healing. When Florence Nightingale founded modern nursing, she was inspired by the Catholic sisters working with the poor in the new industrial cities. She asked a visiting American physician: 'Do you think it unsuitable and unbecoming for a young Englishwoman to devote herself to works of charity in hospitals and elsewhere as Catholic sisters do? Do you think it would be a dreadful thing?' When she went to the Crimea in 1854, she took thirty-eight nurses whom she had trained, including fifteen Catholic sisters, backed by Cardinal Manning.<sup>9</sup>

Today Christian Churches contribute more to health care than any other organizations, especially in the developing

world. It is estimated that globally the Catholic Church runs 26 per cent of all health care facilities,<sup>10</sup> including 5,500 hospitals. These do not exist to gain converts. As with Jesus, people are cared for just because they are sick. An employee of Catholic Relief Services of America said, 'We are called to help others not because they believe, or because they might someday believe, but because *we* believe.'<sup>11</sup>

Recently I visited the monastery, just south of Algiers in the Atlas mountains, where the monks portrayed in *Of Gods and Men* lived. It has become a place of pilgrimage for both Christians and Muslims. The monk most revered is old Brother Luc, the doctor of the nearby Muslim village. He was the one to whom they all came for healing. Even the terrorists came to ask for treatment and to ask for medication to take away. This last he refused, because he did not want the villagers to be deprived of medicine. But he cared for anyone who came, even the terrorists. The Muslim villagers came to Brother Luc for the healing not only of their bodies but also of the wounds of their minds. In the film a young girl shares with Luc her anxiety about falling in love, and asks whether he has ever been in love. He replies that yes, several times, 'and then I encountered another love, even greater. And I answered that love. It's been a while now – over 60 years.' The villagers still come to the monastery, above all to make pilgrimage to his tomb.

The vocation of caring for the sick, regardless of their beliefs or their status, is perhaps the most evident contribution of Christianity to our contemporary culture. When I was in hospital for those operations for cancer, I was bowled over by the kind, professional care that I and everyone else in the ward received. Young and old, rich and poor, we all received the same unfailing attention, just because we are human beings, whatever the faith or lack of it of the doctors and nurses.

Henry Marsh, a brain surgeon, was on his way home after an exhausting day in the operating theatre. He popped into the

supermarket to buy supper, but was held up by a long queue of people at the check-out:

‘And what did you do today?’ I felt like asking them, annoyed that an important neurosurgeon like myself should be kept waiting after such a triumphant day’s work. But I then thought of how the value of my work as a doctor is measured solely in terms of the value of other people’s lives, and that included the people in front of me in the check-out queue. So I told myself off and resigned myself to waiting. Besides, I had to admit to myself that soon I will be old and retired and then I will no longer count for much in the world. I might as well get used to it now.<sup>12</sup>

#### ISOLATION

How can we Christians who are not doctors and nurses still bear witness to this beautiful vocation, which must, St Benedict says, rank above and before all else? In this world of highly complex treatment, for which professionals need years of training, and in which care is hedged around with complex regulation, what have we to offer? Jesus’ healing of the sick offers some clues. First of all, we must overcome the isolation that afflicts many sick people.

To be sick in the time of Jesus was far more terrible than today. Unless one was very wealthy, illness could quickly tip one into destitution and isolation. The sick lived on the margins, at best half-visible. Think of Lazarus lying at the gate of the rich man, with dogs licking his sores (Lk. 16.19–31). José Pagola writes:

The sick people Jesus met suffered the afflictions one would expect in a poor and underdeveloped country: there were blind people, paralytics, deaf mutes, people with skin diseases, the mentally ill. Many were incurable, abandoned

to their fate, and left without means of earning a living; they hobbled through life as beggars, constantly confronted with misery and hunger. Jesus saw them lying by the roadside, at the village entrance, or in the synagogues, pleading for pity from passers-by.<sup>13</sup>

Still today in what is euphemistically called ‘the developing world’ sickness and marginalization are profoundly linked. For the sick, poverty is often unavoidable, and for the poor, sickness is often fatal. In 2014 life-expectancy in Monaco was 89.52 years, whereas in Chad it was just 49.81 years. In Katherine Boo’s novel *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum*, about scavengers in the slums of Mumbai, just near the modern international airport, the kids search the rubbish to eke out a living, but Abdul knows that his livelihood leads inexorably to death:

To jumpstart his system, he saw he’d have to become a better scavenger. This entailed not dwelling on the obvious: that his profession could wreck a body in a very short time. Scrapes from dumpster-diving pocked and became infected. Where skin broke, maggots got in. Lice colonized hair, gangrene inched up fingers, calves swelled into tree trunks, and Abdul and his younger brothers kept a running wager about which of the scavengers would be the next to die.<sup>14</sup>

In the film *I, Daniel Blake*, set in Newcastle, temporary sickness throws a decent chap into poverty and humiliation, ultimately leading to his death.

The isolation of the sick in Jesus’ time was reinforced by the common belief that illness was the result of sin, and so it excluded them from the common life and prayer: ‘The blind and the lame shall not come into the house’ (2 Sam. 5.8). When Jesus sees a man born blind, his disciples ask him: ‘Rabbi,

who sinned; this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (Jn 9.1). The sick were stigmatized. This is an assumption that lurks in the etymologies of the English words: 'The English word "health" is ultimately derived from an ancient Sanskrit word which means "whole", and is related to words such a "holy" and "hale". By contrast, "ill" comes from a Norse word, *illr*, that fundamentally means "bad", "wicked" or "harmful".'<sup>15</sup>

No one was more marginalized in the time of Jesus than the leper. This was not necessarily leprosy in the modern sense of the world, Hansen's disease, but any skin disease that produced boils, eruptions, discoloration, and which broke the life-preserving surface of the body. Lepers were banished to the margins of society, crying out 'Unclean, unclean' if anyone approached (Lev. 13.45). They were seen as threatening the purity and holiness of the people of God. Even today, when leprosy is easily cured, they are feared and banished.

During my visitation of the Dominican Province of Nigeria in 2000, I was driven across much of the country, from Ibadan to Port Harcourt. Leprosy was rife. The sick, including thousands of children, wore distinctive straw hats. The innumerable potholes in these back roads meant that we crawled along slowly, the car surrounded by crowds of people thrusting what remained of their arms through the windows and crying for alms. I remain haunted by the eyes of the children. The income from one month of oil revenue could wipe out leprosy in Nigeria. But these were poor people, and so who cares? The little scavengers in Katherine Boo's novel quickly learn that their lives are of no value to anyone. One kid has a startling revelation when he almost falls off a roof: 'But something he'd come to realize on the roof, leaning out, thinking about what would happen if he leaned too far, was that a boy's life could still matter to himself.'<sup>16</sup>

Even for those of us who live in prosperous Western countries, sickness can bring isolation. It confines people to their homes. Mental illness can be a prison. Pain may make it

difficult to relate to other people. A lack of confidence or energy or strength can lock one in oneself and in one's flat. And who cares that much? Virginia Woolf writes wittily of how often the healthy have little sympathy for the sick, who think that their symptoms are of enormous interest to everyone. The well have no time for that.

But sympathy we cannot have. Wisest Fate says no. If her children, weighed as they already are with sorrow, were to take on them that burden too, adding in imagination other pains to their own, buildings would cease to rise, roads would peter out into grassy tracks; there would be an end of music and of painting.<sup>17</sup>

There is no time left for sympathy for the ill, she writes.

Clive James is terminally ill but carries on with an astonishing creativity. 'The end is nigh, but not that nigh.' He acknowledges the challenge of isolation, so deaf it is hard to 'keep pace with conversations',

But just send silent signals with my face  
That claim I've not succumbed to loneliness  
And might be ready to come in on cue.<sup>18</sup>

Forty years ago I had operations on both of my ears. For a few weeks I could hear absolutely nothing. I feared that I might never hear again. I brought to hospital a large and noisy alarm clock. A couple of times a day I would set it off in the hope of hearing just a tiny sound, but for a long time there was silence. Only the vibrations felt by my fingers assured me that it was ringing. My brethren came from Oxford to London every day and sat by my bed. It was terribly distressing to be with them, unable to communicate. At least when there was no one there, my deafness was less desolating. Alone I did not feel so lonely.

So how can those of us who are not nurses or doctors live the healing ministry of Jesus? By refusing the isolation of the sick. At the Last Judgement scene in Matthew 25, when the Son of Man divides the sheep from the goats, the blessed are those who visited the sick and the prisoners. Maybe they had nothing else to offer but their presence: 'I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.'

St Martin de Porres was a seventeenth-century Dominican lay brother in Lima, Peru, born of a noble Spanish father and an indigenous mother. He treated the sick with herbal medicines but, most importantly, he brought them into the priory, much to the irritation of some of his brethren. The Prior commanded Martin to stop filling the cloister with sick people.<sup>19</sup> One day he found a leper in Martin's bed. 'You have disobeyed me!' Martin replied that compassion was more important than obedience, and he was still canonized! Our presence with the sick is a sign that, even when they feel most alone, God is still near. Meister Eckhart wrote: 'Even if you cannot conceive of yourself as near to God, you should still regard God as near to you.'<sup>20</sup> 'Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget yet I will not forget you. Behold I have graven you on the palms of my hand' (Is. 49.15).

In the gospels, those seeking healing often refuse the isolation imposed on them. The woman with the flow of blood, who is ritually impure and so should keep her distance, fights her way through the crowd to touch Jesus from behind, as if she feared being repulsed (Mk 5.25); blind Bartimaeus refuses to be silenced by the disciples who try to shut him up, and shouts out, 'Son of David, have mercy on me' (Mk 10.48). We should be allies of the sick in refusing silence and marginalization.

Jean-Dominique Bauby was a French journalist, the editor of *Elle*, until he was felled by a massive stroke. In *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* he recounts how, after being unconscious for

seven weeks, he awoke to find that he could only communicate with his left eye.<sup>21</sup> With his speech therapist he devised a way of communicating. It took 200,000 blinks to write the book, each word taking on average two minutes. He died two days after the publication of the book. I shall never again complain about the effort of writing a book!

So a first step is to be present to those who are sick, refusing their isolation and marginalization. The Letter of St James says: 'Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord' (Jas 5.14). We gather around the sickbed, the patient at the centre. The sick may bring the community together and offer us their gifts.

#### THE HEALING TOUCH

Faced with these shunned children of God, Jesus does something dangerous and even forbidden. He touches them. He reaches across the gulf created by abhorrence and fear, and places his hands on their skin. This is the beginning of their return home. He does not recruit them or demand that they follow him. His touch restores them to their communities.

The wisest nurses and doctors know that touch is the heart of their vocation. Paul Kalanithi, the highly trained and successful young American neurosurgeon whom I mentioned in the first chapter, had degrees in English literature, philosophy and history as well as medicine. The world lay at his feet. In his early thirties he discovered that he had terminal cancer. What could he make of his remaining life? Should he become a father while he could, teach or even carry on with surgery?

I didn't know. But if I did not know what I wanted, I had learned something, something not found in Hippocrates, Maimonides, or Osler: the physician's duty is not to stave off death or return patients to their old lives, but to take into our

arms a patient and family whose lives have disintegrated and work until they can stand back up and face, and make sense of, their own existence.<sup>22</sup>

Abraham Verghese, a Stanford University professor of medicine and novelist, insists that touch is at the heart of all healing.<sup>23</sup> The doctor's touch of the patient is not just diagnostic. It is a ritual that binds them together. He says that 'it is cathartic for the physician and necessary for the patient. We skip it at our peril.' It is a covenant that seals the relationship. One must tap the chest, listen to the heartbeat, look under the eyelid and feel the abdomen, attending to the person. He recounts visiting a dying man, in the last hours of his life, who lifted his skeletal fingers and pointed to his chest, as if to say, 'Examine me, touch me. Break down the loneliness that threatens to engulf me.'

Modern medical practice is in danger of losing this healing intimacy. Often today the team discusses the case gathered around the computer screen rather than around the patient's bed. We are in danger, he asserts, of forgetting the flesh-and-blood patient and focusing on the iPatient, the one on the computer screen. A Texan woman who developed breast cancer researched on the internet for the very best centre for treatment and went there, but she came home disappointed. She found unparalleled expertise, 'but they did not touch my breasts.' Care attends to the particular, the mortal, unique individual, touched by his or her suffering and touching. The infinity of love is incarnate in the smallest gesture of a hand touching skin.

After my second operation for cancer, I could hardly look at myself in the mirror. One cheek was terribly swollen, and my neck was slashed with a vivid scar, with nineteen cartoonish stitches. I looked like a one-cheeked chipmunk created by Frankenstein on a bad day. A young nurse, just arrived from Romania, gently anointed my neck. This healing touch is embraced by the Church in the sacrament of the sick. At

Blackfriars, before the operation, I had been anointed with oil: 'Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.' Nurses and doctors too are ministers in their way of this holy anointing.

Honour physicians for their services,  
for the Lord created them;  
for their gift of healing comes from the Most High,  
and they are rewarded by the king.

(Sir. 38.1-2)

Well, not always so well rewarded by the king or government today! Every one of us can be ministers of that healing touch.

#### THE GIFTS OF THE SICK

Finally, we can all be open to the gifts that the sick offer us. They notice things that escape the healthy. Virginia Woolf notes that the well often fail to see the sky, but the sick have the time and leisure to do so. Their eyes are open. Clive James: 'no birds can touch down in the trees without my seeing them.' When he wonders what is given in these years of physical decline, he replies:

This much: you get to see the cosmos blaze  
And feel its grandeur, even against your will,  
As it reminds you, just by being there,  
That it is here we live or else nowhere.<sup>24</sup>

Here again we see the complementarity of gifts. James invites us to live here 'or else nowhere'. I presume he rejects what he considers the illusory consolations of an afterlife. As a Christian, I would want to say to him, 'Thank you. How right you are! We must indeed live here and now, for it is only thus that I embrace eternal life. Eternal life begins now, and we accept that gift by living in this time and place, God's present gift.'

I lived for many years with Brother Vincent Cook OP, who was born blind. When he was young, he could just tell whether or not the lights were on or off, but he never saw a human face. He was one of the most beloved friars in our Province. He was a catalyst for the community, gathering us around him. He was independent in the best sense. Once he went to Liverpool, a city he had never visited before. He loved to tell of how, feeling his way with his white cane, he came to a busy road and asked if he could cross with someone, who agreed eagerly. They set off across the road to the sound of cars breaking and horns hooting. He thanked the other man for helping him across, who replied: 'No, you helped me. I am blind'!

Vincent gathered us into communion with each other because one cannot live with someone who is completely blind without always having them in the back of one's mind. Every time one pushed open a door, Vincent might be on the other side. The various sorts of milk had to put in their right places in the fridge so that he could find what he wanted. Not to think of Vincent would have been a serious failure of fraternal charity. More than this, he showed us that it is all right to need other people. He challenged the foolish Western assumption that we can be self-sufficient. We need each other, and God blesses our mutual dependence. God says to St Catherine of Siena: 'I could well have supplied each of you with all your needs, both spiritual and material. But I wanted to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me.'<sup>25</sup>

#### WHO THEN IS JESUS THE HEALER?

There were many healers in Palestine in the time of Jesus. Why, then, were people amazed by him? When he healed the paralytic lowered through the roof, 'they were all amazed and glorified God saying "We have never seen anything like this"' (Mk 2.12). It is because he does not engage in magical rituals.

He does not use spells, charms or secret words. He just speaks a healing word with authority. When he heals the slave of the centurion (Lk. 7.2–10), he does not even say anything. ‘Jesus was contagious with life and health.’<sup>26</sup> Jesus’ healings are not just a kind person dealing with some health issues. His words had a disturbing authority. And so, when the final showdown with the religious establishment comes, they question him: ‘By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do them?’ (Mk 11. 28). His disciples come to see that he is more than just another healer, but bound up with God who is the giver of all life. ‘I am the Lord who heals you’ (Exod. 15.26). ‘I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal’ (Deut. 32.39). His healing word is God’s own. His healings are the first sign of the coming of God’s Kingdom. Healing promises wholeness and holiness. A lame person walking is the first sign that the fullness of life is near.

This is most beautifully evident in his healing of the man born blind (Jn 9). Jesus tells the disciples that ‘this man was not born blind because anyone had sinned, but so that God’s works might be revealed in him’ (Jn 9.3–4). Sickness and disability were not just physical problems that needed solving. They were a sign that the Kingdom had not come. Creation had not reached its goal. In the Kingdom there will be no more sickness. In the world to come ‘no one will say “I am sick”’ (Is. 33.24). In this case Jesus does not just say a word. He spits on the ground and makes clay and anoints the man’s eyes with the mud. This is not a magical practice. The Hebrew word for ‘clay’ is *adamah*, from which the name Adam comes. ‘Human’ comes from humus. We are earthlings.

Jesus is creatively healing unfinished Adam, who is every one of us. Jesus performs this act on the Sabbath, which was the day that God rested after the completion of creation. In the world of first-century Palestine the man born blind was half-made. Jesus now brings to completion what his Father had begun.

Medical researchers discovering new drugs or new treatments for illness are at the service of the Kingdom, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and making the lame walk. They are co-workers with God, instruments of the Kingdom.

Jesus does not just give him sight. He gives him a voice. The man comes to say, 'I am.' At the beginning of the story the disciples talk about the blind man, but they do not speak to him. Only Jesus does. When he is cured, the neighbours talk about him, but they say nothing to him until he speaks out and says, 'I am the man.' Then he is taken to the Pharisees, and again they begin by talking about him rather than to him. The Pharisees summon his parents, but they refuse to talk on his behalf. They say, 'He is of age; he will speak for himself.' And he does so, ever more strongly, culminating in his confession of faith: 'Lord, I believe.'

John tells the story of someone finding his own voice. He ceases to be the object of conversation and becomes a subject. It is *his* story. The first words he speaks, 'I am the man', are even more significant in Greek text: *Ego eimi*, 'I am', the divine name revealed to Moses in the burning bush. He comes to be someone who can say 'I am' in his own right. Iago, the evil and destructive opponent of Shakespeare's Othello, 'the negation of goodness', unmaking his enemy, proudly says 'I am *not* what I am.'<sup>27</sup>

As God's children, we share his dignity and even say with him, 'I am'. We are not just the objects of other people's opinions, statistics in government analyses, subject to the manipulations of advertising campaigns. Like Daniel Blake in that startling film of that name, we can say,

I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user. I am not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar nor a thief. I am not a national insurance number, nor a blip on a screen. I don't tug the forelock but look my neighbour in the eye. I don't accept or seek charity. My name is Daniel Blake, I am a man, not a dog. As such I demand my rights. I demand you treat me with respect.

I watched the film as I was flying to Australia in May and I wept, much to the alarm of the flight attendant!

We say with the confidence of the children of God: I am! All over Europe at the time of writing, protesters are wearing high-visibility jackets which say, 'Look at me! I am.' In Latin America the Church has established innumerable radio stations, so the voice of the silenced can be heard. CAFOD records the wonderful moment when an Andean peasant finds her voice and speaks on the radio:

Yes, that was her voice coming out of the magical apparatus! All her life everyone had told her to shut up; her dad, her teacher, her husband, the priests, even her children. As they say around here, women should be seen but not heard. For years they had convinced her that she was only good for working, in the kitchen and in bed. But always in silence, obedient. Now her voice was coming out over the radio and her friend Hipólita, her neighbours and all her family were listening.<sup>28</sup>

Creation is not just what God did at the beginning. It is the work of Jesus and our work too. It is the completion of God's fashioning of a just world. Creation is not so much a Big Bang but our common task. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father' (Jn 14.12). The care of the sick, whether by nurses and doctors, or of friends and relatives, is not just an act of compassion. It is a small sign of the breaking in of the Kingdom, in which there will be no more wounds, no more hurt, no more loneliness and isolation and no more contempt.

## 5

### Initial Skirmishes

'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life' (Deut. 30.19). Jesus' offer of abundant life begins almost modestly, curing people of their ailments, healing a woman who has had a flow of blood for years, opening the eyes of the blind and enabling the lame to walk. These are the first small signs of what is to come, the victory of Easter, the fullness of life for which all human beings thirst.

The choice of life implies the combat against all that is subversive of life, all that is destructive, that sucks out the joy of life, all that is mean, oppressive and life-denying. Jesus' campaign against all this nihilism also begins relatively undramatically, casting out the occasional demon. Being a healer and an exorcist were two aspects of the same choice, for life and against all that is deathly. But these healings and exorcisms are just the initial skirmishes in the great battle that is to come on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, when the Lord of life triumphs. What that means we shall see in the last section of this book, when we look at the risen life. Now we are just concerned with these early scuffles before it all heats up.

We can understand the healings easily enough. Visits to the doctor and to hospital are part of everyday life. But what about these exorcisms? Sickness is an obvious limitation of our living, but for most of us, breathing the secular air of our

society whether we are religious or not, these exorcisms may be rather embarrassing. Pope Francis is loved by billions, but when he speaks of the demonic, as he often does, some become uncomfortable, as if a beloved old uncle let slip a belief in fairies. What sense can one make of Jesus' battles against the demons? I shall be brief, since I have written about this extensively elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Exorcism is not a common part of contemporary Christian experience. It is associated with scary films, such as *The Exorcist*, designed to make your flesh creep. Yet in Mark's gospel, Jesus' first act after calling the disciples is to cast out a demon. For many people in Late Antiquity Jesus was primarily an exorcist. His name is found in magical papyri from the first to the fifth century. His was literally a name with which to conjure. How can a secular imagination find a way into this alien world? What has this got to do with being really alive? Let's begin by setting the context of Jesus' engagement with the demonic.

#### AN AGE OF ANXIETY

Demons and evil spirits are hardly mentioned in the Old Testament. They lurked in the desert and in ruins. As long as one did not hang around such places, they were not a major problem. They prowled on the peripheries of civilization, and they were peripheral to the religious imagination. But by the time of Jesus a concern with demons was spreading all around the Mediterranean. Peter Brown claims they were as commonly invoked as microbes today. They were even blamed for bad book reviews. Brown asserts that

the sharp smell of an invisible battle hung over the religious and intellectual world of Late Antique man. To sin was no longer merely to err; it was to allow oneself to be overcome by unseen forces. To err was not so much to be mistaken; it was to be unconsciously manipulated by some invisible malign power.<sup>2</sup>

Demons were everywhere. A rabbi claimed that every area that yielded a half-measure of wheat was home to four measures of demons.

Without wanting for one moment to deny the reality of the demonic, of which I have personal experience, this intense obsession with demons was linked to a sense of powerlessness. It was, in E. R. Dodds's famous phrase, 'an age of anxiety'.<sup>3</sup> People no longer felt in control of their own lives. This derived from the rise of the Roman Empire, which meant that the centres of decision-making migrated ever further away from the traditional centres of power. Most people felt like pawns in the hands of the powerful. They had no voice.

Within the world of Jesus, the intensity of one's concern with demons corresponded roughly to the degree to which one felt powerless. The Sadducees, the rich aristocratic priestly class, were influential, though under Roman oversight. They were not much concerned with evil spirits. At the other end of the spectrum were the Essenes, who dropped out of society altogether, lived in the wilderness and had no say in the affairs of the state. They, as one would expect, had a profound interest in the demonic and believed that history was a gigantic battle between good and evil spirits. The Pharisees were somewhere in the middle.

Unsurprisingly, in the Judaism of the time of Jesus, the demonic was associated with a fear of uncontrollable forces, things getting out of hand, chaos. Demons were especially associated with disorder, dirt and dung. In the Talmud we come across an especially nasty female demon called Shibetta or Shbita, who pounced on children who did not wash their hands in the morning. If you came across a nameless horror as you walked in the night, a good ploy was to say, 'The goat at the butcher is fatter than I am', and hope that the demon would rush off in search of juicier prey. My room, which is usually chaotic, would be seen as a fit place for a multitude of demons.

Exorcists in the time of Jesus were engaged in a fundamentally defensive operation. They fended off the demons, manned the walls and protected the community. Sometimes the boundaries shifted a bit, but evil was not radically challenged. One simply had to live with demons, as we do with viruses. They are 'unclean.' One took all the necessary precautions, recited incantations, chased them out of the lavatory and waited for the coming of God's Kingdom, when they would be finally thrown out. As with a new virus, one could limit and for a time get rid of an infestation of the terrible Igrath and her 180,000 destroying angels, but there were more where they came from.

Jesus was not like these exorcists. He dismisses demons with a word, swatting them like flies. Indeed they are the minions of the Lord of the flies. After that first exorcism the people say: 'What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him' (Mk 1.27). He never touches the possessed, as he does the sick. He simply tells the demons to be off. When he frees the possessed man in the land of the Gerasenes (Mk 5.1-13), he simply says, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' It is as if he were to say, 'Go away, you nasty little thing.' Interestingly the name of the demon is Legion, a unit of the occupying Roman army. Jesus does not man the defences; he routs the enemy. In him the Kingdom has come: 'If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Lk 11.20). Of course, the decisive battle with evil is not quite yet. It awaits Jesus on Good Friday as he hangs on the cross. These encounters are anticipations of what is to come. Here Jesus is winning the battles, but the war is not yet over.

This explains the odd reaction of the religious authorities to Jesus. He who casts out demons with the greatest of ease is accused himself of doing so by the power of the great evil spirit, Beelzebul, the Lord of the flies which tend to hang around dung, dirt and decay (Lk. 11.15). The one who defeats the demons is

accused of being demonic. This is not as odd as it might seem. Demons were seen as sowers of chaos, threatening the proper order of things. But Jesus himself threatens this due order in another way, challenging the authorities, being lax in the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, turning things upside down. The breaking in of the Kingdom is indeed disorientating and alarming, and so it is not surprising that he was seen himself as demonic by his opponents. He upsets the established order. The creative eruption of the Kingdom might easily be mistaken by the fearful for destructive chaos.

#### A NEW AGE OF ANXIETY

Times of profound social change provoke intense anxiety which must be projected upon feared people, strangers or evil spirits. In the sixteenth century those accused of witchcraft bore the blame. In the Middle Ages people believed in witches, although they did not play a major role in the public imagination, just as in ancient Israel people believed in demons but were not preoccupied with them. With the turmoil of the Reformation, things began to change. Starting in 1560, witch-hunts escalated. Interestingly, where the Inquisition was strong, as in Spain and Portugal, the persecution of witches was generally less intense, because the inquisitors demanded evidence, of which there was usually none.<sup>4</sup>

Today we live in a new age of anxiety. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders now affect 18 per cent of the adult population of the United States, or about 40 million people. Xanax, an anxiety-relieving drug, is one of the most frequently prescribed medications in the US. Control of our lives is slipping from our hands. Global forces are at work that we cannot manage. The giants of Silicon Valley with their mysterious algorithms, mould our desires and shape our lives without our consent. Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google,

said: 'We don't need you to type at all. We know where you are. We know where you've been. We can more or less know what you're thinking about.'<sup>5</sup> Powerful multinational corporations move their businesses to where they can make a speedy profit and move on when cheaper labour becomes available. Even governments are relatively powerless to control the new rulers of the world.

Especially since 9/11, even in the West people feel threatened by terrorism. Migrants arriving on our shores have stoked the rise of xenophobia and populism. There is a growing fear and hatred of the stranger. As usual in such times, anti-Semitism is raising its ugly head, and Jews ask whether Europe is still a safe place for them. Fear of Islam leads to violence against peaceful Muslims.

Everywhere there is a deepening distrust of the whole political establishment. Politicians make promises that they are unable to fulfil. If they did not make such promises, they would never be elected. They are forced by the media to present themselves as saviours, and so are doomed to inevitable failure. Everywhere we see the rise of anti-establishment parties who express the anger of those who feel disenfranchised and the 'left behind'. The election of Donald Trump in the US, the presence of UKIP in Britain and the Five Star Movement in Italy, of *Alternativ für Deutschland* and so on, attract workers who had previously voted for the left. The surge of populism expresses the despair of those who feel forgotten or held in contempt.

So our age is not unlike that of Jesus. The forces of death and violence do seem to be on the rise. In such a febrile world, it is no surprise that claims of demonic possession are escalating and the bishops are facing rising demands for exorcism. Anxiety mostly finds other expressions. An obsession with health and safety, the desire for everything to be measured, the fear of the unexpected, all express a deep insecurity. Isabella

Tree worries that the freedom and joy of childhood are being undermined:

Today's children, even if they live in the countryside, are under almost constant surveillance, protected from the perils of adventure and independence. A fear factor has entered our lives, even though there is no evidence to suggest the world is more dangerous for children than it was fifty years ago. In 1971, 80 per cent of eight- and nine-year olds walked to school alone. By 1990 this had dropped to 9 per cent and now it is even lower.<sup>6</sup>

She writes of 'the extinction of experience'. We must be protected, the dangers fended off, life sanitized. Whereas the contemporaries of Jesus called in exorcists, we appoint administrators and managers to hold off the threat of chaos. Not that managers are bad, but then nor are exorcists!

How can we choose life and reject death in this context? I shall suggest just three ways we can follow Jesus and engage in these skirmishes against the forces of evil. More will be explored as the argument of the book unfolds. We must resist the destructive urge that lurks in each of us. We can respond to the banality of evil with pointless acts of goodness. And we can refuse to join the mobs that bay for blood.

#### THE DESTRUCTIVE URGE

In *On Evil*, Terry Eagleton looks at William Golding's *Pincher Martin* and *Lord of the Flies*, the horrible Pinkie in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus* and so on. The essence of evil, he concludes, is that it is nihilistic. It is the raging thirst for destruction. Evil is

bound up with destruction in several senses. One bond between them is the fact that destruction is really the only

way to trump God's act of creation. Evil would actually prefer that there was nothing at all, since it does not see the point of created things. It loathes them because, as Thomas Aquinas claims, being is itself a kind of good. The more richly abundant existence is, the more value there is in the world ... Evil, however, does not see things this way. 'All that comes to birth/Is fit for overthrow, as nothing worth' observes Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*.<sup>7</sup>

We renounce the glamour and deceit of the Devil at the Easter Vigil; his glamour intoxicates us with the false elation of destruction, and his deceit is to pretend he does not exist.

A friend of mine, returning from the north of Nigeria, where he witnessed the effects of Boko Haram's vicious violence against local Christian communities, knew that he had seen the demonic at work. This nihilistic urge to smash and annihilate finds its most evil form today in the death cult of Da'esh. Crucifixions, beheadings, gay people hurled from roofs – it feeds on an insatiable desire to extinguish life. Having spent time in Rwanda during the genocide, in Burundi, the Congo and Angola during civil wars, and in Syria and Iraq, I do not doubt the existence and agency of evil forces opposed to God.

It is tempting to revile these Islamicist terrorists as pure evil and brim over with a furious desire to wipe them off the face of the earth. But that would be a manifestation of the same nihilism that they have, which lurks in our Western culture too. Da'esh (ISIS) wages an audio-visual campaign inspired by Western media:

ISIS employs western cultural memes – characters, scenes, and themes – contained in Hollywood movies, video games, and music, sometimes nodding to them, and frequently directly copying them. *Grand Theft Auto*, *Call of Duty*, and *American Sniper* serve as examples to imitate for the

group's propaganda arm. By appropriating western culture, ISIS manages to speak directly to the audience it wishes to influence most: susceptible, disenfranchised western youths with a bent for violence.<sup>8</sup>

The violence of Da'esh screams out aloud a thirst for destruction that is in us too. Stranded in a hotel near Boston airport by a blizzard, I flicked from channel to channel of American television, my mind dulled by endless murder and violence.

Da'esh, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda: the genocides of our time may seem remote to most of us, but they are extreme manifestations of a destructive urge that inhabits every human heart. Jean Vanier, the founder of the l'Arche communities, in which the disabled and others live together, is the most gentle and peaceable person I have ever met, but, with typical courage and honesty, he faces the violence that can haunt even such a good person. He describes his reaction to the incessant screaming of a mentally disabled young man called Lucien: 'I could sense anger, violence, and even hatred rising up within me. I would have been capable of hurting him to keep him quiet ... I who had been called to share my life with the weak, had a power of hatred for a weak person.'<sup>9</sup>

Sitting in my office, listening to someone bumbling on interminably, one tedious cliché following another, I have known the temptation to break out in violence, but I smile weakly and long for them to be gone. Sometimes I can barely suppress the desire to shout out an obscenity. Instead I kick the filing cabinet after their exit.

Jesus responds to the demonic with just a word. He has no need to use rituals and incantations. This is how we can all begin the fight against the forces of nihilism. We speak life-giving words that lift up and give people strength. We offer words that cherish and delight. The demonic infects language

with contempt. The civil rights movement in the US was largely about purifying the language of its powers of destruction.

Martin Luther King Jr recounts that, when he was a child riding in a car with his father, they were stopped by a white policeman:

‘Aright, boy, pull over and let me see your license.’ My father instantly retorted: ‘Let me make it clear to you that you aren’t talking to a boy. If you persist in referring to me as boy, I will be forced to act as if I don’t hear a word you are saying.’<sup>10</sup>

The policeman wrote the ticket as quickly as possible and scarpered!

Every time we speak words of contempt we are colluding with the power of darkness. We are unmaking the world created by the Word of life. Bishop Desmond Tutu, walking along a narrow pavement in South Africa, was confronted by a big white man coming in the opposite direction, who said: ‘I don’t give way to gorillas.’ At which Tutu stepped aside, made a deep sweeping gesture and said, ‘Ah, but I do.’ Irresistible! In Chapter 10, ‘The Non-Violent Imagination’, I will explore how we can free our hearts from demonic violence and receive the tranquillity that the world cannot give.

#### THE BANALITY OF EVIL AND THE POINTLESSNESS OF THE GOOD

Evil words and acts are, in a sense, pointless. We lash out blindly. Denigration, ridicule, malicious gossip are futile, achieving nothing. As Hannah Arendt showed in her examination of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, evil is banal and dull.<sup>11</sup> One of the ways in which we respond to the pointless banality of evil is with acts of goodness which may also seem useless but are done just for their own sake. St Paul writes: ‘For we are what

he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Eph. 2.10). The way forward, 'the push of life,' as Martin Luther King called it, is in doing those good deeds which it is given to us to do, even if they seem to achieve nothing, for no other reason than that they are good. Terry Eagleton claims that 'the most flourishing acts are those performed as though they were one's last, and thus accomplished not for their consequences but for their own sake.'<sup>12</sup>

In Baghdad the Sisters of Charity care for disabled kids who have been abandoned by their families. I cannot forget the grave face of Nora, born with no legs or arms, feeding the youngest children with a spoon in her mouth. Another day we visited a home for older women, Christian, Muslim and Yazidi, also abandoned, run by two Catholic consecrated virgins. We laughed and prayed with them. Two places of palpable love in the middle of a war zone. What difference do they make? All around them, the killing goes on. Are they just sticking plasters on the wounds inflicted by our violent world? Do they achieve anything? The last words of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: 'The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.'

There are also the good deeds that Muslims do for Christians. Just below the monastery where I stayed in Syria in 2015, half-way between Damascus and Homs, lies the village of Qara. A few years ago it was captured by Da'esh. The icons in our church were defaced, the graves in the Christian cemetery dug up and the bodies scattered all over the church to defile it. Again, the uncleanness of the demonic. When the village was recaptured, the Christians had nowhere to celebrate Christmas, and the imam said, 'Come and celebrate it in the mosque.'

These are good deeds done for their own sake and not as steps towards the Kingdom. They are not means to an end or part of a political programme. They are not the result of utilitarian calculation. The most beautiful response to the meaningless acts of violence is apparently pointless acts of love. We trust that somehow in ways that we cannot imagine or will ever know they will bear fruit in the Lord's hands. We do them because they are to be done. The Lord will give them fruit as he wishes. He is, as St Oscar Romero liked to say, 'the protagonist of history'.

Thomas Merton wrote to a friend who was discouraged by the failure of their peace campaign to produce any results:

Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on ... you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no results at all ... As you get used to this idea you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself.<sup>13</sup>

If we believe that the victory over evil has ultimately been won by Jesus, every loving act is on the winning side. Whether we struggle for justice or against our own destructive impulses, the tide is flowing with us. Even if we seem to get nowhere, still the future victory shines its light on our world. On Low Sunday, the week after Easter, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was just finishing the celebration of a simple service when two plain-clothed members of the Gestapo arrived. He had just time to scribble a message for his friend Bishop Bell of Chichester before they took him away to his death. As he was being taken away, he said to another prisoner: 'This is the end, but for me the beginning. With him I believe in the principle of the universal Christian brotherhood which rises above all national interests. Our victory is certain.'

THE ACCŪSER OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS HAS  
BEEN THROWN DOWN

Our society is hot with accusation. H. G. Wells said that 'moral indignation is jealousy with a halo.' The tabloids, in particular, are always eager to accuse. Every sin must be recorded, repeated, magnified. The past must be scoured for failure. People are defined by their sins. Someone who lies – and who has not? – is for ever 'a liar.' Nothing can be forgiven. Indignation is whipped up. Erich Fromm said 'there is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as moral indignation.'<sup>14</sup>

Can Jesus the exorcist offer anything better than Xanax to our anxious and indignant age? John's gospel tells us of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8.1–11). She is dragged before Jesus by the angry mob and accused of her sin. They are not really interested in her. She is just the bait to catch Jesus. Surely he could not ignore the law and refuse to accuse her? But if he does, where is this mercy that he goes on about? But Jesus hardly seems to take any notice. He bends down and writes in the sand for a while. Then he announces his sentence: 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' 'Does no one condemn you? Neither do I. Go and sin no more.' He frees the members of the lynch mob from their stampede into violence. His silence calms them down. They arrive as a mob and leave as individuals. 'When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders.' Why the elders first? G. K. Chesterton wrote: 'Children are innocent and love justice, whilst most of us are wicked and prefer mercy.'<sup>15</sup>

Ages of anxiety generate mobs who bay for blood. When the judges of the Supreme Court of Britain made a ruling on the process of Brexit that the popular press did not like, the headline on a tabloid paper was 'Enemies of the People'. The judges were judged without trial or due process. Accusation is the chief weapon of the demonic. It is the meaning of the name 'Satan', the accuser.

In *Undergoing God*, James Alison shows how worship can become Satanic:

You bring people together and you unite them in worship. You provide regular rhythmic music and marching. You enable them to see lots of people in uniform, people who have already lost a certain individuality and become symbols. You give them songs to sing ... All this serves to take people out of themselves; the normally restrained become passionate, unfriendly neighbours find themselves looking at each other anew in the light of the growing Bruderschaft.<sup>16</sup>

Then, fired by this ecstatic experience, they begin to look at people differently:

On their way home that evening, though they may not notice it, part of the magic of the day will have rubbed off on them. They will look at the Jew across the road in a different light. He will have lost personality in their eyes, and become a representative of the sort of thing the Führer had suggested to them. They will be that much closer to turning a blind eye to his disappearance, agreeing that old Mr Silberstein the cobbler is indeed a threat to society. To the divinisation of the one [the Führer], corresponds the demonisation of the other, which is the dehumanisation of them all.

Jesus bears in himself all the accusations that human beings make against each other. Every time we brand someone as disgusting, intolerable, rubbish, Christ bears the reproach, 'for Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, "the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me"' (Rom. 15.3, quoting Ps. 69.9). So in a time of rising populism our faith should free us from the seduction of the indignant mob, whether of the left or right, and demand no one's expulsion, demonizing no one,

even though we may have to disagree with them strongly. We believe that in Jesus the victory over evil has been won, and so there is no need to panic and seek innocent victims onto whom to load the blame.

In Baghdad I was cheered by the refusal of so many Christians and Muslims to 'demonize' each other. Despite the violence, friendships endured that were a sort of exorcism of demonic fatalism. In a Muslim restaurant in Baghdad, offering 'impregnating chicken,' 'sheep full of rice' and 'upside down chicken,' there was an image of the Last Supper of Christ with his disciples, and a light burned before an icon of the Virgin and her child. Brian Pierce OP and I gave a public lecture to almost three hundred people in Baghdad, 70 per cent of whom were Muslim. They begged the Christians to stay. One young man said: 'Why do we debate whether the Christians should stay or go? They were here before we Muslims arrived.' The demon of accusation is routed. The shout of victory in the Book of Revelation is that 'the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down' (Rev. 12.10).

## 6

### Growing Up

The appearance of the Lord of life on the public stage begins modestly enough. He heals people of their ailments. He is a God for our aches and pains. It is a first sign of the fullness of life he has come to bring. He casts out demons, those forces of destruction that lurk in each of us and in our societies, in an initial skirmish against all that is deathly. Then the drama heats up. Luke tells us, 'he set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Lk. 9.51) to endure his passion. The disciples tag along after him, not having much idea of what is happening, absorbed in silly quarrels about who is the greatest, refusing to accept what lies ahead. Some fall away, John tells us, when Jesus makes strange claims about being the bread of life, 'Because of this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him' (Jn 6.66).

This journey to Jerusalem is their schooling. Those who hang in begin to grow up. They have a steep learning curve. There is little time. As Jesus' former popularity as a healer and exorcist wanes, the opposition becomes intense. His enemies begin to murmur that this man must die. Jesus has to cram in as much as he can before the crisis breaks and he is taken from them. When it does, they still do not understand much. Jesus says to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!' (Lk. 24.25).

We disciples – which literally means ‘students’ – are for ever at the beginning of grasping what it means to be alive in God. We mature humanly by passing through one crisis after another: birth, weaning, puberty, leaving home, becoming committed to another person, mid-life crisis and finally death. Becoming alive with God’s grace involves similar critical moments, as the fullness of life unfurls within us.

Peter is especially slow. He blocks Jesus’ path to Jerusalem, refusing to accept that Jesus must suffer and die; he cannot understand what Jesus is doing when he washes the feet of the disciples on the last night before his death; he denies Jesus three times. Even after Pentecost he does not get it. St Paul loses his temper at Antioch (Gal. 2.11–14) for Peter’s failure to grasp his freedom from the Law in Christ. According to a legend, he runs away from Rome during the persecution of Christians by Nero. He meets his Lord going the other way and asks him where he is going, ‘*Quo vadis?*’ Jesus replies that he is going to Rome to die again. Then Peter turns around, and finally fulfils the vow he made at the Last Supper to be faithful to his Lord until death. Peter is the patron saint of all late developers. He encourages people like myself who take a long time to ripen into maturity.

Human being is becoming. Life is lived forward. You understand a form of life by seeing the stages it goes through on the way to maturity. Growing up is different for a barnacle, a baboon or a butterfly. Societies differ in their understanding of what it means to mature and make the journey from babyhood to adulthood. So the invitation to choose life implies a vision of what it means to grow up and become adult, humanly and spiritually.

Jesus challenges the inherited assumptions about adulthood. In the Old Testament the mature man is the one who is praised by his peers in the gateway where the assembly’s male elders met to take decisions: ‘Let them extol him in the congregation of the people and praise him in the assembly of the elders’ (Ps. 107.32).

The adult woman ran the domestic economy, and her glory was to have her name praised by the men! 'Let her works praise her in the city gates' (Prov. 31.31). Jesus has the extraordinary idea that to be truly grown up is to become childlike.

When the disciples try to stop the children coming to Jesus he says, 'Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you: whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child, will never enter it.' And then 'he put his arms around them, and blessed them' (Mk 10.13–16). The ancient world<sup>1</sup> mostly saw children as incomplete beings, not yet fully human.<sup>2</sup> Jesus acted scandalously in putting children first. Indeed our God became visible in a vulnerable and defenceless baby. To be truly adult is to be a child of the Kingdom.

This is easily misunderstood. A common accusation against Christianity is that our faith infantilizes us. Alas, it is often true that Christians remain stuck in an adolescent faith with infantile ideas of God, the big Daddy in the sky. For John Hooper this is exemplified by the phrase in Italian that equates most closely to 'Something will turn up': 'Qualche santo provvederà', 'Some saint will take care of it.'<sup>3</sup> Being a child of the Kingdom does not mean being juvenile. Christianity will only be a convincing witness to the Lord of Life if we embody a maturity that has something of the joy and spontaneity of the child.

Such a vision is urgently needed today, for our society is afflicted by a crisis of childhood. Children are often propelled prematurely into the adult world, and many adults fail to grow up. Traditional societies initiated the young into their roles as adult men and women. They were taught who they were to be and what they were to do. Neil MacGregor laments the loss:

We have moved away from a model of elders initiating children into an adult world – children joining their parents in a new role, after an intergenerational transfer of wisdom.

The traditional twenty-first birthday party thrown by parents for friends and family, coming with the right to vote and to be given 'the key to the door' – classic markers of adulthood in the public and private spheres – has largely faded away. Instead, the young initiate each other into adult worlds of their own – with joyous baptisms of beer, song and dance.<sup>4</sup>

He quotes Linda Woodhead: 'I think as a society we're grappling with the problem of how the values which are enduring and do not change can be transmitted.'

Often the young lack not only the rituals of passage but also fathers, who have disappeared, afraid of responsibility, or because they do not even know that they have children, or through the disintegration of the family through divorce and separation. 'Many boys today do not know what it means to be a man because they don't have a man in their lives. Sadly, children will go to bed tonight without saying goodnight to their father because he just isn't there.'<sup>5</sup> The young are propelled into the adult world before they are ready. In the West, children aged as young as eleven and twelve are sexting, experimenting sexually even before they have had the chance to pass through the disconcerting years of puberty.

In recent years the massive scale of sexual abuse of children in every institution has been exposed in charities, schools, care homes, sports teams, the film industry and especially, to our great shame, in the Church and other religious institutions. This is the worst crisis of Christianity since the Reformation. Only slowly are we registering the devastation wrought by abuse, the effects of which often endure for a lifetime. A medical doctor who had been abused by his father as a child told me that abuse annihilates the core of the child's identity.

Globally, millions of children are robbed of their youth by violence and poverty. Rami Adham was known as 'the toy smuggler of Aleppo'. He smuggled thousands of toys to children in the besieged city. 'That first time, we went to a refugee camp

near the border. We'd brought food, but when we started giving away the toys, it created a huge fuss. Kids were coming from all over. I realised they weren't thinking about food – they just wanted a toy.' They wanted a childhood. In *What Is the What* David Eggers gives us the fictionalized autobiography of a Sudanese boy, Valentino Achak Deng. He flees with hundreds of children from the war zone of Sudan, avoiding militias and lions, seeking safety in Kenya: 'I know everything one can know about the wasting of youth, about the ways boys can be used.'<sup>6</sup>

So in this time when the path to adulthood is mined and treacherous and many do not make it, can Christianity offer a vision of how to make the journey? Despite all the failures of the Church to safeguard the young and vulnerable, how can we offer Jesus' startling vision of the true adult who is the child of the Kingdom?

I shall explore this question using the parable of the Prodigal Son. This is not directly the topic of the parable, which is Jesus' response to those who were shocked by his eating and drinking with sinners. We shall look at that in the next chapter. But it tells of a young lad who makes a premature grab at adulthood, gets into a mess, returns home and so is free to set off again on the way to true adulthood. He may even one day become like his father, a childlike adult.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (LK. 15.11–32)

There was a man who had two sons.

Three men! Can such a male-dominated tale really help us to become mature? No females appear, except perhaps as slaves. But a parable is not a story that assembles a plausible range of characters, though, because this is the longest parable in the New Testament, it looks like a story. A parable is a firework that shoots up briefly into the dark sky and explodes, illuminating

everything in a new way. It is intended not to be a lifelike drama but to subvert our assumptions and question how we see the world. Parables open a window in the small shed of our imagination and invite us to come out into God's fresh air. Angela Leighton claims that when we listen to poetry, we are 'moving about in worlds not realised'.<sup>7</sup> This is how parables work.

This parable is part of firework display in which Jesus launches one rocket after another into the night. The parable immediately preceding it is about the woman who lost and found a coin and rejoiced with her neighbours. We shall read this parable of the Prodigal Son almost as if it were a story, asking about the motives and experience of the actors, as do nearly all commentators today. We belong to a storytelling culture, which interprets experience through the narratives of novels, films, songs and podcasts, but it is good to remember that its original genre is other.

The feminine is not altogether absent from its interpretation. Henri Nouwen pointed to Rembrandt's painting of the return of the prodigal child, in which the focus of the painting is the hands of the father: one broad, strong and masculine and the other more delicate and feminine.

The Father is not simply a great patriarch. He is a mother as well as a father. He touches the son with a masculine hand and a feminine hand. He holds, and she caresses. He confirms and she consoles. He is, indeed, God, in whom both manhood and womanhood are fully present.<sup>8</sup>

The boy lying in the lap of the father has a shaven head, suggesting a child snuggling up to his mother, almost a newborn infant close to the womb that bore him. So this can be read as a story of any child struggling to grow up.

The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided

his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

He is not just asking for his due inheritance. He demands adulthood now! According to Kenneth Bailey, he says to his father, 'I cannot wait for you to die';<sup>9</sup> 'Get out of my way'. Growing up we often lunge after a maturity for which we are not ready. Most people at some stage in their youth feel the need to rebel, escape from the parental home, claim an identity that is their own, and maybe experiment with a bit of debauchery. I grew my hair long and joined the Dominicans!

The film *Dead Poets Society*, made in 1989 and directed by Peter Weir, tells of a new teacher, played by Robin Williams, who excites a class of boys at a traditional school with his motto, *Carpe Diem*, 'Seize the day'. He encourages them to be free and break away from the suffocating traditions of the school. They form a club, the Dead Poets Society, which is inspired by a phrase of Henry David Thoreau: 'I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.' But for them, the marrow of life is little more than rebellion against their parents, drinking too much and pursuing women, though for one it ends in tragic suicide. Like the Prodigal Son, they want to live life to the full, but are not yet grown up enough to know how to, and so it ends in disaster.

In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan's novel about growing up, Stephanie looks back on her years of youthful wildness and irresponsibility:

Premarriage, preparenthood, premoney, pre-hard drug renunciation, preresponsibility of any kind, when they were still kicking around the Lower East Side with Bosco, going to bed after sunrise, turning up at strangers' apartments, having sex in quasi public, engaging in daring acts that had more

than once included (for her) shooting heroin, because none of it was serious. They were young and lucky and strong – what did they have to worry about? If they didn't like the result, they could go back and start again.<sup>10</sup>

Which is just what the Prodigal Son did.

Philip Larkin famously laid the blame on his parents:

They fill you with the faults they had  
And add some extra, just for you.

The only answer is to get away and begin anew, perhaps in a distant land.

Man hands on misery to man.  
It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
And don't have any kids yourself.<sup>11</sup>

This youthful rebellion looks like the beginning of a great adventure, drinking the cup of life to the dregs. *Carpe Diem!* Mae West famously said: 'Given the choice between two evils, I choose the one I haven't tried before.' But the idea that escape from your parents will solve anything is an illusion. This premature grab at adulthood is as old as humanity, but Neil Postman argues that it is especially entrenched in contemporary culture, because we have largely lost the idea of childhood. In *The Disappearance of Childhood* he claims that there used to be an idea of childhood as a distinct phase between infancy and adulthood.<sup>12</sup> It was expressed by children's games, children's songs, children's clothes: 'In a hundred ways children were classified as qualitatively different from adults; in a hundred customs, assigned a preferred status and offered protection from the vagaries of adult life.'<sup>13</sup>

Children were protected from the adult world, and above all from sex. One did not talk about sex in front of children; it was a secret adult world from which children were excluded until they were ready. When I was about twelve, I was given what was called 'the jaw' by an ancient monk (probably aged about forty), in which all was supposed to be revealed. I could make no sense of it. I had a vague impression that it had something to do with Winston Churchill.

This idea of childhood as a separate stage in life began to be shaken in the late 1960s. Children began to watch the same programmes as adults, wear the same clothes, play the same games, and they knew about sex long before the kids of my generation. Puberty came ever earlier. In 1860 the onset of puberty for girls was about 16.6 years old. By 2010 it had dropped to around 10.5. Similar shifts happened for boys, with a delay of around a year.<sup>14</sup>

The young were expelled from the garden of childhood. The other side is, of course, that adults were ceasing to grow up. Increasingly they spoke like children, used childish jargon, wore the same jeans as their kids and perhaps, though it is not certain, increasingly committed sexual crimes against children. Postman writes: 'What can this [the rise of sexual abuse] mean other than that the special status, image and aura of the child has been drastically diminished?' These adults are not childlike. They are just childish.

The rebellion of youth often includes rejection of one's parents' religion. Parents may feel guilty because their children stop going to church. It is reassuring to remember that Israel was the child of God in a permanent state of rebellion against the divine father: 'You have been rebellious against the Lord as long as he has known you' (Deut. 9.24). Israel only edges into maturity through constant acts of defiance, choosing other gods, running away from the one who loves her. Only thus, testing God's love time and again, can she learn the faithful love

of the God who never gives up his people. Israel is like a child who tests the boundaries, sulks and has tantrums and only thus discovers the secure enduring love of their parents.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt  
I called my son.

The more I called them, the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in  
my arms;  
but they did not know that I healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.  
I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.

...

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over,  
O Israel?

How can I make you like Admah?

How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart recoils within me;  
my compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy  
Ephraim;  
for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst,  
and I will not come in wrath.

(Hos. 11.1-4, 8-9)

The earliest theologians did not see the fall of Adam and Eve as the arrogant rebellion of strong adults against God. They were like two young children who grabbed everything God was going

to give them when the time was ripe. They were like children who rush in and grab their Christmas presents before time, or like a child impulsively snatching control of the parental car before his feet can reach the brakes.

St Irenaeus of Lyon in the second century compared Adam and Eve to sexually immature children: 'Because they had been created but a short time before, they had no knowledge about generating children; they first had to grow up and from that time on multiply in this manner.'<sup>15</sup> Christ came among us so that we could receive childhood again from God and so grow up into maturity well. We are not irreparably marked by our botched attempts at being grown up.

The Prodigal Son descends into dissolution and debauchery. Even this may be a fumbling after a fullness of life that he mistakenly believes his father has denied him. A sexually promiscuous person may be desperately seeking true love in a mistaken way. In *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck wrote:

The church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously. And each would have been horrified to think it was a different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, the brothel involves the brutal commodification of women, but perhaps Steinbeck is right in that some men have gone to brothels in a mistaken search for the warmth and poetry that they ought to have found in church, but did not.

Simon Tugwell OP writes:

In his hymn on the woman who was a sinner, Romanos the Melodist delicately insinuates that it is Christ who can truly give her what she had been looking for in vain with all her

previous lovers. If the discontinuity involved in conversion is important, so also is the continuity. The unchaste love was an abortive experiment in loving: it is essentially the same experiment that now succeeds with Christ.<sup>17</sup>

When his son grabs his inheritance and leaves, there is no sign that this is a dramatic moment. The father does not make a fuss and demand that he stay. Life carries on. He lets him go. Leaving his son at school, Cecil Day-Lewis discovers 'how selfhood begins with a walking away,/ And love is proved in the letting go.'<sup>18</sup> We love by giving space, even bearing the pain of the other distancing themselves from us, a common experience for parents of teenagers.

For a grown-up Christian, the great drama has already happened: 'Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again.' If the victory is certain, as Bonhoeffer claimed, there is no need to make a drama. OK, the church has burned down, the treasurer has run off with the money and one of the priests has had a sex change. Still, no worries: Christ has risen from the dead.

We help the young to grow up by remaining calm, whatever they do. It belongs to youth to get oneself into a mess, but messes can be fruitful. Thoreau wrote: 'How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experience of living?'<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis believes that we must not be afraid of a bit of mess. He said during the World Youth Day in Rio, after the downpours of rain, 'I expect a messy World Youth Day. But I want things messy and stirred up in the congregations.' The Holy Spirit hovered over the chaos in the beginning, and the creation came to be. The Spirit hovers over the messes we may make of our lives, and brings forth something new.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So

he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."'"

'He came to himself.' He is free to go back home to his father because he has come home to himself, perhaps for the first time. The journey begins with accepting who he is, the son of this father. He no longer seeks an identity apart from his father or in opposition to him. His father is not his rival, but the one who ensures that all of his household have 'bread enough and to spare'. But the moment that he accepts his sonship, he renounces any rights that it gives him: 'I am not longer worthy to be called your son.' His identity as a son is both accepted and let go. What does it matter who he is, as long as he is back home, a member of the household in whatever capacity? Earlier, in Chapter 3, I suggested that it belongs to the adventure of being called both to know who we are and not to know or even care. Growing up is emerging from the chrysalis of the self. This is the hardest thing.

So 'coming to himself' implies a de-centring of his identity. The wastrel learns that he is not the still point at the centre of the world. In *Swing Time*, by Zadie Smith, a young woman wakes up to the fact that she sees everyone insofar as they relate to her:

[For] in my mind at that time – as perhaps it is for most young people – I was at the centre of things, the only person

in the world with true freedom. I moved from here to there, observing life as it presented itself to me, but everyone else in these scenes, all the subsidiary characters, belonged only in the compartments in which I had placed them.<sup>20</sup>

To come to oneself is to come home to others.

This is the experience of Abra in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*: 'When you're a child you're the centre of everything. Everything happens for you. Other people? They're only ghosts furnished for you to talk to.'<sup>21</sup> It is like the man who wanted to cross a river. He saw a man resting under a tree on the opposite bank and shouted, 'How do I get to the other side?' The man shouts back: 'But you are already on the other side.'

Andrew Halls, the head of King's College School, Wimbledon, sees this as the fundamental challenge of education in the world of the iPad, the iPhone, the iPod, I, I, I: 'Children become locked in a world of incomprehension, with an increasingly two-dimensional understanding of other people, incapable of forming real relationships in the world of flesh and blood: like the Far East [*sic*] couple who let their own real baby die of neglect while they tended a "virtual" baby on their computers.'<sup>22</sup>

Immanuel Kant said that the 'dear self is always turning up'.<sup>23</sup> It's tough to quit what Iris Murdoch calls 'the familiar rat-runs of selfish day-dreams'.<sup>24</sup> St Francis de Sales said that if we die to self-preoccupation just half an hour before we die, we have done well. This liberation from the gravitational pull of the self evokes the massive power needed to free a rocket from the gravity of the earth before it sets off into outer space, free to be drawn by other bodies. This is the freedom of saints who are self-forgetful. As Robert Kennedy, the assassinated brother of the President of the USA, lay on the ground dying, his last words were: 'Is everyone OK?'

Robert Cole begins his biography of Dorothy Day, the peace activist, by recounting how he first met her. He arrived at

a Catholic Worker House and found Dorothy talking with a distressed woman. She signalled him to sit down, and went on talking to the woman, who was clearly drunk and hysterical. Finally, when the woman had calmed down, Dorothy came over to Cole and asked, 'Were you waiting to speak with one of us?' One of the most famous women in America did not assume that she was the object of attention or that nobody could possibly want to speak to the drunken woman. Her holiness is summed up in that one word, 'us'. What was she more than just a member of God's household or the human community? She is free of the burden of having to be important, which Emily Dickinson mocks gently:

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
 Are you – Nobody – too?  
 Then there's a pair of us!  
 Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!  
 How public – like a Frog –  
 To tell one's name – the livelong June –  
 To an admiring Bog!<sup>25</sup>

St Dominic embodied just such a spirituality. He was known as Brother Dominic, even though he was ordained. He was one of the brethren, a *frater*, a friar. It is fitting that his earliest biography is in the *Vitae Fratrum*, the Lives of the Brethren, of whom he is just one. To become a brother or sister, the only important titles in Christianity, is to learn to say 'we'.

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and

before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves: 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!'

The father sees his son 'while he is still far off.' He knew that he would come back home eventually, and so he waits. Growing up is a slow business. The pace cannot be forced, any more than can the growing of a tree or the coming of spring. In the Bible God shows vast patience in his restoration of friendship with humanity. After the flood, years pass before Abraham hears the call to go to the Promised Land. Centuries go by before Moses leads the chosen people out of slavery in Egypt; millennia drag on before God's Son becomes one of us in Jesus. And we are still waiting for his return.

The culture of the digital continent cultivates impatience. Our fragile community is tenuously held together by instant communication. Frenetic and half-reflected messages are despatched on the spur of the moment, demanding immediate and undigested replies. It is hard to grow up in such a jostled environment. There is no time to do so. I am by nature impatient. I recognize that is part of my immaturity. When I was Master of the Order, if I was unhappy with a Provincial, I would immediately write a letter. The unresolved tension seemed unbearable. The General Secretary would sometimes keep a letter back and ask, when I had cooled down: 'Do you really want to send this?' Patience is a sort of participation in God's life. St Cyprian, a third-century martyr, wrote: 'Patience begins from Him, from Him its brightness and dignity takes its source. The origin and greatness of patience proceed from God its author.'<sup>26</sup> One matures into patience. The immature adolescent grabs at adulthood before he or she is ready, like

Adam and Eve, according to Irenaeus. God, who is and was and ever will be, waits.

The father was patient because he had confidence in his son. The young lad will wake up from mental hibernation when the winter of his folly is over. When St Dominic sent out his young novices to preach the gospel, the Cistercian monks thought him foolish. Surely they would get mixed up with wild women and never be seen again, but St Dominic said, 'I know for certain that my young men will go out and come back, will be sent out and will return; but your young men will be kept locked up and will still go out.'<sup>27</sup>

Before the World Youth Day in Rio, Pope Francis urged the young to be confident. 'Your young hearts want to build a better world. I have been closely following the news reports of the many young people who throughout the world have taken to the streets in order to express their desire for a more just and fraternal society. It is the young who want to be the protagonists of change. Please, don't leave it to others to be the protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future! Through you the future is fulfilled in the world.'<sup>28</sup> Our churches and parishes should show confidence in the young, letting them experiment, try out daring ideas and fail and start again.

If we are spiritually grown up, we shall prepare the young to supersede us, and be what we could never imagine. Preaching at a solemn profession, our rugged Scottish Provincial, Ian Hislop OP, said:

I am coming to the end of my religious life and you are now beginning yours. As I look back over my religious life, and it has been a long one, I think of all that I have laboured to build and to support. Often I have laboured hard to construct something, to leave some monument behind me, when, inevitably, some idiot has come along after me and torn down all that I have built and called it progress. So, I

want to give you this piece of counsel, whatever schemes you may hatch, whatever plans you may formulate be sure of one thing, God will frustrate them!<sup>29</sup>

His point was that we must exercise the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, part of which is letting the present die so that the future may break in. It is creating the space for the young to do what we cannot imagine or anticipate, loosening the grip of the present, loosening control so that the Spirit, blowing in young minds and hearts, may take us to places that we cannot imagine.

The father clothes his errant son with the best robe. The Greek says 'the first robe.'<sup>30</sup> The early theologians saw a reference here to the first robe that Adam wore before he fell and became ashamed. Even if this is unlikely, it suggests rightly that this is a ritual release of the boy from shame. In Rembrandt's painting the lad returns clothed in a torn, decayed coat, and his sandals are broken. After the stock market crash of 1929, Britain was plunged into the Great Depression. Many of the parishioners in the Dominican parish in Newcastle upon Tyne were so poor that they could not afford shoes. How could we find shoes for them so that they could join the congregation for Mass without shame?

The father literally covers his son's shame. He also covers it with silence. He does not even respond to his son's confession of guilt. Instead, he calls for clothes. And when his eldest son objects by pointing to his brother's sins, again the father passes over them in silence: he was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found. Nothing more needs to be said. The sins of the young man are to be swallowed up in silence.

There is an ancient Christian tradition that, if at all possible, we must not speak of someone's failings. This was central to the spirituality of the desert fathers. 'A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, "If I see my brother sinning, should I hide the fact?" The old man said, "At the moment we hide a brother's

fault, God hides our own. At the moment we reveal a brother's fault, God reveals our own."<sup>31</sup>

St Thomas Aquinas taught that everyone had the right to a good name, even if they sinned. It is our most precious possession in this world.<sup>32</sup> This utterly contradicts our contemporary Western culture of exposure and accusation in the name of transparency. The media are filled every day with revelations about people's failings, especially those of celebrities. But our rejection of this thirst for accusation in no way justifies the cover-up of clergy who have committed sexual abuse of minors. The Church has been slow to learn that this is a gross negligence in our duty of care for the most vulnerable which is utterly unacceptable. Mercy for the abuser can never be at the expense of the abused, who are robbed of their childhood and wounded in their growing up. So, for the young to grow up, they need our patience and confidence so that they are not crushed by the mistakes that we all make. They need us to care for their dignity, lest they be mortally wounded by shame. They will care for our dignity in due course.

The father has something of the child about him. He is what the Greeks called 'the grave-merry man,' serious and playful. Plato writes that 'fun and gravity are sisters.'<sup>33</sup> The only really mature adult is the person who has something of a child. Bruno Schulz, a Jewish poet shot by the Gestapo in 1942, said: 'My ideal goal is to "mature" into childhood. That would be genuine maturity.'<sup>34</sup>

This is apparent in two elements of the story: the father's spontaneity and his festivity. Without hesitation, not waiting for a word from his son, he runs up and kisses him. It is only the very young and innocent and the truly grown up who are self-forgetful enough to be spontaneous. It is quickly lost. I remember my acute self-consciousness as an eight-year-old schoolboy, dreading that an aunt might turn up at school in a ghastly hat.

The elder son is oppressed by conforming to what he thinks are the expectations of his father; the younger son rebels against them. Neither has grown up. It is the childlike father who is free to be spontaneous. The person who is morally grown up recovers the spontaneity of the very young. Good deeds spring from the core of one's being. After decades of training and practice, Novak Djokovic can spontaneously produce a magical backhand on the tennis court. When he was old, Picasso liked to say: 'I have spent all my life learning to paint like a child', with unhesitating brushstrokes. The discipline of Zen calligraphy forms one to make a stroke with a learned artlessness: 'This attainment usually occurs in moments of spontaneous clarity achieved without consciousness, when embodied artlessness, spontaneity, and mindfulness meld in the moment of attainment.'<sup>35</sup>

The father and the son take a first step towards each other. The son takes the first step in going home without waiting for an assurance that he will be received back, and his father takes the first step by rushing towards him without waiting for an apology. If one is truly grown up, one dares to take the first step towards another, in affection or reconciliation. One risks rebuff or humiliation. One is the first to climb out of the trenches, take off the armour and offer an apology even when one believes that the other person has every reason to grovel.

One cannot have the freedom of the grown-up child of the Kingdom if one cares too much about one's dignity. The son shows that he does not care a fig for his. He is prepared to come back even as a hired hand; the father casts off his patriarchal dignity, galumphing across the fields like a fool to embrace his son before he has said a word. Any attempt to be dignified makes one laughable. Think of Peter Sellers as the ridiculous Inspector Clouseau in the *Pink Panther* films, knocking over the furniture, destroying vases, shooting himself in the foot, while trying to appear grand and imposing.

Pope Francis incessantly attacks clericalism, the illusion that the clergy form an elite caste, superior to the mere laity, and whose dignity must always be respected with subservience. Perhaps the present crisis of the Church will free us from its delusions. In her book *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Louise Erdrich hilariously describes a woman who disguises herself as a male priest so as to hide on a Native American reservation. She has to learn how to project a priestly image. These are the ghastly, but all too plausible, rules that she adopts to pass herself off as a cleric:

- 1 Make requests in the form of orders.
- 2 Give compliments in the form of concessions.
- 3 Ask questions in the form of statements.
- 4 Exercises to enhance the muscles of the neck.
- 5 Admire women's handiwork with copious amazement.
- 6 Stride, swing arms, stop abruptly, stroke chin.
- 7 Sharpen razor daily.
- 8 Advance no explanations.
- 9 Accept no explanations.
- 10 Hum an occasional resolute march.<sup>36</sup>

Alas, clericalism is not confined to male priests. If one acts with the childlike spontaneity of the father, one is bound to be misunderstood. Jesus tells the parable because the scribes and the Pharisees are scandalized by Jesus' feasting with the tax collectors and prostitutes. He must be condoning sin. Imagine the headlines if a bishop today were to hold a party for the local prostitutes. My brethren in Brazil organized retreats for sex workers. If one presides at a Mass that is especially welcoming for gay people, the Twittersphere will buzz with denunciations.

In our cautious, risk-averse society, one is told to beware of 'sending the wrong message'. One must not confuse people. But if one preaches the gospel, one will inevitably be misunderstood.

Misunderstanding nailed Jesus to the cross. We shall probably have to endure nothing more than poisonous words on blogs. If one does not risk being misunderstood, one will never say anything at all.

And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

They began to celebrate. The father's spontaneous reaction to his son's return is to have a party. This is the true festivity that the son had failed to find in his debauchery in a faraway land. Growing up includes learning how to have a joyful party which does not end in drunken misery in the gutter or in the mud of a pig farm. This was the party that the lad left home to seek and which he only found when he came back. It is the ecstatic joy of those who are carried beyond themselves in delight in each other.

In *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness* Paul Murray shows that the early brethren and sisters often spoke of the gospel as 'the new wine.'<sup>37</sup> In preaching the

barrel is breached, we get a little drunk with the gospel and the party begins. Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's successor, called the gospel 'the wine of hope', the 'good wine' which puts us at ease, gives us a lift and makes us happy.<sup>38</sup> St Dominic's most famous miracle was when he came to a convent late at night, woke up the nuns and preached to them. When he finished, he said: 'It would be good to have something to drink.' The cup of wine was passed around and never emptied as Dominic urged them to drink up!<sup>39</sup> The brethren obviously delighted in their wine. An early General Chapter ruled that if they drink too much wine after Compline, they must say it again.

The words attributed to St Brigid of Kildare reflect a more northern taste for celebration:

I should like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.

I should like the angels of heaven to be drinking it through time eternal.<sup>40</sup>

The eldest son 'heard music and dancing', but he refuses to join in. This is the complaint of Jesus against his critics: 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance"' (Mt. 11.16-17). His younger brother escaped from the family circle, and now the elder son mirrors this in refusing to join the round dance of the community. He sulks on the edge like a teenager. He accuses his younger brother of wasting his money on prostitutes. This is not necessarily implied by the young lad's dissolute behaviour.<sup>41</sup> No doubt the elder brother has sex on the brain, and probably had been aching to pop out to the prostitutes himself. He refuses even to think of the young lad as his brother: 'Your son'!

Both children are living through the crisis of growing up. Their father wants to share his life with them, but neither knows how to receive this gift. The younger son grabbed what

he wanted while the older son does not dare to accept the gift. Henri Nouwen, an eldest son, identifies with him:

I often wonder if it is not especially the elder sons who want to live up to the expectations of their parents and be considered obedient and dutiful. They often want to please. They often fear being a disappointment to their parents. But they often also experience, quite early in life, a certain envy toward their younger brothers and sisters, who seem to be less concerned about pleasing and much freer in 'doing their own thing'.<sup>42</sup>

He is angrily indignant, a characteristic emotion of our time. It is a cheap substitute for virtue. In Gabriel Chevallier's novel *Clochemerle*, it is said of the schoolmaster that he 'was one of those men for whom virtuous indignation was a necessity'.<sup>43</sup> It is a way of being on the side of the good without doing anything about it. It is an essentially childish emotion, the great cry through all the ages of 'It's not fair!' It is Joseph's brothers' angry reaction to their father's gift of a multi-coloured coat to his resented favourite. Remember the words of H. G. Wells quoted earlier: 'Moral indignation is jealousy with a halo.'

The eldest son stands outside and listens to the joy of the party. A childish tantrum holds him back. Can he let go of his narcissistic sulk, and join the party? Brian Pierce OP wrote: 'Rather than being limited to the traditional idea that conversion is primarily about a penitential way of life, as in the case of John's disciples, Jesus shows his followers that conversion requires a step into the radical practice of gospel joy'.<sup>44</sup> In the preface for Lent it is described as a 'joyful season'. Every Friday at Lauds we sing the great Psalm of repentance: 'Make me hear rejoicing and gladness, that the bones you have crushed may revive' (Ps. 50).

Jesus invites us to grow up and share the joy of God. This is not a ghastly jollity, but the vast joy that is the life of God, large enough to gather up all sorrow and transcend it. The father's

joy in the parable sweeps up the son who has come back, with all his suffering and pain, and is ready to embrace the elder son with all his tantrums. It is more than an emotion. It is God's own abundant life:

For even though the fig does not blossom, Nor fruit grow on the vine,

Even though the olive crop fail, And fields produce no harvest,

Even though the flocks vanish from the folds and stalls stand empty of cattle,

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord and exult in God my saviour.

The Lord my God is my strength. He makes me leap like the deer.

He guides me to the high places.

(Hab. 3.16-19)

It is the spontaneous joy of the childlike adult, free to dance and play. He challenges us to reimagine childhood and the passage to true maturity. Richard Finn OP wrote:

Of course, we can sometimes be nervous of joy, and with some reason. After all, there are those who are tempted to whoop it up regardless of others, of their sufferings. The ghetto-blaster and the iPod can each be symbols of a joy that is sought in isolation from neighbours, either deafening for, or deaf to, those around us. Some look for joy in the oblivion of alcoholic excess or a drug-induced euphoria, stepping out from a mundane world they find empty or just not enough. In the process they grow less and less capable of life in the real world ... But the joy of the Holy Spirit runs through, runs beneath, real sufferings, real grief, like an underground current that at the right time breaks surface and overflows, giving new hope in place of despair. It wells up in faith, trust

in God's infinite goodness, His providence. It issues today [Christmas day] in a joyous festival, a liturgy that practises for the endless and perfect joy of heaven.<sup>45</sup>

As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem to face his passion, death and resurrection, he urgently teaches his disciples how to be alive in God, how to grow up into human and spiritual maturity. He invites them to transcend childish rivalry and teenage sulks, and to forgive as his Father does, to become free and joyful like the father in the parable. But the disciples are slow to learn. In the Church of Corinth we see a community that is still, twenty or more years after the Resurrection, torn by rivalry and immaturity. St Paul longed to feed the community in Corinth grown-up food, but they were not adult enough: 'I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready' (1 Cor. 3.2).

Jesus' teaching would be balm for our society, which is living through such a crisis of childhood. Children are propelled into the world of adults before they are ready, and so many adults never grow up. To be alive is to ripen into maturity, whereas much of modernity traps people in infantilism. But we shall only be able to share this good news if people see that our Christian communities are nurseries of maturity, in which people learn to flourish humanly and spiritually with God's grace. We have to understand young people's thirst for life – *Carpe Diem!* Even if it leads them astray, they must know that they can come home, their shame covered. We should have confidence in the young, so that they can prepare for a future that we cannot imagine, and live Christian lives in a world we do not understand. If we learn the spontaneous freedom and joy of the father, truly adult and truly childlike, we shall touch the imagination of our contemporaries and they may want to join the celebration.

## 7

### Sin and Forgiveness

Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son because 'the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them"' (Lk. 15.1). As the disciples journeyed to Jerusalem, struggling to understand this strange man, the most difficult thing to grasp was his boundless forgiveness. Everyone is offered forgiveness, and any number of times. 'Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."' (Mt. 18.21-2). How could any society survive if there is unlimited forgiveness? Surely one must draw a line somewhere.

Even more extraordinary is that Jesus presents himself as the one who takes away our sins: 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mk 10.45). In St John's gospel, right at the beginning of his ministry, John the Baptist points him out to the crowd and exclaims: 'Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!' (Jn 1.29).

This was hard for his followers to grasp and a scandal to his enemies. This is a claim that is also nonsensical for a secular imagination. Jesus as the one who offers the fullness of life?

That at least is attractive. All human beings want to live fully. 'I put before you life and death, choose life.' Everyone can accept that choosing life is the key to a worthwhile existence, which is why I chose it as the theme of this book. But the claim that abundant life comes from the hideous death of a man on a cross looks weird and even sick. What sort of sadistic God could demand this?

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all worship a merciful God. God proclaims on the mountain of Sinai 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exod. 34.6). Every surah of the Quran begins with the Bismillah: 'In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most compassionate'. But uniquely mercy is the very core of Christianity, whose central image is of a man tortured to death. It seems to put death and not life at the heart of our faith, and guilt rather than joy. If this is so, then no wonder Christianity fails to touch the imagination of our contemporaries. So let us see how the language of sin and forgiveness may be emancipating.

## SIN

Most people today are uncomfortable with the language of 'sin'. Our society has a strong moral sense, articulated in terms of human rights, mutual tolerance, the imperative to preserve the environment and to care for the vulnerable. But if one talks about sin, some become uneasy. It jars with the contemporary imagination, evoking an unhealthy tendency to wallow in guilt. But in my translation of the Bible, 'sin', translating a variety of Hebrew and Greek words, occurs almost one and a half thousand times. One cannot engage with a Christian imagination without unlocking the language of sin and forgiveness.

The day after the baptism of my latest godson, his father sent me an irritated email:

I think Fr X needs to lie down in a field of bluebells or something, all this talk of Sin, Sin and more Sin must be getting to him! I thought you guys had moved on from dwelling on how big a guilt complex we should all be carrying, and thinking of ever more extreme forms of flagellation to keep it in check!

He is on to something. It is rather bizarre that we begin each celebration of the Eucharist by asking people to think of their sins. It is not a promising start for a joyful feast. Imagine beginning a birthday party by asking everyone to repent of their sins. It would put a damper on the celebration. Maybe we are less at ease with the language of sin rather than wrongdoing since it evokes an unattainable perfection. 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5.48). 'Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.' Francis Spufford asserts that Christianity 'makes frankly impossible demands ... It thinks that you should give your possessions away, refuse to defend yourself, love strangers as much as your family, behave as if there's no tomorrow. These principles do not amount to a sustainable programme.'<sup>1</sup>

This seems an intolerable and inhuman ethic. Jeanette Winterson's mother, a strict born-again Christian, loses her cool with a group of carol singers and bursts out: "I have had a lot to put up with," she said, looking meaningfully at me. "I know the Bible tells us to turn the other cheek but there are only so many cheeks in a day."<sup>2</sup>

Such a pursuit of impossible perfection can lead to incessant self-examination, gloom and devastating guilt. In *East of Eden*,

Samuel is married to 'his tiny Irish wife, a tight hard little woman humourless as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.' H. L. Mencken, the American newspaper editor, defined Puritanism as 'the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy'.<sup>3</sup>

I rarely encountered the famous 'Catholic guilt' in my childhood. The Catholicism in which I grew up was not burdened with scrupulosity. For me, the fear was shame. The important thing was not to be found out. But it infected some forms of Irish Catholicism, tinged by Jansenist scrupulosity. It often homed in on sex. Timothy Egan remembers his childhood upbringing: 'Sex was dirty. Sex was shameful. Sex was unnatural. Thinking about it was wrong. Premeditation itself was a sin, and so was flirting. Sex had one purpose: procreation, the joyless act of breeding.'<sup>4</sup> Brian Moore begins one of his early stories with the sentence: 'In the beginning was the word and the word was NO.'

So a common story of liberation in our times is from Christianity's preoccupation with sin. The classic account is James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The hero, Stephen Dedalus, is tormented by guilt and the threat of an eternal toasting in Hell, until he is freed from being 'a dull-witted loyal serf'.<sup>5</sup> Almost the final words of the book, quoted earlier, are his cry of freedom: 'Welcome, O life, I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.' The 'uncreated conscience' was, presumably, unburdened of Catholic guilt.

Edna O'Brien said in an interview: 'I'm an Irish Catholic and I have a long iceberg of guilt.'<sup>6</sup> Of course, there is also Protestant guilt. The story is told of the Scottish minister preaching on the terrible fires of hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He is interrupted by a member of the congregation:

‘But I do not have any teeth.’ ‘Teeth will be provided!’ Doubtless there is Jewish and Muslim guilt as well.

Why demand an impossible perfection? It may look as if one must make people feel guilty first so that they will want what the religion offers, forgiveness. That is like a manufacturer of washing powder convincing you that your reasonably decent trousers are unacceptably filthy so that you must buy their product. In our case it is the blood of the Lamb that washes our clothes clean (Rev. 7.14).

In Stephen Hough’s searingly forthright novel *The Final Retreat*, about a priest who gets mixed up with rent boys, the priest confesses that

a lot of traditional Catholic devotion is built on a kind of inoculation process: you make people sick with guilt, then supply the antidote; you inflict a wound and then, lo and behold, you have the magic ointment; you create a freezing room, watch people turn blue with theological hypothermia, and then turn on the heat. ‘Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.’ And they do. Rosy cheeks warm. With a smile of joy. If a placebo cures the patient shouldn’t the doctor be happy?<sup>7</sup>

The case against the language of sin seems strong. Is there any way in which it can be shown to open our imaginations to a fullness of life? Or is it just oppressive and productive of useless culpability? Is it the shed of Emma Donoghue’s novel *Room*, or does it open a door into transcendence and an infinity of love?

#### DIVINE FRIENDSHIP

In Chapter 3 I cited Charles Taylor’s claim that one of the sources of the secular imagination is the rejection of the pursuit of radical holiness. Being decent is enough. Participation in the very being of God, so fundamental to the first one and half thousand years of Christianity, was no longer imaginable.

According to Taylor, ‘the proposing of goals beyond human flourishing were seen as denials of the right to happiness’;<sup>8</sup> ‘Thus by a variety of routes, one could end up rejecting Christianity, because in calling for something more than human flourishing, it was the implacable enemy of the human good.’ Why torture ourselves in seeking an impossible sanctity? Isn’t it enough for us to be good citizens who love our families, are kind to animals and do no harm?

Here we come to the paradox at the heart of the Christian imagination. Jesus gives an unconditional welcome to the tax collectors and prostitutes. He does not ask that they repent and turn a new page before they come to party with him. He evidently enjoys their company and offers them his friendship regardless of what they have done and been. He likes the prostitutes. How is this compatible with his demand that they be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect? How can he simultaneously accept them without condition and ask for holiness?

To understand how, we have to make an enormous imaginative leap and see that for the Biblical tradition holiness is not about submitting to external constraints. As I have explained in an earlier book,<sup>9</sup> the moral demands of the Ten Commandments formed Israel for friendship with God. To be a friend of God, one must share his freedom. The Commandments were a charter of freedom from the worship of the other gods who enslave their worshippers, from the tyranny of work, from the destructive passions that lead to violence and destroy family life.<sup>10</sup> God speaks to Moses as to a friend. The Commandments are a declaration of love and a discipline for growing up. The Israelites loved God’s commandments because they form us to share God’s company and be his people:

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

(Ps. 19.10)

With the loss of the dream of transfiguration, religion became moralized, and so God's Law was interpreted not as forming us for virtue but as constraining our behaviour. Obedience was no more the response to the one who summoned us to live, but blind submission to the celestial policeman. Once I was asked to give a lecture on sexual ethics for 500 teenagers in Mauritius. I tried to explain, entirely without success, that sexual ethics is not primarily about what you are allowed or forbidden to do, any more than that the point of playing football is to obey the rules, necessary though they may be. Sexual ethics form you to live lovingly. At the end of the lecture, amid much tittering, all the questions were in the form of 'Am I allowed to do this or that?' To understand the language of sin, we must first imagine an ethics that forms us for friendship, with each other and with God.

Any friendship worthy of the name is transformative. I hope that it is not presumptuous to call Jean Vanier, the founder of the l'Arche communities, a friend. His presence, his glance, the way that he talks, who he is, summon one beyond one's trivial self-obsession, the half-truths one tells and dull mediocrity. Jean never, in my experience, tells one to stop being selfish, but one cannot be with him without longing to leave behind all that is petty-minded. In the presence of his magnanimity one unfolds, seeking release from the bubble of what Iris Murdoch calls 'the fat relentless ego'.<sup>11</sup> It is Jean's being that touches one. His gaze is an invitation to grow up. Every particular friendship brings into being aspects of one's existence that had not previously emerged, which is why one needs many friends.

At Jean's recommendation I went to see the film *Untouchables*, directed by Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano, released in 2011. An immensely wealthy businessman, left quadriplegic after a paragliding accident, hires as his carer Dris, a Senegalese ex-convict who has no professional training. Dris steals a Fabergé

egg during the job interview: not a promising beginning. It is inspired by the true story of Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and his carer, Abdel Sellou. It is an uproariously funny story of two people whose mutual friendship liberates both men: the one from the limitations of disability and the other from a world of drugs and violence. The wealthy man dares to love again, and his carer to seek goodness. When the wealthy man is asked why he hired this rough character, he replies that it is because Dris looks at him without pity. There is no condescension. His gaze liberates. Their friendship releases each of them from what has imprisoned them. The door swings open.

True friendship embodies what seems irreconcilable, complete acceptance of the other and the invitation to become more. It is hard to get the balance right. *Lady Bird*, a film released in 2018, is about the fraught relationship between a mother and her daughter, Lady Bird. The mother loves her daughter, but her love is crushing. Invariably she demands perfection. Lady Bird says ‘I just wish ... I wish that you liked me.’ Her mother replies, ‘Of course I love you.’ ‘But do you like me?’ Her mother’s reply expresses a love that has not embraced her daughter in her edgy awkwardness: ‘I want you to be the very best version of yourself that you can be.’ ‘What if this *is* the best version?’ A love that does not totally accept the other person in all of their wounded fragility is devastating. But a true friendship also longs for the flourishing of the other, their holiness as Christians say. If it did not, it would be equally oppressive since it would be without hope.

This tension also haunts the acclaimed series of *Neapolitan Novels* by Elena Ferrante. In *My Brilliant Friend* an intense friendship develops between two girls from a poor neighbourhood of Naples, Lila and the narrator, Elena. Lila is brilliant and daring. She challenges Elena to escape poverty through education. She constantly incites Elena to do more, to

read more, to aim higher. But for all their mutual affection, this just makes Elena feel a failure:

I let her teach me how to do the quadrille. I let her show me how many Italian words she could write in the Greek alphabet. She wanted me to learn the alphabet before I went to school, and she forced me to write and read it. I got even more pimples. I went to the dances at Gigliola's with a permanent sense of inadequacy and shame.<sup>12</sup>

No human friendship can get the balance quite right. It is hard both to let the other be and to invite them to be more. The best that we can manage is often to swing from one to the other, like someone on a bicycle trying to remain upright.

Imagine, then, friendship with the Son of God. The people in the gospels who encounter Jesus struggle to understand what this means. His acceptance of sinners goads the Pharisees and scribes into righteous indignation, but when Jesus invites the rich young man to leave all and follow him, he goes away sad (Mk 10.22). When Jesus says that it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God, his disciples 'were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"' (Mk 10.26).

Yet those who accept this unshakable and demanding friendship are transformed. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice from 1970, Mary Magdalene, the former prostitute, wonders why being around him has changed her:

I've been changed, yes, really changed.  
 In these past few days, when I've seen myself,  
 I seem like someone else.  
 I don't know how to take this.  
 I don't see why he moves me.  
 He's a man. He's just a man.

Any friendship is nourished by a mutuality of gaze. We look and let ourselves be looked at. The disciples lived in the eyes of Jesus for the years of his ministry. It was to this that they witnessed. I have always felt nervous of that passage in Mark's gospel: 'For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light' (Mk 4.22). My father will know that I was the one who, when he went to bed, extracted the whisky bottle from the cupboard, had a hearty drink and then diluted the remains with water, hoping he would not notice. Years later I was relieved to discover that all of my brothers did the same thing.

The gaze of Jesus is challenging, but not because our every sin is noted down. On the contrary, he sees our invisible goodness. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock claim that God's knowledge is rather like that of a *rusticus*, a country bumpkin, who knows and loves his tomatoes, even when they have flaws. 'God knows them [us!] like the artisan because he makes them. God knows them like the *rusticus* because God is intimately present to them in their singularity.'<sup>13</sup> God delights in our being, our goodness, even if it is sometimes concealed. He sees the saint that each of us is called to be with his grace. St John says, 'your heart may condemn you but God is greater than your heart' (1 Jn 3.20). Pope Francis wrote: 'Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love.'<sup>14</sup>

Being alive for the Christian is unfolding in friendship with the Living God, and with those he has created. 'Keep company with him and you will know.'<sup>15</sup> Prayer, according to St Teresa of Ávila, is talking to God as to a friend. It offers an acceptance that is more radical than we can imagine, for our very existence is sustained by God in every moment. His pleasure in our being is without limit. Gregory Boyle introduces his street kids in Los Angeles to God saying, 'Behold the one who cannot take his eyes off you.'

St Teresa also knew that this is a friendship that is utterly demanding. One story, probably apocryphal, tells of how, after a terrible day of travelling, Teresa complained at length to God. He said, 'But that is how I treat my friends,' which provoked Teresa to reply, 'Yes, Lord, that is why you have so few of them.'<sup>16</sup> It transfigures us and forms us for what is beyond our reach and nature, the holiness of God. It is challenging because it offers so much.

Francis Spufford is right: Jesus makes impossible demands. This perfection cannot be arrived at through grim determination and self-flagellation. It is a gift that unfolds as one lingers in his company, dwells on his word and shares his life in the sacraments. All other animals, as far as I know, find their fulfilment in being themselves. A fulfilled rabbit has a rabbit life, eating lettuce and procreating little rabbits. A happy dog has a doggy life, chewing bones and chasing rabbits. It is thus that they are themselves. D. H. Lawrence celebrates a lizard for just being itself, unlike us: 'If men were as much men as lizards are lizards/ They'd be worth looking at.'<sup>17</sup> In one of Walter Percy's novels, the hero contemplates his lazy cat: 'All at once he realized where he had gone wrong, there was the cat sitting in the sun 100% cat, and as for himself, he had never been 100% anything.'<sup>18</sup> None of us is yet, because to be 100 per cent ourselves is to be more than ourselves. Human nature is made for a love that is beyond our nature – supernatural – a sharing in the divine happiness and freedom of God. The virtues form us to live beyond what seems possible, as God's friends.

The language of sin should evoke not self-disgust, but the infinity of the love to which we are called. The essence of repentance is not feeling bad about ourselves but opening ourselves to God's friendship. Of course, if we have hurt people we ought to feel bad about it. But the sorrow is a sign that already God's grace is working within us and that God is close. Remorse for sin is more than regret. It is knowing that we never

really deeply wanted to do it in the first place. We succumbed to small desires. We devoured a stale sandwich, closing our minds to the unimaginable feast God is offering us for free.

#### FORGIVENESS

Some people are equally ill at ease with the language of forgiveness, since this seems to our moralistic age to lift accusation too easily. It is often said that today, 'everything is permitted and nothing is forgiven.' We live in a permissive society and yet an unforgiving one. Tabloids have pictures of naked women on the front page while boiling with indignation at inappropriate touch. The media bristle with accusation. Our failures are recorded on the web for all of eternity. They can never be wiped out. But Hamlet says: 'Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?'<sup>19</sup>

Forgiveness would trivialize our failures if it were merely a matter of forgetting. Often the Bible speaks as if it is. In Isaiah God says: 'I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins' (Is. 43.25). God has cast all our sins behind his back (Is. 38.17). Forgetting is sometimes an element of forgiveness. If I am wounded by a friend, forgiveness might include not letting my mind dwell constantly on the hurt. I must cast it behind my back if we are to move on. But to make forgetting the essence of forgiveness would belittle our dignity as moral beings. God's immeasurable compassion would be reduced to divine amnesia. If I were to murder one of the brethren in an outburst of rage, I would be diminished if God said to me: 'Don't think of it again. Anyone might do it.' If I were to be told to go barefoot on pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a penance, at least I would know that the moral weight of my decisions for good or for evil is recognized. I am being taken seriously.

What then is forgiveness? The first moment of forgiveness is the refusal to inflict revenge. The chain reaction of violence

is broken. We turn the other cheek. Terry Eagleton calls this 'fruitful inaction', and quotes the remark of an African chief in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*. A brave man, he says:

will not want to live by passing on the wrath [of an offence committed against him]. A hit B? B hit C? – we have not enough alphabet to cover the condition ... He shall keep the blow. No man shall get it from him, and that is a sublime ambition.<sup>20</sup>

Antoine Leiris, whose wife, Hélène Muyal, was killed in Paris by terrorists in November 2015, wrote an open letter to her murderers:

On Friday evening you stole the life of an exceptional person, the love of my life, the mother of my son, but you will not have my hatred. I don't know who you are and I don't want to know, you are dead souls. If this God for whom you kill blindly made us in his image, every bullet in the body of my wife is a wound in his heart. So no, I will not give you the satisfaction of hating you. You want it, but to respond to hatred with anger would be to give in to the same ignorance that made you what you are. You would like me to be scared, for me to look at my fellow citizens with a suspicious eye, for me to sacrifice my liberty for my security. You have lost.<sup>21</sup>

This is 'fruitful inaction.' Forgiveness forgoes the elation of revenge and the mechanistic logic of the world. It begins in doing nothing. Creation is *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. It is out of the nothingness of not hitting back that a window is opened for the new. A space has opened in the tight web of human interactions for something unexpected to happen. Whenever one holds back from revenge, God's creative grace makes fertile the empty space. A door has been opened in the small shed of

tit-for-tat through which I may escape into freedom and the fresh air of mercy.

God's forgiveness is revealed in an empty tomb on Easter morning. There is nobody there. On Good Friday humanity crucified the one whom we believe to be God's love made flesh. This brutal hatred gathered up every rejection of love there has ever been. The rising of Jesus from the dead is the irruption of God's creative grace in our world, the beginning of the new creation. It is the only divine act of forgiveness, more than enough for all that we could ever do. Every act of forgiveness is a participation in God's Easter mercy. Eagleton writes: 'Radical forgiveness is probably beyond our power. It is not of this world. The unconditional is the prerogative of the divine. One reason why forgiveness is so difficult is that small children have yet to become capable of it, and small children are to a large extent what we remain.'<sup>22</sup> Forgiveness is a symptom of growing up. It is coming alive in God.

We dare to remember that Friday and call it Good. The cross of apparent defeat is displayed in every church and chapel. Forgiveness is a creative act that bears the marks of God's artistry. In fifteenth-century Japan someone broke a beautiful vase belonging to a general. He had it repaired, but he was not happy with the result. So a craftsman broke it again and stuck it back together with lacquer filled with gold. This became an art form, Kintsugi, 'joining with gold'. The object that was broken becomes more beautiful than ever. Seeking forgiveness, we bring to God the broken pieces of our lives, our failures and sins, and with the grace of God we are restored, the ugliness of our failures swallowed up in beauty, and the nonsense in meaning.

A Greek priest in Tripoli, in Lebanon, Father Ibrahim Sarouj, has a passion for books. Over the years he built up a library of 80,000 books, which he made available to everyone. He wanted everyone to share his library. But inside one of the books was

a pamphlet critical of Islam. Father Ibrahim had not known it was there. The library was put to the torch, and two-thirds of the books were destroyed. An act of pure nihilism, the characteristic of evil. All of his friends, Muslim and Christian, are now turning up with books. He has forgiven the arsonists: 'I am looking for them to tell them that I love them.' The library is being reborn. It will be better than it ever was before. That is the creativity of true forgiveness.

Last year I visited the tomb of my brother Pierre Claverie, the Bishop of Oran in Algeria, murdered in 1996 because of his opposition to violence. A thousand Muslims came to his funeral. A young woman gave her testimony at the end, saying she had returned to Islam because of Pierre. He was the bishop of the Muslims too. Slowly the cathedral was filled with a murmuring in Arabic. I asked what they were saying: 'He was our bishop too. He was the bishop of the Muslims.' Now his tomb is covered with flowers left by Christians and Muslims. The terrible act of his murder bore this unexpected fruit.

I walked in the Algerian Sahara after it had rained. I was astonished to find the sand dunes covered with little sprigs of innumerable small plants poking their heads above the sand. Forgiveness is the evergreen grace of God:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall bloom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing ... then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

(Is. 35.1, 6)

The barren desert of our lives flowers with the rain of God's fertility. The great Easter song the *Exultet* exults in Adam and Eve's fall as the *felix culpa* – the happy sin – because it led to

Christ's coming among us. No human life need come to a dead end, however tragic its apparent failure. It is the triumph of life over death.

A friend of mine, Sister Pauline Quinn OP, was born into a wealthy non-Christian family in Hollywood, but she suffered terrible sexual abuse.<sup>23</sup> She was sent to many institutions where she was raped repeatedly, including by the doctors. She began to cut her body. Her arms are still covered with scars. She became a vagrant living on the streets for many years. And then she met a Catholic sister, and also a dog, a German shepherd called Joni, which gave her safety and affection. She was received into the Church and eventually accepted as a Dominican sister. Her life has become wonderfully fruitful. She has worked with the victims of war from all over the world, persuading benefactors to fund prosthetic limbs for them, finding them jobs. She works with prisoners, training them to train dogs to help the disabled. Grace has triumphed over the ugliness of sin, and her life is beautiful. Now she is being treated for cancer.

On Easter morning Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (Jn 20.22). This is the origin of the tradition in the ancient Christian churches of going to confess our sins to a priest, who represents the whole community. For many people this is a practice that is hard to stomach and embarrassing. Why should they endure such a humiliation? A Dominican called Father Everest was so deaf that he used an ear trumpet. When he heard confessions, he asked people to 'speak up the trumpet'. Once a woman stormed into the priory hot with indignation, claiming that Father Everest had commanded, 'Speak up you strumpet!'

This sacrament celebrates that forgiveness has become flesh and blood, human in our community. It is embedded in the very texture of our communal lives. It is not a just a mental act but becomes visible and audible in this encounter, in these

spoken and heard words, here and now, in this place and time. We are now the Body of Christ, offering the joy of release from sins today. Despite all the ways in which we choose dead ends, the door is opened in our lives into the infinity of God.

Herbert McCabe went to confession on a visit to Dublin. Of course, I have no idea what he said, but he received a roasting from the priest. Herbert emerged from the confessional and waited. When the priest appeared, he grabbed him and shouted, 'You should never hear a confession like that. It is a betrayal of the sacrament.' Confessions in my experience are occasions of joy. They may begin in tears, but laughter often follows.

#### HOW CAN WE FORGIVE?

'If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' (Mt. 6.14). It is a waste of time asking for forgiveness unless one is prepared to forgive. How can we receive the healing of God's creative grace in ourselves if we refuse to share it with others?

But what if the wounds one has suffered are still unhealed? How then can one forgive? If one has endured abuse, especially from a parent, an uncle or a priest, or if one's spouse has been unfaithful or a terrorist has murdered one's child, forgiveness may seem for the moment impossible. To be forced to forgive would be another abuse. One is lost in what Stephen Cherry calls 'the wilderness of hurt'.<sup>24</sup> If the wound was experienced as an attack on one's life by an alien power, to be told one *must* forgive doubles the offence. 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?'<sup>25</sup>

Cherry says that 'forgiveness emerges'.<sup>26</sup> 'Forgiveness will be something that emerges slowly from the heart which is prepared to experience the tension between the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of forgiving.'<sup>27</sup> It comes in its proper time, like the flowers in the desert. The pace cannot be forced.

One cannot drag up flowers without breaking their roots. We can ask God to forgive even when forgiveness has not yet emerged in the springtime of our hearts. On the cross Jesus says, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' (Lk. 23.34). We may say that too, hoping the time may come when we can forgive them ourselves.

The task is, as always, also that of the imagination. In the wilderness, the perpetrator may seem a monster, without shared humanity. The time may come when the monster is seen as a fellow human being, also wounded and hurt. Terry Eagleton offers the example of Patrick Melrose, the protagonist of Edward St Aubyn's *At Last*. Patrick was sexually assaulted by his father when he was a child and is still plunged in 'the wilderness of hurt'. Slowly his image of his parents is transformed:

As the compassion expanded he saw himself on equal terms with his supposed persecutors, saw his parents, who appeared to be the cause of his suffering, as unhappy children with parents who appeared to be the cause of their suffering: there was no one to blame and everyone to help, and those who appeared to deserve the most blame needed the most help.<sup>28</sup>

Eagleton comments: 'Patrick can finally forgive his parents by an acknowledgement of original sin. They, too, were caught up in an anonymous web of damage, debt, guilt and blame, one without source or goal.'

This is not to exonerate them or excuse them. Sin is inexcusable but forgivable. Opening our imagination to their wounded humanity may help us to face our own need for forgiveness. The popular media hunger for blood. The monster must be denounced and expelled from the human community. They must be shamed and ridiculed. But in their expulsion some part of ourselves is cast out so that we cannot become whole.

The opening of our heart and mind to those who have done us great harm may happen in its own time. It cannot be commanded, any more than one can command the spring to happen in winter. The task is to acquire what Cherry calls 'a forgiving heart'. Beginning with the small and more easily forgivable hurts, one becomes someone who habitually forgives. One learns slowly not to scratch the scab of one's wounds, or to nurse resentments, until forgiveness becomes a spontaneous reaction and our deepest freedom. 'But above all, the heart/ Must bear the longest part.'<sup>29</sup>

Eagleton point us to a wonderful scene in *Anna Karenina*. Anna has left her boring bureaucrat of a husband for the dashing Count Vronsky. At first, all that Karenin wants is revenge, but seeing Anna weak, his feelings are transformed:

A glad feeling of love and forgiveness for his enemies filled his heart. He knelt down and laying his head on her sleeve, he sobbed like a child ... his pity for her, and remorse at having desired her death, and, most of all the joy of forgiveness suddenly gave him not only relief from his own sufferings but an inward peace such as he had never known before. He suddenly felt that the very thing that was the source of his sufferings had become the source of his spiritual joy; that what had appeared insoluble so long as he indulged in censure, recriminations and hatred, had become simple and clear when he forgave and loved.<sup>30</sup>

As Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, his enemies and even his followers are scandalized by his talk of unconditional and limitless forgiveness of sins. Even worse, it emerges that he is one whose death brings about this forgiveness, for he is 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'. I have not explored how this death is healing. Thousands of books have been written on theories of the atonement. The concern of this

book is with a Christian imagination which has at its centre the forgiveness of sins. This does not mean that we wallow in guilt and self-hatred. The language of sin uncovers the infinity of the love to which we are called, a love beyond our natural reach but which is freely given. Our hearts are opened to the invitation of Jesus to share the very life of God. Mere decency is not enough for us. And the language of forgiveness is not about perpetually washing away sins, as if the sacrament of reconciliation, as Catholics call confession, was a divine launderette. It is not God's amnesia. It is the creativity of God making our lives beautiful, however ugly they have been. It opens the way when we have been locked in by our past. We are released from confinement.

Now the disciples have arrived in Jerusalem, and now in John's gospel, they begin a journey of another sort. Jesus teaches them.

# *Teaching*

## 8

### Teaching: The Dogmatic Imagination

‘I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10.10). So far we have seen that choosing life means embarking on the perilous adventure of following Christ, being delivered from sickness, healed of the impulse to lash out and destroy, the bumpy adventure of growing up and being liberated from failure. In the gospels becoming alive has taken the form of journeying to Jerusalem.

We are approaching the crux of the adventure. Jesus has arrived in the place where he will suffer, die and rise. But now in John’s gospel something strange happens. Jesus teaches. This is the longest block of continuous material in the New Testament (Chapters 13–17). It is usually referred to as ‘The Last Discourse’, but it could be called ‘The Last Theology Class’. Isn’t it odd that, faced with torture and murder, Jesus holds a theological seminar? The word ‘theological’ is often used to mean pointless speculation, such as the mythological example of counting how many angels could fit on a pinhead.

To understand what is going on here we must briefly confront a prejudice of the contemporary imagination, which is that teaching, except of practical or ‘objective’ scientific matters, is indoctrination. Then we must see how this teaching of Jesus is life-giving and so is revealed in all of its vitality in confrontation with its contrary, the silence and apparent meaninglessness

of violent death. Finally we shall look at how teaching is a form of loving. It opens the doorway of the imagination to transcendence.

#### INDOCTRINATION?

The three Abrahamic religions teach, and so crash against a contemporary prejudice, the suspicion of anyone who makes truth claims. It is assumed that to teach is to impose one's views on people who should be left free to think for themselves. Who are you to indoctrinate me? Nowhere is this truer than in religious teaching. Hence a suspicion of faith schools, which are seen by many as hotbeds of prejudice and narrowness. Sometimes they are, but only when they betray their calling.

Nicholas Lash characterized this suspicion thus:

The Enlightenment left us with what we might call a crisis of docility. Unless we have the courage to work things out for ourselves, to take as true only that which we have personally attained or, perhaps, invented, then meanings and values, descriptions and instructions, imposed by other people, feeding other people's power, will inhibit and enslave us, bind us into fables and falsehoods from the past. Even God's truth, perhaps especially God's truth, is no exception to this rule. Only slaves and children should be teachable, or docile.<sup>1</sup>

Dogmas define the core of the Abrahamic religions' identity, but grown-up people reject dogma, we are told. Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple, summed this up in his Commencement speech at Stanford in 2005: 'Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.' Of course, if one took Jobs's advice seriously,

one would refuse to learn any language at all, saturated as it inevitably is with the assumptions of those who have gone before. One would commune with one's interior truth in dumb, wordless vacuity. G. K. Chesterton asserted: 'there are only two kinds of people, those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and don't know it ... Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broadminded.'<sup>2</sup>

Terry Eagleton wrote that

most modern critics revolt at the word 'dogma', but a great many traditional poems are dogmatic in the original, non-derogatory sense of adhering to a system of belief. Dante and Milton, for example. It is a mistake to hold with some modern critics that too much belief, like too much salt, is invariably bad for you. It depends on the kind of belief in question. And the critics are usually thinking of other people's beliefs rather than their own. My beliefs are supremely flexible, while yours are absurdly arthritic.<sup>3</sup>

One response to this negative perception of dogma is to offer an undogmatic faith. If we 'brand' our religion as a gentle spirituality rather than a teaching, it will seem less oppressive. Mindfulness, meditation techniques, wandering around labyrinths, lighting candles and learning how to breathe slowly are all ways of finding calm in our turbulent world. There is nothing wrong with these, but Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, is a religion that teaches. If it ceases to do so, our faith is eviscerated.

Every Christian is both teacher and student. Eamon Duffy, the Cambridge Church historian, wrote:

In fact, Catholic teaching takes many different forms – a mother teaching her children their prayers, a catechist preparing young people for the sacraments, a parish

bible-study group discussing the Gospels, sermons, lectures or discussions in a seminary, university or adult education class, religious books or articles, pastoral letters, conciliar documents, papal encyclicals. Some of this is more, and some less, important but all constitutes Catholic teaching, and all involved in such activities are teachers, sharing the prophetic work of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Teaching and healing (Chapter 4) are two of the core Christian vocations.

Christian teaching does not put to a stop our search for the truth. On the contrary, it stimulates the adventure of the mind. I joined the Dominican Order in 1965, as the Second Vatican Council was coming to its end and the student protests of 1968 were about to explode. These were confusing and exciting times. Everything was up in the air. Nothing seemed certain. Many of my brethren left the Order. Some of us at Blackfriars stayed because we had wonderful teachers such as Herbert McCabe, Fergus Kerr and Cornelius Ernst, who showed us that the doctrines of our faith liberated the heart and the mind, and launched us on an endless exploration of the mystery of our faith.

The Christian life cannot be sustained just by warm fuzzy feelings that Jesus is nice. Charismatic experiences of the Spirit are wonderful, but when the arid times come, what will sustain us? Doctrines nourish us even when our feelings are dried up and the dark night falls. Studying is every bit as dynamic a response to the promise of life as the journey to Jerusalem. They are intertwined aspects of the same quest. So we need to share with our secular contemporaries a whiff of the 'dogmatic imagination', propelling us forward on the open road of the mind. Confessing that Jesus is risen from the dead does not mean that we have solved the puzzle of the empty tomb: 'That's sorted.' That would make belief in the Resurrection a dogma in the negative and unchristian sense. Rather, as Gregory of Nyssa

said, faith goes from beginning to beginning for all eternity. God is for ever elusive, just ahead. R. S. Thomas, a Welsh poet and Anglican priest who ministered to the hill farmers of Manafon, wrote: 'Such a fast/ God, always before us and/ leaving as we arrive.'<sup>5</sup> We just catch a glimpse of his back, like Moses on the mountain.

The doctrines of the Church – the virgin birth, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus and so on – are not beliefs in isolated events, but all moments in the great drama of God's love affair with humanity. McCabe claims that 'if it were possible merely to convince a man of the resurrection of Christ as an isolated fact, without its context, he would simply regard it as one of the extraordinary things that sometimes happen. It would not have any religious significance.'<sup>6</sup> The empty tomb was pregnant with a new moment in the story which is the drama of our lives.

To say that a view is heretical makes it sound exciting, as if some brave individual had dared to think outside the box. But the opposite is true. A heretical view is one that short-circuits the wonderful and inexhaustible story of our transfiguration in Christ, and reduces it to a conventional and boring tale. It is an example of Mary Midgley's 'nothing buttery'.<sup>7</sup> It is reductionist. To deny the divinity of Christ is to flatten the story of our embrace by the divine life, so that we are left with the account of an inspirational teacher, one of thousands. Denial of the humanity of Christ undermines our belief in God's utter closeness in becoming one of us. We would be left with a celestial ghost clothed in human appearances. So the Creed is always summoning us to carry on the journey into the infinite mystery of God rather than wandering down some neglected path that leads to a dead end. It warns us, 'We tried that route but it is definitely not "*vaut le détour*".'

Doctrine liberates us from all that is narrow and boring. Let us return to that incident in *The West Wing* when the

President's beloved secretary, whom he has known ever since he was a child, is killed in a car accident. He goes to the funeral in the National Cathedral, and afterwards has the building locked so that he can rage alone at God. 'You feckless thug', he shouts. Back in the Oval Office, he has some sort of encounter with the secretary who has died. She says, 'You know God does not control car accidents!' Of course he does, but he had briefly fallen into a childish view of God as the great controller of the world, who is in charge of everything that happens in the way a chess player moves pawns. This is bad theology, reducing God to a very powerful being, the celestial equivalent of himself, the President of the Universe. Sound doctrine opens the skylight of our imagination. It blows holes in small-minded religiosity. It lets in the fresh air of God's infinity.

Our faith tells of how we are embraced by the infinite mystery of God's love, the love that God is. Herbert McCabe, who was anything but a wishy-washy thinker, wrote:

The whole of our faith is the belief that God loves us; I mean there isn't anything else. Anything else that we say we believe is just a way of saying that God loves us. Any proposition, any article of faith is only an expression of faith if it is a way of saying that God loves us.<sup>8</sup>

What that means we shall never cease discovering, and all those who struggle to understand the cost and beauty of love are our allies, regardless of whether they believe in God or not.

So teaching does not close down the mind and switch off our critical faculties. It pushes us on towards astonishment and worship. Flannery O'Connor, the American Catholic novelist, wrote to a friend: 'For me a dogma is only a gateway to contemplation and is an instrument of freedom and not of restriction. It preserves mystery for the human mind.'<sup>9</sup>

McCabe argued that for some the way into the unspeakable mystery is through hard and rigorous study, though not for everyone. This is a path to holiness which we find exemplified in St Thomas Aquinas:

Whatever his many other virtues, the central sanctity of St Thomas was a sanctity of the mind, and it is shown not in the many questions he marvellously, excitingly, answered, but in the one where he failed, the question he did not and could not answer and refused to pretend to answer.<sup>10</sup>

And that, of course, was the question that he was reported to have first asked as a child, 'What is God?'

We shall only infect people with the contagious freedom of the 'dogmatic imagination' if they see that Christians are unafraid to engage with complex questions to which they do not know the answer, to learn as well as to teach, to entertain views that they had not considered. Faced with mindless fundamentalism and its consequent violence, the best response is to think.

#### TEACHING IN THE FACE OF DEATH

Thinking is one way in which we flourish – some of us through rigorous disciplined thinking, others through less academic ways. One catches a glimpse of the joyful exuberance of study in a letter that the young Erasmus sent to his friend Christian Northoff, when he was studying in Paris and savouring the startling new literature of the emerging Renaissance:

Our talk is of letters at the noonday meal. Our suppers are made exquisite by literary seasoning. In our walks we prattle of letters and even our frivolous diversions are no stranger to them; we talk of letters till we fall asleep, our dreams are dreams of letters, and literature awakens us to begin a new day.<sup>11</sup>

As a young friar I hitch-hiked to Munich with a copy of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in my rucksack, which I studied as I waited for lifts. I did not understand much, but it was an enjoyable pose to strike. I felt, 'This is really living.'

If study is one way in which we flourish, its vital beauty shines out all the more strongly in the face of death. So, on the night before he dies, Jesus teaches. He defies the dumb ferocity that awaits him the next day. He teaches his students about friendship when he has already been betrayed by one and is about to be denied by Peter. He teaches them about the peace that the world cannot give when he is about to be swallowed up by violence. He teaches them that they must be one when they will shortly scatter. This teaching challenges the ugly meaninglessness of what is coming. It is vindicated on Easter morning. 'Where words prevail not, violence prevails.'<sup>12</sup>

Brutal death seems to render all our lives meaningless. When St Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, visited the scene of a massacre by the Salvadorian army, he came across the body of a young boy lying in a ditch: 'He was just a kid, at the bottom of the ditch, face up. You could see the bullet holes, the bruises left by the blows, the dried blood. His eyes were open, as if asking the reason for his death and not understanding.'<sup>13</sup> This intense experience of senseless violence provoked a conversion of heart which led him to side with the poorest, oppose the military regime of El Salvador and be assassinated. Either nothing had any meaning or life had a meaning that transcended death and for which it was worth dying.

Václav Havel, the playwright and former President of the Czech Republic, asserted that 'hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'<sup>14</sup> Study expresses our hope that all that we live, our joys and sorrows, will finally be revealed to have a plenitude of meaning that now we barely

glimpse. St Paul reassures the Corinthians: 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Cor. 13.12).

In the war zones of our world, teaching and study express our hope that violence will not have the last word. In Baghdad the Dominicans publish a magazine called *Pensée Chrétienne* ('Christian Thought'), which is read by thousands of Muslims. It does not propose thoughts about Christianity. It shares a Christian tradition of critical thinking. It nudges people beyond simplistic assumptions about what Christians and Muslims believe. It evokes the time when Baghdad was a great centre of intellectual life, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, the Islamic Golden Age, when people of all faiths together sought the truth there. This could be the future too.

Yousif Thomas Mirkis OP, before being named Archbishop of Kirkuk, founded the Baghdad Academy of Human Sciences, 80 per cent of whose pupils are Muslims. Its emblem is a Dominican shield with a large question mark. Here no questions are forbidden. He told me, 'We need places where people can breathe the oxygen of debate.' Reason is God-given!

I returned to Iraq in December 2017 with an American Dominican, Brian Pierce. Our sisters had been driven from the plain of Nineveh by Da'esh. The first thing that the terrorists did was to demolish the schools. The first thing the sisters did when they returned was to rebuild them, even before they had found anywhere to live themselves. Muslim, Christian and Yazidi students sit side by side in the classroom and learn together, fellow students. When a Dominican sister was unable to give a catechism class to the Christian pupils because of a doctor's appointment, she was delighted on her return to find a Muslim teacher giving it, who had found the catechism on the shelf and gave the children their lesson in their Christian faith. She said, 'I did not want them to miss a class.'

When I visited Homs in Syria, a few months earlier, the city was in ruins. We prayed at the tomb of the Dutch Jesuit Frans van der Lugt, who refused to leave the city when the violence began in 2014. After a bombardment he held the liturgy of Palm Sunday, attended by Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims. On 7 April someone walked into the garden and shot him dead. We found an old tired Jesuit there, teaching children, faithfully at his post. The teaching goes on. Meaning will triumph ultimately. Teachers in Europe who struggle out of bed early to prepare classes for their students, especially in places that are poor and seem to have no future, are ambassadors of hope.

Perhaps this is why Jews put study at the heart of their religious life. So often they have been threatened by tsunamis of meaningless violence. Anti-Semitism is on the rise again today. H. G. Wells maintained that it was Judaism that first proposed universal education for every child, because to be a Jew is to study. Study is even holier than prayer, because in prayer we talk to God but in study we listen to him. In Central Europe, periodically engulfed by pogroms, Judaism survived through study. Their place of worship is called in Yiddish *shul*, a school:

The most important item in the family budget is the tuition fee that must be paid each term to the teacher of the younger boy's school. 'Parents will bend the sky to educate their son.' The mother, who has charge of household accounts, will cut the family food costs to the limit if necessary, in order to pay for her son's schooling. If the worst comes to the worst, she will pawn her cherished pearls in order to pay for the school term. The boy must study, the boy must become a good Jew; for her, the two are synonymous.<sup>15</sup>

#### STUDY AS LOVE

When the philosopher Peter Geach met his future wife, another philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, he massaged her shoulder

and said, 'Miss Anscombe, I like your mind.'<sup>16</sup> It is not only philosophers who have beautiful minds. One thing that I have missed because of my life as a friar is that I have not had children and assisted at the unfolding of their minds. I would love to have seen their exploration of language. We belong to the species *homo sapiens*, 'wise human', and when our minds are cramped and blunted, we fail to live fully.

Teaching is a form of love, love of the truth and the love between teacher and student who encounter each other in the truth. St Thomas Aquinas loved the expression, inherited from Aristotle, *anima est quodammodo omnia*: the soul is in a sense all things. The human soul is open to all forms of being and becomes one with them in knowledge.

Knowledge is a sort of consummation in which barriers are overthrown. When we love another, we are joined to them and become one. The deepest knowledge of another in the Old Testament is sexual union. 'Adam knew his wife again' (Gen. 2.25). This knowledge, we have seen, is transformative of who I am. That love or friendship brings into being aspects of myself which have never before unfurled.

Once I welcomed Pope John Paul II to our Roman University, the Angelicum, with a long Polish phrase which I had tried to memorize. When I had finished, to my relief, he completed the phrase. I said in Italian, 'I hope that my Polish pronunciation is better than my Italian.' He replied without hesitation: 'If the heart is open, the mind understands.' Study makes minds more loving and our love more perceptive.

Dominique Pire OP, a Belgian Dominican who received the Nobel Peace Prize after the Second World War, wrote: 'One must really fill oneself with the other. It therefore requires one to put one's self, who we are and what we think, between a sort of parenthesis, to appreciate the other positively, without necessarily sharing the other's point of view. In this there is a profound self-sacrifice.'<sup>17</sup> This is the asceticism of study.

Study opens one to what is other. When I studied in Paris for a year, I had to open myself to a French way of being human. I let France get under my skin. I was freed a little from what was constrictive in my British identity and became a little bit French. When I was Master of the Order and had to learn Spanish, I spent much time in Latin America, reading the novelists of the continent, savouring their food and opening myself to their way of being human. Thomas Aquinas calls this *latitudo cordis*, the expansion of the heart.

‘The soul is in a sense all things.’ Serge de Beaucueil, the French Dominican who spent many years in Afghanistan, learned to be a guest in the house of Islam. ‘To understand the other, one must not take him over but become his guest.’<sup>18</sup> Slowly Serge came to think of Afghanistan as his country, his Promised Land.<sup>19</sup> This in no way implies a wishy-washy relativism; he remained a disciple of Christ but with an expanded heart and mind, a more ‘catholic’ imagination.

In an age uncertain of truth, the temptation is to turn inwards in self-examination. Philip Roth talked of ‘the sheer fact of self, the vision of self as inviolable, powerful, and nervy, self as the only real thing in an unreal environment.’<sup>20</sup> Many of the most memorable books of our time are indeed memoirs, such as Dave Eggers’s *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* or Karl Ove Knausgård’s six-volume autobiographical novel *My Struggle*, a minute study of every moment of his life.<sup>21</sup> But the discipline of Christian study breaks the gravitational pull of the self and lets oneself be touched and changed by what is other. The sheer gritty difference of their being breaks open the bubble of the ego. This is true whether I am studying St Augustine, physics or the digestive system of a worm.

In Ted Hughes’s poem ‘The Thought Fox’ the poet in a sense (*quodammodo!*) becomes the fox. He opens his very being to the foxiness of the fox. The poem is an attempt to bridge the gap between fox and human.

Across the clearings, an eye,  
 A widening deepening greenness,  
 Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
 Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox  
 It enters the dark hole of the head,  
 The window is starless still; the clock ticks,  
 The page is printed.

In the poem they become one. The printing of the poem is a sort of consummation. Wendell Berry gives us a glimpse of a similar transformation in his contemplation of a yellow-throated warbler:

My mind became  
 Beautiful by the sight of him. He had the beauty only  
 Of himself alive in the only moment of his life.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at what is beautiful beautifies the mind. Looking at what is ugly, pornographic, sadistic, contemptuous, deadens the mind. What about science? Can it transform who you are? Might one be attracted to a molecule and changed? I asked Robert Gilbert, professor of biochemistry at Oxford and an ordained Anglican priest. Science is powered, he says, by a love of beauty: 'Understanding something in appreciating it involves giving oneself to it, immersing oneself in it. It involves loving it.'<sup>23</sup>

If the study of birds and molecules is expansive of our humanity, then imagine how fructifying is the study of the Word of God, opening our whole being to the infinite One who addresses us in friendship. A narrowly academic study which treats texts just as objects to be dissected will not yield this fruit, but if we linger with the Word of God, savour it, question it and

let it question us, our friendship with Christ will change who and how we are.

'The soul is in a sense all things.' As teachers we open ourselves to our students and, in a sense, become them, get under their skin and see with their eyes. St Paul said that he became all things to all so that he could teach:

I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law ... I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

(1 Cor. 9. 19–21)

St Gregory the Great said that often he couldn't understand scripture until he became one with his congregation.<sup>24</sup> St Dominic wanted so passionately to communicate with the Albigensians or Cathars that he literally got off his high horse to be close to them, to walk with them and share their poverty. He became as much one of them as he could without betraying himself, as God became one with us, for 'we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4.15).

Being a teacher is becoming all to all. If you teach soldiers, you must enter the military mind. When I lectured to seminarians in Milan, I had to imagine being one of them, reading their faces as I talked. If one teaches feminist American sisters, one must draw as near to them as possible and hear every word through their ears, anticipate what will jar and what will delight. Love demands no less. To teach the young is to become young in a sense (*quodammodo* again!), while being aware that one is not. It means knowing their songs and their dreams.

What if the audience includes traditionalists and progressives, each group with its own vocabulary and sensitivity? I preached in a Cambridge college to a congregation that included both liberal Christians and a fiercely conservative nun, who sat with a pen poised to record my errors. Then one prays in desperation for a spacious word from the Word who sustains all in being, liberals and conservatives alike.

One must be so eager to share the truth that, like St Philip Neri, one will do almost anything, even risk being considered a fool, as when he shaved off half of his beard to show the futility of trying to look important! Once one has become one with one's students and entered their language, one can offer them new words, a richer language. I remember a Dutch student telling me he loved coming to our church because he learned new words, like 'glory' and 'holiness'. But first one must draw near, as God the Word became human.

#### IS IT ALL TRUE?

However close we draw near to people, however great our sympathy for their way of being, Christianity still teaches truths that seem foolish to a secular culture. We teach that a human being was divine, that he was born of a virgin, that he rose from the dead and that he gives us his body. How can we dare to share such a faith when surely it will be rejected as absurd?

We only do so because we believe that our faith is true, and that human beings are made for the truth, *homo sapiens*. So our doctrines cannot be utterly alien to any human mind. They must evoke some tiny glimmer of recognition. According to the Dominican Constitutions, which govern our lives as brothers, human beings have a *propensio ad veritatem*,<sup>25</sup> an inclination towards the truth. Human beings catch its scent, even if faintly in our secular culture. Nothing human is alien to Christ, and Christ is never utterly alien to any human being: 'the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world' (Jn 1.9).

We are made for truth as fish are made for water and birds for air. Without it, we shrivel. If we teach with imagination, people may awaken, like bears after a long hibernation, catch the scent of spring and be hungry to eat. When St Paul preached in Athens on the resurrection of the dead, 'some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this"' (Acts 17.32). We teach our faith hoping that in some deep part of the hearer's mind a 'Yes' will awaken from its sleep.

Towards the end of her life Dorothy Day wrote in her diary:

No matter how old I get ... no matter how feeble, short of breath, incapable of walking more than a few blocks, what with heart murmurs, heart failures, emphysema perhaps, arthritis in feet and knees, with all these symptoms of age and decrepitude, my heart can still leap for joy as I read and suddenly assent to some great truth enunciated by some great mind and heart.<sup>26</sup>

Leonard Cheshire was an RAF pilot in the Second World War, who later founded homes for the dying and disabled. During a dinner with friends during the war, he denied any belief in a personal God, and a friend objected: 'Absolute nonsense. God is a person and you know it perfectly well.' Cheshire wrote: 'No sooner was the statement made than I knew it to be true. It was not that I had known it all along and just needed a jolt to admit it openly, nor that I had followed a process of reasoning which I found unanswerable, but that purely and simply what up to until then had seemed nonsense now carried total conviction.'<sup>27</sup>

This can even happen to academics. Edith Stein was born into an observant Jewish family in October 1891 but became an atheist in her teenage years. She obtained her doctorate from Freiburg University and was an assistant to the great philosopher Edmund Husserl. A brilliant academic career lay ahead: 'One evening Edith picked up an autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila

and read this book all night. "When I had finished the book, I said to myself: This is the truth." Later, looking back on her life, she wrote: "My longing for truth was a single prayer."<sup>28</sup> She was received into the Catholic Church and became a Carmelite nun with the name Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. She was sent with her sister Rosa, also a nun, to Auschwitz, where they died in the gas chamber in 1942. So we dare to teach our faith because we believe that human beings are 'meaning-seeking animals,' in the words of Jonathan Sacks, and so may recognize in our teaching the meaning for which we all hunger.

But why is theology so complicated? Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* contains hundreds of obscure questions, and this is just a summary – *summa* – for beginners.<sup>29</sup> When Karl Barth, perhaps the greatest Protestant theologian of the last hundred years, went to America in 1962, he was asked to summarize the millions of words that he had written, and he said: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'<sup>30</sup> What more do we need? Why do theologians like Barth or Aquinas bother with vast tomes exploring questions that never occur to most people? Isn't it all so simple? Love God and one's neighbour as oneself!<sup>31</sup>

G. K. Chesterton records that

a lady I knew picked up a book of selections from St Thomas Aquinas, with a commentary; and began hopefully to read a section with the innocent heading, 'The Simplicity of God'. She then laid the book down with a sigh and said: 'Well, if that's His simplicity, I wonder what His complexity is like.'<sup>32</sup>

Theology is complex not because God is complex but because we are. Our ways of making sense of the world are multiple. God is utterly simple, a simplicity beyond our comprehension. As we draw near to God in faith, hope and love, we become ever simpler, but this is a long and hard rebirth, unknitting

the torturous labyrinths of our hearts and minds, as we slowly mature into radiant clarity and become coherent individuals rather than conflicted people with multiple personalities.

The simplicity of Karl Barth's response was the fruit of endless years of study and prayer. Of course anyone could *say* the same words, but it takes a lifetime to do so with authority. Conrad Pepler OP, a wise Dominican and a friend of Wittgenstein, often preached about love and how it was the one thing necessary. Many preachers say much the same thing, and we look at our watches and wonder when they will cease from such vacuous platitudes. When Conrad spoke, we listened because he spoke with the authority of one whose life was rooted in the unimaginable simplicity of God. It was the fruit of years of living with the one who said, 'I call you friends.'

## 9

### Impossible Friendships

*Friends*, the American sitcom about a group of New Yorkers, is still the favourite TV programme in Britain for young people aged between five and sixteen, according to research published in February 2019. It was first broadcast a quarter of a century ago, and ceased production before they were born. 'Generation scroll' mainly watches it on their smartphones. I love it, but what is the secret of its popularity with another generation, sixty years younger than I am? Its theme song is 'I'll be there for you.' It is there for them whenever they want it, ten years of programmes. Simon Leggett, who directed the research, said, 'Children are more digitally connected than any other generation and more so than last year. Yet as connectivity increases, rather than feeling more linked to their peers, children are increasingly feeling alone and isolated.'<sup>1</sup> They long for friends but usually watch programmes about friendship alone. One can have a thousand friends on Facebook, but not one with a flesh-and-blood face.

Faced with death, Jesus calls his fickle followers his friends. Maybe the embodiment of this friendship is the way to engage the imagination of not just these young people but of the often lonely millions who inhabit our anonymous cities.

As this book has progressed, it has become apparent that Jesus' friendship is a key to the Christian imagination.

In Chapter 7 we saw that the moral life is not about submitting to rules that impose external constraints on our behaviour. One lets oneself be transformed by the Lord's friendship. Chapter 8 argued that study is the discipline of opening oneself to other ways of being. 'The soul is in a sense all things.' Studying another person's mind and humanity, imagining their hopes and fears, is also a part of friendship. Now, on the night before he dies, Jesus the teacher calls his disciples his friends, including the ones who betray him and desert him.

There is a long tradition of associating teaching and friendship, going back at least to Socrates. Teachers share what is most precious with their students, their love of the subject. Teacher and pupil sit side by side, looking together, as friends do. But there are limits. Friendship implies a complete equality which is impossible between a teacher and a young pupil. Many contemporary films about teachers and their students explore the beauty and the pitfalls of this relationship, testing the boundaries: *The History Boys*, *Educating Rita*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *An Education*, *A Single Man*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Les Choristes* and so on. It is everywhere from Harry Potter's Dumbledore to Gandalf and Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* and to *Star Wars*' Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker. So what is Jesus teaching his disciples when he calls them his friends? He says that 'I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father' (Jn 15.15). What has he heard?

#### BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIP

The Bible overflows with stories of friendship.<sup>2</sup> There are the friendships between Ruth and Naomi, between Elisha and the Shunamite woman (2 Kgs 4), David and Jonathan, and Job's tedious friends and so on. Friendship is usually between the good and virtuous. You are the company that you keep.

One of the gravest accusations against anyone is that they are friends of the wicked. The composers of the Psalms are especially keen to tell everyone that they do not hang out with bad people:

I do not sit with the worthless,  
nor do I consort with hypocrites;  
I hate the company of evildoers,  
and will not sit with the wicked.

(Ps. 26.4–5)

The wicked do not really have friends. They gather together for selfish reasons – above all, to bring down the righteous. Friendship is almost by definition between those who fear the Lord:

Faithful friends are beyond price;  
no amount can balance their worth.  
Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;  
and those who fear the Lord will find them.  
Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright,  
for as they are, so are their neighbours also.

(Sir. 6. 15–17)

But God tends to make friends with dubious people: for example, Abraham (Jas 2.23), who tries to save his skin by passing off his wife as his sister. God even regards David, the adulterer and murderer, as ‘a man after my own heart’ (Acts 13.22), his beloved (Ps. 89.24). Jonathan’s love for David is also an exception. The Cistercian St Aelred of Rievaulx wrote in the twelfth century, ‘Jonathan, the friend of virtue, was led to experience love for a virtuous youth,’<sup>3</sup> but David is hardly a model of virtue. This gives us a hint of what is to come with his descendant Jesus.

Jesus was a man of close friendships. He was an intimate friend of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, and risked his life to visit the tomb of Lazarus, where he wept (Jn 11). John's gospel is almost certainly the witness of the Beloved Disciple, who faithfully remains at the foot of the cross when the others flee. So far, so traditional.

But Jesus smashed the mould by befriending sinners – above all, prostitutes and the despised tax collectors who made their money out of squeezing the poorest and collaborating with the hated oppressors, the Romans. This friendship with the moral outlaws was not a sign that he was a broad-minded chap who was happy to mix with anyone. It was more than the generosity of a kind person who was pained by their exclusion from the circles of the good. It was more than scandalous. It was impossible. Such friendships could not happen because you are defined by your friendships. They are the tissue of one's existence and the heart of one's identity. It is only when we glimpse the utter impossibility of such friendship that we begin to see why Jesus' declaration of friendship on the night of his death was so electrifying. In John's gospel he made it precisely then, in the clear knowledge that these very same friends would betray him, deny him and desert him. The good news is of God's impossible friendships.

#### THE GRACE OF FRIENDSHIP

In the thirteenth century St Thomas Aquinas reflected deeply on the nature of this friendship. Most theologians before his time thought of God's love for humanity in terms of the Song of Songs. This erotic, spousal love caught their imagination, especially that of the Cistercian theologian St Bernard of Clairvaux, and later St John of the Cross. Aquinas preferred the calmer, less febrile language of friendship to describe both God's own Trinitarian life and our relationship with God.

Perhaps this was because he was a friar, a brother. His was a fraternal life which stressed the horizontal relationships of equals in our democratic Order, rather than the hierarchical relationships of monks to their father abbots.<sup>4</sup> This spirituality was a gift to the new urban world of the thirteenth century, when the old hierarchies of the feudal world were breaking down and democracy was in the air. Merchants were travelling between cities in increasing numbers, like the father of St Francis of Assisi. Strangers of uncertain status were encountered in the city squares. A spirituality of friendship caught the mood of the time, and people flocked to the priories of the friars, *fratres*, 'brothers', and there were sisters too. The spirituality of friendship is good for our time too, when the age of deference is over. Most people live in cities and rub up against strangers, and look for some warmth and recognition in the urban desert. Jesus' offer of friendship can speak to our world too.

In the ancient world, Biblical and classical, west and east, friendship is only possible between equals. There must be at least an approximate equality in status and in virtue. There were exceptions. When Pontius Pilate attempts to release Jesus, he is threatened by the religious leaders: 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor' (Jn 20.12). This is not the friendship of which Aristotle and the gospels speak. It is a relationship of subservience which makes one a client of a powerful patron. Herod the Great had the title *Amicus Caesaris*, a friend of Caesar, a client king but not an equal. But Jesus' friendship is not patronage. The Church came to see that it was the unimaginable offer of a sort of equality with God.

Even more unthinkable than friendship with sinners was friendship between God and his creatures, for there could be no greater inequality. God is not a very powerful version of a human being but utterly transcendent. So how then can

God befriend us? For Aquinas this must simply be God's gift: whether to a saint or a prostitute, it makes no difference. Denys Turner puts it thus:

Therefore, if Jesus proclaims that now his disciples are to be called his 'friends,' this can be only because in some way the radical inequality of Creator and creature has been overcome, because there is, as it were, a new creation, establishing a new order of relationship between God and human beings. Since, however, there is no possibility of that inequality being levelled by action on the part of the creature, it must be that the initiative has been taken on the part of God, entirely gratuitously, to make human creatures thus equal to the divine, so that friendship becomes a possibility between them. Or, as Thomas puts it in the *Summa, solus Deus deificat*, 'only God can make us godlike.'<sup>5</sup>

So when Jesus calls the disciples his friends, he is not just being nice and broad-minded: 'You may be a pretty rotten lot, but I love you all the same.' He does not just call them friends: he *makes* them friends. They are taken up into the very life of God, the eternal and utterly equal love which is the life of the Trinity. A door in the world of finitude is opened into infinity.

This is what we call grace. God's love makes us worthy to be loved, and free to love in return. We are loved because we are good, and we are good because we are loved. Because it is a sharing already in the eternal life of God, friendship defies death. So it is so right that it is now, in the face of death, that Jesus claims these vacillating followers as friends. Friendship with God is death-defying. It smacks of the risen life.

Even people who do not profess any faith sometimes sense this. The bonds of friendship shine most radiantly in the face of mortality. In June 2001 Alain Jacques and his colleagues were excavating some land at the battlefield of Arras and came across

a grave with the bodies of twenty soldiers.<sup>9</sup> They were laid with their arms interlaced, even sometimes their fingers joined. They were probably soldiers of the Grimsby Chums. In the First World War many battalions were formed of friends who, it was hoped, would support and sustain each other during the horrors of war. They were often called 'Pals': the Preston Pals, the Leeds Pals, the Bradford Pals and so on.

Here the Grimsby Chums are still united in death. They must have been buried with extraordinary care. Alain Jacques said, 'Can you imagine the friendship and dedication of those who went about laying down the remains in this way? To go and get a leg and position it in the line – what a remarkable act. They must have died within hours of each other.' I know nothing of the faith of these men or their friends who buried them, but that grave is a sort of implicit testimony to that eternal friendship which Christians believe was offered in Christ. There is just one body set slightly apart, touching no other. Perhaps he was an officer and so seen as superior, and sadly not one of the Chums. Friendship always can be stretched open a little further.

THE GRACED FRIENDSHIP THAT BREAKS DOWN WALLS  
 We fall in love, but we make friends. A passionate love is experienced as a sort of compelling destiny. We are bowled over. But friendships are made, deliberately sustained and cultivated. Jesus asks at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan, 'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' (Lk. 10.36). The Good Samaritan reaches out and makes the relationship. Befriending is a creative act. It breaks down barriers and pierces prejudices. It has a touch of the divine creativity which in Christ 'made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Eph. 2.14). Making unexpected friendships is one way in which we share

in Christ's redemptive work. So Christians are charged with making friendships which the world holds to be impossible. This is our divine task.

I will give two examples of the creative nature of this Christian friendship, its beauty and excitement: one contemporary and the other from almost five hundred years ago. Both show how God's friendship breaks through barriers to create relationships that seem impossible.

#### THE WEST BEFRIENDS THE EAST

Let's take at some length one of the most extraordinary and prophetic examples of creative friendship, embodied by the life of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci. I write about him with hesitation since I know little about him, but, as one of my brethren once said, ignorance has never stopped me in the past! I acknowledge my debt here to Ana Carolina Hosne and to James V. Schall SJ.<sup>7</sup>

Ricci and his companion began their journey up the Pearl River in China in September 1583, accompanied by interpreters. Their clothes imaged their mission. They wore grey robes like Buddhist monks, and square caps that looked like Catholic birettas, and they became embedded in Chinese society as wise scholars.

Ricci's first book, the first by a Westerner in Chinese, was *Jiaoyou lun* – 'On Friendship'. Its final edition had a hundred maxims on friendship taken from pagan and Christian authors. Friendship was both the subject and the goal. He was quickly received with amity. Prestigious friends wrote prefaces to his books, giving him status and credibility. At this period in China there was an intense interest in friendship, and he was able to show that the West from which he came was not barbarous but shared values with the Chinese, and so open their minds and hearts not just to friendship with him but to the gospel he proclaimed.

Ricci, unlike Aristotle but like many Chinese sages, thought that one should have many friends. The very last maxim in Ricci's collection, for instance, reads: 'When Wo-mo-pi (a renowned ancient scholar) cut open a large pomegranate, someone asked him: "Master, what things would you like to have as numerous as these seeds"? To which he responded: "Fruitful friends"'<sup>8</sup> Ricci wrote: 'I have friends everywhere, so many that they will not let me live, and I spend the whole day in living rooms answering different questions, apart from the tasks I have here.'

Ricci and his readers agreed that friendship was linked with virtue, one soul in different bodies. Both traditions stressed reciprocal affection, the sharing of possessions, and both rejected flattery as the very antithesis of true friendship. However, there was one considerable difference. In the Confucian tradition, friendship was one relationship among five, of husband and wife, with one's parents, with one's brothers, between ruler and subject and, finally, with one's friends. There was intense interest in friendship, Ana Carolina Hosne writes, because

of the five relationships in Confucianism, the fifth, friendship, was unique. The others were overtly concerned with the maintenance of China as a *guojia*, literally a 'state-family'. But friendship was the only bond in society that was freely chosen; and it could be dangerous on account of its potential to create a human relationship that was not hierarchical.<sup>9</sup>

Friendships are made!

Ricci made these friendships central to his life and writing, puzzling and challenging the Chinese. Ricci and the other Jesuits had left their kingdoms, their families and their friends, with whom they had grown up. They came to a foreign land to make friends. The Jesuits broke with other bonds so as to

create this new, almost scandalous, form of friendship. Hosne writes that

one of the most serious criticisms against the Jesuits was that they did not enter into the *wulun*: they did not marry, therefore they neglected the relationship of husband and wife (*fu fu*); they left home, and thus their relationships with their parents (*fu mu*) and brothers (*xiong di*) were broken; and by leaving their country they lost their relationship with their ruler (*jun chen*), so that only relationships with friends (*pengyou*) remained.<sup>10</sup>

In some ways, Ricci argued, friendship was superior to the other relationships, because it could only persist with love. If you ceased to love your family, they were still your family. So the friendship that he described was both familiar and strange, reassuring and subversive. He wrote: 'It is possible for family members not to love one another. But it is not so with friends. If one member of a family does not love another, the relationship of kinship still remains. But unless there is love between friends, does the essential principle of friendship exist?' (Maxim 50).

Ricci was searching for a subtle way to talk of the most High Christian God that was comprehensible but challenging. He talked of the Lord on High (*Shang di*), who commanded people to be friends. This appeal to a universal friendship, beyond the boundaries of the Chinese Empire, was implicitly subversive. The Middle Kingdom was not the centre of the world.

If Ricci had the Church's mission in mind all the time, was he really offering friendship? Can friendship have an ulterior motive? I imagine he would have replied that all true friendship is founded on the truth. One owes the truth to one's friends, including the truth of the one who said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14.6). When he was being pestered by

visitors, an eminent friend suggested that he should simply say that he was not in, but Ricci refused because that would be to tell a lie. Friendship depends on truthfulness, which he found lacking in China. He was known as the man who never lied.<sup>11</sup> The bonds of friendship for Ricci were based on truth, whereas for his Chinese contemporaries they were subservient to the bonds of society.

In making friends with the Chinese, Ricci was enacting the creative words of Jesus when, faced with death, he said, 'I call you friends.' Ricci's friendship resonated with the experience of his hearers but questioned some of their most fundamental assumptions, a friendship that implicitly loosened the bonds of family and empire, and opened one to a universal human community which he and his hearers were only beginning to discover. It was a friendship that was both human and evangelical. This is an understanding of friendship that could excite the imagination of today's urban dwellers.

#### A FRIENDSHIP THAT BROKE THE BARRIERS OF DISABILITY

Let's look at another example, which is utterly different but equally challenging. Here the divisions overcome are not between cultures but between those who have profound disabilities and the rest of us, whose disabilities are less visible.

I have written above about Jean Vanier, a Canadian citizen born in 1928, who came from a privileged background. His father was the Canadian Ambassador to France and then Governor General of Canada. Jean served in the navy during the war, studied in England and in Paris and obtained a doctorate on Aristotle's understanding of happiness. He, like Aquinas, was struck by the Greek philosopher's beautiful vision of friendship. But Jean's own life was turned upside down by an experience of friendship that Aristotle would have found shocking.

This is how Jean describes what happened:

In an asylum near Paris I met two men with mental handicaps, Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux. Raphael had meningitis when he was young, and this had left him almost unable to talk, and unable to move freely. Philippe could talk, but encephalitis had left one of his legs and one of his arms paralysed. After the death of their parents, without anyone asking them what they felt about it, both men had been placed in this asylum. My first step was to buy a small and rather dilapidated house in Trosly and, having obtained the necessary permission from the local authorities, I invited Raphael and Philippe to come and live with me. And so in August 1964, l'Arche was born. We did everything together: cooking, housework, gardening, going for walks.<sup>12</sup>

The heart of l'Arche, which now has daughter houses all over the world, was quite simply friendship:

In welcoming Raphael and Philippe, I discovered something about communion. Raphael and Philippe did not want to live with a retired naval officer who ordered everybody about and thought himself superior. Nor did they want to live with an ex-professor of philosophy who thought he knew a lot. They wanted to live with a friend. And what is a friend if not someone who does not judge me, who does not abandon me when he discovers my weaknesses, limitations, wounds, shortcomings, everything that is broken within me? A friend is someone who sees my true beauty and potential, and who wants to help me to develop them. A friend is happy to be with me. He feels joy in being with me.<sup>13</sup>

Philippe's description of the foundation of l'Arche evokes Emma Donoghue's novel *Room*, which I quoted in the first

chapter, the story of a woman and child locked in a shed and the glorious liberation of the child who discovers the real world with its brilliant colours and sounds and fresh air. Philippe wrote that Jean

took me out of a centre where I had been placed by social workers. It had really been desolate there: There was no village nearby, there was no way of communicating with the outside world, and we were always inside surrounded by four walls. When he took me out of there, I felt so relieved: 'phew'! When I came to l'Arche, there was no electricity, none. We used candles for lighting, it was fun! There were no toilets or showers, but I felt like I was exploding with joy – phew! – I was so happy to be there. Previously, for me, it had been no life at all: all day long, sitting in a room.<sup>14</sup>

The divine friendship that Jean mediates unlocks the doors, punches a hole in the ceiling, lets in the light and the air. He leads people out of the narrow confines in which we take refuge, whether they are created by culture or class, ethnicity, religion, ill health or personal failure. We breathe freely the intoxicating breath of the Holy Spirit, not knowing where it will waft us. This is the task we are given, to go and make friends, the more improbable the better!

#### THE CALL TO FRIENDSHIP TODAY

So the divine friendship is creative. It overthrows the cultural barriers of East and West. It overcomes the prisons of ill health and disability. It even breaks through the most utter difference of all, between God and creation. Aquinas's theology of friendship excited the new urban culture of the thirteenth century, its new universities and the opening up of a wider world. Here was a new spirituality which spoke to a new age. It can speak to ours too.

We tend to think of friendship as essentially private. But our forebears, pagan and Christian, understood that human beings are essentially social beings and so the government of our communal lives should be marked by the most human of relationships, friendship. Servais Pinckaers OP wrote:

justice does not reach its perfection, however, until it succeeds in creating friendship at various levels of society, ranging from personal and familial friendship to friendship in the political and social spheres. According to Aristotle and St. Thomas, the goal of civil law is the formation of friendship among citizens, a friendship solidly based on justice and the other virtues, and not something vague and sentimental.<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle and Thomas lived in small societies compared with the megacities of today. Then one might know most of the people with whom one had interactions. Today this is not possible. And yet even our vast communities are knitted together by multiple interactions which can be, if not of friendship, at least friendly and just. The social crisis that is shaking the West today is in part a loss of friendship as integral to a civilized society. Social relationships in business and politics, even on the road – think of road rage – are conflictual and competitive. We dwell in our silos of the like-minded, barely acknowledging the humanity of those who belong to other tribes.

At St John's University, Minnesota, I heard a lecture by a political commentator who linked the radical polarization of American politics to the collapse of cross-party friendships. A few decades ago politicians would settle in Washington for months at a time, he said, and so Democrats and Republicans got to know each other well. Their children attended the same schools, they met each other at church and at dinner parties, and friendships were formed which enabled them to understand and respect their opponents and so compromise.

Now politicians jet in to vote and rush back home as soon as possible. Speeches are composed with their supporters at home in mind. There is no time for friendships with one's opponents, and so the search for consensus breaks down, and the US drifts towards becoming ungovernable. Even in the smaller world of British politics, the terrible non-debate over Brexit makes one wonder whether friendship is alive in Westminster. Even families are split and unable to talk about the issue. Are we able to have at least friendly conversations with each other?

In this time of rising populism there is hardly a more important question than whether one can befriend strangers. The future of our civilization depends on believing that we can. Our world is torn apart by terrorism and war; millions of people are on the move, and the world faces migration on a scale unknown for millennia. Will fear of the stranger lead us to close our minds and hearts, or will we dare to see them as fellow friends of God?

This is the question that haunts E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, published in 1924. Is friendship possible between the races in the India of the British Raj? Towards the end of the book Ralph Moore meets Dr Aziz, whose life had been ruined by friendship with Ralph's mother, bringing him to prison.

'Can you always tell whether a stranger is your friend?'  
[Aziz asks].

'Yes.'

'Then you are an Oriental.' He unclasped as he spoke, with a little shudder. Those words – he had said them to Mrs Moore in the mosque at the beginning of the cycle, from which, after so much suffering, he had got free. Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. And here he was starting again

...

'Did your mother speak to you about me?'

'Yes.' And with a swerve of voice and body that Aziz did not follow he added: 'In her letters, in her letters. She loved you.'

'Yes, your mother was my best friend in all the world.' He was silent, puzzled by his own great gratitude. What did this eternal goodness of Mrs Moore amount to? To nothing.<sup>16</sup>

Almost a hundred years after the publication of that book, this question is even more acute today: can strangers be friends? Five hundred years ago, Ricci and his companions believed that a seemingly impossible friendship between East and West could be made with the grace of God. For the divine friendship offered by Jesus nothing is impossible.

Our God who calls us his friends has a habit of drawing near to us as a stranger. Abraham and Sarah are quietly minding their own business when three strangers appear to whom they offer lavish hospitality (Gen. 18). This is the epiphany of the God who calls Abraham his friend. At the end of John's gospel, the Risen Lord appears as a stranger to Mary Magdalene at the garden; to the disciples out fishing, he is a stranger on the beach, 'the disciples did not know it was Jesus' (Jn 21.4). To the disciples walking to Emmaus, he is the stranger whom they meet on the road (Lk. 24.16). So if we wish to meet him, let us befriend strangers.

Of course, we cannot befriend everyone. But the gospel calls us to offer friendship to those whose paths we cross. The Good Samaritan taking the road to Jericho from Jerusalem came across the man who had been robbed lying by the side of the road. Their lives intersected. At that moment he did not walk by like the priest and the Levite, but created the relationship with the stranger. Jesus asks the question: 'Who do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' (Lk. 10.36). The Greek is more emphatic: who 'became' the neighbour of this man? Who made himself his neighbour?

Rowan Williams recognizes that none of us can carry an infinite responsibility to be neighbour to everyone. We are not God. 'But each one of us carries a responsibility that is going to come alive in ways we cannot predict.'<sup>17</sup> We never know in advance when we shall come across someone lying by the side of the road, or begging from on the street, or ringing up in desperation, and be summoned to respond. *The Lady in the Van* tells of how Alan Bennett found a woman in a van parked in his driveway and he responded, even if sometimes reluctantly.<sup>18</sup> She stayed there for fifteen years. He said, 'Even I didn't know her well. But I knew what she was like.' Some sort of bond was forged by this accidental encounter. All his emotional intelligence was at the service of creating this relationship, which he could never have predicted.

We can never know in advance when we shall be called on to make a friendship with someone from a different religion or of none, or with different political views or of another generation. But when that unexpected moment comes, we can dare to do so because the friendship of Christ creates bonds that we could not have imagined.

#### THE DISCRETION OF FRIENDSHIP

The idea that Christians should be bearers of Christ's friendship sounds alarming. We do not want people bearing down on us with gritted teeth determined to be our friends or telling us that Jesus is our friend. It sounds obtrusive and oppressive. 'I am going to love you whether you like it or not!' My reaction would be to escape immediately and maybe watch an episode of *Friends*. So let us remember the inherent discretion of friendship. Of all relationships, it is the least imposing.

We cannot demand that our friends tell us all about themselves, as we might of our spouses, though even with them there may be a certain reticence. We let people reveal what they can and wish, when they are ready. The first volume of Cardinal

Heenan's autobiography was called *Not the Whole Truth*.<sup>19</sup> We have no right in friendship to demand the whole truth, though we should expect that there will be no masks.

Friends let each other be. They do not attempt to take over the lives of their friends or claim exclusive possession of them. At that last meal with Jesus, each disciple relates above all to this man who has called them friends, but his commandment is that they love each other. We share our friends with our other friends, letting them create their own bonds with each other. Friendship is not possessive, as spousal love rightly is to some extent.

This letting be is rooted in the very mystery of creation, the gift of the God whose life is friendship. Herbert McCabe OP wrote:

The power of God is pre-eminently the power to let things be. 'Let there be light' – the creative power is just the power that, because it results in things being what they are, in persons being who they are, cannot interfere with creatures. Obviously creating does not make any difference to things, it lets them be themselves. Creation is simply and solely letting things be, and our love is a faint image of that.<sup>20</sup>

When we let others be in friendship, giving them the space to breathe and flourish as they wish, we are living out in a tiny way the self-effacement of God. McCabe again:

What gives us elbow room, what gives us space to grow and become ourselves, is the love that comes to us from another. Love is the space in which to expand, and it is always a gift ... To give love is to give the precious gift of nothing, space. To give love is to let be.<sup>21</sup>

In a collection of articles by McCabe's friends, Fergus Kerr OP wrote about Aquinas's understanding of friendship in similar terms:

[Friends] let one another *be*: each delights in the other's existence, and the freer the one allows the other to be, the more fully and truly they are revealed to each other. What is crucial, I think, is that there is no question of one partner's losing his or her identity in the other. The lover is not infatuated with the beloved. There is no annihilation of self in submission to, or submersion in, the absolute other. The relationship is modelled on the kind of 'space' that friends accord one another: *koinonia* [communion], conversation, even a kind of 'symposium'.<sup>22</sup>

A 'symposium' means literally 'a drinking party', a common experience of Herbert's friends.

We began this chapter with the six New Yorkers in *Friends*. Let us conclude with four others who appear in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*, winner of the 2015 Man Booker Prize.<sup>23</sup> They are above all held together by their love for Jude, who is brilliant but deeply wounded by sexual abuse in his childhood, including, alas, by a Catholic religious, Brother Luke. They wish to share his life and give him strength but learn with pain that sometimes friendship demands bearing apparent rejection. Willem, his closest friend, discovers that he must not express too much interest 'in exploring the many cupboarded cabinet in which Jude had secreted himself'; 'You understood that proof of your friendship lay in keeping your distance, in accepting what was told you, in turning and walking away when the door was shut in your face instead of trying to force it open again.'<sup>24</sup> Jesus loved the rich young man, invited him to follow him, but let him go (Mk 10.22), as the father let his prodigal son go.

They are there to share what Jude wishes to share, which often is much and sometimes nothing:

Why wasn't friendship as good as a relationship? Why wasn't it even better? It was two people who remained together, day after day, bound not by sex or physical attraction or money or children or property, but only by the shared agreement to keep going, the mutual dedication to a union that could never be codified. Friendship was witnessing another's slow drip of miseries, and long bouts of boredom, and occasional triumphs. It was feeling honoured by the privilege of getting to be present for another person's most dismal moments, and knowing that you could be dismal around him in return.<sup>25</sup>

When Willem dies in a car accident, Jude is bereft. Before his life finally falls apart, what he misses most is the presence of Willem, him just being there: 'It was precisely these scenes [the quiet companionship that he observed with his parents] he missed the most from his own life with Willem, the unforgettable, in-between moments in which nothing seemed to be happening but whose absence was singularly unfillable.'<sup>26</sup>

It is a book filled with silence. There is the massive silence of Jude about his childhood suffering, which takes hundreds of pages to break, but sometimes the friends break through to the companionable silence of those who are at ease with each other. Anne Michaels puts it well: 'Silence: the response to both emptiness and fullness.'<sup>27</sup> Because these novelists understand friendship, they help us to see how at the living centre of our friendship with each other in God often there is silence. Our closest friends are those with whom we do not need to talk all the time. This is what St John of the Cross called 'the silent music' that is the presence of the Beloved. In my life, sitting with the brethren in the silence of prayer is a profound intimacy.

Bruno Hussar OP had long dreamed of founding a village in the Holy Land where Jews, Christians and Muslims could live together in friendship. When I stayed with him in 1970, the dream was on the way to becoming a reality. The name, *Neve Shalom*, or *Wahat al-Salam* in Arabic, is taken from Isaiah 32.18: 'my people shall dwell in an oasis of peace.' It was being built on land lent by the Cistercian monastery of Latrun. It was also near a Jewish kibbutz and a Muslim village. Bruno recounted how when he and some friends celebrated a first Mass there, the text was from Isaiah 62: 'your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her.' After Mass the chalice, made from glass in Hebron, was broken by a mistake. Initially Bruno was downcast, but then he realized that this was like the glass smashed at a Jewish wedding, God's blessing on the project.

By 2010 the village had become the home to sixty families, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. There is a school for about 250 children, who come from surrounding villages and are taught in Hebrew and Arabic. There is a school of peace which organizes seminars and conferences on interreligious dialogue and peacemaking. At the centre is still Bruno's beloved House of Silence, Doumia, which refers to Psalm 65.2, which he translated as 'for you silence is praise'. Here the three faiths can gather in the intimacy of shared silence, an impossible friendship and an oasis of peace.

## The Non-Violent Imagination

On the night before Jesus was swallowed up by violence, he gave his disciples his peace: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid' (Jn 14.27) After Gethsemane, he goes to meet the armed soldiers who have come to take him by force. He refuses to respond with violence. Peter is ready for a fight and cuts off the high priest's slave's ear, but Jesus will have none of that. 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think I cannot appeal to my Father, who would promptly send twelve legions of angels to my defence?' (Matt. 26:52-3). That's 36,000 angels: enough to cope with any squadron of Roman soldiers.

If Christians were to embrace the radical non-violence of Christ, people would be shocked. This rejection of all violence was even more incomprehensible for his contemporaries than it is for us. Terrence Rynne wrote:

Jesus was born into a land seething with violence. The people of Galilee at the time of Jesus' birth were murderously angry. They were angry at the Roman occupiers who squeezed them for tribute to fight their wars, angry at Herod and his sons for bleeding them dry with taxes to build their glorious

buildings and towns, angry at their priests for sending thugs into the countryside to steal their grain, their only source of meagre wealth.<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus was a child, Judas the Galilean revolted against this oppression and attacked Sepphoris, just four miles from Jesus' home in Nazareth. The rebellion was crushed by the Romans, and two thousands Jews were crucified. Without doubt, the young Jesus saw the bodies rotting on the trees. During his lifetime and for decades after the Resurrection, rebellions and uprisings erupted, every one suppressed by the Romans with hideous violence, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70 and the end of a Jewish state for nearly two thousand years.

Jesus grew up in a ferocious world, under the brutal boot of the Romans, a world in which his contemporaries prayed for the violent overthrow of their oppressors. His disciples accompanying him to Jerusalem were probably confident that he would raise the rebellion. But when the crunch came, he refused. They were puzzled and disappointed. It may have been this that pushed Judas into betrayal. The disciples on the way to Emmaus lament to the stranger on the road: 'We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' (Lk. 24.20). They could not grasp his teaching, and today few Christians do so.

In the early centuries conversion to Christianity entailed the rejection of all violence. Christians refused to take part in the rebellion of AD 70. For the first three centuries, with few exceptions, they refused to serve in the army or accept any office that might entail inflicting the death penalty. Soldiers who were baptized laid down their arms, often resulting in their martyrdom. Justin Martyr, who died in about AD 165, wrote: 'We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and all wickedness have each and all throughout the earth changed our instruments of war, our swords into ploughshares and

our spears into farm tools, and cultivated piety, justice, love of humankind, faith and the hope.<sup>2</sup> In AD 295 St Maximilian was beheaded for refusing to be conscripted into the Roman army. At his trial he said, 'I cannot serve. I cannot do evil. I will not be a soldier of this world. I am a soldier of Christ.' Yes to the God of life meant an unambiguous No to violence.

By the middle of the third century, or at the latest after the conversion of Constantine in AD 312 – scholars disagree about precisely when – Christianity's commitment to the most shocking teaching of its founder began to wane. Not only did Christians begin to join the army but in later centuries sometimes soldiers were even led into battle by bishops and popes. This is not to say that Christians were utterly seduced by violence. Beginning with Augustine in the fifth century, there were arguments as to what constituted a just war and how it might be legitimately waged; there were attempts to limit war and negotiate truces. But the hold on the Christian imagination of Jesus' radical non-violence was lost.

There was not even a word for it until the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1906 Mahatma Gandhi held a competition to find a word to describe the nature of the struggle that he was leading against the British. Eventually he came up with a new word, *satyagraha*, the force (*graha*) which is born of truth or love (*satya*), which he also called 'non-violence'.<sup>3</sup> It was a Hindu inspired by Jesus who gave Christians a name for what many today are coming again to see as at the core of our founder's life and teaching.

Dorothy Day asserted that 'the big fight is against violence more than it is against atheism.'<sup>4</sup> 'Christians, when they are seeking to defend their faith by arms, by force and violence, are like those who said to Our Lord, "Come down from the Cross. If you are the Son of God, save Yourself."<sup>5</sup> She went to the Vatican to argue her case against war. Initially there was resistance, but she won in the end. Addressing the United

Nations in 1965, Pope Paul virtually repeated the words of Jesus to his disciples as the Roman soldiers drew near: 'No more war, never again war. If you wish to be brothers, drop your weapons.' This rejection of war has been repeated by every one of his successors. Pope Benedict XVI stated that 'non-violence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God's love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the "Christian revolution."<sup>6</sup>

It is as though, two thousand years after that night in the garden, the successors of Peter have again listened to Jesus and call on us all to do the same. Like Peter in the heat of the confrontation, we still struggle to imagine what this means. I preached a mission to a vibrant parish near Los Angeles. The congregation was packed with intelligent and committed Catholics, attentive to the Word of the Lord, open to all comers, even an Englishman like me. Yet they had never noticed how odd it was to have a sign outside their church which warned all: 'Armed Response.' Did a holy place dedicated to the Prince of Peace need that threat of violence? How have we been held captive so long by the seduction of violence, and how may we be touched again by Christ's call to drop our weapons?

The last century was the most violent in human history: the terrible massacres of two world wars, the slaughtering of whole peoples, from the Armenians in Turkey to Rwanda. Indeed the word 'genocide' was invented to describe the mechanical holocaust of Jews in the Shoah, using all the efficiency of modern technology. But there was also the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the carpet bombing of Dresden, the murder of hundreds of millions of people by Stalin, Mao Zedong and Pol Pot. We see today the rise of violent jihadism, the death cult of Da'esh, the blind fury of Boko Haram, the slaughter of Muslims and Christians in India, the massacre of kids in the poor slums

of the United States. These outbreaks of hideous violence are often described as 'medieval'. Alas, they are more typical of modernity.

If Christianity is to capture the imagination of our contemporaries, surely it will be through recovering the radical non-violence of Jesus. This does not necessarily mean pacifism. Gandhi, the twentieth century's greatest witness to non-violence, refused to condemn armed resistance to Nazism. This is not the place to explore the difference.<sup>7</sup> Our concern here is with how we can see the world, which Dante calls 'that little threshing floor that makes us so fierce',<sup>8</sup> through eyes cleansed of toxic violence.

This means purifying our being of the pockets of violence that seethe within us. Even if we do not come to blows with people, let alone murder them, we live in a culture that is saturated with aggression. Just think of all the violence of the words exchanged every day in the media, the contemptuous and dismissive words that are the daily fare of so many conversations: the swear words, the road rage. Think of how the views of people with whom we disagree are dismissed as ridiculous, nonsensical, absurd, thus rubbishing people made in the image and likeness of God.

Think of the brutal pace of our lives, rushing from one event to another, restless and anxious, checking emails, sending text messages, bent over our smartphones. Thomas Merton believed that

the rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his own inner

capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the roots of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi refused to fly anywhere, not because of his carbon footprint, but because planes go too quickly. You rush. One day two American women journalists came to interview Gandhi and asked him, 'Is it true that you object to railways, steamships and other means of speedy locomotion?' Gandhi replied, 'It is and it is not.' But they did not wait for him to explain his answer. They had a train to catch.<sup>10</sup>

Think of the violence that permeates our treatment of other animals. Almost uniquely in the world of Jesus, the worship of Christianity did not involve the slaughter of animals. One could have smelt the blood spilt in the Temple in Jerusalem long before one could see it. Leo Tolstoy said that 'as long as there are slaughterhouses, there will be battlefields.'<sup>11</sup> Surely one day our descendants shall look back on the brutality with which we treat animals and be ashamed.

Let us look at four overlapping ways in which the violent imagination holds us in its grip and how the gospel might in each case liberate our minds from its seduction: violence is inevitable; the only safety lies in arms; violence is sexy; and anyway, it is not real.

### *1. Violence is inevitable*

For most of history war seemed inevitable. It is just how things are, one battle after another. David sets out to fight 'in the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle' (2 Sam. 11.1). It belonged, like sowing and harvesting, to the natural rhythm of the year. The historian Will Durant claims that since the beginning of recorded history, there have been only twenty-nine years without war.<sup>12</sup> Asked what would happen after the end of the Cold War, Colin Powell replied: 'We are preparing

for the next war. We don't know when it will be or where it will be. But what we do know is that there will be war.<sup>13</sup> All one can do is to recover from the wars that are past and prepare for those to come.

It has been claimed that the Greek word for 'peace', *eirene*, just means a pause in war:

It describes an interlude in the normal human condition: war. *Eirene*, therefore, has more the sense of a truce between wars, not an end to war. *Eirene* is a 'peace' that accepts the curse of the inevitability of war. The Latin word for peace, *pax*, has a slightly more positive meaning: it suggests a 'pact', 'an agreement' not to fight for the time being. It is a state more or less fragile that exists for a time in the midst of ongoing struggle and strife. It too accepts the belief that war is inevitable.<sup>14</sup>

In *Another Day in the Death of America*, the journalist Gary Younge looks at the lives and deaths of ten young men and children who were killed on one day, 23 November 2013.

The children caught up in the slaughter of innocents on the streets of American slums have a similar sense of being mired in a war that will never end: 'It's as though they had lost a loved one in a war without any clear purpose, end or enemy, a war they could do nothing about.'<sup>15</sup> No other state of affairs can be imagined. Their only hope is to survive as long as possible, constantly aware that they may be devoured in turn:

Far from being considered newsworthy, these everyday fatalities are simply a banal fact of death. They are white noise set sufficiently low to allow the country to go about its business undisturbed: a confluence of culture, politics and economics that guarantees that each morning several children will wake up but not go to bed while the rest of the country sleeps soundly.<sup>16</sup>

Father Gregory Boyle SJ, who ministers to kids in the gang wars of Los Angeles, says that 'gang members form an exclusive club of young people who plan their funerals and not their futures.'<sup>17</sup>

The violent imagination of our culture has deep roots, going back to the beginning of the Biblical narrative, Cain's murder of Abel. Human history springs from the murderous rivalry of the original siblings. John Steinbeck explores the endurance of this myth in *East of Eden*. The title refers to Cain's home after his murder of Abel: 'Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden' (Gen. 4.16). This is where we all dwell, according to Steinbeck.

Lee, the wise Chinese servant in Steinbeck's novel, believes that it is the enduring story of humanity:

I think this is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody's story. I think it is the symbolic story of the human soul. I'm feeling my way now – don't jump on me if I'm not clear. The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt – and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human would not be what he is.<sup>18</sup>

The novel is filled with characters whose names begin with C or A, echoing the original actors, whose story is replayed again and again with minor variations throughout its long length. If we are to find the peace of a non-violent imagination, we must be freed from the enchantment of this story. Are we doomed to be for ever fatalistically caught in its murderous mesh, like those kids fighting it out in the American slums? Is war the motor of our histories, with occasional pauses to prepare for the next hostilities?

In Genesis the ferocious rivalry between Cain and Abel is indeed played out from one generation to the next. Ishmael, born of Sarah's slave, is expelled with his mother and almost perishes in the desert, while Isaac, his stepbrother, is the chosen one; Esau and Jacob vie for the blessing of Isaac, but again the younger one is chosen and Esau is cheated of his birthright. Young Joseph, the beloved of Jacob, is hated by his jealous brothers who leave him in a well to die. Sibling rivalry is the thread that knits together the narrative, the younger one chosen to the anger of the elder.

Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi, argues that this sibling rivalry in the scriptures of the Abrahamic religions has fuelled the violence of the West. It is clear, he writes, 'why Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been locked in a violent, sometimes fatal, embrace for so long. Their relationship is sibling rivalry, fraught with mimetic desire: the desire for the same thing, Abraham's promise ... They are competing brothers. Each must see the other as a profound existential threat.'<sup>19</sup> The same rule applies; the young one claims the blessing. Christianity claimed it from Judaism, and Islam from both the older faiths. 'Each regards itself as *the* heir to the covenant with Abraham. Strife is written into the script. It may lie dormant for centuries, but its seeds lie intact, ready to spring to life once circumstances favour religious revival. Each defines and defends itself by negating the others.'<sup>20</sup> For centuries Christianity was tempted to see Judaism as the enemy within and Islam as the enemy without. It does look as if we do indeed dwell east of Eden, forever re-enacting the quarrels of Cain and Abel and so alienated from each other and from God.

However, Sacks argues brilliantly that if one studies the text closely – he also refers to later rabbinical interpretations – this is not the message of Genesis. Cain does murder Abel, but he remains under the protection of God. Isaac was the chosen one, but Ishmael received his own blessing. The rabbis taught that

Abraham sought out Ishmael so that 'Ishmael then knew that his father still loved him'. Many rabbis in the early centuries were called Ishmael, proof that he was not seen as a rejected figure. The two brothers stand together at their father's grave (Gen. 25.9). The choice of Isaac does not mean the exclusion of Ishmael.

Sacks demonstrates beautifully that, although the line of descent passes through Jacob, yet Esau receives the blessing that Isaac originally intended for him. Jacob had longed to be Esau and snatch his place from him, but eventually he learns to accept his own blessing and long for no more. The story of Joseph also ultimately subverts the sibling rivalry that almost led to his death. God's blessing transforms his curse into a blessing for his family: 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life' (Gen. 45.5). Read attentively, the story of Genesis liberates us from the illusion of the violent imagination, that rivalry and conflict are inevitable and everlasting.

The cross looks like inevitable victory of violence. What else would happen to someone who tells soldiers to put down their swords? On Easter day victory goes to the one whom Dan Berrigan called 'the impossible, unteachable, unreformable loser'.<sup>21</sup> We are on the winning side. It may look as if violence has the upper hand, but, as Martin Luther King said, 'the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending towards justice.'<sup>22</sup>

When a political rally against apartheid was prohibited, Archbishop Tutu led a service in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. The soldiers and riot police were sent in, bayonets drawn, to stop it. Tutu addressed them: 'You may be powerful – very powerful – but you are not God. God cannot be mocked. You have already lost.' Then, coming down from the pulpit, he went up to them smiling: 'Therefore, since you have already

lost, we are inviting you to join the winning side.' Everyone started to dance.

## 2. *Allaying fear*

Fear sells guns, and so the gun lobby must make sure you never feel safe. After the tragic massacre of children at Sandy Hook in December 2012, the mantra was 'Guns don't kill people. People kill people' and 'The only protection against a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.' Gary Younge reports the CEO of the National Rifle Association (NRA), Wayne LaPierre,

addressing a huge rally painting a dark picture of hydra-headed threats enveloping the country, leaving no person safe and no place uncontaminated by suspicion. 'We know, in the world that surrounds us, there are terrorists and home invaders and drug cartels and carjackers and knockout gamers and rapers, haters, campus killers, airport killers, shopping-mall killers, road-rage killers, and killers who scheme to destroy our country with massive storms of violence against our power grids, or vicious waves of chemicals or disease that could collapse the society that sustains us all. I ask you: Do you trust this government to protect you? We are on our own.'<sup>23</sup>

President Trump stokes up this fear of immigrants as the justification for the wall that he wants to build on the US's southern border.

St Matthew's gospel is a sustained invitation not to be afraid. It begins with the appearance of an angel to St Joseph in a dream, who says, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit' (Mt. 1.20), and it ends with this same son addressing the women at the tomb: 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me'

(Mt. 28.10). He asks the disciples battling against the storm on the Sea of Galilee: 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' (Mt. 8.26); Later he tells them: 'Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows' (Mt. 10.31). The man in the parable of talents buries his talent in the ground, because he is afraid (Mt. 25.25). Belief liberates from fear, or at least frees us from being the prisoner of our fears.

Because Jesus was not afraid; he could welcome people as they were. The good and the bad were welcome at his table – the strictly observant Pharisees and the lax tax collectors, women and men – and he healed Gentiles: 'For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Eph. 2.14).

Every society distinguishes between members of one's own community and people from other places or of other religions or cultures. We love our small communities, and it is right that we should. But acute fear may make us see entire groups of people as threatening, an abomination, and so justify violence against them, even their extinction. An awareness of our common humanity is sundered by a terrible dualism, 'Us' against 'Them.' Jonathan Sacks again:

Suicide bombings, the targeting of civilians and the murder of school children are not normal. Violence may be possible wherever there is an Us and a Them. But radical violence emerges only when we see the Us as all-good and the Them as all-evil, heralding a war between the children of light and the forces of darkness.<sup>24</sup>

It is this dualism which fuels a death cult such as Da'esh or, conversely, Islamophobia.

Often we are most afraid of ourselves. If we can dare face our own complexity, rather than succumbing to an internalized dualism in which we flee from facing bits of our own selves

that we dislike, we can discover a deep tranquillity. We peep into the complexity of our conflicting desires and impulses, acknowledge all that we are and so can be at peace with ourselves. Simon Tugwell OP urges that

the way to peace is the acceptance of truth. Any bit of us that we refuse to accept will be our enemy, forcing us into defensive postures. And the discarded pieces of ourselves will rapidly find incarnation in those around us. Not all hostility is due to this, but it is one major factor in our inability to cope with other people, that they represent to us precisely those elements in ourselves which we have refused to acknowledge.<sup>25</sup>

People who are militantly anti-gay usually fear to face their own attraction to people of the same sex; those who hate Western corruption most bitterly are those most drawn to Western pornography.

In 1956 the threats against Martin Luther King escalated. He was urged to have armed guards to protect his family and their home. After talking with his wife, he declined protection and got rid of the gun he had in the house: 'I was much more afraid in Montgomery when I had a gun in my house. When I decided that I couldn't keep a gun, I came face-to-face with the question of death and I dealt with it. From that point on, I no longer needed a gun nor have I been afraid.'<sup>26</sup>

When the Ku Klux Klan rode into Montgomery to terrify the African Americans who were demanding their rights, they were shown up as powerless, even ridiculous. Their intended victims were revealed as people with dignity and authority. The myth of a subservient black population was demolished in a scene that is almost hilarious:

Ordinarily, threats of Klan action were a signal to the Negroes to go into their houses, close the doors, pull the

shades or turn off the lights. Fearing death, they played dead. But this time they had prepared a surprise. When the Klan arrived – according to the newspapers ‘about forty car loads of robed and hooded members’ – porch lights were on and doors open. As the Klan drove by, the Negroes behaved as though they were watching a circus parade. Concealing the effort it cost them, many walked about as usual; some simply watched from their steps; a few waved at the passing cars. After a few blocks, the Klan, nonplussed, turned off into a side street and disappeared into the night.<sup>27</sup>

Thus was the emptiness of their claim to power shown up.

Suad Nofa is a schoolteacher in Raqqa. She joined the protests against the Syrian government, but when Da'esh captured the city and began to impose its tyrannical rule, other people decided that it was too dangerous to protest. Yet Suad refused to be silenced. Every day she stood in front of the headquarters of Da'esh with a different banner: ‘Our revolution was triggered by honourable people, and it is being stolen by thieves’, ‘Release all detainees’ and ‘Where were you when the crimes of Ghouta [a place subjected to chemical weapon attacks] happened? Sleeping in your palaces?’ Her family tried to dissuade her. She was shot at. But still she went back every day. She has inspired other ‘one-woman’ demonstrations all over Syria. She faced down the terrorists and refused to be intimidated.

The violent imagination weakens when people refuse to be subdued by fear. In 2014 jihadists from Al-Shabaab boarded a bus in Kenya and demanded that the Christians and Muslims be separated. This is usually the first step in the massacre of the Christians. But the passengers, mainly Muslim women, refused to obey. They put hijabs on the Christian women and said that all must be shot or no one. The terrorists left, and no one died.<sup>28</sup> Non-violence works.

### 3. *Violence as sexy*

People are fascinated by guns because they are 'sexy'. In the third series of *The West Wing*, C. J. Craig, the White House Press Secretary, receives death threats and reluctantly accepts to be accompanied everywhere by a Special Service Agent, Paul. His presence becomes more interesting to her as she becomes fascinated by his gun, a 3.5 Magnum, and even has a go at shooting it at a firing range. The episode is soaked with sexual innuendo, and before they part, she tries to kiss him and lure him inside her apartment. Guns are potent. A recent series on the BBC television, *Bodyguard*, also evokes the sexiness of guns, when the Home Secretary ends up in bed with her bodyguard. A Smith & Wesson advert evoked the sexual stirrings of teenage lads: 'You know [your son] wants a gun. But you don't know how much he wants it. He can't tell you. It's beyond words.'

Gary Younge attended a convention of the NRA in Indianapolis:

The relationship some of the men walking these halls have with guns is romantic. At times it even borders on the sexual. 'Pick up a rifle, a pistol, a shotgun, and you're handling a piece of American history,' writes Chris Kyle in *American Gun*. 'Take the gun up now, and the smell of black powder and saltpetre sting the air. Raise the rifle to your shoulder and look into the distance. You see not a target but a whole continent of potential, of great things to come, a promising future ... but also toil, trial, and hardship.'<sup>29</sup>

For the kids in the slums, guns are also romantic and macho. To have a gun is to be a real man. For example, the gun violence of the South Side of Chicago – known as Chi-Raq because the death rate is much the same as it was in Iraq during the war there – is celebrated in song by rap artists like G. Herbo, who recorded with Nicki Minaj: 'Ain't yellin' cut, when it's shootin'

time, sign up, it's recruitin' time' and he 'know a couple niggas, that's down to ride for a homicide, when it's drama time.' This is the only drama that some of these poor kids know – kids for whom death comes prematurely.

Marlon James's novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* describes a similar gang culture in Jamaica. One of the characters, Bam Bam, a name evocative of a shoot-out, describes in the dialect of his tribe the fascination of the weapon: 'Nobody ever own a gun. You don't know that until you own one ... Gun hunger worse than woman hunger for at least a woman might hungry for you back. At night me don't sleep. Me stay up in the dark shadow, looking at it, rubbing it, seeing and waiting.'<sup>30</sup>

Seamus Heaney experienced the thrill of the gun and the exhilaration of its power, but then awoke to its blasphemy.

It exhilarated me – the bullet's song  
So effortlessly at my fingertip,  
The target's single shocking little jerk,

A whole new quickened sense of what rifle meant.  
And then again as it was in the beginning  
I saw the soul like a white cloth snatched away

Across dark galaxies and felt that shot  
For the sin it was against eternal life –  
Another phrase dilating in new light.<sup>31</sup>

The fascination with guns is also part of the myth of the Wild West. Born in America, it is now an element of our global culture. Western movies are the favourite entertainment, along with pornography, of jihadists. Ironically, in their battle against the West sometimes they imagine themselves as heroes of a Western. President Trump's Asian Advisory Committee, commenting on future American policy towards China, said

that 'a new sheriff has come to town.' The drama of our time is the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, and billions of men imagine themselves as John Wayne or Clint Eastwood.

How can the ultimate impotence of the gun be unmasked? A Swedish sculptor, Carl Fredrik Bengt Wilhelm Reuterswård, was horrified by the murder of John Lennon in New York on 8 December 1980. He said: 'I was filled with bitterness and anger and immediately began to create a symbol for John Lennon and everyone else who has been a victim of such assassins.' He made *The Knotted Gun*, a Colt Magnum revolver with its barrel tied into a knot, as if the gun was emasculated. Several variations have been erected in different cities around the world. The version in Reuterswård's home town, Landskrona, is doubly knotted, just to make sure.

Jesus' confrontation with the soldiers who come to arrest him shows that power based on force is ultimately fake. He asks the soldiers in the garden whom they seek. When they reply 'Jesus of Nazareth' and he said 'I am he', they 'drew back and fell to the ground' (Jn 18.6). He is brought before Pontius Pilate, the representative of the imperial power of Rome, and it is this unarmed prisoner who wields true power and shows up the impotence of those who judge him. It is a power of an utterly different sort from that of the Romans to whip and crucify their enemies. 'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not of this world' (Jn 19.36).

#### 4. *It's just a game*

The sneakiest trick of the violent imagination is to allay our repulsion by pretending that it is all just a game, good old-fashioned fun. By the age of eighteen, American teenagers will have witnessed on the media 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders.<sup>32</sup> Often these are glamorized or treated as

humorous. Violence is normalized and even seems harmless as one zaps demonic enemies in a video game. This seemingly innocent entertainment nurtures a violent imagination which has no guilt about destruction because nothing is real.

Indeed, the dramas of international politics, with its confrontations and conflicts, are often imagined as games. People gathered outside the White House to celebrate the assassination of Osama bin Laden with banners proclaiming 'Obama 1 Osama 0'. It could have been a game of basketball, and the principal actors in the drama are called 'players', as though all this violence were just a cyber game. During the Cold War the Americans thought of nuclear conflict in terms of computer-modelled war games, as though no one really gets hurt. No real bodies are involved. It is all numbers on a screen. Interestingly the Russians thought of the Cold War in terms of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, a triumph emerging almost mystically from suffering and disaster.<sup>33</sup>

On consecutive nights I saw two films, *Avatar* and *Sherlock Holmes*. They could not have been more different. The first was about eight-foot-tall blue-skinned Californians living on a distant planet in the future, and the second was about our great British detective solving crimes in nineteenth-century London. But they end almost identically with a shoot-out, in which the bad people get killed and the world is safe, until another bad guy turns up.

Gary Younge's aim in writing about the death of those ten young people on a single day, 23 November 2013, is to open our eyes to the horrific suffering of real people, the sons and daughters of ordinary families. He tells us of

Californian Democratic congressman Adam B. Schiff, who found twenty minutes to meet with Faisal bin Ali Jaber. Jaber's brother-in-law and nephew were incinerated by a US drone strike in rural Yemen while trying to persuade Al

Qaeda members to abandon terrorism. Schiff said after the meeting, 'It really puts a human face on the term "collateral damage". My aim here is to put a human face – a child's face – on the "collateral damage" of gun violence in America.'<sup>34</sup>

As inhabitants of the digital continent, it is hard for us to register the brutality of murder, even for those who live in the violent neighbourhoods. Younge tells of Nicole, who texted a friend about the man whose child she bore and who will one day kill his youngest boy:

'I swear he's gonna kill me one day. In two years, when nobody suspects him, I know he's gonna kill me.'

'We were serious,' says Amy. 'But somehow it was still more like a joke. Who can wrap their minds around a reality like that until it really happens? It's not really real until it happens.'

And then it happened.<sup>35</sup>

It left her son Jaiden dead with a bullet in his head.

Jesus' non-violence is rooted in his clear perception of people. As God's living Word, he knows them from the inside. 'He knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone' (Jn 2.24). Nathaniel asks him: 'Where did you get to know me?' (Jn 1.48). The Samaritan woman tells everyone: 'Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did' (Jn 4.30). Seeing with utter clarity the God-given humanity of each person, violence would have been impossible. Chrys McVey OP, an American who ministered in Pakistan for many years, wrote of how St Dominic was often moved to tears:

They flowed from the discipline of an open-eyed spirituality that did not miss a thing. Truth is the motto of the Order – not

its defence (as often understood), rather its perception. And keeping one's eyes open so as not to miss a thing, that can make the eyes smart.<sup>36</sup>

Notice the pun on two senses of 'smart', as intelligent and as hurting.

The old pastor in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead* says, 'Any human face is a claim on you, because you can't help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it.'<sup>37</sup> The beginning of our training in non-violence is learning to see people. If we see them not as objects but as subjects who see us, it will be almost impossible to inflict profound hurt.

Robert Graves, a poet of the First World War, found 'a certain cure for lust of blood' in seeing a dead German. Here there was the stark reality of war.

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,  
 In a great mess of things unclean,  
 Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk  
 With clothes and face a sodden green,  
 Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,  
 Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.<sup>38</sup>

Not long before their death Christian de Chergé, the Prior of the Algerian Trappists, wrote his final testament. It is the most beautiful declaration of non-violence that I know. He sees the person who will come to kill him not as an enemy but as his brother:

And you too, my last minute friend [the one who will kill him], who will not know what you are doing, Yes, for you too I say this THANK YOU AND THIS 'A-DIEU' - to commend you to this God in whose face I see yours.

And may we find each other, happy 'good thieves' in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both ... AMEN! INSHALLAH!<sup>39</sup>

#### THE POETRY OF NON-VIOLENCE

Non-violence needs more than the determination not to hurt. It invites us to imagine the world differently. Isaiah offers this through poetry:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

(Is. 11. 6-9)

Vegetarian lions! Is that just fantasy, an escape from a world that is inevitably brutal? Or is it an evocation of the peace that Jesus promises, and which the world cannot imagine and so can only be hinted at poetically. I was intrigued by a headline on the BBC website: 'Ballerinas storm the streets of Cairo.' Just before Christmas 2016, they refused to be intimidated by the violence of the city and reclaimed the streets for women, dancing and twirling their way through the night. Videos of their dancing went viral. It was a danced parable.

Colombia was afflicted with civil war for fifty years. Most Colombians had never known, and could not imagine, anything else. The war between the army and the FARC rebels seemed eternal and unresolvable. An advertising executive, Jose Miguel

Sokoloff, was invited to look for creative ways of reaching out to the guerrillas. He planted Christmas trees near where they would pass. He tells us of

the gigantic trees that we put in nine strategic pathways in the jungle covered with Christmas lights. These trees helped us demobilize 331 guerrillas, roughly five percent of the guerrilla force at the time. These trees were lit up at night, and they had a sign beside them that said, 'If Christmas can come to the jungle, you can come home. Demobilize. At Christmas, everything is possible.'

Probably not many of the guerrillas saw the trees, but they all heard of them. In the darkness of mutual destruction a potent symbol appeared which was not a gun. It evoked the Prince of Peace in whom nearly all Colombians believe and the domestic peace from which they were excluded.

Non-violent resistance is not just an effective tactic in the struggle against evil. Its power springs from the deep interior peace of those courageous people who dare to refuse violence and imagine the world differently. Jesus 'taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come"' (Mk 7.21).<sup>40</sup> The majestic power of Jesus before the judgement seat of Pontius Pilate sprang from his communion with his Father, 'the utter, invulnerable, tranquillity of his eternity'.<sup>41</sup> In this we find our home.

## At Home

Jesus teaches the disciples that they will be at home in him, and he and the Father in them. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (Jn 14.1-2). He tells them this at just the moment when they are apparently about to lose their home with him. He will be taken from them, first by force and then in the ascension. This shows us what sort of home it is, one that cannot be destroyed by persecution, by failure or by God's apparent absence.

Every living being needs a home, and its home expresses what it means for it to be alive. Coral reefs, dung pats, hedgerows and beehives are all homes. Lions and bears, dogs and foxes, mark their territories with urine and fight any rival who tries to barge into their home. Spiders weave their webs and badgers dig their setts. Home may not be a single place. The 'home' of a salmon includes its spawning grounds, where it is born and dies, and the ocean in which it is fattened and grows to adulthood. Migratory birds are at home in their summer grounds and their winter grounds, between which they move like the wealthy elite migrating between London and New York, the grouse moors and the ski slopes. If plankton drifting through the sea do not seem to have much of a home, maybe they don't have much of

a life. But who am I to judge? Maybe, as was said of the early Dominicans, 'the ocean is their cloister.'

So what does Jesus' promise of home say about what it means for us to be truly alive in God? There are two home-building movements. We are to find our home in God: 'I go to prepare a place for you' (Jn 14.2). And Jesus and the Father will make their home in us: 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them' (Jn 14.23). To be fully alive is God dwelling in us and we in God.

Why this double homecoming? The mystery of God's love is both particular and universal. We are loved individually. God does not love humanity in general, as I might love red wine in general. Each of us is not just an instance of a group that is loved in a general way. Such a love would be abstract and vacuous. W. H. Auden joked that 'we are here on earth to do good to others. What the others are here for, I don't know.'<sup>1</sup> The Father and the Son are at home in the individual struggles and delight of our loves and friendships. The Holy Spirit nests in the warp and weft of our personal lives.

At the same time God's love is universal. Nothing falls outside it for it would cease to exist. God abides in the smallness of our lives, and we are stretched open by the immeasurable vastness of God's life. Like the salmon, we flourish because God dwells in the small pools in which we are secure and at ease, and fills us with hunger for the vast ocean of his love. Let us look at each aspect of our homecoming and see how they relate.

'THOSE WHO LOVE ME WILL KEEP MY WORD, AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE THEM, AND WE WILL COME TO THEM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH THEM.'

James Rebanks, in his marvellous account of the life – one might say the vocation – of a shepherd in the Lake District, tells us that sheep are bound to the land in which they are raised:

‘They are “hefted” – taught their sense of belonging by their mothers as lambs – an unbroken chain of learning that goes back thousands of years.’<sup>2</sup> ‘Their sense of belonging is so strong that some have been known to go straight back to where they were hefted with their mothers, an irresistible urge within them to head home to their “stint”, even if they haven’t been to the mountain for three or four years.’<sup>3</sup>

Human beings too love places. Alastair Bonnett writes that ‘place is the fabric of our lives; memory and identity are stitched through it. Without having somewhere of one’s own, a place that is home, freedom is an empty word.’<sup>4</sup> We are ‘topophilic’, lovers of places, whose names we cherish. The housing shortage in Britain today is a crisis not just of accommodation but of places in which we may be planted and flourish.

Children need places of their own, preferably unknown to adults, where they are secure to play and observe the world. Seamus Heaney asserts that

all children want to crouch in their secret nests. I loved the fork of a beech tree at the head of our lane, the close thicket of a boxwood hedge in the front of the house, the soft, collapsing pile of hay in a back corner of the byre; but especially I spent time in the throat of a willow tree at the end of the farmyard.<sup>5</sup>

Places are, he asserts, ‘imagination’s protein’ and ‘countries of the mind’. They shore up a sense of who we are, where we come from and whither we are going. Jeanette Winterson writes that ‘home is much more than shelter; home is our centre of gravity.’<sup>6</sup>

For the Biblical ‘country of the mind’, home is where God made his home with us, choosing a particular place and a particular people.

For the Lord has chosen Zion;  
he has desired it for his habitation:

‘This is my resting place forever;  
here I will reside, for I have desired it.’

(Ps. 132.13–14)

In Jesus, God made his home in a particular person, in a small town in Galilee, and in the family of a carpenter. After Pentecost, when the disciples were sent to the ends of the earth, there was an ambiguity about holy places and sacred homes. Some argued that Jesus led us beyond the particularity of place. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well: ‘Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father’ (Jn 4.21). Stephen, the first martyr, is arrested because ‘he never ceases to speak words against this holy place’ (Acts 6.13), but Christianity is a religion that embraces our ordinary human needs. As Aquinas asserted so often, ‘grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.’ The human hunger for homes and holy places could not be denied. We need oases on the journey to the vast home of God’s life. How else could we imagine it? We need images of how God dwells with us now if we are to travel onwards to our shared life in the many mansions of God.

Our ancestors had a profound sense that God dwells in our family homes. John McGahern describes the domestic piety of an Irish home in the last century:

The kettle began to boil and we had tea with slices of bread and jam. Before going upstairs, we knelt in the red glow of the room and the leaping firelight to say the Rosary. ‘Thou, O Lord, will open my lips.’ ‘And my tongue shall announce thy praise.’ ‘Tower of Ivory, House of God, Arc of the Covenant, Morning Star, Gate of Heaven,’ we prayed. The poor slated house thrown up in the middle of the field was a frail defence against every wind and rain shower that blew, but that night it could have been one of the mansions of heaven.<sup>7</sup>

I grew up with a similar sense that God and all the saints shared our home, though our only attempt at saying the rosary together ended in giggles when the dogs burst in and could not be restrained from licking our faces. Seamus Heaney writes of the domestic rituals for each season:<sup>8</sup> Brigid's crosses cut from green rushes on 1 February, buttercups and lady's smocks laid on window sills on May Eve, and flowers on the chest of drawers for Mary's month of May. So what if some of these practices are pagan in origin? Nothing human is alien to Christ.

Eastern Christianity, Orthodox and Catholic, sees the home as the domestic church, with the parents as the 'clergy' and the children as the 'laity'. In every house, usually near the entrance, is the 'red corner' or the 'beautiful corner', with icons where the family will gather to venerate morning and evening. Often there is an icon of the virgin and child by the door, which will be venerated as one enters and leaves the house. In the West priests are often asked to bless a new home, so that God may dwell in it. It's easier to grasp that one is at home in God if God is at home in one's house. It is easier to give thanks in the Eucharist if we give thanks for every meal. We need ways of hallowing our homes, though this is less easy when the people with whom you live may not share your faith. How can one hallow one's home without making others ill at ease?

#### AT HOME IN THE CHURCH

God makes himself at home not just in our homes, our flats and family houses but in our parishes and our Churches. Pope Francis has called on everyone to find their home in the Church: 'The Church is called on to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open ... where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems and to move towards those who feel the need to take up again their path of faith.'<sup>9</sup> No one must ever find the door closed. Alas, many fine Christians do feel that door is closed, or at least not wide open, because they are divorced and

remarried, or gay, or living with partners, or disagree with the Church in some way, or have in some way lost their way.

‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.’  
‘I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.’<sup>10</sup>

If the Church is our home, we do not have to deserve membership. We do not have to justify taking our place in the congregation. Sometimes people hesitantly say, ‘But I am a bad Catholic’ or ‘not much of a Christian.’ All that one can say is ‘Welcome home.’ When the prodigal son came home, he was not given time to make an apology or explain where he had been. His father ran and embraced him, and clothed him and held a party.

The American poet Maya Angelou said: ‘The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.’<sup>11</sup> Precisely because the Church is our home, we should not face interrogation about who we are and what we have done. We are there as children of the household. We should also be able to express ourselves freely, ask our questions and name our doubts. At home, one can be spontaneous. The pre-war writer Hilaire Belloc went to Mass at Westminster Cathedral and was kneeling down at some moment in the Mass when everyone else was standing. A verger came up and said, ‘Please, sir, we stand here.’ And Belloc said, ‘Go to hell.’ The verger replied: ‘I’m sorry. I had not realized you were a Catholic.’<sup>12</sup>

Jews understand that this freedom is a sign that we do belong. Most famously, Levi-Yitzchak of Berditchev, an eighteenth-century Hassidic rabbi, regularly got angry with God, especially when he felt that God had neglected his children. ‘You order man to aid orphans. We too are orphans. Why do you refuse to help

us?'<sup>13</sup> Elie Wiesel claims that this is the freedom of those who are at home in the community: 'From inside the community, [the rebel] may say everything. Let him step outside it, and he will be denied this right. The revolt of the believer is not that of the renegade; the two do not speak in the name of the same anguish.'<sup>14</sup>

We come to church with our questions and doubts, our objections and our anger. We bring to church our secular selves, for we are all children of this secular age. When Father Tony Philpot was a parish priest in the diocese of East Anglia, he attended a lecture in Cambridge given by Cardinal Ratzinger. It was brilliant. In a sense he agreed with every word. It was all true, but it had little to do with what his people lived. He wrote:

It is uncomfortable, occupying the space between the rock and the hard place. It is uncomfortable to belong to the world of orthodoxy, and yet spend so much of my time and energy with the unorthodox, and indeed to belong to their world too. I would want to say to men preparing for diocesan priesthood that this divided heart is the characteristic pain of their vocation, and if they experience the pain, it is a sign that they will be good priests.<sup>15</sup>

I would add that it is the pain of anyone who looks for a home in the Church. We come to church with our faith and lack of it, our consent and our dissent too.

A home that brooks no disagreement and allows no questions is dead. We are at home in chewing over the questions that bother us without fear that we shall be shown the door. Yehuda Amichai, an Israeli poet, wrote:

From the place where we are right  
flowers will never grow

in the Spring.  
 The place where we are right  
 is hard and trampled  
 like a yard.  
 But doubts and loves  
 dig up the world  
 like a mole, a plough.<sup>16</sup>

There are at least two more reasons why we may not feel at home in the parish or the Church. First of all, because they are filled with strangers, and second, because the Church is corrupt. Who would want to belong to it?

#### AT HOME WITH STRANGERS

Why bother to go to church with strangers who may not particularly welcome me and with whom I might have little in common? When the kiss of peace was extended once more to the congregation after the Second Vatican Council, some found it distasteful. A woman seeing a stranger advancing towards her with outstretched hands declined: 'I would rather not. We haven't been introduced.' Some dioceses in the US introduced an annual day when people who had drifted away from the Church were invited to come back. It came to be known as a special day 'to remember why you left in the first place'.

The word parish comes from the Greek *paroikeis*, which means a 'visitor' or 'stranger'. It is the word used by the disciples on the way to Emmaus when they ask Jesus 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' (Lk. 24.18). A parish is a home for strangers, where we gather with people with whom we are not necessarily bound by friendship or relationship. Certainly, in modern cities, it is not a natural community. It speaks of the Kingdom precisely by bringing together people

who probably have no deep desire to know each other. Dorothy Day's conversion to Catholicism was triggered when she dropped into a church in New York and saw the very richest and the poorest going to communion together.

The paradox of our home/non-home in the local parish was most vivid in the early Church because one kissed strangers. It really was a kiss and not an embarrassed hug or a distant handshake. Pagans were scandalized because when strangers at Christian worship kissed each other on the lips, it seems that some young men got carried away. Bishop Clement of Alexandria wrote with a slight air of desperation that 'we must realise that the unrestrained use of the kiss has brought it under grave superstition and slander. It should be thought of in a mystical sense. Let us kiss with a mouth that is chaste and self-controlled.'<sup>17</sup> Some hope of that! Athenagoras warned against asking for a second kiss. One kiss might be holy, but if one went back for a second, this was lust.<sup>18</sup> Because of this abuse, this intimate touch, which probably went back to Jesus, was lost, and men and women came to sit on either side of the aisle, and the paradox of a community in which we are intimate with strangers was weakened.

The beauty and the pain of the local Christian community are precisely that we are at home in Christ with people to whom we do not naturally belong and often have no desire to know better. Of course, if we gather every Sunday for years, many of them will cease to be strangers, but that is not the point. Jesus said that 'where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Mt. 18.20), even if they are strangers. We go to receive the gift of his body, which includes the gift of the unknown person beside me in the church.

In the early Church every parish had a hostel set aside for visiting foreigners, for they were Christ. It would make no sense to receive Christ in the Eucharist and to reject Christ in

the visitor. It was called the 'Xenon', from the Greek word for foreigner. St John Chrysostom suggested that every Christian home should have its own place for the foreigner:

How many of the brethren are strangers? ... Make for yourself a guest-chamber in your own house: set up a bed there, set up a table there and a candlestick. Gain a victory over the Church. Would you put us to shame? This do: surpass us in liberality: have a room, to which Christ may come; say, 'This is Christ's cell; this building is set apart for Him.'<sup>19</sup>

No Christian can be fully at home as long as anyone is homeless. The people arriving at the shores of Europe in search of refuge are not just homeless. They must shed their old identities, and cut themselves off from all that ever gave them identity. When I stayed in late 2018 in a centre for 400 migrants in northern Italy, run by the local parish, I noticed too late the nervousness when I asked a group at breakfast from where they came. One must not ask.

*The Gurugu Pledge*, by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, portrays what it is like to be an African living on the edge of Europe, trying to get in: 'The rule of thumb was that the closer you got to the gates of Europe, the more you disposed of anything linking you to a concrete African country. On Gurugu (the camp in which they lived), you revealed your origins only to those you truly trusted.'<sup>20</sup> When a new arrival is asked about himself, he says: 'Don't ask me where I came from. It was via lots of places, but I came through Algeria. They told me I no longer have a country, that's what they said at the border: you've no country any more, now you're just black.'<sup>21</sup> The dominant model of community in the camp was the football team, for on the TV they saw people like themselves who had a name. The true nature of the parish, our home with strangers, is revealed

when we welcome in migrants, so that they have somewhere they can call home.

#### AT HOME IN A CORRUPT CHURCH?

Do we really want to be at home in the Church? For many people, especially in this crisis of sexual abuse, it has become impossible to belong any longer. I met a friend in Paddington Station, a highly intelligent and impressive young woman who was raised a Catholic but finally found the scandals too much, and she told me that she could no more endure it. She was off. How can we think of the Church as home when it is shaken to its foundations by such sin? Where are the signs that God is still here?

I was in Australia for the summer of 2018, where the Church is deep in this crisis. I met the head teachers of Catholic Schools in the State of Victoria. I am deeply grateful for how they approached this with open eyes and deep faith. One of them quoted Carlo Carretto (1910–1988), who had been the national president of the Catholic youth movement in Italy in the early 1950s, before becoming a little brother of Charles de Foucauld. Carretto wrote an ‘Ode to the Church’, in a book called *I Sought and I Found*,<sup>22</sup> in response to a book by an atheist called *I Sought and I Did Not Find*. What Carretto said sums up the ambiguity of the Church, my home but not yet my home, revealing and concealing God:

How much I must criticize you, my church, and yet how much I love you! You have made me suffer more than anyone, and yet I owe more to you than to anyone. I should like to see you destroyed, and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal, and yet you alone have made me understand your holiness. Never in this world have I seen anything more compromised, more false, yet never have I touched anything more pure, more generous or

more beautiful. Countless times, I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face – and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms! No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you. Then too – where would I go? To build another church? But I could not build one without the same defects, for they are my defects. And again, if I were to build another church, it would be my church, not Christ's church. No, I am old enough. I know better. I shall not leave this Church, founded on so frail a rock, because I should be founding another one on an even frailer rock: myself. And then, what do rocks matter? What matters is Christ's promise, what matters is the cement that binds the rocks into one: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit alone can build the Church with stones as ill-hewn as we are.<sup>23</sup>

Faced with all the ambiguities of our home/non-home, many, like my friend, leave. Yes to Jesus and No to the Church. Yes to spirituality and No to institutional religion. I believe that because God has made his home with us, we must stay. The last words of Matthew's gospel are 'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Mt. 28.20). God's abiding presence is not dependent on our remaining faithful to God. But if we remain, despite the temptation to turn our backs on the sometimes sordid institution, we are signs of our God who will not go away and because of whose presence we can still call the Church holy, despite everything.

Sometimes abiding is the great adventure of our faith. Some Christians in Iraq and Syria express their rootedness in the Lord by just remaining in their homelands. Most have fled, and often for excellent reasons, and so are not to be judged. But those who remain are a sign of the God who remains with us. The Chaldean Patriarch in Baghdad told me that his cathedral had been bombed, killing many. Now the

government has taken away all his guards. But he remains, awaiting whoever comes, knowing that some day a stranger may arrive with a gun.

Serge de Beaurecueil OP, who lived in Afghanistan for twenty-five years, usually the only Catholic priest in the country, often wondered what was the point of remaining. But he wrote: ‘Silent carriers of the Word, of a creative Word, incarnate and crucified, simply in being, simply in living here, simply in loving, simply in dying here, simply in celebrating the Eucharist here, I engage the future of a people in the Light.’<sup>24</sup>

Rowan Williams wrote that “I’m not going away” is one of the most important things we can ever hear, whether we hear it from someone at our bedside in illness or over a shared drink or at a moment when we wonder what’s happening in our neighbourhood and society.<sup>25</sup> We remain in the Church despite our shame at its failures. We remain even though it’s a bother to have to turn up on a Sunday and listen to tedious sermons that drive you mad.

It is the faithful endurance which expresses itself in so many other ways too, remaining faithful to friends even when they cease to be amusing and stimulating or have been engulfed by failure, and to our spouses when the love has grown cold. James Rebanks, the Cumbrian shepherd, said: ‘Sometimes I think that our sense of belonging relates to how much weather we have endured – we belong here because the wind, rain, hail, snow, mud and storms couldn’t shift us.’<sup>26</sup> Christians today are enduring much rough weather. And if we flee the Church, we can still come back to warm ourselves at the paschal fire in the hearth, just like everyone else.

The very buildings of our churches are symbolic of God’s enduring presence and are an invitation in stone and brick for to us to stay. They embody memories and promises. When Joshua made a covenant with the people as they entered the Promised Land, he set a great stone in the sanctuary of

the Lord: 'See this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us' (Josh. 24.27) – the stone embodied the memory of the everlasting covenant.

At the Lambeth Conference in 2008, Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, wanted the bishops to pass time in Canterbury Cathedral so that the building, with all its memories of St Augustine and St Thomas Becket, could work upon their imaginations and its vast open space, rising towards the altar, might summon the Anglican Communion to deeper unity. He said he got all the bishops together in the cathedral for long periods of silence, on the principle that the building ought to be doing some work.<sup>27</sup>

In the Catholic tradition there are in every church two special reminders of this faithful abiding of God: the altar and the sanctuary lamp. I was present at the dedication by the bishop, Robert Lynch, of a new altar in a parish in the diocese of St Petersburg, Florida. It was hewn from massive blocks of delirium granite and symphony quartzite. It is emblematic of Christ, our solid rock. It is engraved with five crosses to symbolize the five wounds of his passion. It is stripped on Good Friday to symbolize the stripping of Christ. Bishop Lynch rolled up his sleeves and rubbed great quantities of chrism all over it, like the oiling of a wrestler's body before combat. The anointed altar represents the Anointed One, the Christ. This heavy lump of beautiful stone speaks of Christ who has pitched his tent there in Our Lady of Lourdes, Dunedin, Florida, and won't go away. That is why the closing of a loved church is such a wound.

The sanctuary lamp is a sign of the presence of Christ in the tabernacle. Christ abides in our churches, even when there is no one in the church. He remains even when the parish lives through a crisis, even if the priest is a failure. He does not go away and so how could we desert? At the very end of

*Brideshead Revisited*, the celebration of a traditional Catholic imagination, Charles Ryder returns after a long absence to the chapel in the house:

a small red flame – a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design, relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle; the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.<sup>28</sup>

One church holds a unique place in the Catholic imagination: not St Peter's in Rome, but the Lateran Basilica, the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. The Basilica was dedicated by Pope Sylvester I in AD 324. It has been battered by history, burned down and rebuilt, sacked and restored, a symbol of the Church's survival through turbulent centuries. Every year we celebrate its feast day, because it is the *mater et caput*, the mother and head, of all the Catholic churches of the world. It is the parish church of the world, and so no one there is a stranger. I am just as much at home there as the priest presiding at Mass or the pilgrims from Latin America or Asia who are milling around. It is a sign of God's abiding with us through all the chaos of history, the accidental disasters, the wars and earthquakes, even the scandalous failures of the clergy, the Borgia Popes. Christ remains steadily here with us, Emmanuel, God with us, today as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow.

Our Churches reveal and conceal the God who dwells with us. When the Roman general Pompey went into the Jerusalem Temple in 63 BC he forced his way into the Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest could enter once a year on the Feast of the Atonement, and found an empty room. Where the image

of God was expected, he found nothing. Roger Scruton wrote: 'The temple is the place where the faithful can encounter God. But he is also hidden there, concealed in the inner sanctum, or in rituals that only the few can decipher.'<sup>29</sup> God's promise to make a home with us is sealed on the cross, a human being apparently abandoned by God. Where was God then? Jesus promised a home to the disciples on the night before he died, when they were about to scatter. He gathered a community of saints and sinners who would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, and who would also fail at times, as did Peter. In what they did and who they were, they showed him and hid him as do we today.

Elijah flees from his ruined homeland (1 Kgs 19) to Mount Horeb, thinking that all is over and that he alone is left. He stands in the door of the cave and hears a whisper 'of thin silence' which commissions him to go and rebuild Israel. Home lies ahead and he has more allies for the task than he knows, seven thousand who, unknown to him, had never bent the knee to the false gods. St Francis was praying in the little church of San Damiano, near Assisi, when he heard the voice: 'Francis, go repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruin.' One can be confident that even now there is a St Francis or a St Clare who is being summoned to the task yet again.

#### AT HOME IN THE OCEAN

So God is at home in our homes and local congregations, these gatherings of friends and strangers. But we are also invited to be at home in God. 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?' (Jn 14.1-2). Like the salmon, we need the small pools where we are born and die, but we are also summoned to be at home in the vast ocean of God's love. St Catherine of Siena called God 'the pacific Ocean' and 'the boundless Ocean.'<sup>30</sup> 'You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea. The

more I enter you, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you.<sup>31</sup>

The Eucharist articulates this tension between the home we have and our final dwelling place. In the third Catholic Eucharistic prayer we say to God that 'you never cease to gather people to yourself'. The Church is an active gathering of people into our home. But the Eucharist ends with us being sent out. Go in peace. The church building can express this too. The cathedral of Kericho in Kenya, Neil MacGregor tells us, is so designed that at the end of Mass everyone can pour out. Almost the entire ground level consists of doors which are flung open as the concluding act of worship. The building gathers people into a warm embrace and then opens up to let them go, like breathing lungs.

In the old rite we are sent forth: *Ite missa est*, from which we get the word 'Mass'. Originally this just meant that the people were dismissed, but it came to be seen as expressing the missionary nature of the Church.<sup>32</sup> To be at home in the Church is to be propelled beyond its boundaries. We go to church and we are sent beyond it, as the heart draws the blood to itself and pumps it out. So God is an uncomfortable guest in our homes because he pushes us out of the nest. The divine love renders us restless, like the Magi in T. S. Eliot's poem 'no longer at ease in the old dispensation'.<sup>33</sup> There is an ancient Persian saying: 'Do not welcome elephant trainers into your house unless you are prepared to entertain elephants.'<sup>34</sup>

What sense can we make of this longing for a home in God? We are like salmon who sense that the time has come to leave the pool and head to the unknown ocean, the unexplored vastness to which we are drawn. C. S. Lewis calls this *Sehnsucht*, 'the inconsolable longing in the heart for we know not what'.

In speaking of this desire for our own far off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness ... We

cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name ... the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>35</sup>

Lewis believed that this longing for our final home is awoken by 'stabs of joy'. In a letter to Dom Bede Griffiths he asserted that it is strongest when he is happiest in this world, as if the more joy we have, the more we long for our final bliss:

It is just when there seems to be most of Heaven already here that I come nearest to longing for a patria. It is the bright frontispiece which whets one to read the story itself. All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings.<sup>36</sup>

We have intimations of this home in God in hospitality. This is more than welcoming the stranger into our home. We learn how to be at home with them, with a new sense of what a home is. We enlarge our sense of what counts as belonging. We offer hospitality but learn to receive it in forms we could never have anticipated. We break open our sense of 'home' and in 'a stab of joy' have a foretaste of our ultimate home. Visiting the Order as Master, I was welcomed by drums and dancing, by feasts during which I did not dare ask what I was eating, with fireworks and solemn Latin chants, with the rubbing of noses.

The General Council of the Order in Rome has fourteen members. At one stage in my time the brothers came from almost as many nationalities and from every continent bar the Antarctic. Every brother brought his own understanding

of community derived from his culture. If I may be forgiven an exaggeration, a bit of a parody, some thought in terms of a sports team, others of a family, or a tribe or even a political party. For this Englishman the model of the club came to mind! Making community meant letting each of the brethren enlarge our understanding of what it meant to belong, to be courteous, to celebrate and lament. In welcoming each brother and what home meant for him, we gained a glimpse of what it might mean to be at home in the Kingdom.

I visited Algeria at the invitation of the Catholic bishops, as part of a long process through which the Church was reflecting on its identity and mission. I travelled all over Algeria with a French Dominican, Jean-Paul Vesco, who is the Bishop of Oran. Because of civil unrest, internal flights were cancelled, and so we had to drive to the Sahara. On the way there was an alarming incident, which I shall recount in Chapter 15. We aimed to visit a remote community at El Abiodh, where Carlo Carretto had made his noviciate.

The direct route was blocked by fighting, and so we had to go via the northernmost edge of the Sahara. It was not clear from our map if there was a route there. We stopped at a beautiful oasis, a green place in the sand and rocks of the desert. The bishop asked a man who was standing by the road with his two sons whether we could get there. He replied: 'Not in that car!' But it was late, and the only other route we could see would have added hundreds of kilometres to the journey, and on the map there seemed to be a road, so we set off.

Before long the road petered out and it became obvious that we would be unable to progress any further. We stopped, looked back and saw that the man and his sons had followed us. They said, 'We told you so.' They invited us to stay that night in their home. Like Abraham and Sarah encountering three strangers in the wilderness (Gen. 18), there was the miracle of hospitality but, in this case, it was the strangers who made

the invitation. I shall never forget their faces. It was as if, in a moment of half-recognition, I had seen the face of God in these three Muslims. With a stab of joy I had an intimation that we are all on our way to our Father's home. We are pilgrims on the way to 'Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect' (Heb. 12.22-3).

## The Ecology of Faith

Now we come to the climax of Jesus' teaching, as his betrayal and death approach. All that he taught his disciples about serving each other, abiding in the true vine, being his friends, receiving his peace, all his teaching is summed up in a great prayer to the Father, overheard by the disciples. 'May they be one as we are one!' (Jn 17.21). He makes this prayer at the last minute, before they go out into the darkness of the night. But as a prayer to his Father, who always hears his Son, it is not a vague wish, but will be fulfilled.

'May they be one!' But would it be good if there was only one Church? Some people argue that a competitive market of Christian churches keeps us on our toes. Monopolies make for laziness and inefficiency. It is claimed that the US is religiously vibrant because there is an open market where the Churches must promote their 'brands' or sink. If all Christians were indeed gathered into the unity of a single body, as St Paul demands, might not Christianity stagnate and wither?

However, in *The Scandal of Christian Disunion* Nicholas King SJ shows that virtually every document in the New Testament insists that Christians be one.<sup>1</sup> The author of the letter to the Ephesians writes: 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and

through all and in all' (Eph. 4.1-6).<sup>2</sup> In Acts, Luke presents us with the first community in Jerusalem that was 'one in heart and soul' (Acts 4.32). It is indisputable that in the New Testament being a Christian means being called into the communion of the one Church. This is not a wishy-washy mutual tolerance but a profound and intimate unity. Christ's prayer defies the competitive imagination of the consumerist society. To be fully alive is not to thrive through victory over competitors in the market-place but to live for and with each other. To be alive in God is to flourish in our interdependence.

King also demonstrates that almost every document of the New Testament shows Christians fighting each other, splitting and casting out those with whom they disagree. The first communities were divided as to whether the law should still be obeyed, as to how Gentiles and Jews should live together, by divisions of wealth (see 1 Corinthians and the Letter of James), by different understandings of Christ and his relationship to his Father. St Paul is so steaming with rage at those who disagree with him in Galatia that he would be delighted if they were to castrate themselves (Gal. 5.12). Even the idyllic community of Jerusalem that Luke portrays in Acts is divided by deceit and greed. Bodies are carried out!

The letters of John command his hearers to have nothing to do with people who do not believe that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus. In Mark's gospel the followers of Jesus quarrel with each other as they walk to Jerusalem, arguing as to who is first and greatest. There are competing leaders of the Christians in Corinth, each with their own cheerleaders and slogans: 'Is Christ divided? Was it Paul who was crucified on your behalf? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?' (1 Cor. 2.12). And in the Book of Revelation, the Church of Laodicea is informed, 'I am about to spit you out of my mouth' (Rev. 3.17).

So there is a profound tension which is as old as Christianity itself. We must be one. This is non-negotiable. It is the will of

Jesus, according to the New Testament. That we shall be one is our belief and not a pious hope but the prayer of the Lord, which his Father will surely grant. But the New Testament is also filled with venomous rejection and excommunication. Long before the breakdown of communion between the Catholics and the Orthodox, and later the Reformation, Christians were at each other's throats. The scuffling and fisticuffs that periodically break out around the tomb of Christ in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem are symbolic of our long Christian tradition of mutual aggression.

Some people think that the cause of Christian unity is lost. Just before the new millennium, Bruno Delorme dismissed it as 'la grande illusion de ce siècle'.<sup>3</sup> Other people believed that the Churches have drifted so far apart that we are shivering in an ecumenical winter. But the unanimous witness of the New Testament does not allow us to give up our quest for complete unity even if it seems impossible to attain. With God nothing is impossible, Gabriel says to Mary. If the virgin can bear a child and Jesus be raised from the dead, then Christian unity is possible with the grace of God, even if at this time we cannot imagine how it might be attained.

From the beginning Christianity has been torn by the twin imperatives, to be one and to live in the truth whatever the cost. All Christians will surely agree that ultimately truth and unity are inseparable. Christ is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14.6). But on the journey to the Kingdom, truth and unity often seem to clash.

The divisions between and within our Churches are imaginative as much as doctrinal. Speaking to his daughter, Edmund Knox, the evangelical protestant Bishop of Manchester, confided his puzzlement about his Anglo-Catholic and Catholic sons: 'Between ourselves, Winnie, I cannot understand what it is that the dear boys see in Blessed Virgin Mary.'<sup>4</sup>

The violence that has torn Christianity apart is in part ignited by different ways of imagining the relationship between truth and unity. Perhaps the Catholic temptation is to privilege unity over truth, and thus impose conformity. The Protestant temptation is to insist on truth at the expense of unity, and thus break up the Body of Christ. We Catholics must grasp that there is no real unity without truth. This means that we must be eager to embrace every truth that is held by other Churches. It took centuries for the Church to be open to good Protestant Biblical scholarship, largely, I suspect, because it was Protestant! But I would hope and pray that other Churches would grasp that there is no fullness of truth without unity, for God is one.

‘May they be one!’ At the Lambeth Conference of 2008, which I was privileged to attend, I asked a wise Anglican bishop how he understood this text. He replied that perhaps this unity would only be given eschatologically, in the Kingdom. Perhaps, but we cannot just wait until the eschaton to seek it. We have small signs even now. In 2008 a memorial to twenty-three people was unveiled in the University church of Oxford by the first Catholic Chancellor of the University since the Reformation. Over their names is written: ‘Remember the martyrs of the Reformation both Catholic and Protestant who lived in Oxfordshire, taught at the University of Oxford or were brought here for execution.’

#### ONE IN THE NAME

Why does unity matter? Jesus prays: ‘Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one’ (Jn 17.11). Jesus is given the Father’s name, and he now prays that his disciples may be one in that name. The name of God was revealed to Moses at the burning bush: ‘God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you”’ (Exod. 3.14).

In Greek, 'I am' is *ego eimi*. At crucial points of John's gospel, this is the name that Jesus claims for himself.<sup>5</sup> When he comes walking on the water to the disciples, he says literally, 'It is I am; do not be afraid' (Jn 6.20). When the soldiers come to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane, and ask for him, he replies, 'I am,' and 'when he said to them, "I am", they drew back and fell to the ground' (Jn 18.6). Jesus shares in the unimaginable life of the Holy One who is, who was and who will be.

Israel probably broke through to the belief that God is not the best and strongest God but the only God as a result of the sixth-century Babylonian exile. If Israel was defeated, either her God was not up to much or else there are no other gods and the God of Israel is the Lord of all history. The oneness of God is not a mathematical statement. It is not that there might have been several gods, but it turns out that there is only one, just as some species of animal might be on the verge of extinction because there is only one left. The utter unicity of God was the great religious revelation to Israel.

Jonathan Sacks asserts that

the belief in one God meant that all the conflicting forces operative in universe were encompassed by a single personality, the God of righteousness, who was sometimes just, sometimes forgiving, who spoke at times of law and at others of love. It was the refusal to split these things apart that made monotheism the humanizing, civilizing influence that, in the good times, it has been.<sup>6</sup>

So the great Biblical characters are marked by battles within their souls: Abraham, our father in faith, passes off his wife as his sister to the Pharaoh; Jacob deceives his blind father and grabs Esau's birthright; the beloved King David is a murderer and adulterer; and the wise Solomon is foolish. St Paul bravely faces battles within his very being: 'So I find it

to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand' (Rom. 7.21).

Sacks derives our view of the individual from monotheism: 'Theology creates an anthropology. Discovering God, singular and alone, the first monotheists discovered the human person singular and alone.'<sup>7</sup> The belief that God is one and three does not negate this profound insight into the unicity of the individual. But our belief in the Triune God means that the solitary human beings that we are only thrive in being drawn into the utter mutuality of the divine life. Our individuality is the fruit of our relatedness. Our belief that our God is Three in One defines Christianity anthropology. Our true individuality is founded on our relationships, and we are capable of true relationships because we are individuals. The Western understanding of the individual as a social being is Trinitarian in origin.

Sarah Coakley points us to a vibrant image of the Trinity, from the early sixteenth century:

a memorable trio of mad March hares from Paderborn Cathedral ... their confused circular flurry ... the uniting of the three via their ecstatic dance of interaction and delight. The ears of the hares form a perfect divine triangle, even as their movement constantly keeps the figures turning and bringing new perspectives to the fore. By using a figure of nature, rather than the more common gendered anthropomorphisms of the Trinity, the sculpture injects the idea of divine intratrinitarian delight, careless frolicking, and even erotic excess, all the while holding the movement within its circular frame.<sup>8</sup>

So the unity that we are called to share is seen here in the explosive joy of the one God, in the life-giving mutuality of the Godhead. I am myself in my ecstatic delight in others. We are one in the flourishing of each.

Raymond Brown translates John 17.23 as 'that they may be brought to *completion* as one'. Separated from each other, we are incomplete. Our humanity is unfinished if we are divided. Dorothy Day glimpsed this when she was eight years old, when a terrible earthquake demolished much of San Francisco, and the walls tumbled down and people came together in the streets: 'While the crisis lasted, people loved each other,' she wrote in her autobiography. 'It was as though they were united in Christian solidarity. It makes one think of how people could, if they would, care for each other in times of stress, unjudgingly in pity and love.'<sup>9</sup> The curtain lifts for a moment.

During the civil war between rival ethnic groups in Burundi, Tutsis and Hutus, I travelled around the country looking for the relatives of the brothers and sisters, accompanied by my assistant for Africa, a Hutu, and the local superior, a Tutsi. Each evening we celebrated the Eucharist, the sacrament of peace, black and white, Hutu and Tutsi, but brothers of St Dominic. We visited a bishop whose compound was filled with people from both groups seeking sanctuary. I asked him how they could live together when their relatives were murdering each other outside. He replied that everyone was welcome as long as they came together around the altar for Mass. In such moments one glimpses the human vocation to share in the unutterable unity of God. The bread of life is the gift of unity, because without unity we are only partially alive.

So Christian unity is not about becoming a very big multinational institution. It is a fragile, fractured sign of God's very life in which all are one, alive in our ecological interdependence. Ephesians tells us that Christ 'is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us' (Eph. 2.14).

This unity in the Risen Jesus holds together the living and the dead. The apostles and earliest disciples are members of our household, sharing in the eternal life of God. The councils of the past have made affirmations about our faith that stand. G. K. Chesterton said:

Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead ... Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death ... I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the unity of the Church is a sacrament of the mutuality of life that Charles Darwin famously witnessed in 'an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of various kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth ... these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other and dependent on each other in so complex a way'.<sup>11</sup>

This final prayer of Christ points us to a unity that is more than institutional. It is organic, appropriately for the Body of Christ, and ecological. It is a sign of the mutuality and interdependence of all life, given existence by the One God whose life is the reciprocal love of the Trinity. Christ draws everything into one, for through him 'God was pleased to

reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Col. 1.19). We are only alive with and for each other.

#### THE YES AND THE NO

Yet from the very beginning Christians have been divided, often viciously. Just over five hundred years ago Western Christianity was shaken by Luther's great No to Rome. All through Christian history there have been people whose consciences have driven them to say No! No to corruption, to violence in the Church. 'Here I can stand and can do no other.'<sup>12</sup> I can never imagine leaving the Catholic Church, and yet I must recognize that many of the finest Christians whom I know and love could never imagine being a Catholic or Orthodox and are impelled to say No! The Protestant martyrs remembered on that plaque in Oxford said No to Rome, as the Catholics said No to the claims of their monarch.

The challenge for my Catholic tradition is to imagine dissent as fruitful and even necessary. The great 'No's that have echoed throughout Christian history are part of the life-giving mutuality that binds us together. Even the heretical 'No's contain some truth that needs to be gathered in, some insight into God that needs to be treasured, even if it has been presented in some exaggerated, wrong or unbalanced way. In the mud there is that speck of gold waiting to be collected. Nothing must be wasted. Aquinas was a beggar after the truth, regardless of the giver.

As a Catholic I treasure the unity of the Church, but if this is maintained by violence and menace, as has often happened, then it becomes life-denying, and a subversion of its deepest meaning. A Christian unity that is imposed by threat and force is a contradiction in terms. It is not the mutuality of the Trinity.

Recent Popes have been deeply aware that, although they are called to be the guardians of unity, they have often produced fracture and scandal. Pope Paul VI admitted to the Secretariat for

Christian Unity that ‘the Pope, as we well know, is undoubtedly the gravest obstacle in the path of ecumenism.’<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II also recognized that the exercise of the Petrine ministry has harmed Christian unity and that he ‘must fervently make his own Christ’s prayer for that conversion which is indispensable for “Peter” to be able to serve his brethren.’<sup>14</sup>

A beginning is for Catholics to recognize how much the vitality of the Church is owed to the holy people who have said No within the Church, and whose protests have ultimately nurtured the unity for which Christ prayed. Karl Barth, the greatest Protestant theologian of the last hundred years, said that Mozart’s music was so profound because its massive Yes contained and embraced a resounding No! Disharmonies are embraced within an ultimate harmony. Without them, the harmony would be lifeless. Can we imagine a way of being one that is strong enough to embrace invigorating protest? Can we imagine ways of protesting that ultimately nurture our unity in God?

A contrast is often made between the Catholic both/and (grace and freedom, Scripture and tradition, faith and works) and a Protestant either/or (*sola scriptura*, faith alone etc.). This is what Barth referred to as that ‘damned Catholic “And”’, *das verdammte katholische “Und”*. One might conclude that, if the Catholic imagination is to be really spacious (‘In my Father’s house there are many dwellings’), there must be a space for the necessary protests that shine the spotlight on our failures and prevent us falling into complacent sleep. Our Yes to life must include that life-giving No! We are insufficiently Catholic until it does. Nikos Kazantzakis invites us to be more spacious: ‘The bosom of God is not a ghetto.’<sup>15</sup>

Think of St Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century Dominican laywoman who had no formal education; she could not even write. Yet she challenged the Pope to fulfil his ministry of making peace in the Church. She went to the papal court,

exiled in Avignon, and there confronted the Pope and cardinals with their failures. She said:

The honour of Almighty God compels me to speak bluntly. The truth is that even before I left my native city I was more conscious of the evil odour of the sins committed by the Roman Curia than were the persons themselves who committed them: yes, and who continue to commit them daily.

Raymond of Capua, her Dominican brother and Master of the Order, says that the Pope was silent, 'and I myself was completely stunned'.<sup>16</sup> Not surprising! She said: 'Be silent no longer. Cry out with a hundred thousand voices. I see that the world is destroyed through silence.'<sup>17</sup>

Think of Dorothy Day, a committed convert to Catholicism who found herself constantly in conflict with her archbishop, Cardinal Spellman, most especially over his support for the Vietnam War. Spellman exhorted the US to pursue 'victory, total victory'. Dorothy Day campaigned vigorously against this view. Her Catholic Workers' Movement was regarded by the Cardinal as communist but, despite the clergy's attempt to marginalize her, she remained rooted in a profound love of the Church. She wrote:

As to the Church, where else shall we go, except to the Bride of Christ, one flesh with Christ? Though she is a harlot at times, she is our Mother. Love is indeed a 'harsh and dreadful thing' to ask of us, of each one of us, but it is the only answer.<sup>18</sup>

Finally she felt vindicated by Pope John XXIII's unambiguous rejection of violence and war in *Pacem in terris* in 1963.

Day was deeply critical of the clergy. She said that 'as a convert, I never expected much of the bishops. In all history,

popes and bishops and father abbots seem to have been blind and power-loving and greedy. I never expected leadership from them. It is the saints who keep appearing throughout history who keep things going.<sup>19</sup> And yet she could say 'that my faith, my feeling that the Church is Christ on earth, is my joy, my delight, my solace.'<sup>20</sup> How can such a No be embraced by such an unconditional Yes?

Once I had an acute experience of being torn apart by conflicting sentiments and being unable to make sense of my position. When I was a very young friar, in the late 1960s, I hitch-hiked to Rome and there met one of my brethren. I had always resisted visiting Rome since I had a deep suspicion of all things Roman and especially anything that looked like papolatry. At the same time I was utterly committed to the Church.

The tension within me exploded one morning during our visit. An Irish Dominican offered us tickets to a papal audience. I refused to go and persuaded my brother Dominican to abstain also. We were wandering down the side of St Peter's when Pope Paul VI's car swept by and stopped so that the Pope could bless a group of motorcyclists from Turin. I was immediately captured by a vast enthusiasm. Here was the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter, the guardian of the unity of the Church, and I rushed over, eager to be near to him. The carabinieri immediately blocked my path, presumably fearing that I was an assassin.

My companion was deeply puzzled. First of all I had refused to attend a papal audience; then I rushed over to see the Pope, overcome with excitement. We sat down in the piazza in front of St Peter's, and he confessed: 'I simply do not understand you, Timothy.' I could not understand myself. I was torn between a profound sense of the necessary unity of the Church, which I believed was entrusted to the Bishop of Rome, and an unhappiness with how the Petrine ministry was exercised, plus

a strong dose of youthful and foolish judgementalism. The Yes and the No fought within me. How can they be held together? If we can imagine that, perhaps we can take a small step towards a way of imagining Christian unity that will draw us closer to other Christians.

When I studied in Paris for a year, I had the extraordinary privilege of being Yves Congar's very lowly assistant. My work mainly consisted in getting him cups of coffee, photocopying documents and discussing the translation of English texts. He is often called 'the father of the Second Vatican Council'. He championed the role of the laity and ecumenism boldly when they were viewed with suspicion in Rome, and supported the worker priest movement. He was silenced by the Holy Office, the successor to the Inquisition, which he detested and called the Gestapo. Paul Murray OP asserts that

Congar, as much as anyone in his generation, understood the importance, within the church, of the freedom to think and to study, and the freedom to speak. For Congar, throughout all his adult life, that freedom was part of his vocation as a scholar and a preacher, and part also of his priesthood. Study was not merely a sort of academic duty or right. It was part of a sacred trust, a commission from God to preach the Word.<sup>21</sup>

When Yves Congar was exiled to England in 1954, a cruel punishment for a Frenchman, he wrote in his diary: 'To speak the truth. Prudently and without provoking a useless scandal. But to remain – and become more and more – an authentic witness to what is *true* ... My resistance can only consist in this: never to give up but to continue and intensify my service of the Truth.'<sup>22</sup> He once said, 'I have loved the truth as I have loved a person.'

Many of the saints who uttered their No suffered profoundly as they sought the way forward, often misunderstood by Church

authorities, persecuted and even excommunicated. And yet they lived these moments with joy. How can that be? Let us hear the witness of two great women, separated by five hundred years: St Catherine of Siena again, a doctor of the Church, and St Mary MacKillop, the first Australian to be canonized. Both understood what they endured from the Church as a sharing in Christ's suffering, and as a healing of the Body of Christ.

In the Dialogue, Catherine reports God as saying to her: 'Bring then your tears and your sweat, you and my other servants. Draw them from the fountain of my divine love and use them to wash the face of my bride. I promise you that thus you will see her beauty will be restored.'<sup>23</sup> She was unrelenting in her denunciation of the failures of priests and the Roman Curia, but she believed that her suffering was somehow redemptive.

When Sister Mary MacKillop was excommunicated by her alcoholic bishop, who afterwards repented, she was strangely calm: 'I loved the Bishop and priests, the Church and my good God then more than ever. I did not feel alone, but I cannot describe the calm beautiful something that was near.' Cathleen Kaveny asks: 'How did Mary endure and bear her cross? In ways that may seem counterintuitive to us today. It was easier for her to withstand the false and vicious attacks on her character; precisely because they were unjust, she saw them as uniting her more closely with Christ, who suffered similar attacks.'<sup>24</sup> Her sufferings contributed to the healing of the Church. Yves Congar suffered from a form of sclerosis that finally left him paralysed. He bore this suffering for the sake of Christian unity. His prayer was that the suffering in his body might somehow bear fruit in the healing of the Body of Christ.

I find that hard to stomach, but I suspect that it is right. St Paul, who suffered so much from his fellow Christians, says, 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church' (Col. 1.24). St Catherine and St Mary

MacKillop, Congar and his brother friar Marie-Dominique Chenu OP and countless others have endured suffering in the Church in the hope that somehow their pain will be part of the renewal of the Church. Their No is part of their Yes. They challenged the Church authorities in the belief and hope that this would help the Church to grow in truth and unity, for our truths are only authentic if they build the unity of the Church, and we are only one in the truth.

#### THE TWO HANDS OF THE FATHER

How can we heal the divisions that have sundered the Body of Christ, in which we are one but not one? St Irenaeus in the second century wrote of the two hands of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which tend and sustain the Church.<sup>25</sup> The Church's unity is nourished by the Spirit which is God's love and the Son, the Logos, which is God's wisdom.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor accompanied Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to meet Pope John Paul II. After a formal meeting, the Pope took the Archbishop's arm and led him to lunch saying, 'Do not worry. You know, affective collegiality will lead to effective collegiality.'<sup>26</sup> The unity that Jesus prayed for was the love of the Father and the Son, and so it can only be achieved through loving other Churches and traditions. We should love the differences between our traditions. I give thanks that I studied theology under Anglican and Methodist tutors and that I am an ecumenical canon of an Anglican cathedral.

Contemporary Western culture fears difference. Christians should be countercultural by delighting in it. The world of the internet gathers together global communities. When I open my inbox I may find emails from three continents, but the tendency of the medium is for us to become linked with people who are like-minded. If there is friction, disconnect, unfriend. The American novelist Jonathan Franzen claims that

'invisible Facebook and Google algorithms steer you towards content you agree with, and non-conforming voices stay silent for fear of being flamed or trolled or unfriended. The result is a silo in which, whatever side you're on, you feel absolutely right to hate what you hate.'<sup>27</sup> I cannot resist quoting the novelist Tom Rachman's evocation of our cyber world, which fears engagement with what is other:

Consider the catchphrases that ooze cynicism and passivity – 'It is what it is' or 'Whatever' or 'You do you.' Or 'Haters gonna hate', which means nothing much except that, if someone opposes your view, you should write them off. Don't argue, simply shut them out, hold to your comfy in-group, close your eyes, plug your ears, and hum loudly till they've left. But first, take a peep at your news feed. There's another meme waiting. And It. Is. Hilarious.<sup>28</sup>

Christianity has a delight in difference. It is in its DNA. Difference is fertile. Our Bible embraces the Old and the New Covenants. The New Testament does not abolish the Old, as some early Christians maintained, any more than Judaism is simply superseded by Christianity. We live in the interplay of the hope of the Old Testament and the consummation of the New. The New Testament wraps together between one cover four gospels, which describe Jesus' life, death and resurrection in apparently incompatible ways. A bishop told me that when he tried to explain to a group of prisoners why it is that the gospels have irreconcilable accounts of what Jesus said and did, one of them saw no problem: 'If they all said the same thing, it would be a put-up job!'

Francis Watson wrote: 'A consensus slowly emerged that the four gospels are to be read alongside each other and that no other gospel is permitted to share in their intertextual conversation.'<sup>29</sup> The history of the Church is of their unending

dialogue. John Berger wrote: 'Never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one.'<sup>30</sup> There are, of course, wrong ways of telling the story of the empty tomb – such as that the disciples came in the night and stole the body – but this does not mean that there is only one right way of recounting it.

The person of Christ embraces the most radical difference of all, that between the Creator God and his creatures. The mystery of Christ is of difference embraced, but not eliminated, not muddled in a mixture, not confused, but utterly one, as the Council of Chalcedon taught in AD 451. The doctrine of the Trinity is of difference and oneness. So the Christian imagination is charged with a delight in difference, and so Christian Churches should be unafraid of ours, hoping to learn from each other and slowly build that 'affective collegiality'. Nothing is more tedious than the mantra that the Churches must dwell on what unites us rather than what divides, so that we pretend that we are all the same. What is the point of conversation with those with whom you agree? It would be as unexciting, for me at least, as joining an Elvis Presley fan club in which everyone looked the same.

The divine 'hand' of the Holy Spirit reaches across boundaries in friendship, opening us to other minds and languages. Friends spend time in each other's company and do things together not as a grim duty but as a pleasure. And yet how often people's eyes roll with dismay at the prospect of an ecumenical service. Think of the Inklings, Catholics such as Tolkien and Anglicans like C. S. Lewis, building friendship over pints of beer in the Eagle and Child pub, two minutes from where I live. At the Lambeth Conference I learned more drinking pints of Bishop's Finger beer with Anglican bishops than in the formal debates. Affective collegiality, sustained by the pleasure of time spent with friends, builds effective collegiality. One hand of God, the Spirit of friendship, leads us to delight in fruitful difference.

The Father's other 'hand' is the Logos, God's wisdom. Through study and intuition we can come to imagine why it is that other people have views that our community does not hold, and why these views might have insights that we can learn to cherish. Fergus Kerr OP preached at a Chapter of my Province about what he had come to love about the Dominican way of life. It could also apply to how we can build unity between Christians of different Churches:

If you ask me to say what I prize more and more the longer I am in the Order (and it will be 40 years this September) then I have to say that it is a way of thinking – of expecting other people to have views we may disagree with; expecting also to be able to understand why they believe what they do – if only we have the imagination, the courage, the faith in the ultimate power of the truth, the charity to listen to what others say, to listen especially for what they are afraid of when they seem reluctant to accept what we want them to see.<sup>31</sup>

All this is rooted in the pleasure of argument, of floating ideas, testing hypotheses, delighting in disagreement. The clash of ideas ignites new insights and helps us towards a more spacious truth. Theodore Zeldin lamented: 'Unfortunately, though humans ruminate, cogitate, brood, play with ideas, dream and make inspired guesses about the thoughts of other people all the time, there has been no *Kamasutra* of the mind to reveal the sensuous pleasures of thinking, to show how ideas can flirt with each other and learn to embrace.'<sup>32</sup>

Such a wise flirtation implies that one does not take oneself too seriously. St Dominic was said to have understood everything '*humili cordis intelligentia*',<sup>33</sup> in the intelligence of his humble heart. The other person is honoured for what they bring to the discussion, even if you vigorously disagree with

much of their position. Thomas Aquinas quoted Aristotle, who claimed that 'we should love both kinds of people: those whose opinions we follow, and those whose opinions we reject. For both study to find the truth and, in this way, both give us assistance.'<sup>34</sup>

At the moment I cannot imagine how we shall again become one as the Father and the Son are one in the Spirit. But if we let the two hands of the Father, the Logos and the Spirit, shape us, if we live in friendship and listen to each other intelligently and open our imaginations to what seems odd and even wrong, who knows what may happen? Nothing is impossible for God. Jesus' prayer that we shall be one will somehow be answered.

Thomas Merton, Thomas Aquinas and I  
 Went fishing for lobster  
 We set our traps  
 And proceeded to spend the entire day  
 Discussing Jesus and Quantum Physics  
 We ate like kings  
 And drank in the sun.<sup>35</sup>

## 13

### Affliction

'After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered' (Jn 18.1). He goes to face not just death but the annihilation of that fullness of life which he came to bring. The one who first appeared on the scene as a healer will now be wounded. All that he taught his disciples on that last night will be systematically devastated. The ones he called his friends will desert him; the peace he offered is swallowed up in violence; the home he promised to his friends is demolished, and their unity broken. Jesus goes out into the night to face worse than death. Death comes to us all, sometimes gently. It is utter, the collapse of all meaning.

Everything speeds up. Jesus is grabbed, rushed to the house of the high priest, bundled over to the Roman governor, stripped, mocked and sent to the cross. All is anarchy and random violence. Rowan Williams catches the confusion perfectly: 'You have a sense of intense, rapid, *physical* movement. There is violence around, the camera is jostled, a bright light shines in our face, then there is a blur of confused activity. All around you can hear or half-hear voices, but you cannot quite make out what they're saying.'<sup>1</sup> He compares it to Kafka's *The Trial*, in which Joseph K is arrested without knowing what the charge

is, is caught up in a judicial process that is utterly chaotic, and finally is knifed in a disused quarry:

The real terror of this story is the growing certainty that no sense can be made of what is happening. As Kafka himself said, it is as if we know we are guilty, but not what we are guilty of. We are going to die, but we are denied the satisfaction of knowing why ... When you are caught up in such a world, power appears to be purely and simply unaccountable, in both senses of the word. It is answerable to no one, and you cannot give a rational account of how it works.<sup>2</sup>

#### ENSLAVEMENT

Affliction, according to Simone Weil,

is something apart, specific and irreducible. It is quite a different thing from simple suffering. It takes possession of the soul and marks it through and through with its own particular brand, the mark of slavery. Slavery as practised by ancient Rome is only an extreme form of affliction. The men of antiquity, who knew all about this question, used to say: 'a man loses half his soul the day he becomes a slave.'<sup>3</sup>

According to Aristotle, people who were by nature slaves were not fully human. Their souls were incomplete. 'From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.'<sup>4</sup> Slaves did not have an independent existence. They were extensions of their master. They were incapable of foresight and were made for labour. They are not humanly alive.

The drama of these final hours is the enslavement of Jesus. In the Passover meal which he has just shared with his disciples according to the three synoptic gospels, he has eaten 'the bread of affliction,' as the Jews remembered their liberation from the slavery of Egypt. Now Jesus faces crucifixion, a punishment

reserved by the Romans for slaves. The slave revolts against Rome were punished with the crucifixion of thousands. 'Redemption' means the liberation of someone from slavery. Our salvation is our liberation from the affliction of slavery which Christ embraced.

In the film *12 Years a Slave* a freeborn African American is captured and reduced to slavery.<sup>5</sup> His captors demand that he admit that he is indeed a slave, and remove the neat, smart clothes, dressing him in rags, in an act of ritual abasement: 'That old thing of yours is just rags and tatters. You need something proper to wear. Go on, put it on. There. That's fine. That's fine. Got no gratitude?' He loses his shoes, the sign of a free man, the shoes that the father of the prodigal son restored. This is a re-enactment of Jesus' affliction, stripped and mocked, and clothed with the parody of a crown.

The story of Jesus' passion and death is not the fantasy of masochists or sadists. It tells of how God embraced in Jesus the affliction of humanity. The most horrifying act of human history, along with the Jewish Holocaust, was the enslavement of 12.5 million Africans, transformed into commodities. Two-thirds were transported between 1700 and 1808, the time of the so-called Enlightenment, 'the age of reason'. The enslavement of people for labour and sexual exploitation continues today. It is reckoned to generate \$150 billion dollars a year, even more than the drug trade.<sup>6</sup>

Slavery is the most extreme form of affliction, but not the only one. Weil witnessed it in the factories where she laboured: 'As I worked in the factory, indistinguishable to all eyes, including my own, the affliction of others entered into my flesh and my soul.' The most common word in the New Testament for 'affliction' is *thlipsis*. This mean 'to press upon' or 'make constricted'.<sup>7</sup> It covers the afflictions that St Paul endured, everything that weighs one down and crushes one's humanity, all that squeezes out the zest for life. Affliction locks one in misery. People who

have been sexually abused are often imprisoned in affliction for years. All this is embraced by God in the abasement of Jesus. Does the Church dare to embrace now those whom we have afflicted?

Gerard Manley Hopkins expresses the burden of this affliction in the dark sonnets:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
 Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;  
 Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.  
 Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see  
 The lost are like this, and their scourge to be  
 As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.<sup>8</sup>

He is imprisoned in himself: 'my taste was me.' The Lord of life takes in his care those who are farthest from life, the living dead who have been reduced to a zombie existence. It is even worse than death, since with death comes peace. The afflicted often long to die. Job regrets that he has ever been born:

Why did I not die at birth,  
 come forth from the womb and expire?  
 Why were there knees to receive me,  
 or breasts for me to suck?  
 Now I would be lying down and quiet.

(Jb 3.11-13)

Faced with affliction, what have we to say? Jesus in Matthew's gospel says nothing when he is accused:

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you

not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

(Mt. 27.11–14).

When the Word comes to his end, words are ended. 'Where words prevail not, violence prevails.'<sup>9</sup>

Paul Murray OP writes:

When confronted by someone in great affliction, our words – all our words – seem to die in our throats, an initial reaction which is understandable, even perhaps inevitable. But such awkwardness in the presence of the afflicted has one unfortunate side effect: it causes us to shy away from those whose lives have been manifestly scarred. And the result is that the afflicted are left to cope with suffering on their own and at a time when they are most in need of help and attention. To the heavy burden they are already compelled to carry, there is added the new and often wholly unexpected burden of loneliness and isolation.<sup>10</sup>

Pierre Claverie OP was the Bishop of Oran when Algeria exploded in violence, leading to the death of the Atlas monks in 1996. Many friends told Pierre that he must flee back to France, because if he stayed he would be consumed by the terror. Shortly before his death he preached:

Throughout the dramatic events in Algeria, I have often been asked, 'What are you doing there? Why do you stay? Shake off the dust from your sandals! Come back home!' Home ... Where are we at home? ... We have no power, but are there as at the bedside of a friend, of a sick brother, silently holding his hand and wiping his brow. We are there for the sake of Jesus, because he is the one suffering there amid violence that spares

no one, crucified again and again in the flesh of thousands of innocents. Like his mother Mary and Saint John, we are there at the foot of the cross where Jesus died abandoned by his followers and bitterly mocked by the crowd.<sup>11</sup>

On the cross Jesus speaks; his enemies speak, but Mary and the beloved disciples are simply there.

In the film *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean accompanies Pat as the time of his stay on death row draws to an end and the day of his execution is named.

I say to him, 'If you die, I want to be with you.' He says, 'No, I don't want you to see it.' I say, 'I can't bear the thought that you would die without seeing one loving face. I will be the face of Christ for you. Just look at me.' He says, 'It's terrible to see. I don't want to put you through that. It could break you. It could scar you for life.' I know that it will terrify me. How could it not terrify me? But I feel strength and determination. I tell him it won't break me, that I have plenty of love and support in my life. 'God will give me the grace,' I tell him. He consents. He nods his head. It is decided. I will be there with him when he dies.<sup>12</sup>

Pat needed a face, to en flesh the face of the one who for our sake had his brief time on death row and was executed.

A friend of mine lost his wife and son in a car accident. He lay in bed, badly wounded, furious with God, furious with the Church, furious with everyone, especially if they said anything pious. He could not tolerate the presence of a priest. The moment of healing began when a young Dominican priest, the hospital chaplain, came to see him and said, 'I do not know what to say.' If there is anything to say, we shall be given it then. As Jesus says of the moment of great suffering, 'Do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say what is given to

you in that hour, for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit' (Mk 13.11). But sometimes nothing is given. The loneliness of the afflicted is absolute, because they may feel abandoned even by God. Hopkins cries out:

And my lament,  
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
To dearest him that lives alas! away.<sup>13</sup>

Weil writes that 'affliction makes God appear to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man, more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. During this absence, there is nothing to love.'<sup>14</sup> This utter desolation is embraced by Christ on the cross when he cries out: "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15.34). All our sense of abandonment is taken into God at that moment. God holds close to himself our sense that we are forgotten by him.

Remembering the dead is a refusal of affliction's obliteration of their humanity. In Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng (it means 'the hill of the poisonous trees') execution centre was one of 150 used by the Khmer Rouge regime for the murder of hundreds of thousands of its opponents. The seventh of the instructions issued by the commandant on the wall is: *Do nothing, sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet.* They are ordered to be silent, and their lives are ordered towards oblivion. Today the walls are covered with photographs of those who died here, lest they be forgotten.

Our remembering of the afflicted is a protest against the annihilation into which their persecutors wished to cast them. Every little memorial, every half-faded photo stuck on the wall, is a refusal to consign the afflicted to non-existence. In *If This Is a Man*, Primo Levi records his memories of Auschwitz. The dedication on the frontispiece, echoing the injunction in the

book of Deuteronomy, to remember all the commandments of the Lord, concludes thus:

Consider if this is a woman,  
 Without hair and without name  
 With no more strength to remember,  
 Her eyes are empty and her womb cold  
 Like a frog in the winter.  
 Meditate how this came about:  
 I commend these words to you.  
 Carve them in your hearts  
 At home, in the street,  
 Going to bed, rising;  
 Repeat them to your children,  
 Or may your house fall apart,  
 May illness impede you,  
 May your children turn their faces from you.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus now surrenders his last breath and dies, having borne all our affliction. In the BBC series *Killing Eve* the main character, a woman assassin called Villanelle, says that when people die, they fall inwards: 'Your eyes will just empty. Your soul goes in. People think your soul or your personality or whatever leaves the body when you die; I swear it just goes further in. It falls so far in it just becomes so small that it can't control your body any more.' Having been present with a few people at the moment of their death, this almost rings true. Rather, it is as if we fall back into the centre of our being, where God is 'closer to me than I am to myself', as Augustine said. *Tu autem eras interior intimo me.*<sup>16</sup> We fall into God's waiting hands.

#### SONGS IN THE FACE OF DEATH

In this story of utter affliction there are small signs of hope, the words of Jesus on the cross, quotations of the Psalms and

deeds of kindness. But there is one tiny detail in Matthew and Mark's accounts which particularly touches the imagination, the theme of this book: 'When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives' (Mk 14.26).

Jesus and the disciples prepare for what lies ahead by singing. This is almost certainly the second part of the 'Hallel',<sup>17</sup> Psalms 114 to 118, with which the Passover meal ended. The word means 'praise', from which we get 'Alleluia', 'God be praised'. Faced with his passion, Jesus and the disciples sing songs of thanksgiving and praise. The final Psalm rejoices with 'glad songs of victory', and that 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.' The last words are 'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.' Then they leave and his passion begins, but already the final victory is saluted from afar by song. On Good Friday, traditionally, the passion of Christ is sung.

There is an Arabic proverb: 'When danger approaches, sing to it.' This is how many martyrs face death. When, on 3 June 1886, King Mwanga of Buganda burnt to death thirty-two young Christians, Catholic and Anglican, for their refusal to denounce their faith, they went to their death singing. It was reported that when, in February 2015, twenty Egyptian Coptic Christians were beheaded by Da'esh on a Libyan beach, they died singing songs to Jesus. Paul Murray claims that, faced with desolation, for many the only resource is poetry and music. After 9/11 poems sprang up all over NY. 'Almost immediately after the event, improvised memorials often conceived around poems sprang up all over the city, in store windows, at bus stops, in Washington Square Park, Brooklyn Heights and elsewhere. And poems flew through cyberspace across the country in email-mails from friend to friend.'<sup>18</sup> Music and song were needed too.

An opera about 9/11, *Between Worlds*, by Tansy Davies, had its world premiere in 2015. Some were shocked that anyone

should compose an opera about such a horrible event, but perhaps it is the only way to face its brutality. Nicholas Drake, the librettist, said that

putting the transforming power of music at the heart of the drama, we thought, might allow us to weigh the tragedy of what happened on 9/11, and yet discover some kind of light in that darkness. Music even seems to have played a role in helping some people on that day. A security guard sang hymns to those descending the stairs, to give them courage. Some relatives, lost for words as they spoke to loved ones on the phone, sang together.<sup>19</sup>

In the summer of 1942 Leningrad (now St Petersburg again) was under siege from the German army.<sup>20</sup> People were starving to death, devouring whatever they could find: rats, cats and dogs. There were rumours of cannibalism. Three-quarters of a million people are estimated to have starved to death in the city before the siege was lifted in January 1944. As the grip of the German army tightened, Karl Eliasberg, the conductor, gathered together anyone who could play a musical instrument to perform Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, which he had begun to compose in the city the previous year. The members of the orchestra were so weak that some keeled over during the rehearsal. One trumpeter apologized for being unable to produce a single note. Loudspeakers were set up to broadcast the performance not only for the city's population but also so that the German soldiers could hear. The members of the orchestra, barely able to stand, wore formal evening dress. Olga Kvade, eighteen years old, was in the audience. She said that the only thing they feared was that the Germans would start shelling and bring the concert to an end before they reached the conclusion of the symphony. Faced with destruction, unable to eat, they made music.

On one day in April 2015, nineteen people were killed by car bombs in west Baghdad. Karim Wasfi, the conductor of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra, went to the site of the first explosion with his cello, sat among the wreckage and played a piece he had composed called 'Baghdad Mourning Melancholy'. He said afterwards: 'I wanted to show what beauty can be in the ugly face of car bombs, and to respect the souls of the fallen ones.' Since that day he has played at innumerable bomb sites in the city. After the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 a young man wheeled up a piano outside the Bataclan theatre, the scene of so many deaths, played and walked away weeping.

Even those of us who are fortunate enough to die in peace in bed need music and poetry as we face the end. I flew home from Jerusalem to be with my father as he was dying. He asked for his Walkman, so that he could listen to Mozart's *Requiem* and Haydn's *Seven Last Words*. And when his death was near, his children passed the breviary around and read Psalms: songs and poetry.<sup>21</sup> When the Dominican brethren die, we gather around the bed to sing the hymn to Our Lady, the *Salve Regina*. The last sounds I hope to hear will be of my brethren singing, probably not in tune.

Song breaks through barriers that divide us from each other. When the German soldiers sang Christmas carols in the trenches during the First World War, the British soldiers joined in, and soon they left their trenches and met together to sing in harmony and play football. For a brief moment song relieved the affliction of the trenches. Strangely the song that broke the silence of hostility was *Stille Nacht*, 'Silent Night'! The following year, the British generals ordered that the great guns drown out the songs of peace.

Francis Spufford had a terrible row with his wife. They argued from midnight until six in the morning. Finally he fled the house and went to a café to have a coffee by himself, utterly miserable. Then the waiter put on the Adagio from

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. As he listened, his experience was transformed. He wrote:

It sounds as if it comes from a world where sorrow is perfectly ordinary, but still there is more to be said ... Everything you fear is true. And yet. Everything you have done wrong, you have done really wrong. And yet. And yet ... Shut up and listen, and let yourself count, just a little bit, on a calm that you do not have to make for yourself, because here it is, freely offered.<sup>22</sup>

Music has a wordless narrative structure that carries us forward beyond the pain. Spufford's sorrow is acknowledged by the music, but he is swept onwards by its movement, like a surfer propelled to the safety of the beach. Its order embraces the disorders of our lives in hope.

In John's version, Jesus' last words on the cross (Jn 19.30) are best translated as 'it is completed' or even 'it is perfected'. At the beginning of the Last Discourse, John wrote, 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' – the Greek means literally, "to perfection". His love is perfectly accomplished on the cross.<sup>23</sup> It evokes a final harmony which is beyond our words and maybe only hinted at in music.

Roger Scruton claims that music speaks to us by moving to completion. Disharmonies crash and are transcended, crises are overcome, as the music transports us towards a sort of closure.

Musical movement is, or seems to be, goal-directed. That is to say, it moves toward definite closures or half-closures, and these again cannot be easily explained in terms of harmonic tension ... And this presents us with something that we do not encounter in everyday life, which is too much troubled by randomness – namely, the completed gesture, the gesture that completes itself out of its own inner content, which has

no purpose but itself and yet which also accomplishes that purpose. For many people this is the central mystery, and the most important reward, of serious music – that it shows us human action drawing itself to a close.<sup>24</sup>

Music lifts the veil on a future place of peace in which conflicts and tensions are resolved and we shall find that rest for which we long. In *Of Gods and Men* a military helicopter hovers menacingly over the monastic chapel, like an enormous insect. The ugly, dull thud of its blades breaks the silence of the monks' prayer. Slowly they rise, cling to each other and sing 'O Père des lumières', 'O Father of lights'. They refuse to let its melody be drowned by the aggressive vibrations of the chopper. The harmony of the song and of the brethren wins, and the machine slinks away. Music evokes the ultimate harmony in which we shall rest and be still. The twelfth-century theologian Peter Abelard evoked this glimpse of the end of the journey:

There Sabbath unto Sabbath  
Succeeds eternally,  
The joy that has no ending  
Of souls in holiday.<sup>25</sup>

Scruton argues that 'music is a perceived resolution of the conflict between freedom and necessity, made available in a space of its own.'<sup>26</sup> Profound music will often take a direction that we could not have anticipated but which we immediately see is right, even necessary. We are astonished but we say: 'It must be so. Anything else would have been banal.' This was the inevitable note for which we were waiting, but did not know it.

When Jesus turns his face to go to Jerusalem, he tells the disciples that it is *necessary (dei)* for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the authorities, be killed and

rise on the third day. This *must* happen. But the disciples cannot bear to listen. Peter rebukes Jesus and is told, 'Get behind me Satan' (Mk 8.31). So they stumble on to Jerusalem with their ears blocked, quarrelling about silly little things such as who is the greatest. This necessary death is freely embraced at the Last Supper, when he makes it a gift of his body and blood in a liturgy that culminates in song. The disciples who flee to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection still have not understood, and Jesus rebukes them: 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' (Lk. 24.25). This necessity is not imposed by some hard god implementing an iron plan: it is love's necessary deed.

In any human life suffering will seem to be an imposition: 'Why me?' But we all must die, the final and unavoidable necessity. In music we have a distant glimpse of how necessity and freedom are reconciled. Whatever suffering crashes into our lives, derailing our plans, even bringing death, can be embraced. Not in a spirit of masochism, but as an entry into freedom, a summons to life. This is hard, and I have rebelled against it often enough, like Peter at Caesarea. I would hesitate to say this to someone burned by illness or rejecting their approaching death. That might sound presumptuous. But in the breaking of bread and in the song and the music, the necessary is freely embraced, as we set off for our own Gethsemanes.

#### THE COCK CROWS

So, with a last song, Jesus goes to face what must happen. That song of praise, the 'Hallel', is the last sign of order and sense before chaos descends. It is a promise that the silence will not be final. Has all song been left behind at this point in the story? Perhaps there is a hint of song, the crow of the cock. Jesus has told Peter: 'Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times' (Mk 14.30).

In Mark's gospel not a word is wasted, and so why the cockcrow, our final song in the night? In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the crow of the cock is 'the trumpet to morn' and the cock 'the bird of dawning', which sings all night at Christmas to proclaim the birth of the saviour. Paintings by Theodoor Rombouts (*The Denial of Peter*, 1625–30; Liechtenstein Museum) and Petr Jan Brandl (*The Repentance of Peter*, 1724; National Gallery, Prague) show dawn breaking as Peter denies Jesus.

But the crow of the cock does not mark the dawn. Marie-Joseph Lagrange OP, the founder of the Dominican École Biblique in Jerusalem, suffered from insomnia and recorded that in March and April the cocks began to crow around 2.30 to 3.00 a.m.<sup>27</sup> The cock begins to crow when night has passed its midpoint and the dawn is not long to come. The world is still dark, but its end is impending. In the dawn Jesus will be taken to the house of Pontius Pilate, handed over to be crucified and thus ascend his throne, the cross. Then there is the dawn of Easter day, when the women will come to find the tomb empty and the sun risen.

The cockcrow hints while it is still night that Peter's denial is not the end. It sounds a note of quiet hope for what is not yet visible or even glimpsed. Peter's betrayal is part of a story that he cannot yet tell, but which he will one day. It is fitting that Mark's gospel is often called Peter's gospel, the account that he passed on to his disciples, and in which he dared to face his darkest moment and be carried beyond it.

When I lie in bed and hear 'the dawn chorus', usually long before the dawn, it speaks of hope. The experts tell us that this chorus is merely rival birds staking their claims to their territory and warning off their competitors, like tourists coming early to the beach to claim their bit of sand with their towels. To stop there would be to succumb to Mary Midgley's 'nothing buttery'. The dawn chorus exudes whatever is the birds' equivalent of joy.

In Magdalen College, Oxford, there is a circular path by the river. On a wall is set a poem by C. S. Lewis, who often walked there, 'What the Bird Said Early in the Year':

I heard in Addison's Walk a bird sing clear:  
This year the summer will come true. This year. This year.

Winds will not strip the blossom from the apple trees  
This year, nor want of rain destroy the peas.

This year time's nature will no more defeat you,  
Nor all the promised moments in their passing cheat you.

This time they will not lead you round and back  
To Autumn, one year older, by the well-worn track.

This year, this year, as all these flowers foretell,  
We shall escape the circle and undo the spell.

Often deceived, yet open once again your heart,  
Quick, quick, quick, quick! – the gates are drawn apart.

On the cross Jesus' final words are quotations from the Psalms. These are the songs and poetry with which he grew up. Not sung on the cross, gasped or whispered, but songs all the same, embracing all that he endured since singing the 'Hallel', the great praise before setting out for Gethsemane.

*The Risen Life*

## Introduction

### ‘HEAVEN IN ORDINARIE’

The argument of this book is that we are most likely to excite people with our faith if Christianity is grasped as the invitation to live fully. The life of its founder, his moral teaching, the forgiveness of sins, the Church’s doctrines, Jesus’ gruesome death – all these are properly understood as the gift of abundant life. The flourishing to which we are called is not mere mortal happiness. Schools are mistaken when they promise to realize the full potential of their pupils. We are called to a fullness of life that is more than human: a sharing in the divine.

The breakthrough into transcendent life is achieved in the resurrection. On the cross Christ has embraced our affliction, all that oppresses and destroys us, even death, and overcome it. What does this mean? It is often imagined that Christians believe in an afterlife. Having died, we migrate to some better place and have another life. Charming, the Royal Mail told a seven-year-old lad that it had delivered a birthday card to his deceased father, ‘avoiding stars and other galactic objects en route to heaven’.<sup>1</sup>

This is how some adults think too, which sounds like the fantasy of people who shut their eyes to the finality of death. But the risen life is not another life but the fullness of life, beginning even now: ‘We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in

death' (1 Jn 3.14). What does it mean for us now to share that risen life with Christ?

In the first chapter we argued that what undermines a religious imagination is not so much atheism, which is a form of belief, as a dull way of seeing the world, what William Lynch SJ called 'the univocal mentality'. This is a reductive imagination, 'the globalization of superficiality'. As I mentioned there, our liberation from its thrall is beautifully imaged by Emma Donoghue's novel *Room*, in which a woman and her child are held captive in a shed. The child thinks that nothing else exists except 'Room', until one day he escapes from its confines and discovers the real world in all its glorious colours and vitality. Fresh air!

The writers of the New Testament cannot directly describe the Risen Life, the beginning of the New Creation, any more than we can literally describe the Big Bang, the beginning of the old creation. But it is striking that its reality impinges first of all in an empty tomb, the stone rolled away. Jesus is unconfined or, one might say, uncoffined! Fresh air again! A hole is blown in the chain of events. His appearances are marked by the liberation of the disciples from confinement: 'When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you"' (Jn 20.19). Walls and locked doors are no obstruction to the Risen Christ, not because it is convenient if one lose one's keys, not because he is a ghost for he eats with them, but because the victory of love sweeps away all barriers. The disciples are released from their imprisonment by fear in the upper room.

In Ephesians the author's interpretation of the ascension uses the same language of release and freedom. He 'takes captivity captive'. He undoes all bondage. He ascends 'so that he might fill all things' (Eph. 4. 10). Christ's ascension is not here a journey to somewhere else. He ascends into the omnipresence of God who knows no limits.

John Rae, the former headmaster of Westminster School, presided at evensong in the Abbey for many years but was unable to decide whether he believed in God or not. He arranged meetings with a number of atheists and Christians to help him come to a decision.<sup>2</sup> We met several times and became friends. We always came back to the question of what it meant for him to love his wife, children and friends. Is that love a transient emotion in a universe that ultimately has no meaning? Or is it an experience of a transcendental love which is the meaning of everything? Are human beings caught up in a great mystery of ultimate meaning or are we, as Stephen Hawking thought, just 'chemical scum on an average-sized planet, orbiting around a very average-size star, in the outer suburb of one of a million galaxies.'<sup>3</sup> I have no quibbles about living in the outer suburb. I am no snob! It is just the 'chemical scum' to which I object.

We cannot imagine the risen life, but I want in this last section to explore how different dimensions of our present life have a depth of meaning that we can only just glimpse. Even now we are beginning to share in the divine fresh air, the escape from confinement, of the Risen Christ. We shall try to see a little of what this means by looking at a few aspects of our present life – the spiritual life, the bodily life, the just life, the liturgical life and the life of prayer – and see how all of these are a foretaste of the risen life, 'heaven in ordinarie',<sup>4</sup> in the words of George Herbert. Each chapter invites us to imagine things differently, sacramentally.

I could have added other topics, but the book would then never have been finished. I could have structured the material differently and placed some chapters in other parts of the book, just as Luke puts the miraculous catch of fish by the disciples as the beginning of his gospel and John puts it after the Resurrection. We begin with the breath of the Holy Spirit, fresh air indeed.

## The Spiritual Life: Fresh Air

In Acts, the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the beginning of the disciple's new life, so let us begin by asking what it means to be spiritually alive. Many people identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. This position even has its own acronym: SBNR. Religion is seen as institutional, binding one into a sect of people who probably think they are superior to others, as cramping one's mind with dogmas and one's actions with rules. Spirituality is altogether more liberating. It is individual; it can be practised in the privacy of one's home. It is about experience rather than doctrine. It is about interior peace and not exterior conformity. One can mix spiritualities like exotic cocktails, a touch of Buddhism with a zest of icons. And if one spirituality is unhelpful, one can try another. What's not to like?

### BREATHING

This is an illusion. Any spirituality worthy of the name is tough and transformative. Let's begin by looking at the word 'spiritual'. The Hebrew word usually translated as 'spirit', *ruah*, also means 'breath' or 'wind'. Pentecost is God's breathing on the disciples. Breathing is fundamental to mammalian life, the most intimate interaction between our bodies and the rest of creation. The average human breathes about 650 million times during a lifetime. Breathing is more than the mechanism for

oxygenating our blood. It is intrinsic to many of our most intense experiences of being alive.

In his novel *Breath*, Tim Winton explores the dramas of breathing, beginning with the first breath: 'It's funny, but you never really think much about breathing. Until it's all you ever think about. I consider the startled look on the faces of my girls in the moments after each of them was born and suctioned and forced to draw air in for the first time.'<sup>1</sup> The hero and his friend Loonie practise swimming under water, holding their breath. It is a way of claiming their freedom. Mastering their breathing symbolizes being in control of their lives:

As a youth you do sense that life renders you powerless by dragging you back to it, breath upon breath upon breath in an endless capitulation to biological routine, and that the human will to control is as much about asserting power over your own body as exercising it on others. Loonie and I acted out the impulse without thinking, for dumb larks. We held our breaths and counted. We timed ourselves in the river and the ocean, in the old man's shed or in the broken autumn light of the forest floor.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the novel we encounter breath and music-making, sexual intimacy and dying.

During my sabbatical in Berkeley I discovered delight in the rhythmic breathing of the runner. Good sleep is peaceful breathing. One of the brethren who left the Order wrote that his deepest loss was no longer to share the breathing of the community as we sang the Psalms, each side of the choir breathing in and out in its turn, the shared breath of the common life. Anger quickens our breath. Saul comes after the Christians, 'breathing [from *pneuma*, 'spirit'] threats and murder' (Acts 9.1). In moments of astonishment our breath is taken away. Affliction suffocates us. 'I can't breathe' were the last

words of an African American, Eric Garner, repeated eleven times and recorded on the phones of onlookers while he was choked to death by the police on Staten Island, New York, on 17 July 2014. These words have become the rallying cry of African Americans, symbolic of their oppression. To live is to breathe freely. They were also the last words of Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi journalist who was murdered in his country's consulate in Turkey on 2 October 2018.

Paul Kalanithi's autobiography, *When Breath Becomes Air*, takes its title from a poem by Fulke Greville, 1st Baron Brooke: 'You that seek what life is in death/ Now find it air that once was breath.'<sup>3</sup> This highly cultured neurosurgeon, discovering at the age of thirty-six that he has terminal cancer, confronts his own diminishing allowance of breaths as death draws near. His breathing is sustained by his wife, Lucy. She explains: 'At home in bed a few weeks before he died, I asked him, "Can you breathe okay with my head on your chest like this?" His answer was "It's the only way I know how to breathe."' We move ineluctably to the final moment, when Paul's breath too becomes air: 'As the room darkened into night, a low wall lamp glowing warmly, Paul's breaths became faltering and irregular. His body continued to appear restful, his limbs relaxed. Just before nine o'clock, his lips apart and eyes closed, Paul inhaled and then released one last, deep, final breath.'<sup>4</sup> Our last breaths are the countdown to the end, as in R. S. Thomas's poem 'Grandparents':

There are themselves  
 at the windows, faces staring  
 at an unreached finishing  
 post. There is the sound  
 in the silence of the breathing  
 of their reluctant bodies as  
 they enter each of them the last lap.<sup>5</sup>

Human life depends on the breathing of our green planet, plants and trees converting carbon dioxide into oxygen, the northern and southern hemispheres inhaling and exhaling in their seasons, our planetary *chorus contra chorum*. The Amazon forests are 'the lungs of the earth', but the planet is beginning to suffer from emphysema. In the urban sprawls in which most of humanity lives now, people pant for breath.

#### GOD'S BREATH

So it is not surprising that most religions cultivate good breathing. The Jewish Kabbalah has the three levels of breathing of each stage of the spiritual life; Sufi Islam has the breathing exercise of *Zikr*; and in Buddhism, breathing is the central discipline of meditation. The Jesus prayer of Christianity is recited to the rhythm of our breathing.

The Christian story of creation and recreation is a drama of the divine breath inhaled and exhaled. God gives breath to all living things (Gen. 1.30). Most intimately: 'The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being' (Gen. 2.7).<sup>6</sup> Breath is divinity's gift of life. The crisis of God's relationship with humanity precipitates the Flood, when God swore, 'For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die' (Gen. 6.17). In the Ark the breath of life is carried above the silence of the sea which has suffocated all life.

In the wilderness Moses encounters the burning bush and hears God's name. According to Jacob Josipovici, this name, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*,

is as near as we can get in language to pure breath, non-articulation, non-division ... With its repeated 'h' and 'sh' sounds, his is the breath that lies beneath all utterance

and all action, a living breath which does not move forward yet does not remain static, upholding both speech and the world.<sup>7</sup>

The divine name is repeated every time we exhale and inhale.

When all seems lost, Elijah flees to Mount Horeb and awaits the Lord. The Lord was not in the great wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in an enigmatic phrase which may be translated as a 'gentle breeze'<sup>8</sup> or even a 'gentle breath.'<sup>9</sup> Job, the man of affliction, is oppressed by God who will not let him breathe (Job 19.18) and whose breath his wife finds repulsive. Surely the problem is not halitosis! His very life has become repulsive to her.

God became one of us when Jesus drew his first breath, perhaps with a slap on the back. His short life ended when he bowed his head and 'handed over the Spirit [breath]' (Jn 19.30). Now, on Easter morning, he will breathe on the disciples, sharing the peace and forgiveness of God. 'He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"' (Jn 20.22-3). Every small act of forgiveness is another breath of the Body of Christ. Without it we are dead. An unforgiving community suffocates everyone. Finally there is the great outpouring of God's breath at Pentecost.

So one way to imagine the risen life is as filling our lungs with the life-giving oxygen of God's breathing.<sup>10</sup> God breathes within us. When a friend of Paul Murray OP was seriously ill, he wrote for her this poem:

Now as your spirit  
fails, you can  
with your last breath  
breathe deep

and feel another's breath  
 inhale and breathe  
 within your breath. (Paul Murray OP<sup>11</sup>)

Gerard Manley Hopkins compared Mary to 'the air we breathe', an air that is both enfolding and safe but also tempestuous and cosmic:

O live air,  
 Of patience, penance, prayer:  
 World-mothering air, air wild,  
 Wound with thee, in thee is led,  
 Fold home, fast fold thy child.<sup>12</sup>

#### BREATHING OUT

One cannot breathe in unless one has emptied one's lungs. Jesus' mission begins with a sort of emptying of himself. After his baptism, 'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished' (Lk. 4.1-2). He prepares for his mission by becoming hungry, with an empty stomach, in the wildness, which is empty of life. It is as if he needs a void at the core of his being before the preaching can begin.

The disciples are also prepared for the mission by an emptiness. The disciples must lose Christ if they are to receive the Spirit. His absence prepares the way. In the Last Discourse of John's gospel, Jesus said, 'It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you' (Jn 16.7). In Acts, after the ascension the men in white robes rebuke them: 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as

you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1.11). He is lost as a presence among them so that he may come to them more intimately in the Spirit. There is no inspiration, in every sense, until there is expiration. The spiritual life begins with a letting go of breath.

Jean-Pierre Lintanf OP, a Breton Dominican, said: 'I pray to God who has given me, in my own mortal clay, a little of his own breath; so little, it is true, that at every instant I have to surrender my breath, so that it may be given to me anew.'<sup>13</sup> We need an emptiness at the core of our being if we are to receive the Spirit. This is not a sterile emptiness but the expectant hunger of those who have 'immortal longings.'<sup>14</sup> This is not a matter of being desolate, any more than we are miserable when we hunger for the next meal. If you stuff yourself with deep-fried Mars bars, you will not hunger for the heavenly banquet. The hunger opens us for a yearning for God.

God makes his home in emptiness. When the Israelites journeyed into the wilderness, Moses was commanded to build a throne for God. It was just an empty space between the wings of the cherubim. It was tiny, just the breadth of a hand. God does not need much space. And when God became flesh, the fertile Spirit entered into the small empty space of Mary's womb. When that child grew up, he was nailed on a cross and shouted out for his Father, who seemed so absent. This was a vast emptiness waiting to be filled on Easter morning. Then, John tells us, Mary Magdalene, Peter and the beloved disciple found the empty space of the tomb, with two angels on either side, the new throne of mercy of the Risen Lord.

So when we feel a void in our hearts that we long to fill, we must treasure it, because it is the throne of God. To be fertile, we need at the centre of our being an empty womb, waiting for God's generating Spirit. Emptiness can be alarming. Will it ever be filled? This was the question of Hannah, whose womb was empty, jealous of Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah, the one with all the babies (1 Sam. 1). If we endure, God will fill the space.

When a great commitment lies ahead – marriage, ordination, solemn profession in a community, even a new job – people often expect that utter fulfilment is imminent. Their joy will be complete. Four or five years later, dissatisfaction frequently sets in. Companionship with the beloved has moments of tension; all one's problems do not disappear with ordination; the new role is not quite so exciting. Paradise has not arrived.

The temptation is to fill the void in one's heart, perhaps with food or drink, sex or power. Some try to fill it with hours of trivial television or obsessively checking their emails, or plans to become extremely rich. David Sedaris confesses that he shops to fill the void: 'obviously we have some hole we are trying to fill, but doesn't everyone? And isn't filling it with berets the size of toilet-seat covers, if not more practical, at least *healthier* than filling it with frosting or heroin or unsafe sex with strangers?'<sup>15</sup> Indeed, but the void remains, however many berets he buys. Innumerable gadgets, iPhones and computers, iPads and Kindles, or fast cars or expensive holidays and exotic experiences, may give temporary relief but the void can only be filled by God, who comes in his own good time.

One may even be tempted to fill the void with endless prayers, long devotions, battering on the doors of heaven with novenas and more and more decades of the rosary, processions and pilgrimages – all good in themselves but sometimes a way to drown out God's deafening silence and keep at bay the Spirit who would drive us into the wilderness, where, Hosea is told, God will speak to Israel gently. 'Therefore I will not allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her' (Hos. 2.14).

Nothing  
of all you have longed for  
or have sought to hold fast  
can relieve you of your thirst,  
your loneliness,

until you learn  
 to take in your hands  
 and raise to your lips  
 this cup of solitude  
 his chalice of the void

and drain it to the dregs. (Paul Murray OP<sup>16</sup>)

Like the disciples waiting after Christ has ascended, we must endure with hope in times of emptiness. If we are full, we shall have no space for the gifts of the Lord. Innumerable possessions are a contraceptive against the divine fertility. When I was a young friar, wise old Gervase Mathew OP used to say that a Dominican should own no more than he can carry in two hands. When I moved back from London to Oxford, entire communities were mobilized to fill and empty the van. A priest of the Westminster diocese called Michael Hollins famously never locked his door. Anyone could just walk in. When you visited him, you would find bodies sleeping on the staircase. Thieves helped themselves, and he did not object. Once Michael found a thief in his office helping himself to his money. He let him have it and made him a cup of tea. Such vulnerability is beyond me, but it is one way of getting rid of excessive possessions and so opening oneself to the gifts of God.

Empty we can draw near to those who have lost God or never known him. Tomáš Halík, the former general secretary of the Czech Catholic Bishops' Conference, believes we are impelled to engage with atheism. Instead of seeing atheism as the enemy of belief, Halík says we must dare to enter the wilderness of God's hiddenness and listen for him:

I'm convinced that a mature faith must incorporate those experiences that some call 'the death of God' or – less dramatically God's silence, although it is necessary to subject

such experiences to inner reflection, and also undergo and overcome them honestly, not in a superficial or facile manner. I am not saying to atheists that they are wrong, but that they lack patience. I am saying to them that their truth is an incomplete truth.<sup>17</sup>

Halík says: 'Hardly anything points towards God and calls as urgently for God as the experience of his absence.'<sup>18</sup> His great heroine is St Thérèse of Lisieux. I was always put off by her nickname, the Little Flower, which sounded saccharine. But Halík shows that Thérèse's difficult vocation was to unite herself with atheists. Nineteenth-century France was rabid with anticlericalism and atheism: 'Thérèse declares that she perceives unbelievers as her brothers, with whom she sits at the same table and eats the same bread and she begs Jesus not to banish her therefrom.'<sup>19</sup> She wanted to drink their cup of pain. Maybe they will share her faith one day.

In Antwerp Cathedral there is a statue by the contemporary artist Jan Fabre of himself balancing the cross in his hand and gazing at it with astonishment. He says of himself: 'I am an atheist, thanks be to God.'<sup>20</sup> He explains that in this sculpture he is 'everyone', balancing his beliefs and ideas. He interrogates the cross; the cross interrogates him. Here is the enduring conversation which lasts all of his life. He returns constantly to the religious tradition of the Low Countries, questioning it, searching for the meaning of human existence.

The Bishop of Antwerp wanted the statue inside the cathedral, as if we thus embrace the questions of this creative artist and are close to him in the non-belief for which he gives thanks to God. This artist also breathes the *ruah* of God and has gifts to share with us if we dare get close.

Jesus dies outside the holy city, apparently abandoned by his Father, cursed. He breathes out his spirit, and empties his lungs. G. K. Chesterton, as always, sees the paradox: those who

revolt against religion will not find another religion in which God has joined the revolt! 'Let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.'<sup>21</sup>

#### BREATHING IN

We have breathed out, emptying our lungs. We have refused to fill the void at the core of our being, waiting for God to do so. What, then, does it mean to fill our lungs with God's 'live air'? The Holy Spirit is the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. St Bernard of Clairvaux called the Holy Spirit the kiss of the Father:

If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.<sup>22</sup>

Let us return to a point I touched on earlier, when I was thinking about how we are at home in God (Chapter 11): the divine love, both particular and universal. Jesus loved people in particular, such as the Beloved Disciple of John's gospel. He loved the family of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and wept when Lazarus died. 'We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death' (1 Jn 3.14.).

God delights in each of us individually. He cherishes our particular humanity. Thomas Aquinas believed that it is only God whose knowledge penetrates to the utter uniqueness of each person.<sup>23</sup> God delights in the unrepeatable being that each of us is. Even with the people whom we love most, we only partially glimpse how they are unlike anyone else. Our

perception of others always has a slight blur of abstraction. Just in rare passing moments do we glimpse what God always sees, their uniqueness.

Each of us is sustained in existence by this particular love. Denys Turner wrote: 'Between my existence and my nothingness there is nothing but the divine love.'<sup>24</sup> When I was ill with cancer, I was bowled over by an intense experience of my mortality. I was like one of those cartoon characters who blithely stride over a cliff and keep on walking, suddenly looking down to see that there is nothing under their feet. Then I glimpsed for a moment that my life was a gift, given in each moment. I need not be, and I would one day die.

This is an especially Western blindness. In Abraham Verghese's novel *Cutting for Stone* the hero says:

It was as if in Ethiopia, and even in Nairobi, people assumed that all illness – even a trivial or imagined one – was fatal; they expected death. The news to convey in Africa was that you'd kept death at bay ... In America, my initial impression was that death or the possibility of it always seemed to come as a surprise, as if we took it for granted that we were immortal, and that death was just an option.<sup>25</sup>

Those who love us mediate God's gift of life to us. In a weird and wonderful novel, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, by Audrey Niffenegger, the hero leaves a letter to be opened by his wife after his death:

Our love has been the thread through the labyrinth, the net under the high-wire walker, the only real thing in this strange life of mine that I could ever trust. Tonight I feel that my love for you has more density in this world than I do, myself: as though it could linger on after me and surround you, keep you, hold you.<sup>26</sup>

In the words of the German Catholic theologian Josef Pieper, we are driven to say to one another that 'it is wonderful that you exist'.<sup>27</sup>

The Spirit of God's love is also boundless. When the breath of God is poured on the disciples at Pentecost, they will be despatched from the Holy Land, to the extremities of the Empire; Peter and Paul will perish in Rome, the great Babylon, the heart of the pagan world. God propels us outside all that is familiar, even just to our next-door neighbour, because all belongs to God. 'Oh and the night, the night when the wind full of outer space gnaws at our lifted faces.'<sup>28</sup>

Chrys McVey OP wrote with his customary boldness:

Early in the Bible, it is written that 'anyone who wished to consult the Lord would go to the meeting tent outside the camp' (Exod. 33:7). 'Outside the camp' is where we meet God. Outside the institution, outside culturally conditioned beliefs and perceptions, 'outside the camp', God speaks to us 'face to face' (Exod. 33:11). It is 'outside the camp' that we meet a God who cannot be controlled. And it is outside the camp that we meet the Other who is different – and discover who we are. And where our 'home' really is.<sup>29</sup>

I agree, but inside as well, inside the Church, the home, the tradition. The living breath is rhythmic. If we just breathe out, we shall collapse.

The temptation of the pious is to remain cloistered in safe religious spaces, sharing our lives with unthreatening fellow believers, sheltered from the rough winds of the secular world. Indeed we all need such places occasionally – parishes, religious movements, monastic communities, prayer groups or whatever – so that we can breathe peacefully and be refreshed. Even great preachers such as St Paul or St Dominic had to come home from time to time to recuperate, but they did not remain

there. The Spirit of God drove them outside the camp, to claim what is secular or other. Mother Teresa dared to leave the safe convent of her first vocation and look for God among the dying on the streets of Calcutta.

So to inhale God's breath is to be oxygenated with a love that is particular and universal. It cherishes the utter 'thisness' of each thing, and excludes nothing from its scope. So a Christian family is not closed in upon itself. A friend of mine, an American Dominican sister called Pat Walters, is one of eleven children. Every year there is a Christmas party for all the great tribe, a hundred people or more. One year Sister Pat saw a couple of young people whom she did not recognize so she went up and asked them, 'Whose children are you?' They admitted that 'we were driving by, feeling lonely, and we saw the lights and heard the party and so we just came in.' The matriarch of the family ruled that they could stay, as long as they watched the family videos, like everyone else!

The spiritual life is lived in the dynamic of these two imperatives: to love in particular and to love more widely. We love in particular (our spouses, friends and children), but, breathing the fresh air of God, our loves are expanded, liberated from exclusivity and narrowness. Mother Teresa liked to say: 'The problem with the world is that we draw the circle of our family too small.'

The discipline of the spiritual life is keeping the rhythm of one's breathing steady, remaining faithful to the particular loves in which our lives are planted, and yet open to the love of others. It is not easy. How can husbands and wives learn to love more widely without the risk of falling in love with other people and undermining the mutual love that is their soil? Promiscuity can be a mistaken attempt to lay hold of a love that is expansive. It is as if one has caught the whiff of a love that is infinite and tries to grasp it in a way that destroys the home and the family.

Nelson Mandela inspired the world with his commitment to the triumph of justice and the defeat of apartheid, but he came to see that he had neglected his family.

My commitment to my people, to the millions of South Africans I would never know or meet, was at the expense of the people I knew best and loved most. It was as simple and incomprehensible as the moment a small child asks her father, 'Why can you not be with us?' and the father must utter the terrible words: 'There are other children like you, a great many of them ... and one's voice trails off ...'<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps none of us ever gets the balance perfectly right between cherishing those who are close and opening ourselves to an unexpected needy person. We mature in the life of the Spirit as we learn painfully how to articulate *eros* and *agape*, the individual loves that sustain us and the spacious love from which no one is shut out. What is one in God is in tension in us. So the spiritual life is not a pleasant way of recovering calm at the end of a busy day, the religious equivalent of a gin and tonic. It is being caught up in the heady atmosphere of God, the dizzy oxygen of God's breathing which never lets us quite catch our breath.

#### THE COURAGE OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER

We need courage to fill our lungs with the fresh air of God. The vastness of God's all-encompassing love is terrifying. Chrys McVey OP quotes St John Chrysostom:

'It might be possible,' he writes, 'for a person to love without risking danger – but this is not the case with us!' Not the case with us, not the case for the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic and poet, Jalaluddin Rumi, who also speaks to the risk involved: 'I am a man who is not afraid of love; I am a moth who is not afraid of burning!'<sup>31</sup>

We are called to be moths unafraid of burning.

So those who are spiritually alive pluck up the courage to risk being hurt; otherwise they are not alive. Herbert McCabe OP:

We recognise that our very nature calls us to something new and frightening ... We are the kind of being that finds its fulfilment, its happiness and flourishing only in giving itself up, and getting beyond itself. We need to lose our selves in love; that is what we fear. We are summoned to venture into what is unknown, to abandon what is familiar and safe, and set out on a journey or quest. And yet we do not like to take risks. We settle for the person that we have achieved or constructed because we are afraid of being made in the image of God. This failure to respond to the summons into life, this failure of faith, is called sin.<sup>32</sup>

If we do love, we shall make mistakes, make fools of ourselves, even commit sins, but it is better than never to have taken the risk at all.

Peter was afraid to accept the call of Jesus to become a fisher of human beings. The apostles were afraid to break up the post-resurrection companionship of the first disciples and scatter to the ends of the earth. It was only persecution that finally drove them out of the nest. When St Dominic wanted to break up the first community of brethren in Toulouse in 1217 and send the brethren to the new universities of Europe to begin the mission, some resisted. For once Dominic insisted on obedience, saying, 'If grain is sown it bears fruit, but if it is stored it rots. Stored grain rots.'

Courage is foundational for the spiritual life. In 1932 Bede Jarrett OP, Provincial of the Order in Britain, decided to send a young friar, Bertrand Pike, to be in charge of the Order's mission in South Africa. But Bertrand was afraid. He had no

desire to go on mission and did not feel up to the challenges. Bede wrote to him, reminding him of how as a chaplain in the First World War he had found the courage to overcome his fear:

Do you remember that dreadful day you had to cross between trenches at Ypres, when your courage failed you and only after 3 or 4 attempts did you force yourself to get by, and how you found the carved edges of your rosary beads had cut into your finger in your unconscious gripping of them to take a new lease of courage from holding them? Yes I remembered that. But my dear Bertrand courage and fear are not opposed? Those only have courage who do what they should do even though they have fear; to be fearless is not to be courageous but only not to need courage. Those are courageous who fear and yet do what they should.<sup>33</sup>

The brave are those who venture out, knowing that they are weak and even that they may fail, trusting in the Lord and not in their strength. Even if one does fail ignominiously, as Peter did, the Lord is there to lift one up. St Thomas More, that most humane of people, profoundly misrepresented by Hilary Mantel in her otherwise superb novel *Wolf Hall*, wrote to his daughter Meg just before his death: 'I will not mistrust him, Meg, though I shall feel myself weakening and on the verge of being overcome with fear. I shall remember how Saint Peter at a blast of wind began to sink because of his lack of faith, and I shall do as he did: call upon Christ and pray to him for help.'<sup>34</sup>

So the spiritual life is not for wimps, but nor is it just for the strong and heroic. It is for us all, as we inhale the oxygen of God's expansive love. We may be fearful and stumble, but we blunder on, and with the grace of God we shall arrive and inhale a freer atmosphere. The film *Breathe* tells the story of Robin Cavendish, who in 1958, aged twenty-eight, contracted polio and was given only three months to live.<sup>35</sup> He was unable

to breathe without an oxygen machine. He was consigned to a ward, immobile in bed, and expected to wait there for death. But he refused to submit to this fate. He and his wife constructed a wheelchair with oxygen equipment attached so that he could leave the ward and make a life. They had a child, embarked on adventures in Spain, took to the air and flew. His life's mission was to liberate from imprisonment in hospital wards others similarly afflicted, freed to set out in their oxygenized chariots and live unconfined.

He and his wife are strong and heroic. I identify more with the other patients liberated by his victory over fate and who share in his breakout from prison. I trail behind, following in the footsteps of people like Sts Francis and Dominic, who broke out and offered oxygen to those who came after. Courage, like cowardice, is contagious.

## Bodily Life: Hallowing the Senses

Jesus' mission began with healing (Chapter 4). He responded to people's aches and pain. It was a first and modest sign that he came as the bearer of life for us bodily beings. After Pentecost the launch of the Church's mission is also a healing, of the man born lame (Acts 3.1–10). But what has this healing got to do with sharing in the life of the Risen Lord? One might think that with the Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost we had entered the new realm of the spiritual life and left behind any preoccupation with such ordinary physical dimensions of our existence. No, Christianity is a very physical religion. Just as the 'spiritual life' is best imagined in terms of that most fundamental bodily activity, breathing, so our bodily life – hearing, seeing, touching, walking, eating and drinking – is made holy in the Lord. Our bodily life is open to the transcendent. In him all our senses are hallowed.

From the beginning Christianity has fought against, and occasionally succumbed to, a dualism between the mind or soul and the body. In the first centuries Gnosticism in its many forms offered salvation through escape from the body. Manichaeism, from the third century onwards, imagined a profound antagonism between the spiritual and the physical, briefly attracting St Augustine. In the thirteenth century St Dominic founded the Order of Preachers to oppose Albigensianism or Catharism,

which claimed that the physical world was created by an evil god. The philosophy of Descartes (1596–1650) is frequently seen as dualistic: ‘I think, therefore I am.’ Mary Midgley, the Newcastle philosopher, has argued that contemporary scientific culture often dreams of salvation as an escape from the physical.<sup>1</sup> The World Wide Web offers us a virtual world, liberated from the limitations of the physical, which we can reshape as we will. Here you need never die. Your hologram lives for ever. In William Gibson’s famous cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, Case yearns to transcend the flesh. ‘In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat.’<sup>2</sup>

Our culture is profoundly ambiguous about the body. The body must be young and beautiful, honed and slim. Fat old people like me are ashamed to take off our clothes to bathe in the sea lest we provoke a howl of disgust. Jean Vanier recounted how an angry young woman came to l’Arche hating her body. Slowly the community calmed her, taking her to jacuzzis, giving her lovely scent, combing her hair, giving her massages, finding beautiful clothes for her until at last she was at peace in her body. Millions are plagued by Body Dismorphic Disorder (BDD), hating their appearance. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia torment numerous young people. One’s body matters hugely, a source of shame or pride.

On the other hand, the body is devalued, as if it were not really part of who we are. We are our minds, and so we can do whatever we want with our bodies. Sexual promiscuity is innocent fun because it does not touch the real ‘me’. In the virtual world you can have whatever body you want – indeed several. In the real world you can self-identify as male or female or as gender-fluid. Our body is something that we own, to do with as we like. So there is intense ambiguity about our bodies, seen both as central to who we are (one is morally obliged to be beautiful) but not really so because we are minds.

Christianity proclaims the startling news that we are bodies and that our bodies are good. Whatever form or shape or colour or size, they are gifts that we should cherish and love. St Thomas Aquinas made the shocking claim that we 'should love our bodies with the same charity with which we love God.'<sup>3</sup> Famously he proclaimed, 'I am not my soul.' He scandalized his contemporaries by his vigorous rejection of all dualism. The holiness of the body underpins most of the doctrines of our faith. God embraced our physical existence in Jesus; he offers us his body as the bread of life; our hope is the resurrection of the body.

Dorothy Day wrote in her diary:

But this aging flesh, I love it, I treat it tenderly, but also I rejoice that it has been well used. That was my vocation – a wife and mother, I gave myself to husband and children, my flesh well used, droops, my breasts sag, my face withers, but my eyes and lips rejoice and love and laugh with happiness.<sup>4</sup>

Our bodies are to be loved, first of all, because they are a gift from God given through our parents. One of the ways that we fulfil the commandment to honour our parents is through loving the body that they have given us and which we are.<sup>5</sup> We are hallowed in every dimension of our bodily life. In her autobiography Caryl Houselander wrote:

Christ used the flesh and blood of Mary for his life on earth, the Word of love was uttered in her heartbeat. Christ used his own body to utter his love on earth; his perfectly real body, with bone and sinew and blood and tears; Christ uses our bodies to express his love on earth, our humanity. A Christian life is a sacramental life, it is not a life lived only in the mind, only by the soul ... Our humanity is the substance of the sacramental life of Christ in us, like the wheat for the host, like the grape for the chalice.<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian in the second century wrote 'caro cardo salutis': 'the flesh is the hinge of salvation', the fulcrum of our encounter with God.

When I visited the noviciate of the English Dominicans in 1965, wondering whether this might be my life, I was delighted when one of the friars talked of how the sacraments bless the dramas of our physical life: birth and death, eating and drinking, sex and health. There is nothing ethereal about the sacramental life. It is down to earth, like our God.

There is another reason for our love of the body, which may sound a little bizarre and is difficult to express in few words. It is shaped to love. Through the millennia of evolution it became the embodiment of an openness to offer and receive love and so is a fit dwelling for Absolute Love. It is as if all those millennia of human evolution, as we became upright, able to look at each other eye to eye, our faces softening to become expressive of joy and sorrow, able to smile and laugh, our hands able to touch each other with sensitivity, all lead not just to us, *homo sapiens*, but to a fit home for the God who is love to be with us. We are made in the image and likeness of God not because God has eyes and a mouth and ears but because God is love and our bodies in their very structure are an openness to love. God could not have become a Pekinese dog, though it is not for me to deny that the Pekinese may express some aspect of the divine being. Dogs live in a world of smells we cannot imagine.

The seventeenth-century poet Thomas Traherne claims that the human body was designed to be a home for the Godhead:

Thou hast given me a body,  
Wherein the glory of thy power shineth ...  
Limbs rarely poised,  
And made for Heaven ...  
For God designs thy body, for His sake,  
A temple of the Deity to make.<sup>7</sup>

William Blake, more than a hundred years later, makes a similar point:

For Mercy has a human heart,  
 Pity a human face,  
 And Love, the human form divine,  
 And Peace, the human dress.<sup>8</sup>

Blake therefore concludes that 'all must love the human form', regardless of whether the person in question is Jewish, Christian or Muslim. The feared stranger bears 'the human form divine', an image of God, whatever their faith or lack of it. Every human body is shaped by and for the mystery of love and so is worthy of reverence.

The mission of the Church begins with the breathing of God's holy breath, the breath of love, and then it is launched with the healing of the lame man. This is not just a quick solution to a disability. The interaction of the disciples and the sick person is filled with the promise of a deeper healing. All of the senses and capacities of the human body embody something of what it means for us to love. Human meaning is incarnate. Our faith always brings us down to earth and to the flesh, away from the abstractions in which the fullness of being alive is sucked dry. Dylan Thomas wrote: 'Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells and senses. Through my small bone island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all.'<sup>9</sup> Aquinas claimed that 'nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.'<sup>10</sup> Let us now look at the encounter of the disciples and the lame man and see what it suggests about our bodily sharing even now in the risen life of Christ:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man

lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

(Acts 3. 1-10)

*When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms.*

He speaks; they listen. They hear his plea and they look at him. Often I do not want to hear people's needy cries for help. I do not want to be deflected from my pressing plans and have to respond. There is a homeless man who lives on the pavement outside Blackfriars called Carl. Every time I leave the priory, he calls my name, 'Father Tim'. Sometimes I just do not want to hear the desperation in his voice, especially as I rarely have silver and gold. The temptation is to close my ears and pretend that I have not heard when what he needs more than anything else is someone who recognizes him and knows his name. Sometimes he just wants a physical touch. Walking through Oxford last night, I was struck by how loudly many of the homeless speak. They shout and exchange obscenities. Perhaps they want us

to remember that they exist. They refuse the invisibility with which we cloak the poor.

On holiday in Italy, the literary critic James Wood sees young migrants probably just arrived from Africa:

I regard these men with compassion, shame, indignation, curiosity, profound ignorance, all of it united in a conveniently vague conviction that, as Edward VIII famously said of mass unemployment in the nineteen thirties, 'something must be done.' But not so that it would disturb my week of vacation ... It's not just that we are morally impotent; the continuation of our comfortable lives rests on the continuation – on the success – of that impotence.<sup>11</sup>

Impotence excuses us from doing anything. We have not enough silver and gold, we tell ourselves, and so walk on.

God always listens. Israel's return home begins when the voice in the burning bush says to Moses: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings' (Exod. 3.7). God's ear became flesh in Jesus. The disciples were always turning needy people away and telling them not to bother the Master, with all the self-importance of the companions of the great. But he summons blind Bartimaeus to his side and asks what he wants; he listens to the dubious Samaritan woman at the well. He hears the plea of the Syro-Phoenician woman with a sick kid. We are now called to be the ears of the Risen Lord.

Listening is the hardest art. There was an advert on television a few years ago. A young man looks in the direction of a beautiful young woman. She says, 'What I like about you is that you are such a good listener.' No reaction. The view shifts slightly, and behind her shoulder we see a television with a game of football.

Amos Oz said of his grandfather:

He possessed a quality that is barely ever found among men, a marvellous quality which for many women is the sexiest in a man. He listened. He did not just politely pretend to listen, while impatiently waiting for her to finish what she was saying and shut up. He did not break into his partner's sentence and finish it for her. He did not cut in to sum up what she was saying so as to move on to another subject. He did not let his interlocutress talk into thin air while he prepared in his head the reply that he would make when she finally finished. He did not pretend to be interested or entertained, he really was.<sup>12</sup>

The good listener is attentive not just to what the other says, but to how they say it. They may be using words in a slightly different way from ourselves, with different connotations. Our ears are open to what they are trying to say, but not quite successfully. The English philosopher Iris Murdoch said that if you are to understand someone else you must know of what they are afraid.<sup>13</sup> And of what I am afraid, making me unwilling to hear them? To listen we must enter into other ways of being in the world. To attend to another self, I must be selfless.

Commonly other people's opinions are dismissed as absurd, ridiculous, nonsensical. This is a failure of the imagination and the intelligence. If I cannot imagine why someone might say something that I would not, I remain stuck in my own little world, unable or unwilling to venture beyond my small plot of ground. That is either moral laziness and so a failure of charity, or else stupidity. No one who dismisses other points of view as 'absurd' is worthy of holding public office.

We are unlikely to listen to God if we do not listen to each other. Both require silence and tranquillity. St John of the Cross said: 'The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he always speaks in eternal silence, and in silence it must be heard by the soul.'<sup>14</sup> If we are not still, we shall never hear what other people say. St Augustine says that we need 'the

Sabbath in the heart'. Otherwise we shall be like the Egyptians tormented by gnats: 'These tiniest of flies, always restless, flying about aimlessly, swarm at your eyes, giving no rest. They are back as soon as you drive them off. Just like the futile fantasies that swarm in our minds.'<sup>15</sup>

*Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.'* Notice the intensity of this mutual gaze. Peter looks at him and invites the lame man to look back. This reciprocal gaze embodies Israel's deepest longing that God might look at her graciously and she might look at God. 'Let your face shine on us and we shall be saved' (Ps. 80.3). In the First Eucharistic Prayer we ask, in a slightly strange translation, that God will look at us 'with a serene and kindly countenance'. We want to be smiled at. Madonna, the American singer, begs: 'Jesus Christ will you look at me/ Don't know who I's supposed to be.'<sup>16</sup> Peace is resting in God's gaze.

But Israel also wanted to see the face of God. 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?' (Ps. 42.2). This is what Moses asked of God: 'Show me your glory, I pray' (Exod. 33.18). Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones sings: 'You don't want to walk and talk about Jesus/ You just want to see his face.'<sup>17</sup>

In Jesus the face of God gazes on us. How do we gaze on him? We do not even know what Jesus looked like and so we have to be his face for others and see his face in others. 'Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on the world.'<sup>18</sup> We rest in the gaze of people whom we love. It is a tiny anticipation of the beatific vision. The faces of those whom we love nourish us.

The brethren in Jamaica took me to a rubbish dump outside Kingston, the capital. It was one of the most malodorous places I have ever visited and the home of the poorest. On the top of the dump was a cardboard shelter. As I squelched towards it, a young mother emerged with her son. She offered me a

Coca-Cola, probably found on the dump, and her son asked if we could swap T-shirts. I kept his for many years. What remains with me to this day is the mutuality of our gaze, two human beings on a rubbish dump looking each other in the eyes. I felt like Moses ascending Mount Sinai and encountering God.

In a truly human society people meet each other's eyes. In the anonymous urban sprawls in which ever more people live, the direct look is evaded. We glance at strangers surreptitiously, out of the side of our eyes, afraid of what a straight gaze might provoke. It might be seen as a threat or an intrusive invitation. Francis Spufford perfectly captures this evasion in his novel *Golden Hill*, set in eighteenth-century New York. A woman

turned to face him, glancing as he spoke at his forehead, at his shoulders, at his chest – all around him, yet not quite at him ... Her eyes kept up a flickering dance of avoidance, around and about his visage. He could almost feel it: a tickling, wary, dry, velvet-light attention, as if he were being visited by the scouts of a bee-swarm.<sup>19</sup>

For Wittgenstein, 'the face is the soul of the body.'<sup>20</sup> But often our faces do not reveal what we are thinking and feeling. Eleanor Rigby, in the Beatles lyric, leaves the house, 'wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door'. Faces can be masks behind which we hide, with false smiles or stony distance. Our faces can placate or refuse intimacy. Roger Scruton wrote: 'I lie behind my face, and yet I am present in it, speaking and looking through it at a world of others who are in turn both revealed and concealed like me.'<sup>21</sup> It belongs to our sharing in the life of Christ, that we inhabit our faces, offering ourselves to each other in mutual vulnerability. Of course, sometimes it is better to hide what we are thinking!

The goodness of a person irradiates their face. Auden claimed that 'the blessed will not care what angle they are

regarded from/ Having nothing to hide.<sup>22</sup> Romano Guardini marvellously asserted that the holier we become, the more our faces are revelatory:

The face of a man who is passionately searching for truth is not only more 'spiritual' than that of the man with a dulled mind, it is also more of a face, that is to say, it more genuinely, more intensively 'body' ... The body as such becomes more animated ... as it is more strongly informed by the life of the heart, mind and spirit.<sup>23</sup>

The saints do not have poker faces. The intensity of their lives is apparent on the surface of their faces, like Moses' face, radiant after his encounter with God.

The faces of the good are transformative. They are grace-filled and gracious, as the desert fathers knew:

Three Fathers used to go and visit blessed Anthony every year and two of them used to discuss their thoughts and the salvation of their souls with him, but the third always remained silent and did not ask him anything. After a long time, Abba Anthony said to him, 'You often come here to see me, but you never ask me anything,' and the other replied, 'It is enough for me to see you, Father.'<sup>24</sup>

Nelson Mandela became the face of the campaign against apartheid, but because the government prohibited the publication of any photograph of him, as his years in prison passed by, people no longer knew what he looked like. In the 1980s, after he had been in prison for decades, he was taken to hospital for a check-up. Afterwards he was allowed to walk on the beach for a little while before returning to prison. Nobody recognized him, since the image in the public mind was of someone twenty years younger. The government tried to rob his face of its power.

It also belongs to our growth in holiness that we learn how to read other people's faces and see their hidden beauty. If one has eyes to see, one can glimpse another's wounds and their courage. Brian Pierce OP, an American Dominican, visited Peru as a young university student studying Spanish. One day he was being driven through a poor village in the Andes when an indigenous woman looked at him through the car window, begging for a coin. He was bowled over by her face. Before he did anything, the car drove away and he regretted for ever that he never even touched her hand. Her face, with its dignity and suffering, is printed on his memory for ever. It was the beginning of his vocation as a Dominican. He wrote:

On the surface I was overwhelmed, sick to my stomach, but deep in my being God was tilling the ground. Thanks be to God, I have seen that face and reached out to touch that hand many, many times. Today her face is a face of courage and dignity for me. Today I see her face as the face of God.<sup>25</sup>

In Chapter 11, I described the end of a long day in Algeria, travelling with Bishop Vesco, when we were welcomed by strangers in the desert. Earlier that day we had been caught up in violent clashes between the people and the army. We tried to follow other cars up a track on a hill, but it was too sandy and we slipped backwards. People surrounded the car in front of us and pulled out the driver and passengers, who would, presumably, be held hostage. In front of our car a young man stood with a large stone, the size of a football, calling the crowd to surround us. As they gathered, it looked as if we too would be taken, but the bishop spotted a way out, accelerated and we escaped.

I will never forget the young man's face. At first it seemed marked only by hatred. But beneath the hatred I could detect fear. He may have been wondering how he got caught up in the violence of the mob and what he might be about to do. Under the

fear, I caught the tiniest glimpse of a young person who was loved and lovable. Here was someone of whom I might be fond in other circumstances. **Thinking** over the encounter afterwards, I was struck by the complexity of his face, the palimpsest of emotions. To glimpse the person who is also a child of God, one has to see with clarity the particularity of his face, transcending the generalized impressions that mask another's unique humanity. The more one sees their individuality, how they are unlike anyone else, the more one may glimpse their creator who sustains them in being in every moment. Each face is a particular word of God.

*And he took him by the right hand and raised him up.*

Peter reaches across the space that divides him from the lame man and takes him by the hand. He touches him. Jesus touched the untouchable: the lepers, the sick and even the dead. This made him ritually impure in the eyes of the Pharisees. He was not afraid to be touched.<sup>26</sup> In the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo depicts God reaching out to touch the sleeping Adam into life. The divine touch becomes flesh and blood in Jesus, and now in us. We are called now to be the healing touch of God. John's First Letter opens with the most extraordinary assertion: 'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life' (1 Jn 1.1). How often do preachers tell us what they have touched with their hands? How often is the good news abstracted from our bodily lives, disincarnate?

Aquinas asserted that touch is the most human of the senses. It is mutual. One cannot touch in a good way without being touched. It is the embodiment of mutuality. The skin is the largest organ of the body. It separates us from each other, enclosing each in its membrane, but the skin also mediates contact and joins us to each other. Healthy and holy touch acknowledges that we are both separate and one. We do not stand apart, repulsing all contact, but nor do we engulf the

other. Remember the words of St Thomas Aquinas: 'In love the two become one, but remain distinct.'<sup>27</sup>

In the novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, by Jonathan Safran Foer, one of the characters writes:

Touching him was always so important to me. It was something I lived for. I never could explain why. Little, nothing touches. My fingers against his shoulder. The outsides of our thighs touching as we squeezed together on the bus. I couldn't explain it, but I needed it. Sometimes I imagined stitching all of our little touches together. How many hundreds of thousands of fingers brushing against each other does it take to make love?<sup>28</sup>

Touching, we explore the world. Aristotle's philosophy was grounded in his delight in touching things. He was a marine biologist with a fingertip philosophy.<sup>29</sup> In Anthony Doerr's novel *All the Light We Cannot See* the heroine is a blind girl who grows up in a museum and feels her way into understanding the world:

Her hands moved ceaselessly, gathering, probing, testing. The breast feathers of a stuffed and mounted chickadee are impossibly soft, its beak as sharp as a needle. The pollen at the tips of the tulip anthers is not so much powder as it is tiny balls of oil. To really touch something she is learning – the bark of a sycamore tree in the gardens; a polished stag beetle in the Department of Entomology; the exquisitely polished interior of a scallop shell in Dr Geffard's workshop – is to love it.<sup>30</sup>

I wrote above, in Chapter 11, of how people in the early centuries were scandalized by the intimate touch of the kiss of peace. In church, strangers kissed each other on the lips! But even in our more formal liturgy the kiss of peace evokes a distant recollection of the holy touch of the Incarnation. Dorothy Day was moved by the ritual embrace of monks:

This morning when the kiss of peace was given, it was given deliberately, not a perfunctory, nor self-conscious embrace. The monk placed his hands on the shoulders of the monk to his right and bowing first, slightly, bent his cheek to the cheek of his brother monk so that they touched, so that human love and tenderness was expressed, sublimated by Christ's love. Mind, body and soul are all integrated in such worship.<sup>31</sup>

'A man who knows how to embrace is a good man.'<sup>32</sup> Holy touch is intrinsic to the Incarnation, and should be an inherent dimension of the life of the Church. But the Church has been overwhelmed by the sexual abuse crisis. Thousands of innocent young people have been exposed to abusive touch, with unimaginable damage to their confidence and their joy. Sexual abuse subverts this most human of the senses. It turns the touch of love and communion into a dominative and exploitative grab. Sexual abuse of the young is being revealed in every area of life. No institution is innocent. Teachers are afraid to pick up or hug their pupils. To protect our young as we must, we deprive them of their human need for gentle unpossessive touch.

So the tragedy is that today we urgently need the good news of Jesus, the one whose touch healed and never hurt. But the Church is disqualified from witnessing this because of her complicity in the abuse of thousands of innocent young people. The Church cannot recover holy touch until we register the poisonous wound of its abuse. Enda McDonagh, an Irish priest, wrote:

Are we destined for despair, for the despair which has dogged these victims [of sexual abuse] for decades as they sought a loving, pastoral hand to accompany them through their darkness? That's where we all need to be now, as brothers and sisters in Christ, trying to share the pain and the darkness and the despair.<sup>33</sup>

If we dare to share the deep hurt of the abused, then with them, side by side, we may regain a healing touch, so that God's incarnate compassion may become flesh in our lives anew.

In *The Final Retreat* Stephen Hough portrays a priest who has become addicted to sex, especially with rent boys. On retreat he prays for a healing of his touch:

'Stretch out your hand', Christ once said to a paralyzed man. I hear him say it to me now. Can I hope that one day will and muscle will be united and that my withered limb can be made whole? This thought at least keeps the bandage in place; it allows some ray of light into the sepulchre.<sup>34</sup>

*And immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.*

It is not by accident that the first miracle of the Church after Pentecost enabled someone to walk. The earliest name of the Church was 'the Way'. The disciple walks in the way of Christ. When blind Bartimaeus is given his sight, immediately 'he followed him on the way' (Mk 10.52).

The foot has a noble history. Four hundred million years ago lobe-finned fish heaved themselves out of the water and began to stagger along on their fins, the ancestors of our feet.<sup>35</sup> Twenty-six bones locked in a rigid structure so that the earliest human being could stand up, survey the African savannah and eventually set off on the great migrations from our first homeland to Europe, Asia and the Americas.

The migratory instinct is literally embodied in our feet. Vast numbers of our brothers and sisters are on the move today, fleeing war and poverty. When Shannon Jensen visited South Sudan in July 2012, she was astonished to encounter a hundred thousand refugees fleeing from the north. How could she communicate this human drama? No one was interested until she began to photograph their broken-down shoes, their last possessions: 'The incredible array of worn-down, ill-fitting and jerry-rigged shoes

form a silent testimony to the arduous nature of their journey, as well as the persistence and ingenuity of the individuals who survived it.<sup>36</sup> Each tattered pair of shoes was testimony to the gruelling adventure of its owner. The photographs touch our imagination in the way that bare statistics fail to.

In the novel *Tightrope*, by Simon Mawer, the heroine, having survived concentration camp, comes home to her parents.

‘You’ll find your feet soon enough.’ Find your feet. The feet were the most important part of the body, much more important than your brain. Women had scratched each other’s eyes out over a pair of boots. In the evenings they unwrapped their feet and washed them with what little water there might be. Washed each other’s feet, often. Tenderly. With love. Like Christ. Your feet were your life. With your brain you could only think, but if you had your feet you could work and if you could work, you might survive.<sup>37</sup>

The story of our salvation embraces the tramping of many feet: Abraham summoned from Ur of the Chaldees to the Promised Land; Moses leading his grumpy people through the wilderness for forty years; a people sent into exile and walking home again. Finally God became one of us, a human being who walked around Galilee preaching and teaching before he turned his face to Jerusalem, to go to his suffering and death.

On the night before he died he washed the tired and dirty feet of his disciples, and ordered them to do so for each other. In a wonderful poem, Chet Corey presents to us the feet of each of Jesus’ disciples as they hold them out to be washed and dried:

Pigeon-toed Matthew’s foot, the bunion  
on John’s big toe – and those of  
Thomas,  
large as potatoes.<sup>38</sup>

On the first Maundy Thursday of Pope Francis's pontificate he washed the feet of twelve young people in a youth detention centre near Rome, one of them a Serbian Muslim girl. This ritual is repeated in Christian churches all over the world, as a sign that we are all weary pilgrims helping each other on the way.

After the halt at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, on Easter day the walking resumes. The women who have come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body are told that he is not there, 'but go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee' (Mk 16.7). Keep on walking! Christians have ever since. We walk on pilgrimage, to Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, Lourdes, Walsingham, Canterbury, Czestochowa, Vézelay, Guadalupe and a thousand other places. Every devout Muslim hopes to make the haj to Mecca, Jews go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and Hindus go to Varanasi to bathe in the Ganges.

We walk in demonstrations. Think of the long walks organized by Martin Luther King to obtain respect for the equal dignity of all human beings. In his 'Letter from Birmingham Jail', King records a seventy-two-year-old woman who refused to take segregated buses but walked: 'My feet is tired but my soul's at rest.'<sup>39</sup> We walk in procession in solemn liturgies.

All these are symbolic of our human questing, the endless search to understand who we are and where we are heading. We journey in the light and in the dark. Pope Benedict XVI gave marvellous, lucid teaching on the Christian faith, as clear as the daylight. But we cannot stop there. Pope Francis leads us in the exploration of difficult topics where sometimes the clarity lies ahead. If we demand complete clarity all the time, we would never move. The name of the first Native American saint, Tekakwitha, means roughly 'the one who walks groping her way', a good patron for the Church today in this time of transition, which is joyful for some but hard for others.

*Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*

The lame man not only walks; he dances! If we are embodied souls or ensouled bodies, our joy must burst out in physical expression. The Psalms are filled with invitations to dance, but today we remain firmly seated. King David danced and leaped before the ark to the disgust of his wife (2 Sam. 6.16). Charmingly, Malachi 4.2 will have us leaping like calves when they are released into the fields from their stalls at springtime, bouncing all over the place with pure exuberance. St John the Baptist leaped in the womb at Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Jesus tells that when we are persecuted we must 'leap for joy' (Lk. 6.23) for our reward is great in heaven. When God became flesh, he leaped and danced, though we remain seated. Is it any wonder that people find our worship tedious?

Prayer in the Middle Ages was more physical than today. St Dominic had his nine ways of prayer, each using a different posture of the body. His praying was athletic. Tommaso da Celano tells us that when St Francis of Assisi was preaching before Pope Honorius III and the cardinals, he became lost for words and was impelled to dance, 'not playfully but burning with the fire of divine love'.<sup>40</sup> But with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation prayer became less bodily. Like Descartes, we thought that we were minds and that our prayer was mental.

Bruno Hussar OP was astonished to watch Hassidic Jews celebrating the feast of *Simhat Torah* ('Rejoice in the Torah').

The whole congregation started to sing and dance in a circle, each one putting his hands on the shoulders of the person in front. In the middle of the circle, four or five 'pious ones' clasped the scrolls of the Torah, surmounted with crowns and bells, while they danced to the same rhythm. From time to time, someone broke from the circle to replace

one of the scroll bearers. I looked at the eyes of those men, many of whom were old, and they shone with childlike joy. Sometimes it seemed the scroll bearer was in ecstasy.<sup>41</sup>

How can we recover that physical expression of our joy in the Lord? I find charismatic hand-clapping and most liturgical dancing embarrassing. I commissioned a Mexican Dominican, Angel Méndez Montoya, to choreograph a dance in honour of St Dominic, which he performed at a General Chapter of the Order in 2001. Most of the brethren seemed delighted, but some gave the impression of wanting to disappear under the pews in embarrassment.

We need our African brothers and sisters to teach us how to dance our praise of God. When I visited the student house of the Nigerian Province in Ibadan, I was greeted with a hundred brethren dancing and beating drums. I did not know what to do, until a visiting Dominican bishop propelled me onto the floor: 'Dance, for God's sake dance, Timothy.' When Kinshasa was surrounded by rebels and gunfire could be heard, we danced into the Mass with a joy that defied the echoes of violence nearby, the acolytes twirling their candlesticks and the thurible tracing circles of incense. I shuffled along.

Dance makes us gracious with God's grace. 'When you do dance I wish you a wave of the sea, that you might ever do nothing but that.'<sup>42</sup>

Grace, it's the name of a girl  
 It's also a thought that changed the world ...  
 Grace she carries a world on her hips ...  
 No twirls or skips between her fingertips ...  
 Grace makes beauty out of ugly things.<sup>43</sup>

It would be enjoyable to explore other senses that are not mentioned in this passage, such as smell. In the Old Testament,

God loves the pleasing odour of sacrifices. On Rosary Sunday we bless roses saying, 'You created these roses as a source of pleasant fragrance and gave them to us to lift our spirits.' Dorothy Day thought that the phrases from the Song of Songs 'I will run after the odour of Thy garments' and 'the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon' expressed the attractiveness of Christ. On solemn occasions we enjoy the smell of incense. Saints are said to die in the 'odour of sanctity'. But this chapter is already quite long enough.

There is a last detail of this story of healing which must be mentioned. The lame man is never alone. People carried him to his place every day so that he could beg, and when he is cured, he goes into the Temple with Peter and John. He belongs to a new community. To be bodily is to be dependent. The sick and the aged teach us that this is good. It challenges a Western view of the individual as essentially solitary, standing on one's own two feet. The Christian understanding of the self is essentially communitarian and so necessarily in tension with the Enlightenment's understanding of the self as autonomous and solitary, finding freedom in escape from the demands of others. For the Christian imagination, freedom is found in belonging to each other in a mutual dependence.

The healing of the lame man, right at the beginning of the Church's mission, suggests that we share in the risen life of Christ by embracing our bodily existence. St Augustine wrote that 'through Christ the human you come to Christ the divine'.<sup>44</sup> God became human, and we must too if we are to become divine. Peter and the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, have ears that are open to the lame man's distress, eyes peeled to see this needy human being and a touch that heals him and raises him to his feet. They are alive at the tip of their senses, embodying the love that the Lord is in his very being.

## The Sacramental versus the Technocratic Imagination

The body is not a lump of flesh which the soul longs to escape. It is holy. All of the senses of the body open us to each other and to God. Our physical existence – hearing, seeing, touching, walking, smelling no doubt – opens us to transcendence. Our sharing in the life of the Risen Christ is a very down-to-earth matter. The mystery of eternal life already penetrates our daily interactions.

Now we shall look at two moments of the life of the early Church that are about the sharing or withholding of gifts. In Acts 4 we learn that the whole community is one in heart and mind and no one calls anything their own: all is shared. Then we learn of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, and of the squabbling over the sharing of bread: gifts are withheld. The Resurrection is the victory of the infinite generosity of the one who said, ‘This is my body, given for you’ over the forces that would enslave him and snatch away his life. But though the victory was won on Easter day, every generation struggles to imagine what this might mean. The Spirit of God and the body of Christ are given, but in Acts we see the battle to understand how to live with the radical generosity of Christ.

It is especially difficult for us today because we live under the spell of what Pope Francis calls ‘the technocratic imagination,’

which sees everything as matter to be used for our own ends. Creation in all its glorious diversity is stuff to be manipulated for our satisfaction. For such an imagination, the generosity of the divine life is incomprehensible. How can we open our eyes to see a world of gift? But first let us look at the early Church in Acts trying to get its mind around this.

#### BIFOCAL VISION

‘Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common’ (Acts 4.32). Luke pictures the early community of Christians in Jerusalem as living in perfect unity, sharing everything. It looks like a primitive form of communism. But just a few verses later Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, secretly try to hang on to some of their property for their private use. When St Peter confronts them with their deceit, they both drop dead, which is a pretty drastic punishment for not being generous in the collection! Then, in Chapter 6, we are told that there are divisions between the Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Christians, quarrels about the distribution of bread. So a picture of perfect peace and unity is immediately followed by stories of clashes over possessions. How do these conflicting accounts relate to each other? Was the harmony of heart and mind just a brief honeymoon in the life of the community, or was it a dream of what the disciples aspired to but never attained?

Luke’s accounts are both true, but in different ways. The disciples were indeed profoundly one, baptized into the body of Christ. Their lives were deeply enmeshed with each other. They belonged to each inalienably. But it is also true that they quarrelled, lied and fought. The first account by itself would portray a Cloud-cuckoo-land, turning a blind eye to the tensions and failures of the community. The second account by itself would omit what was most profound about

the community, its unity in the Risen Lord. The true nature of that earliest community, and our own, is caught in interplay of these two accounts. Bifocal vision is needed to glimpse the victory and the failure that characterize the Christian life. We are Christ's wounded and living Body. We are blessed but we keep on sticking the knife into each other. We are bonded like a quarrelsome married couple who are one flesh and yet gouge out each other's eyes.

The truths disclosed by each account are not of the same nature. The stories of fighting and disunity recount what is easily seen and verified even today. One has only to glance at the media to see that corruption and conflict still infect Christian communities. Frédéric Martel's book *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy* makes that clear.<sup>1</sup> But our deeper unity in Christ, the common life that no amount of aggression and failure can destroy, is a truth that is often invisible. The veil only rarely lifts. Small gestures of love and symbolic acts disclose this deeper reality. God's presence in our midst is utterly discreet. R. S. Thomas:

We never catch  
him at work, but can only say,  
coming suddenly upon an amendment,  
that here he had been.<sup>2</sup>

We believe this to be true of all of humanity, indeed the whole of creation. For through Christ 'God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Col. 1.20). Humanity is already one, and we cannot flourish apart from each other, but it is also true that we are ripped apart by strife and inequality. Justice is sought in this tension, hearing the cries of the poor and wounded, and striving to bring to light our hidden bonds. Justice is giving to each his or her due, but what that is can only

be glimpsed rarely, when the fog lifts and we see how we are part of each other. The Cistercian monk Thomas Merton wrote in his *Asian Journal*, 'We are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.'<sup>3</sup> The task here is once again that of the imagination, the sacramental imagination which perceives both how we are one and how we are yet divided.

Frank Cottrell Boyce showed how two recent events disclose analogous truths about the community of the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> The first was the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games in 2012, watched by billions all over the world.

The ceremony painted a portrait of a progressive, inclusive, innovative, funny nation stuffing an astonishing heritage into its backpack as it strode into a brilliant future ... The opening ceremony put culture right at the heart of our national narrative. The story that began with the industrial revolution moved on to pop music and to children's literature, as if to say, that's what we did then, this is what we do now. Culture is our industry. The opening ceremony is supposed to have redefined the nation, heralded a new era of social cohesion and national pride.

Cottrell Boyce says that 'the ceremony didn't depict a nation, it revealed it.' It was not a literal portrayal of how we are. Music, dance, humour, even ritual, lifted the veil. One might almost call it a sacramental moment. It is no coincidence that both Cottrell Boyce and Danny Boyle, who created the ceremony, are Catholics nurtured by a sacramental imagination. Many spectators wept because they recognized in it both who we are and who we are called to be. This was like the account in Acts of the community as one in heart and mind.

The second event, which is the equivalent of the stories of the thieving Ananias and Sapphira and the widows squabbling

over the bread, was the drama of Britain's contested membership of the European Union. Cottrell Boyce wrote shortly after the vote that

the press these last few weeks has been peppered with articles about how the divisive orgy of fear and loathing that was the referendum campaign was a kind of anti-opening ceremony. Divisive where that was inclusive. Soul-destroying where it was soul-lifting. Robert Harris called the campaign 'the most depressing, divisive, duplicitous political event of my lifetime'.

It was a great bellow of pain by millions of people who felt that they did not belong in today's Britain, and that they were forgotten and invisible. Both events disclosed truths about who we are. Commitment to a just society means that we face the pain of our wounded, polarized society, and also struggle to reveal the profound unity which Christians believe already holds us in its grasp.

#### THE TECHNOCRATIC IMAGINATION

So a sacramental imagination requires the interplay of at least these two ways of seeing the world and each other, a glimpse of our unity in Christ and a clear-eyed perception of how that is sundered. We are bonded by gift and sundered by rapacity. What Pope Francis calls the 'technocratic imagination', the prevailing cultural paradigm of our time, blinds us to both. By this the Pope does not mean the power of technology to reshape the world, but all the ways in which we see creation as just there to be used and bent to our will. In *Laudato Sí* he writes of the 'globalisation of the technocratic paradigm'.<sup>5</sup> Our relationship with creation has become destructive and confrontational.<sup>6</sup>

This technocratic imagination blinds us to the presence of the transcendent in creation. Gerard Manley Hopkins's often

quoted poem 'God's Grandeur' evokes the radiance of God's presence:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil,  
Crushed.<sup>7</sup>

But then Hopkins laments how the Industrial Revolution renders us insensitive to the divine. It desecrimentalizes our world.

All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

The technocratic imagination also blinds us to the second story of Acts, of how humanity is divided and damaged. Its calculations shred humanity's interdependence. It is both the flightless chicken of Flannery O'Connor, which we met in the first chapter, unable to take off into the transcendent, and it is the world of the abstract third leg of the chicken of Shigeto Oshida, which sucks out our delight in the particular and the finite. It neither lifts us up to heaven nor brings us down to earth, and so it is the very contrary of the religious imagination.

Charles Taylor brilliantly explored the rise of a mechanistic view of reality during and after the seventeenth century, especially in the north of Europe. The world is disenchanting.

We have to abandon the attempt to read the cosmos as the locus of signs, reject this as illusion, in order to adopt the instrumental stance effectively. Not just on a level of popular belief, as a world of spirits, do we have to disenchant the universe; we have also to bring about the analogous shift

on the high cultural level of science, and trade in a universe of ordered signs, in which everything has a meaning, for a silent but beneficent machine.<sup>8</sup>

Creation is no longer an organic unity, charged with symbolic meaning, just an enormous clock.

This paradigm has such a powerful hold on our imagination that it is hard to see the world otherwise. Pope Francis writes:

The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic ... Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic.<sup>9</sup>

Life, he goes on, 'gradually becomes a surrender to the situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence'.<sup>10</sup>

Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: 'A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.'<sup>11</sup> When we are caught in a way of seeing things, a picture of the world, we are like a fly trapped in a bottle, bumping into the sides and unable to get out. The aim of Wittgenstein's philosophy was to free the fly from the bottle.<sup>12</sup> So our challenge is to liberate our imagination from captivity to this single world-view, which blinds us both to our unity in Christ and to the divisions that wound our humanity.

This is not to reject technology or modern science. Without them I would be dead by now. Technology and science are blessings in innumerable ways and have enriched our imaginative life too. The Pope is calling us not to be Luddites,

but to free our minds from bondage to one way of seeing the world. William Blake prayed: 'May God us keep/ From single vision and Newton's sleep.'<sup>13</sup> If we remain captivated by the technological imagination, Pope Francis believes that civilization will crumble and the planet will die.

But how can we be freed? A common way is to try to frighten people out of the dominant way of thinking by describing the apocalypse that lies ahead. This is called 'catastrophism'. Unless we act immediately, social and ecological disaster lies ahead. I believe these predictions to be true, but if one terrifies people, they may feel so helpless that they close their minds to the horrible future. Perhaps it is too late to do anything anyway. Let's eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die. So catastrophism leads to despair.

Stephen Jackson wrote that, in the introduction to her book *This Changes Everything*,<sup>14</sup> Naomi Klein follows this line of reasoning when recounting her personal experiences with the politics of climate change: 'I denied climate change longer than I cared to admit,' she writes.

A great many of us engage in this kind of climate change denial. We look for a split second and then we look away. Or we look but then we turn it into a joke ('more signs of the Apocalypse!'). Which is another way of looking away ... We deny because we fear that letting in the full reality of the crisis will change everything. And we are right.<sup>15</sup>

Naomi Klein was astonished to be invited to the Vatican to support the launch of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Sí* on the ecology of our little planet. At the press conference the Vatican spokesman explicitly presented her as secular, Jewish and a feminist. One such adjective would be enough to make a traditional Vaticanista tremble. All three together looks like a revolution!

She accepted the invitation because she believed that religions are the only sorts of bodies that can radically change people's convictions. She wrote:

People of faith, particularly missionary faiths, believe deeply in something that a lot of secular people aren't so sure about: that all human beings are capable of profound change. They remain convinced that the right combination of argument, emotion and experience can lead to life-altering transformations. That, after all, is the essence of conversion.<sup>16</sup>

So how can Christians in this perilous time, when the technocratic imagination is endangering the future of humanity, have a conversion of our hearts and minds and share this with our contemporaries? We need to renew both of those ways of seeing reality which we find in Acts, the sacramental imagination of our unity in Christ and the clear-eyed perception of the wounds of humanity. We need to learn to see again, which is the meaning of the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*.

#### ONE IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD

Earlier in Acts, Luke explicitly linked the sharing of common goods to the breaking of bread and prayer.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

(Acts 2.42-5)

Shared bread led to shared goods. They are bound together by a mutual gift.

We discover the world of God's grace by mutual graciousness, for 'every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change' (Jas 1.17). 'Eucharist' means 'Thanksgiving'. A Eucharistic imagination discloses a world of gifts: gifts received, the body and blood of Christ and the gift of each other.

The technocratic imagination blinds us to this world of gifts because everything is seen as grist to the human mill, to be used, devoured and consumed. The earth is to be exploited, raw material to be bent to our will, raped for our pleasure and profit. Of course it is true that we must use things: mine minerals, generate energy, devour food and shape things for our purposes. If we did not, human life would be impossible. What is murderous is the exclusive dominance of this utilitarian imagination.

Everything is seen in terms of possession, dominion, naked power. It even infects the language of politics, which becomes not the service of the public good but taking control of the levers of power, the machinery of government. During elections seats in Parliament are 'up for grabs'; when Theresa May became Prime Minister, she took possession of the 'keys to 10 Downing Street'.

Frequently the Judaeo-Christian tradition is blamed for this exploitative understanding of humanity's relationship to nature. When the days of creation are completed, God says to the first human beings: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Gen. 1.28). It looks as if we own the earth and can do with it whatever we wish. We have dominion, the Bible says, and so our religious inheritance must bear the blame for the ecological disaster that is upon us.

The word translated as 'dominion' (*radah*) does not imply domination. It is a royal word. 'Unable to be present through an

extensive territory, a king would appoint an official to oversee the region in his name. He was said to have “dominion” over that part of the kingdom, charged with carrying out the wishes of the ruler he stands in for.<sup>17</sup> Israel could not dispose of creation as it wished. God’s people were to represent God’s benign rule of the earth, which God saw was very good. When the earth is threatened with catastrophe, Noah exercises God’s care for his creatures by bringing them, two by two, into the ark. ‘Dominion’ means stewardship. The idea that dominion meant domination occurred only with the rise of the technocratic imagination.

#### TRANSFORMATIVE GESTURES

How do we challenge this ruthless technocratic imagination? These early Christians expressed their new vision of the world in a small gesture, the breaking of bread together. This was unlike the massive machinery of the Temple sacrifices, the butchering and cooking of hundreds of sheep and cattle, the violent and messy business of daily slaughter. Initially the Christians in Jerusalem continued to frequent the Temple. Peter was on his way there when he heard the cry of the lame man. But the community’s own form of sacrifice slowly displaced this. It was just a little act, hardly noticeable, the single loaf broken and shared.

The French essayist Georges Perec<sup>18</sup> wrote: ‘I search at the same time for the eternal and the ephemeral.’<sup>19</sup> These two seem as far apart as it is possible, but it is often in the fragile and the fleeting that eternity shines through, and the Giver of the gift is glimpsed. So it is appropriate that God’s gift of eternal life takes the form of bread, which is ephemeral in the literal sense, lasting for a single day. After that it is stale. This is why we ask for our daily bread, day by day, just as we receive our oxygen breath by breath, trusting the next will be given too.

Dorothy Day believed above all in the efficacy of small gestures. She loved to quote Blessed John Henry Newman, that

the tragedy is never to have begun, and the Russian proverb that a man who has planted three trees will never go to hell. The very humility of small gestures challenges the technocratic imagination, which is founded on massive interventions that reshape through their force: 'shock and awe'. Trust in the power of the small challenges the pretensions of the powerful. On 1 December 1955 Mrs Rosa Parks refused to move to another seat on a segregated bus. She said, 'I can't take it any longer', and did not budge, but the world did.<sup>20</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi also understood that small actions may have vast consequences. The salt taxes imposed by the British forbade Indians to make salt, and so in 1930 Gandhi led thousands of his followers 240 miles to the coastal town of Dandi, on the Arabian Sea, where he picked up a small lump of salt. Thousands of his followers did the same. This tiny act of civil disobedience shook the power of the British Empire. It was a symbolic dispossession of the British claims to ownership of another land and people. It imaged another world.

Pope Francis, like Pope John Paul II before him, has a genius for the small gesture that opens our eyes. In this he follows his patron, St Francis of Assisi. G. K. Chesterton wrote that

the things that [St Francis] said were more memorable than the things he wrote. The things he did were more imaginative than the things he said ... From the moment when he rent his robes and flung them at his father's feet to the moment when he stretched himself in death on the bare earth in the pattern of the cross, his life was made up of these unconscious attitudes and unhesitating gestures.<sup>21</sup>

Gestures open a window in the imagination and unsettle our assumptions about how things need be. On the day of the canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Pope Francis

invited 1,500 homeless people to a pizza party in the Vatican. They were not beggars but guests. He often asserts that our task is not always to conjure up solutions but to initiate processes. The pizza party opens the door to another world, in which all may sit at the table.

The failure to make small gestures can speak too. I attended a conference in the US, organized by religious sisters, on the threat of climate change. It was a hot day, but inside the building the temperature was freezing, and so most of the sisters wore sweaters and still shivered. Outside the air was filled with the noise of hundreds of air-conditioners.

The sacraments are small gestures that transform the world. A baby is splashed with water; food and drink are blessed and shared; a sick person's forehead and hands are anointed with oil; hands are joined in matrimony; a person weighed down whispers to a priest. We lift up the bread at the consecration, lifting it out of its ordinary context into our relationship with God. These are all tiny events, easily missed, but it is through such acts and words that God's transformative power enters the world. So what are the small gestures that we can make which disclose the world as a place of gifts rather than a world just to be used and often abused?

#### THE GIFT OF ONESELF

There is no greater gift than the gift of oneself. This is the heart of the sacramental life: 'This is my body, given for you,' 'This is my blood poured out.' God the giver of all good things becomes the gift. A martyr, which is simply the Greek word for 'a witness', is someone who makes of his or her life a gift. 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (Jn 15.13). This is the most radical antithesis of the dry calculations of the technological imagination.

On 8 December 2018, high above Oran, the second city of Algeria, the Church beatified the nineteen religious who

refused to flee the violence that engulfed the country in the 1990s and so died. The first martyrs were Sister Paul-Hélène Saint-Raymond, a Little Sister of the Assumption, and a Marist Brother, Henri Vergès, who were murdered in May 1994. When Archbishop Henri Tessier warned his priests and religious of the danger of staying, Sister Paul-Hélène said, 'Father, our lives are already given away.' They could not be taken. She ran a library in the Casbah, Algeria's poorest neighbourhood, so that Muslim students had somewhere to study. Two years later, when I was being driven around his diocese, Bishop Pierre Claverie, the last of the martyrs, said that it was hard now to find anyone to run his diocesan library, it was so dangerous. An old friar, Jean-Pierre Voreaux OP, sitting in the back of the car, immediately volunteered: 'I am old enough to die. I will go to the library.'

Knowing what was approaching, Pierre said: 'Giving one's life for this reconciliation [between Muslims and Christians], as Jesus gave his life in order to tear down the wall of hatred that separated Jews, Greeks, pagans, slaves, free persons – isn't this a way of celebrating the sacrifice of Jesus?'<sup>22</sup> The seven monks from the Atlas mountains portrayed in *Of Gods and Men* slowly discovered that giving their lives to the Order would mean giving their lives away in death.

Of course, not many of us will face such a violent dispossession, but the task is still the same, of becoming in all that we are and do a gift. Pierre called this 'white martyrdom':

White martyrdom is what one strives to live each day, the giving of one's life drop by drop – in a look, in being present, in a smile, a gesture of concern, a service, in all of those things that makes one's life a life that is shared, given, bestowed on others. This is where openness and detachment take on the meaning of martyrdom, of immolation – in letting go of life.

This is simply the logic of the sacramental imagination, the sharing of the bread. What sense does it make to receive the gift if one does not become a gift oneself?

Claverie recognized that this will seem mad: 'There is an aspect of folly in holiness, the folly of love, the very folly of the cross, which makes a mockery of human calculation and wisdom.'<sup>23</sup> Is it in such radical contradiction with the calculations of the technocratic imagination that it will make no sense today? On the contrary: it was the very folly of the early Christian martyrs that shook the pagan Roman Empire and alerted people to the good news that something new and marvellous was afoot.

When I visited Bishop Claverie shortly after the murder of the monks, he told me that, when he drove, he feared barricades across the road, because they were often put up by terrorists disguised as police to catch people like himself. When he gave me a tour of his diocese, he first rang up friends to see where was more risky on that day. When I returned to Oran for the beatification, there were lots of barricades, this time to protect us. The esplanade of the sanctuary was filled with the relatives and religious brothers and sisters of the martyrs. The Minister of Religious Affairs, Mohamed Aïssa, expressed the government's 'entire satisfaction' with the beatification. There were hundreds of Muslim officials who came to share our celebration. Their presence was greeted with thunderous applause.

Nothing quite like this has ever happened before in a Muslim-majority country, as far as I know. How was it possible? Perhaps because we were not there to remember the murder of Christians killed by Muslims. Two hundred thousand Muslims died in the violence, including 119 imams and hundreds of intellectuals and journalists. We celebrated that these religious had made of their lives a gift without condition or reservation to the people of Algeria. The fruit was this shared festival on the esplanade of the chapel, renamed 'Vivre ensemble,' under

the statue of Our Lady, protectress of the city. It was this unconditional self-gift of the martyrs that opened up a space in which Christians and Muslims could discover friendship and mutual esteem. This radical generosity demolished the barriers between us.

Emblematic of that shift in perspective was the friendship between Bishop Claverie and Mohamed Bouchikhi, a young Muslim who would sometimes act as driver for the bishop, and who died with him on 1 August 1996, when a bomb was exploded outside the bishop's home as they were entering the building just before midnight. Mohamed is there too on the icon of martyrs unveiled at the ceremony. On the evening of the beatification there was a performance of a play, *Pierre and Mohamed*, written by Adrien Candiard OP, which explores their friendship. The play was attended by Mohamed's mother, who blew a kiss to the actor playing her son and hugged the bishop. These martyrs died for their faith in our generous Lord.

Perhaps radical generosity can shake the hold of the technocratic imagination and open the eyes of our contemporaries to the world of gifts in which we live, and the gifts that we are. Maybe Eucharistic generosity can open people's eyes to the God who is the giver of all good things. We challenge the dominant paradigm by living as those who are gifts and receive the gifts that are other people.

#### SEEING OTHERS AS GIFTS

As I write, France is being shaken by protests that began in November 2018. The protesters wear the *gilets jaunes*, the yellow vests, which French law requires all drivers to have in their cars so that they are easily visible if the car breaks down. Yellow vest protests have now spread throughout the world, from North America to Iraq and North Africa. The yellow vests are also known as 'hi-vis' (high-visibility) jackets. To wear them is to say, 'Look at me.' They have become symbolic of the feeling

of millions that they have become invisible. No one notices that they exist. If they have no influence then, for the technocratic imagination, they are non-existent.

Etienne Grieu SJ asserts that

a world dominated by competition engages in a formidable task of classification, not only of performances but also of people. Right at the bottom of the chart are those who are not efficient enough. They thus become invisible to others, as they are unable to demonstrate their usefulness in any of the various exchanges we take part in ... They also feel humiliated because they scarcely can have the means to say who they are or to make people notice the unique treasure they bear.<sup>24</sup>

A culture that is enthralled by money does not register the existence of the poor. They do not count and are not counted. Our home is *Mammon's Kingdom*, according to the political analyst and former MP David Marquand, in which everything can be bought and sold.<sup>25</sup> The American historian of ideas Lewis Hyde shows that the market mentality permeates everything: 'The loyalty of school children, indigenous knowledge, drinking water, the human genome – it's all for sale.'<sup>26</sup>

Karl Polanyi describes the birth of 'the commodity fiction' in seventeenth-century Britain. This is the fiction that land, labour and money are just objects to be owned. For our medieval ancestors it was obvious that other human beings and the soil of God's earth could not be owned absolutely. However much the rich ruled the earth and imposed their will, the earth is ultimately the Lord's, entrusted to our common care. But our ancestors became captivated by this new fiction of total possession.

Polanyi wrote: 'Labour, land, and money are obviously *not* commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and

sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them ... The commodity description of labour, land and money is entirely fictitious.<sup>27</sup> It was a necessary fiction if the world were to become a universal and unrestricted market. This fiction coincided with the explosion of the slave trade, the wholesale marketing of human beings as if they were mere commodities.

The commodification of creation reduces everything to gold or dollar-green. William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*:

Gold? yellow, glittering, precious gold?  
 This yellow slave  
 Will knit and break religions, bless the accursed,  
 Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves  
 And give them title, knee and approbation  
 With senators on the bench.<sup>28</sup>

Money homogenizes everything, stuff for sale. Everything must be measurable, quantifiable. Everything has a price. The American anthropologist David Graeber writes that it is 'money's capacity to turn morality into a matter of impersonal arithmetic' which justifies 'things that would otherwise seem outrageous or obscene',<sup>29</sup> such as the capture and marketing of human beings. They are reduced to quantities on a balance sheet. Mr Gradgrind, in Dickens's *Hard Times*, typifies the harsh world of the Industrial Revolution, believing that all imagination and fancy must be suppressed, although unknowingly he himself typifies the technocratic imagination:

Thomas Gradgrind, sir A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing anything over ... With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his

pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic.<sup>30</sup>

When we looked at Jesus' non-violence, we saw that the gun seduces our culture. It is sexy. Mammon exercises a similar seduction: 'There is a mystery about money as well as a fascination. It is fungible, protean, evanescent and indefinable, as hard to pin down as mercury sliding along a polished surface.'<sup>31</sup> We are detached from the reality of God's creation, with its unimaginable diversity and the delight in the sheer being of things. Instead we worship money, which is dead, and often no more than numbers flashing on a screen. Moses came down the mountain and interrupted the worship of the golden calf. Having led them to freedom from the servitude in Egypt, the Israelites became slaves again, abasing themselves before a golden idol.

A world dominated by money blinds us to the poor, and so we come to tolerate an escalating inequality. The United Kingdom, for example, is the most unequal of the 'long-established democracies of the European continent'.<sup>32</sup> In the last thirty years, the average wages of the country as a whole have risen threefold, whereas that of top executives in some cases has increased by as much as 5,000 per cent.<sup>33</sup> Many CEOs receive more in their annual bonus than most people earn in a lifetime. Many of the very, very rich earn more than entire countries. Marquand tell us that society is divided between the Haves and the Have Yachts.

The dramatic inequality of income is accentuated by the amount of wealth which is stashed away in tax havens, which Marquand calls 'treasure islands'. There are thousands of Ananiases and Sapphiras hiding their wealth beyond our scrutiny. Bastian Obermayer and Frederik Obermaier show how the offshoots of a Panamanian law firm handle trillions of dollars of the wealthy, avoiding or evading taxation, while

ordinary people must pay.<sup>34</sup> Politicians from every continent, business people, celebrities and footballers escape paying their share. Money is sucked out of the common wealth and thus absolutely privatized.

One might ask whether it matters that some people have vast amounts of money. After buying one's yacht, a football team and a string of racehorses, what can they do with it anyway? But the chasm between the extremely wealthy and everyone is destructive of our imagined common humanity. The political philosopher Michael Sandel asserts that 'the more things money can buy, the fewer the occasions when people from different walks of life encounter one another ... Democracy does not require perfect equality, but it does require that citizens share a common life.'<sup>35</sup> Gross inequality undermines any sense we have of a shared identity and destiny, and a sense that, as George Osborne, the former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, said, 'we are all in this together'. We are not.

Gross inequality humiliates the poor. Marquand writes that 'there is no place for them in the narrative of "meritocracy", "opportunity" and "ambition" that dominates our public culture on left and right alike; and they have no alternative narrative to counter it.'<sup>36</sup> Scandalous inequality is corrosive of trust, the glue that holds society together. If we see other people as unlike us, they will seem to belong to another species. Marquand again:

As society becomes more unequal, it fragments. Empathy withers ... Those at the bottom of the pile can gape at those at the top, but they can't empathise with them. Those at the top don't gaze at those at the bottom; they shudder with distaste or fear or both. The 'squeezed middle' looks up with resentment, and down with trepidation.<sup>37</sup>

Christianity proclaims the countercultural truth that differences of wealth make no difference to our dignity. Indeed

according to Christianity, God has a fondness for the poor. God became flesh in an unimportant family in a corner of the Roman Empire of which well-bred people, the Establishment, had never even heard, and died a shameful death, one reserved for slaves.

#### OPENING OUR EYES

Above we saw that we challenge the technocratic imagination by making our lives gifts to others. The supreme example is that of the martyr, in whom we see the utter generosity of Jesus who gave us himself. The logic of the Eucharist, the world of gifts, frees us from the calculations of technocracy. We shall oppose its devastating consequences by seeing those whom it renders invisible, and delighting in them as gifts.

Martin Luther King struggled to share with some white pastors, who were nervous of joining him, this terrible sense of being robbed of existence:

When your first name becomes 'nigger', your middle name becomes boy (however old you are), and your last name becomes 'John', and your wife and mother are never given the respected title 'Mrs'; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly plagued by inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness' then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.<sup>38</sup>

Looking back on the march to Washington in 1963, King realized that what changed everything were the images on television of the quiet, peaceful, non-violent people on the march. Many white people could never look at African Americans in the same way again. The fears of the white population had been projected onto them, motivating the violence that was meted

out on them, the baton charges, the use of vicious dogs and water cannons. King wrote:

Millions of white Americans, for the first time, had a clear, long look at Negroes engaged in a serious occupation. For the first time millions listened to the informed and thoughtful words of Negro spokesmen, from all walks of life. The stereotype of the Negro suffered a heavy blow. This was evident in some of the comments, which reflected surprise at the dignity, the organisation, and even the wearing apparel and friendly spirit of the participants.<sup>39</sup>

For some, at least, the caricatures collapsed and the conversation began.

The Pope's pizza party for the homeless shows that they are not human vermin endangering the lives of ordinary citizens but the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, who was 'the Son of Man who had nowhere to lay his head'. Gandhi's salt tax march shed light on the quiet dignity of the oppressed Indians, who were seen to have their own power and identity. The British Empire was unmasked as brutal and small-minded. Its mystique as a fount of justice and enlightenment crumbled.

Often it is fiction that reveals the truth of who we are. The great novels and poems have done most to open our eyes to the humanity of strangers, and above all the poor, and so fuel our resistance to gross inequality.<sup>40</sup> Martha Nussbaum, a Jewish philosopher, argues that Victorians were awoken to the horror of poverty by Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* mobilized people in the US to combat slavery. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* opened the eyes of the American public to the suffering of the migrant workers and won support for the New Deal.<sup>41</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* uncovered the crushing barbarity of Soviet Communism.

Dorothy Day said that her life was founded on the teachings of Jesus and the Church, and reading novels: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorki: 'I'd like people to say that "she really did love those books!" ... That's the meaning of my life – to live up to the moral vision of the Church and of some of my favourite writers ... to take those artists and novelists to heart, and live up to their wisdom.'<sup>42</sup>

The terrible Mr Gradgrind understands that his technocracy is threatened by the reading of novels. After long hours of grinding work in his factories, the workers go to libraries to read stories:

They wondered about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of common men and women! They sometimes, after fifteen hours' work, sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own. They took De Foe to their bosoms, instead of Euclid, and seemed to be on the whole more comforted by Goldsmith than by Cocker.<sup>43</sup>

The hill farmers to whom R. S. Thomas ministered were not much interested in his sermons or in him. He too found it difficult to relate to them. But in his poetry he discloses their and our common humanity. One poem must stand for many. A hill farmer addresses both Thomas and us, challenging us to hear him:

The hens go in and out at the door  
 From sun to shadow, as stray thoughts pass  
 Over the floor of my wide skull. The dirt is under my  
 cracked nails;  
 The tale of my life is smirched with dung;

The phlegm rattles. But what I am saying  
 Over the grasses rough with dew  
 Is, Listen, Listen, I am a man like you.<sup>44</sup>

Nothing human is alien to Christ. Every novel, poem, film or painting that opens us to our invisible brothers and sisters is an ally of the sacramental imagination.

Pope Francis summons us to open our eyes and see. Not just our fellow human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, but God's creation in all its beauty. Annie Dillard claims that 'the gift of seeing is the pearl of great price.'<sup>45</sup> Sometimes she delights to look down a microscope or a telescope. Technology can help us wonder! Otherwise she simply looks, almost vacantly, waiting to be surprised, glancing from the side of her eye. 'Learn to see what is there without the need to own it, pick it, stuff it, pickle it, photograph it. Just let it show itself ... there is a kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and empty.'<sup>46</sup> Dillard tells of a child who is given a microscope so that it can gaze at the jungle in a drop of water and be enchanted:

But in the puddle or pond, in the city reservoir, ditch or Atlantic Ocean, the rotifers still spin and munch, the daphnia still filter and are filtered, and the copepods still swarm hanging with clusters of eggs. These are real creatures with real organs living real lives, one by one. I can't pretend they're not there. If I have a life, sense, energy, will, so does a rotifer. The monostyla goes to the dark spot on the bowl: to which circle am I heading?<sup>47</sup>

Pope Francis invites us to take another, more astonishing step. If we truly see people's faces, we converse with them. If we see the natural world with clear and unpossessive eyes, we shall be addressed. St Francis of Assisi addressed creation with the

language of the family: Sister Earth, Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water. For the Gradgrinds of this earth, this is foolish sentimentality. But even more, creation speaks to us. Sister Earth ‘now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her ... She “groans in travail”<sup>48</sup>

For the Judaeo-Christian imagination the whole of creation speaks of God and shouts with joy. At Morning Prayer on every feast day, we sing the song from Daniel, Chapter 3, ‘O all you works of the Lord, O bless the Lord, to him be highest glory and praise for ever’, and go on to proclaiming that every part of creation – sun and moon, showers and dew, birds and fish – all praise God. St Augustine wrote that nature is the great book that speaks of God: ‘Heaven and earth cries out to you, “God made me”<sup>49</sup>

#### WE HAVE ALLIES

When we see the forces mobilized by the technocratic powers of this world, we may be tempted to doubt whether anything can be done. Pope Francis honestly questions our ability to free ourselves from the iron grip of the technocratic paradigm. The multinational corporations that drive the global economy, the invisible hand of the market, the tsunami of money surging in an instant from one financial centre to another, the rise of dictatorships in every continent: how on earth can we do anything in the face of such forces?

We have allies in the novelists and poets I mentioned above, and the young give us hope. Our millennials do not despair of doing their bit for humanity and our small world. They do not expect politicians to change things. Most are deeply disillusioned with institutions, whether political, legal or religious. But they believe in their power to change things in other ways. Think of Avaaz, an international campaigning website, which has

more than 40 million followers, more than 4 million in France alone. In Britain there are innumerable campaigning groups harvesting the enthusiasm of millions of people, often young, who want to make a difference. Some are religious, but many are not. Inspired by Danny Boyle's ceremony for the opening of the London Olympics, 38 Degrees is a campaigning group that transcends party-political affiliations.

A new imagination is coming to be. Countless small organizations are seeking a different way of living, which walks more softly on the earth and cares for the fragile web of creation of which we are part. Sister Margaret Atkins calls this 'the undergrowth movement'.<sup>50</sup> These are bottom-up organizations, which reject the dominant economic model of endless growth. There is a swelling tide of people from every culture who want to live sustainably.

The film *Transition 2*, 'a story of resilience and hope in extraordinary times', produced by Emma Goude, explores how a loose network of over 1,800 organizations is spreading across the globe, transitioning to a new way of living. Often these initiatives are connected with growing food, from the desolate inner city areas of Philadelphia to the platform of Kilburn underground station in London, which now proudly sports an apple tree. Often these organizations have sprung up in response to a crisis, such as the nuclear disaster in Japan or the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, both in 2011.

Naomi Klein claimed that only faith can lead to the conversion of heart and mind that we need if we are to survive, but already millions of people, mostly young, are rejecting the dominant technocratic paradigm. We believers do not have to do it all alone. If we can listen to the young, connect with their initiatives, the Church can share her wisdom and be in turn enriched. If we push together, we can change how the world is seen.

We place our hope in the Lord, who promises us the triumph of life over death and gift over rapacity. We have no idea how

this will happen. Our hope may not be fulfilled as we anticipate. We cannot second-guess God. It is the hope that Martin Luther King expressed in his brilliant rhetoric, in which the poetry of the Bible embraces the travails of the civil rights movement.

I know you are asking today, 'How long will it take?' I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long because truth pressed to the earth will rise again.

How long? Not long because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long because you shall reap what you sow.

How long? Not long because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice ...

He has sounded forth the trumpets that shall never call retreat. He is lifting up the hearts of men before His judgment seat. Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him. Be jubilant my feet. Our God is marching on.<sup>51</sup>

In the final two chapters I shall look at how we are sustained, as we wait, by worship and the life of prayer.

## The Liturgical Imagination: God's Providence

If you go to a church service on a Sunday, you will see strange things, remote from the ways of secular society. People process around in bizarre clothes, perhaps some wearing odd pointy hats. Trousers will be rare, even for men. People perform odd gestures – bows and genuflections and even prostrations. The strange choreography of liturgy fascinates many, whose hearts skip a beat at the sight of a maniple, and who are ecstatically happy when a cardinal succumbs to the temptation to wear a *cappa magna*. Perhaps for them it has the enchantment of a ballet. Others, like myself, are more immune to the delights of extravagant liturgy. One of my brethren even gently suggested that I was not the best person to write this chapter. Which is exactly why I wished to tackle the subject, in the hope that it would stretch my non-liturgical imagination. Liturgy is one way in which Christians express what it means for us to share in the risen life of Christ and for Christ to share ours. To choose life includes accepting the invitation to join in the Church's liturgy. The liturgical imagination is an aspect of the Christian imagination. This I have struggled to understand, and I am glad to have done so.

In the early days after Pentecost, Christians worshipped in the Temple, and their own rituals were domestic: 'Day by day,

as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people' (Acts 2.46). As the Christian community settled into its own identity, they ceased to go to the Temple, denounced by Stephen, the first deacon, and destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. When they left Jerusalem, for a while Christians probably attended the local Jewish synagogues and constructed their own. The Church was setting on the path of its own separate liturgical development, especially after Christianity became the official religion of the Empire after the conversion of Constantine in 312.

How can a modern secular person relate to the liturgies of our Churches, especially those of the Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans, which have theatrical celebrations of their faith? When domestic rituals such as grace before shared meals are disappearing, what sense can people make of any ritual? Yet in May 2018 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in collaboration with the Vatican, launched its biggest ever exhibition, with luminaries such as Dolce & Gabbana, Versace and Schiaparelli: 'Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination'. It was visited by 1.3 million people. Extravagant pieces by famous designers like Alexander McQueen, Yves Saint Laurent and John Galliano were submitted which echoed 'the cults of the saints, angels and the Virgin Mary'. The ecclesiastic dresses of Vatican *monsignori* were draped around female figures. The show was opened by the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, and the catalogue was introduced by Cardinal Ravasi of the Vatican.

Our humdrum secular world seems remote from the drama of the liturgy, with its prostrations and genuflexions, and yet millions of fans of *The Game of Thrones* argued passionately about why Jon Snow refused 'to bend the knee' to Daenerys Targaryen. The phrase has entered the popular vernacular. 'Taking the knee' during the singing of the national anthem

at the beginning of National Football League games in the US has become a form of protest against police brutality and perhaps against President Trump's policies. It was banned in May 2018. The liturgy of the football match began to include its own subversive counter-liturgy. More people watched the elaborate Christian liturgy of the marriage of Prince Harry to Megan Markle than any other event in 2018. It was widely seen as an expression of what it means to be British, though Bishop Curry's lively sermon reminded the world that God had at least a walk-on part. Once you start looking, ritual is everywhere. Human beings are ritualistic animals. What, then, does Christian liturgy say about choosing life?

#### PROVIDENTIAL TIME

Our lives are ordered by many calendars: the agricultural year with its sowing and harvesting; the school year with its holidays and term times, its sports and examinations; the financial year with its time for accounting and for taxation; the football season, which now seems to be uninterrupted and so on. Human lives are ordered in many different ways. The Church and its liturgical year order our lives according to our faith, embodying another understanding of time, which goes from Advent to Christmas and Epiphany, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week, and on to Pentecost, with periods of 'ordinary time' in between. On my desk there is a book called the 'Ordo', the order of this liturgical year. This is different from the 'orders' which keep business running, and the 'orders' which govern the army. The 'order of service' orders our lives towards our ultimate destiny.

On the day that I began to write this chapter, 17 December 2018, we began the 'O' antiphons at vespers which point us to the coming of Christ at Christmas. The first one, which I shall sing in just a few moments, after writing these words, prays for the Wisdom which is God's Son to order our lives:

*O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodidisti,  
 attingens a fine usque ad finem,  
 fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia:  
 veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.*

(O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,  
 reaching from one end to the other,  
 mightily and sweetly ordering all things:  
 come and teach us the way of prudence.)

This, Christians claim, is the true ordering of our lives towards our happiness and freedom in God. History is not, as Henry Ford the carmaker, said, just 'one damn thing after another'. Humanity and all of creation are 'mightily and sweetly' ordered by God's discreet providence towards fulfilment. Despite disaster and failure, God's providence is quietly at work. When Abraham is about to slay his son Isaac and so extinguish the promise of descendants, a ram is discovered in the thorns: So 'Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided"' (Gen. 22.14). Liturgical time orders our lives so that we may receive the gifts of God. It is providential time.

Of course, other calendars are necessary if the human community is to survive, for businesses and schools to operate, for food to be grown and harvested and for trains to run on time, but all these other ways of ordering our lives are secondary and are gathered under the ultimate order of this 'Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High'. In the cathedral of Antwerp the guilds of the different businesses of this busy city had their own altars, where the fraternities of the brewers, cloth-shearers and dyers and so on met to pray. Each profession had its own end, which ordered the lives of its members. But in the liturgy of the Church these secondary purposes were gathered into the final end of all human living and dying, being alive in God.

The antiphon prays that we shall learn the *via prudentiae*, the way of prudence. This is not a prayer that we should be cautious, and not invest too much money in any venture lest we go bankrupt. Prudence is the beautiful virtue of living in the real world, with one's eyes open to how things really are. Prudence in this sense can sometimes require courage and bold action. The prudent person dares to choose life and avoid the seductions of single-minded devotion to wealth or fame. The real world is God's world. Sacred time offers us 'the time of our lives'.

The liturgy is orderly. We walk in processions, bow to each other and give each other the kiss of peace because we are in the first place ordered to each other. The first name of our place of worship was the *domus ecclesiae*, the house of the assembly. We belong to our families, but in the liturgy we take our place among strangers, because belonging to the family of God, the Body of Christ, is our deepest identity.

Unlike Judaism and Islam, our worship does not orientate us towards any place. The synagogue points its worshippers towards Jerusalem. Pope Benedict XVI tells us that

the rabbi and the people gaze at the 'Ark of the Covenant', and in so doing, they orient themselves toward Jerusalem, turn themselves toward the Holy of Holies in the Temple as the place of God's presence for his people. This remained the case even after the destruction of the Temple. The empty Holy of Holies had already been an expression of hope, and so, too, now is the destroyed Temple, which waits for the return of the Shekinah, for its restoration by the Messiah when he comes.<sup>1</sup>

The semicircular niche in the mosque, the miḥrāb, indicates the direction of the qiblah, the Kaaba in Mecca, towards which the worshippers are turned.

Christians have holy places – Jerusalem, Rome, Walsingham, Santiago de Compostela etc. – but our worship is not ordered

to any of them. The Risen Lord is everywhere. Our order is an orientation, literally. We are turned to the *sol oriens*, the rising sun. Our churches faced east, unless it was impossible and until Copernicus's discovery that the earth circulates the sun dislocated our cosmic geography and dawn ceased to have an obvious religious significance. Still, the rising and the setting of the sun permeate the language of our worship. Every morning, in the *Benedictus*, we celebrate 'the loving kindness of the heart of our God, who visits us like the dawn from on high' (Lk. 1.) Even in churches that do not face east we often pretend that they do, facing towards 'liturgical East' to honour the orientation of our lives towards the rising Christ.

This morning,  
 On entering the cold chapel,  
 I looked first  
 to the sun, as the pagan does,  
 not by strict custom  
 nor by constraint, but because  
 I too, as creature,  
 sense man's primitive emotion;  
 his need to praise.  
 And so, like priest or pagan,  
 According as the sun moves, I perform  
 this ancient ritual.  
 And though not always able  
 to approach  
 often, effaced in light, I stand  
 before this  
 chalice of the morning,  
 I break this  
 ordinary bread  
 as something holy. (Paul Murray OP<sup>2</sup>)

Human life is sustained by the seasons of the sun: spring and summer, autumn and winter, sowing and harvesting, the times for animals to be born and raised. When our fruit and vegetables are flown in from all over the planet, we may forget how our living is embedded in the solar rhythms of animal and vegetable life.

The drama of our salvation is enacted each year in the pattern of the sun's strengthening and weakening. Christ's birth is celebrated at the winter solstice, the annunciation of his conception at the first stirrings of spring, the Resurrection at the budding of the year, the feast of John the Baptist, who said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (Jn 3.30) as the day reaches its longest time, and the commemoration of All Souls as winter tightens its grip – at least in the northern hemisphere, for even if we do not order our worship to a place, the liturgical year reflects the land in which Christ was born, lived and died. We are Adam, literally earth beings, whose lives cannot flourish in abstraction from the life of the soil, lifted into the drama of eternity: 'Keeping time,/ Keeping the rhythm in their dancing,/ As in their living in the living seasons'.<sup>3</sup>

Israel's neighbours had also blessed the cycle of the seasons. Her neighbours worshipped fertility gods. It is hardly odd to find in the seasons of the sun the traces of divinity. But Israel, and Christianity after her, were not content with the endless repetition of the year but awaited a final victory of the divine. Christians looked to the rising sun as more than the annual victory of spring over winter and life over death. We are turned to the Christ who will come at the end of time, when death will be no more. Pope Benedict again: 'Praying towards the east meant going to meet the coming Christ. The liturgy turned towards the east, effects the entry, so to speak, of history toward the future, the new Heaven and the New Earth, which we encounter in Christ.'<sup>4</sup> Liturgical time is imbued with hope.

To enter a medieval Catholic Church was to find yourself embraced by a narrative as old as the universe. The structure,

with its stained glass and the statues, propelled you towards the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb. So the very building of the church embodied a journey into freedom. 'Ordinary time' in the Church's calendar is not the time when nothing special like Christmas or Easter is happening. It is when our everyday lives, with our ordinary dramas, are ordered towards their final end. Its vestments are green, the colour of our flourishing.

How we are ordered to each other in God and to God in each other is not our invention. It is received as a gift. This is why the great liturgies of the Christian life cannot just be made up as we go along. 'Do this in remembrance of me,' says Jesus. St Paul writes to the Corinthians, who were clearly involved in adventurous liturgical experiments, 'For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you' (1 Cor. 11.23). Pope Benedict contrasts the liturgy that God gave to Israel on the mountain to the worship of the golden calf which the Israelites made up, a 'self-generated cult':

In these rites I discover that something is approaching me here that I did not produce myself, that I am entering into something greater than myself, which ultimately derives from divine revelation. That is why the Christian of the East calls the liturgy the 'Divine Liturgy', expressing thereby the liturgy's independence from human control.<sup>5</sup>

For Benedict the last thing that liturgy should be is spontaneous. "Creativity" cannot be an authentic category for matters liturgical.<sup>6</sup>

Surely Pope Benedict is right in asserting that one cannot just make up liturgy. But much as I hesitate to disagree with so great a theologian, whose profound understanding of liturgy marks this chapter, surely not all spontaneity is forbidden. We do not need to submit passively to every rubric, without a whiff of creativity. The people of God is a community of God's free

people, on whom the Holy Spirit is poured, entrusted with a worship that evolves through time, through innumerable small adaptations, in different rites and in different places. For me, a bossy master of ceremonies is an incitement to rebellion. But I must beware of getting out of my depth here, lest liturgical sharks snap me up.

With modernity came a transformation of our sense of time. True time was no longer sacred, governed by gentle divine providence. It was, in the phrase of the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin, 'homogenous, empty time'.<sup>7</sup> The historian Jacques Le Goff asserted that 'perhaps the most important way the urban bourgeoisie spread its culture was the revolution it effected in the mental categories of medieval man. The most spectacular of these revolutions, without a doubt, was the one that concerned the concept and measurement of time'.<sup>8</sup> Time was no longer 'mightily and sweetly' ordered towards our flourishing. It tick-tocked with heartless regularity, impervious to our human hopes and dramas. The measurement of time was at the service of our culture of control.

It is the time of Mr Gradgrind, of factories, railways and armies. It is the time of the technocratic imagination. Gabriel Le Bras, the French sociologist of religion, joked that the platforms of the Gare du Nord in Paris were magical, since the moment that the feet of pious Breton peasants touched them when arriving from the country, they ceased to be Catholic. The railway station embodied a different sense of time and of the ordering of our lives than the Church. Impersonal 'railway time' superseded the providential time of God's gifts.

Of course we need these other times, just as medieval human beings needed all their many calendars, but true time, ultimate time, was no longer God's. Having constructed the great clock of the universe, God just let it tick away without a goal. This is a fascinating and complex topic which we have no time to explore further,<sup>9</sup> and so let us conclude with a quotation from

Charles Taylor, who has explored this complex transformation of the modern mind at length:

Time has become a precious resource, not to be wasted. The result has been a creation of a tight, ordered time environment. This has enveloped us, until it comes to seem like nature. We have constructed an environment in which we live a uniform, univocal secular time, which we try to measure and control in order to get things done.<sup>10</sup>

It is this 'time frame' that merits Weber's famous description of the 'iron cage' of modernity. Those who live under the dominion of this sort of time will find our liturgies incomprehensible. They are a waste of time since nothing seems to get done. But for the Christian imagination they embody the ultimate point of everything, which is the worship of God.

#### WORSHIP

The most elaborate description of a liturgy in the New Testament is in that fascinating and opaque work the Book of Revelation. Chapter 4 describes the heavenly worship of God:

At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the

first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

‘Holy, holy, holy,  
the Lord God the Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come.’

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.’

(Rev. 4.2–11)

Heaven is an eternal liturgy, which I confess does not fill me with impatience to join the heavenly choir. An unending High Mass is not my idea of celestial joy. But I must curb my gut reactions and stretch my imagination open. Our liturgies are a present participation in the risen life of Christ and an anticipation of future glory. Whenever we sing the ‘holy, holy, holy’ before the Eucharistic prayer, we join with the choir of ‘the four living creatures’. In AD 988, when Prince Vladimir of Kiev visited Constantinople, he wrote home after taking part in the Eucharist at Hagia Sophia: ‘We did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth. Never have we seen such beauty ... We cannot describe it, but this much we can say: there God dwells among mankind.’<sup>11</sup> We could add, and here humanity dwells even now with God.

The focal point of all the liturgical drama is the act of *worship* of the unnamed one on the throne and of the Lamb. To choose life is to worship. The Israelites are liberated from Egypt so that they may worship. God commands Moses to say to Pharaoh: 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness"' (Exod. 7.16). Four times the Pharaoh refuses until plagues and torments beat him into submission. Parents may dream of such drastic measures if they are to get their progeny to church today. The Promised Land was not just a place to possess but where God could be worshipped by his Holy People, obedient to his law. Ethics and politics find their supreme expression in worship.

The celestial liturgy of the Lamb in Revelation 4 is an ordered event, structured by repetition, the elders casting their crowns before the throne. (When do they retrieve them?) It has a cast of hundreds of thousands of angels and saints. It is a gigantic ceremony. In a story by George Mackay Brown, the main character defends himself against the accusation of having been seduced by Popish mumbo-jumbo:

It is ceremony that makes bearable for us the terrors and ecstasies that lie deep in the earth and in our earth-nourished human nature. Only the saints can encounter those 'realities'. What saves us is ceremony ... Ceremony makes everything bearable and beautiful for us. Thus transfigured by ceremony, the truths we could not otherwise endure come to us. We invite them to enter. We set them down at our tables. These angels bring gifts for the house of the soul ... It is this saving ceremony that you call 'idolatry' and 'mumbo-jumbo'.<sup>12</sup>

The instinct to worship is inherent in our humanity. It cannot be suppressed even by the technocratic imagination. According to the English theologian Peter Tyler, nearly everyone has some

experience of the transcendent, usually in their teens or early twenties. The heavens open for a moment. We have a glimpse of glory. But often the young receive no help as to how to respond. Tyler wrote: 'Thus, when the inevitable encounter with the transcendent does occur – and occur it must – many young people today will have no conceptual framework with which to make sense of it. It may appear weird, an irrelevance, or indeed a mental pathology or psychosis.'<sup>13</sup> Many young people just shake their heads and wonder what all that was about. What had I been smoking or drinking? And so the door that was opened drifts shut and we settle back into the banality of the age.

But our faith offers us an ancient tradition of what to do when we are touched by the infinite and the world is filled with glory. We kneel down. I shall never forget a moment alone in the great abbey church of Downside, when I felt compelled to kneel in prayer. In that moment all my failures in sport and study were as nothing. I had been taught to kneel but only in that moment sensed it as a beautiful and liberating imperative.

Such a glimpse of transcendence can come through the mediation of nature. Dom Bede Griffiths describes a moment of revelation when he was a schoolboy, listening to a lark singing at the close of day:

Everything then grew still as the sunset faded and the veil of dusk began to cover the earth. I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look at the face of the sky, because it seemed as though it was but a veil before the face of God.<sup>14</sup>

Dorothy Day noted in her diary that 'one day, I saw Mrs. Barrett at her prayers, kneeling by her bed at ten in the morning, in the bedroom off the kitchen, and suddenly the grandeur of that

act of worship [*sic*].<sup>15</sup> She perceives, as perhaps the puzzled secularist at the back of the church does not, that to kneel in worship of God is an act of grandeur. It is natural to us. Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jewess who drew near to Christianity and who died in Auschwitz, wrote: 'A desire to kneel down sometimes pulses through my body, or rather it is as if my body had been meant and made for the act of kneeling.'<sup>16</sup>

In Patrick White's novel *Riders in the Chariot* four apparently despicable characters, nobodies in the small-minded petty bourgeois world of suburban Australia, have each been secretly touched by the glory of God. Miss Hare, a slightly crazy old spinster, Mrs Godbold, a washerwoman, the former Professor Mordechai Himmelfarb, who escaped from a concentration camp in Nazi Germany and makes bicycle lamps, and Alf Dubbo, an aborigine who sweeps the factory floor, are the riders in the chariot of God's glory, which is revealed in Ezekiel's vision and evoked in the passage I quoted from the Book of Revelation. They are the ones who see through the mundane and catch glimpses of God's secret presence and worship.

Miss Hare wanders in the decaying garden of Xanadu, her ruined house:

At one stage she fell upon the knees of her earth-coloured, practical stockings, not because she was discouraged, or ill – she had reached the time of life where acquaintances and neighbours were always on the lookout for strokes – but because it was natural to adopt a kneeling position in the act of worship, and because intense conviction will sometimes best express itself through the ungainliness of spontaneity. So she rested a little upon her knees, under the great targe of her protective hat, and dug her blunt, freckled fingers into the receptive earth. She knelt for a while in the tunnel that led to Xanadu, and anybody would have found her more grotesquely ugly, less acceptable than they had thought.<sup>17</sup>

Old Himmelfarb, reciting the eighteen benedictions of Judaism in his crumbling shack, is one of those who have seen. These four characters draw together, fellow initiates into the mystery of God's glory. Pope Benedict wrote that 'worship gives us a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from that divine world into ours,' and so it has 'the character of anticipation'.<sup>18</sup>

The most famous exposition of worship is surely the fifteenth-century painting that came to be known as *The Adoration of the Lamb*, by the brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck. It is more than a portrayal of the adoration described in the Book of Revelation. It is a participation in it. On feast days the panels were opened immediately behind the altar at which Mass was being celebrated. The unfolding of the panels opened a door between heaven and earth. The great room of the church becomes an ante-chamber to heaven. Like the young lad in Emma Donoghue's novel, who escapes from the confines of the Room, the panel takes the lid off the mundane reality of our lives. Every icon is a door between the finite and the infinite. We breathe the fresh air of God. The celestial vision shines through a painting that delights in the material world, in the flowers and the jewels, the clothes and the building. Jan van Eyck had such a passion for reality, such a pleasure in the material world, that he cannot but reveal its Creator. Eternity shines through the particular.

The liturgy is our sharing in the splendid scene the Eyck brothers portray. The scene is structured by octagonals, representing the eight days of the New Creation. The participants at the Mass are the eighth side. When the priest raised the chalice at the consecration, it pointed to the Lamb from whose chest the blood flowed. The painting is an unveiling. When people see it today, they are often overcome with a 'speechless amazement'. Frits van de Meer reports that a child seeing it gasped, 'Daddy - this must be heaven, right?'<sup>19</sup>

Liturgical celebrants wear beautiful and exotic garments as a sign that even now we share in the heavenly worship. They are a sign of the beauty that lies ahead. Perhaps the fashion gurus who took part in that exhibition in New York's Metropolitan Museum, most of whom were raised Catholic, retained a distant memory that the glory of their clothes is not about present status but about future promise.

The typical act of worship, at least in my tradition, is the genuflection. One bends the knee and stands up again. It is a flowing gesture, which descends and ascends. It conforms itself to the movement of Jesus in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Rev. 2.8-11)

We kneel with Jesus so that we may stand up with him. The Council of Nicaea forbade Christians to kneel in Eastertide. Each moment in the movement of the genuflection has its sacred time, Lent for kneeling and Easter for standing, expressing our sharing in the victory of Christ. He stands at the right hand of the Father to plead for us.

Perhaps the Christian imagination remains opaque until we have experienced the glorious freedom of kneeling in adoration. When I talk with young Christians, their engagement with their faith is nearly always rooted in some experience of the imperative to adore. Pope Benedict offers an astonishing insight:

The Latin word for adoration is *ad-oratio* – mouth-to-mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence, ultimately love. Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is Love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.<sup>20</sup>

Adoration is being kissed by the Lord.

Worship draws us out of the suffocating bubble of our own being. It refuses narcissism and self-contemplation. It liberates us from a complacent egoism and expresses our fundamental relationship with one another as fellow worshippers. There are eucalyptus trees that need forest fires to crack open their tough pods so that they may germinate. Without the fire the tree cannot seed. The fire of worship cracks us open so that we may be fertile. We are released from our tiny self-obsession, from what Iris Murdoch calls the ‘the fat relentless ego’. We kneel and worship because, thanks be to God, we are not the centre of the world. It revolves around others, and ultimately around God. In the wonderful phrase of the American Franciscan Richard Rohr: ‘Your life is not about you.’<sup>21</sup> St Paul says, ‘I do not live, but Christ lives in me.’ We yield the centre of the stage. We are happy with a small walk-on part: scruffy friar in my case.

#### WHOM DO WE WORSHIP?

But isn't there something obscene about a God who demands that we bow down before him? Doesn't this suggest a tyrant whose glory is our abasement? Worship of anything or anyone might be seen as a denigration of human dignity. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* Satan refuses to bend low and worship the Son of God. When he is defeated and thrust down to Hell, famously he glorifies in his freedom: ‘Here at last [in Hell]/ We shall be free. [...] Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven!’ (I.258–9, 263). The desert fathers noticed that often demons

do not have knees. Isn't there something noble about refusing to kneel, as when in 1793 Lord Macartney refused to prostrate himself before the Chinese Emperor, though he did manage a genuflection? When Mrs Thatcher fell down the steps outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, some Chinese thought that at last Britain had made its prostration!

Worship we must, but worship whom? Worship is only demeaning if one worships anyone or anything other than God. Twice when the seer of the apocalypse bends down to worship an angel, he is rebuked. "Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!" (Rev. 19.10 cf. 22.8-9). Aquinas believed that human beings are tempted to put wealth, honour, pleasure or power in the place of God, and worship these.<sup>22</sup> But they never give us what we want and enslave us. They promise what they cannot deliver, and so we become caught in a futile addiction, seeking more and more drink or power or honour or wealth. God is the only one whose worship sets us free.

In the Book of Revelation the division is between those who worship God and those who bow down to the Beast. The celestial liturgy of Revelation is not the escapist fantasy of someone who cannot cope with living in 'the real world' and takes refuge in imaginary scenes with strange beasts and angels. It unmasks the truth; God rules, and not the Beast who 'represents the political and political power of the Roman Emperors', nor the Harlot of Babylon who is 'the city of Rome in all her prosperity gained by economic exploitation of the Empire.'<sup>23</sup> John's hearers lived in a world saturated with religious symbols, the worship of the divinized Emperor and the cults of the Olympian gods. Citizenship imposed worship of the imperial and local gods. Many of John's hearers were prosperous, enmeshed both in the religion of their new faith and in the Roman cults. John unmasks the cult of the Emperor and the adoration of wealth

as idolatrous and false. The heavenly liturgy of Chapter 4 is the feast of our freedom from these false gods.

The Book of Revelation and its liturgy offer a countercultural imagination. It breaks the hold of the Beast and the Harlot on the minds of its hearers. They may seem almighty but their empire is tottering. Soon it will be gone. The author describes the imminent collapse of trade, listing the very products on which Rome built its power:

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves – and human lives.

(Rev. 18.11–13)

The author's imagination lifted the veil and showed us where real power lay. What about us? Most heads of state and politicians today do not claim divinity. We can work in a bank or trade goods without offering sacrifices to the gods of the city. In the West, at least, we live in a secular world with freedom of religion. Do our liturgies challenge anyone or anything? Is our liturgical imagination subversive? A bishop said that when St Paul preached there were riots but that when he preaches, he is offered a cup of tea.

In previous chapters we have seen how many aspects of our contemporary imagination can enslave us. The seduction of violence, the cult of celebrity, the fear of the stranger, the Kingdom of Mammon. Let us look at just two: a scientism that quenches any sense of God's providence, and the divinization of the market. Both are aspects of the technocratic paradigm critiqued by Pope Francis.

Our ancestors believed that the stars of the zodiac had powerful influences on our lives, but in Christ all fatalism was overcome. We are freed from the dominion of the stars. This explains the extraordinary fascination with the magi in the Middle Ages. These wise men, astrologers, according to legend buried in Cologne's great cathedral, followed the star which led them to the child who was the true King of the Universe. A star liberated them from the stars. Abraham had escaped from Ur, the land of astrologers. Moses had challenged the magicians of the court of Pharaoh and led his people to worship the God of freedom. Magic and witchcraft had no hold on God's people.

But what of our contemporaries, who rarely believe in astrology? Our universe is not under the governance of celestial powers. Since the seventeenth century it has become just a cosmic clock, which goes on revolving according to the immutable laws of nature. The stern rule of the stars was replaced by the immutable rule of Newton's laws. No space is left for God's providential guiding of humanity towards beatitude. Miracles contradict the known order, revealed by the new religion of science, and so are impossible. Reality is disclosed by science. All else is emotion.

Aidan Nichols OP writes that the Scottish philosopher David Hume

points out how it is part and parcel of being reasonable, being rational, to accept that the world is orderly and predictable: that the sun will rise each morning and my toothbrush will not have changed overnight into a tortoise. So, Hume concludes, it's always more reasonable to suppose that something has gone wrong with the evidence than to accept that a miracle actually happened – unless, that is, we have absolutely overwhelming evidence in the miracle's favour which in practice we never *do* have. The question to put to Hume, and to all who reject miracles, is this: what kind of

order, in the last analysis, is the order of the world? Only by answering that question can we find our way to the kind of rationality appropriate to understanding an 'orderly' world.<sup>24</sup>

The answer of Christianity, embodied in our liturgy, is that, for all of our acceptance of the laws of nature, and our gratitude for their predictability, there is a more fundamental ordering of creation, Wisdom's 'strongly and sweetly' ordering of all things to our final flourishing. Pope Benedict in *Spe salvi*:

It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love – a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free.<sup>25</sup>

There is another liberation we celebrate: from the rule of the market. Harvey Cox, in *The Market as God*,<sup>26</sup> argues that the Harlot of Babylon still demands our worship. His eyes were opened when a friend advised him to skip the front pages of the *New York Times* and go directly to the business section. This reveals what is happening in 'the real world'. It is the market, with its values and assumptions, that determines what counts as 'reality'.

Behind descriptions of acquisitions and mergers, monetary policy and the convolutions of the Dow and the NASDAQ, I gradually made out the pieces of a grand narrative about the inner meaning of human history, why things go wrong and how to put them right. Theologians call these myths of origin 'legends of the fall' and 'doctrines of sin and redemption'.

Here they were again, and in only thin disguise: chronicles about the creation of wealth, the seductive temptations of over-regulation, captivity to faceless business cycles and, ultimately, salvation through the advent of free markets, with a small dose of ascetic belt-tightening along the way for those economies that fall into the sin of arrears ... Faith in the workings of markets actually takes the form of a functioning religion, complete with its own priests and rituals, its own doctrines and theologies, its own saints and prophets, and its own zeal to bring its gospel to the whole world and win converts everywhere.<sup>27</sup>

It has its seers and prophets, its sacred scriptures, its feast days, such as Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving when retailers crossed from being 'in the red' to being 'in the black'. It is, he writes, an ersatz religion:

I want to demonstrate that the way the world economy operates today is not simply 'natural' or 'just the way things work,' but is shaped by a powerful and global system of values and symbols that can best be understood as an ersatz religion. Both words are important. It is a religion because ... it exhibits all the characteristics of a classical faith. But it is ersatz because the market, like the graven idols of old, was constructed by human hands.<sup>28</sup>

Its values are everywhere. It says, 'Buy this and be happy.'

Cox is not against markets, just against the utter dominance of this way of seeing the world, just as Pope Francis is not against technology but against the supremacy of the technocratic paradigm: 'The Market must be deprived of its sacred aura so we can think about it clearly. We do not need to take off our shoes or our hats when we enter its sanctuary.'<sup>29</sup> One might argue that Cox has overstated his case. Markets are highly regulated.

Unquestioning worship is not demanded. Nevertheless, he is surely right that we have, in Wittgenstein's words, been held captive by a picture. It has come to seem natural to think of human beings as motivated by greed and animated by competition. In his novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* Tom Wolfe describes the small band of people, 'some three hundred, four hundred, five hundred', who were 'the Masters of the Universe', the young men who ran the bond market in New York in the 1980s. Sherman, a bond trader, gazes at Manhattan in astonishment: 'There it was, the Rome, the Paris, the London of the twentieth century, the city of ambition, the dense magnetic rock, the irresistible destination of all those who insist on being *where things are happening* – and he was among the victors!'<sup>30</sup>

As in the time of the Book of Revelation, our liturgy says No! There is one Master of the Universe, and it is to him that we owe worship. We bend the knee to honour his glory, and he raises us up to share his freedom. In his rituals we are all equal disciples, followers of the Lamb and not consumers. Here we are promised a happiness that cannot be bought but which is freely given. This is truly where 'things are happening', the gift of Christ's body, freedom from bondage and not by the sale of bonds. Catherine Pickstock claims that it is our liturgies that are most likely to open up a new way of seeing the world: 'Traditional communities governed by liturgical patterns of some sort are likely to be the only sources of resistance to capitalist and bureaucratic norms today.'<sup>31</sup>

The most powerful liturgies may be in the lowest key, barely visible, since they oppose forces that seek to annihilate them. When the Cardinal Archbishop of Prague, Dominik Duka OP, was Provincial of the Dominicans in Czechoslovakia in the time of Soviet Communism, he shared a prison cell with Václav Havel, the playwright and future President of the Republic. The celebration of the Eucharist was strictly forbidden, and so the two prisoners would apparently play chess, but the queen's

crown contained a tiny amount of wine and the king's crown a fragment of bread, so that unbeknown to their guards they shared in the liturgy of heaven. Quietly whispering 'Holy, Holy, Holy', they participated in the worship of the angels.

Father Walter Cisek SJ, an American Jesuit, entered the Soviet Union incognito to serve whatever Catholics he could find. He was captured and spent twenty-three years in Soviet prisons and labour camps, celebrating the Eucharist whenever possible, and hearing confessions. Sometimes he could gather a few people in a corner of the barracks for the simplest of ceremonies: 'I had a little chalice and patten which one of the prisoners made for me out of nickel; the wine again was raisin wine, and the bread was baked especially by some Latvian Catholics who worked in the camp kitchen.'<sup>32</sup> Sometimes he was so carefully watched that he would celebrate the Eucharist stretched out in his bunker as if asleep, whispering the words of consecration. Still the sacrifice of the Lamb was offered, as it was secretly by Catholic priests in Elizabethan England who would have been hanged, drawn and quartered if caught celebrating the Mass. The very humility of the ceremony was a protest against the pretensions of the rulers of the land. We worship the One who sits on the throne.

Turning to the east, whether literally or liturgically, in our worship of the Lamb, we acknowledge the one who is to come and who orders our lives to freedom. We kneel down with him, and are lifted up by him. 'To him belong all time and all the ages', as we confess at the Easter Vigil. We are imprisoned neither by the un pitying rule of the stars nor by the unbending laws of nature. We are not slaves to the rule of the market or of any tyrannical ideology. It is not the powers of this world who rule us but the Lamb who ascends to the throne in the celestial liturgy, the humble and powerful one who is our liberation. His time is the time of gifts, and he 'mightily and sweetly' brings our lives to fulfilment.

## PRAISE HIM

The celestial liturgy in Revelation climaxes in praise. The twenty-four elders hurl down their crowns and cry: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.' Liturgy is ordered to praise. Indeed the whole of creation finds here its goal and fruition, the praise of the Creator. But isn't there something rather nasty about a God who demands not only that we worship him but also that we tell him how wonderful he is? I am reminded of the masters at school who thrashed me with a cane when I was bad and then, insult on top of injury, demanded that I shake hands with them.

This is the puzzle that C. S. Lewis addressed in his *Reflections on the Psalms*: 'We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand.'<sup>33</sup> He goes on: 'Gratitude to God, reverence to Him, obedience to Him, I thought I could understand; not this perpetual eulogy.'<sup>34</sup>

Lewis came to see that we must praise God not because he is vain and longs to be told how fantastic he is, but because what we say in praise is true and the truth must out. Our joy in a truth needs to be voiced.

It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with.<sup>35</sup>

The twenty-four elders belt out their song of praise for the pure delight in its truth. Our praise of God in the liturgy is just the foretaste of that joy, even though I must still confess it is not a joy that I always feel at the prospect of a very long service.

In dark times such as our own it is hard to praise, but all the more important that we do so. As Etty Hillesum left Westerbork camp for Auschwitz, she managed to toss out a postcard for a friend. It said, 'We left the camp singing.'<sup>36</sup> The Coptic Christians sang the praises of Jesus when they were lined up to be murdered on the beaches of Egypt. Mystics, poets, painters, musicians help unblock the flow of praise when it is hard and the world is grim. Rilke believes it is the vocation of the poet, indeed of all artists.

Tell us poet, what is your task?

I praise.

But the murderous things, the monstrous things,  
how can you endure them, how can you bear them?

I praise.

But the mysteries which are anonymous and nameless,  
how, poet, can you still invoke them?

I praise.

By what right can you presume, in all your disguises?  
and in every kind of mask, to remain true?

I praise.

And how is that both stillness and turbulence  
know you like star and storm?

I praise.<sup>37</sup>

## The Life of Prayer: The Poetry of Hope

A Christian imagination, in all its various forms, challenges the dull technocratic imagination. In the words of William Blake: 'Where others see but the dawn coming over the hill, I see the soul of God shouting for joy.'<sup>1</sup> We see a world of gifts, not just objects to be consumed. Our lives in liturgy are ordered to our ultimate joy and freedom and not exclusively by utilitarian calculation.

I have argued that what subverts such a religious imagination is not so much secularism as fundamentalism, Lynch's 'univocal mentality'. Small-minded reductive ways of seeing reality blind us to hints of the transcendent and suppress the impulse to worship the One who sets us free. Anyone who is nagged by ultimate questions – why is there anything rather than nothing? In what lies human happiness? What does it mean to love? – may be our allies even if they adhere to other faiths or none. Anyone who is faithful to the complexity of human experience, its heights and depths, sorrow and ecstasy, can help Christians to understand better what it means to choose life. And if we attend to those who are wise in such matters, they may attend to us.

How can we keep a Christian imagination fresh when we are assailed all day by banality? How can we keep an ear attuned to the beauty of God's summons to share his life when we are

battered by an unremitting barrage of emails, blogs, adverts, inviting us to see the world in purely utilitarian ways, stuff to be consumed, small desires to be satisfied? An hour in church every Sunday will not suffice. The average American watches television for more than five hours a day. The 'globalization of superficiality' is like an asbestos blanket, snuffing out the fire of a vivid imagination.

We are like people who know that the earth is a globe but live with people who assume that it is flat and that if you go too far you will fall off the edge. It is hard to keep alive another perception of reality and of human destiny. I visited an American Dominican priory in the middle of a famous Ivy League university. I was shocked at the expensive carpets scattered over the floors. When I challenged the brethren, they replied that this is what all the members of their congregation had. They were just fitting in, which was exactly what they ought not to have done! In the noise and bustle of London's night-time, nightingales learned that they must sing more loudly if they are to be heard.<sup>2</sup> So we Christians must sing our countercultural song more boldly.

The traditional way in which Christians have resisted the gravitational pull of the banal has been to set aside moments each day to recite or sing poetry. For two millennia the Church has kept alive its countercultural imagination by songs and poems, above all those wild, sometimes belligerent and often beautiful poems, the Psalms. They shock us out of any trite and utilitarian way of seeing our lives. Members of religious orders gather several times a day to sing songs that jolt us out of the 'common sense' of our society. Millions of lay people pray the breviary with us or alone.

The singing of the Psalms was most vital for our forebears when our faith was most countercultural. The regular singing of Psalms probably began during the exile of the Israelites in Babylon in the sixth century BC. The Temple in Jerusalem was

destroyed, and so no sacrifices could be offered. The God of Israel appeared to have failed them. The pressure to conform to the faith of their conquerors was almost irresistible. The only way to keep alive their hope was to sing the Psalms and to compose new ones. They were sustained by their poetry. But they faced a dilemma, for their conquerors mocked them, insisting that they sing those foolish songs about their failed God and his silly little hill Zion. Psalm 137 articulates the clash of imperatives which tore them apart. How could they sing for their scornful captors? But sing they must, if they were to endure the desolation of exile.

By the rivers of Babylon –  
 there we sat down and there we wept  
 when we remembered Zion.  
 On the willows there we hung up our harps.  
 For there our captors asked us for songs,  
 and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
 ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’  
 How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?  
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!  
 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not  
 remember you,  
 if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

The singing of Israel’s poetry also sustained the early Christians through the long years of imperial persecution. When Constantine granted tolerance of Christianity by the Edict of Milan in AD 313, the radicalism of the Christian vocation began to fade. Our faith became normal, even fashionable, blunting its challenge, and so men and women retired to the deserts of Egypt and Syria to live a starkly ascetic discipleship, singing the Psalms, often reciting the whole psalter every day. This sustained their countercultural Christian imagination.

It was here in the desert, and with the laity gathered in the cathedrals, that our breviary began to take shape.

When the Roman Empire collapsed and Europe entered a dark age of chaos and barbarity, the Christian imagination was kept alive in the monasteries that followed the Rule of St Benedict, which formalized something very like our modern breviary. Throughout the confusion of the fifth and sixth centuries, these ancient Biblical poems kept the flame of another imagination burning until a new Christian Europe could come to birth.

The Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre drew parallels between the barbarity of that Dark Age and our own confused times. We too need a modern St Benedict, he argued: ‘This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St Benedict.’<sup>3</sup> In every period in which our faith has gone against the grain – and it always does to some extent – we have responded with poetry, the old poetry of the Psalms, and new poetry too. I had to explain to some visitors to Blackfriars that the ‘Divine Office’ is not where the Pope conducts his business but the daily liberation of our imagination from banality.

The blessing of the times of the day.  
 In the deserts of the heart  
 Let the healing fountain start,  
 In the prison of his days  
 Teach the free man how to praise.<sup>4</sup>

Some people find other poetry better to teach us how to praise, and yet the daily recitation of the Psalms still animates the imagination of millions of Christians, and so asking why is a good way to conclude this book.

## WHY THE PSALMS?

Why do we continue to sing these Psalms, more than two and half thousand years after the Babylonian exile? They are filled with raw passion and are not at all politically correct. I am sometimes amused to look at my brethren declaring that 'Moab I will use for my washbowl; on Edom I will plant my shoe' (Ps. 60.8). We sit in choir as contentedly as cats bellowing out 'I crushed [my enemies] fine as dust before the wind; trod them down like dirt in the street' (Ps. 18.42).

Briefly, since this question merits a whole book, they are filled with fierce passions that we might not feel or which we repress. But the purpose of the Psalms is not to express what I feel but to stretch open the range of my feelings. I do not spontaneously cry out 'How long, O Lord, how long?' (Ps. 13.1), but my Dominican sisters and brothers in Iraq do. The young in Iraq have never known peace since the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war in 1980. They have endured war, sanctions, invasions, Da'esh, suicide bombs until this day. With them I must cry out 'How long, O Lord?' If I do not, because my own little life is safe and secure, then I have forgotten who I am, their brother. Many of the Psalms cry out for vengeance. This desire may be ugly, but it lurks in the hearts of millions who have been driven out of their countries by war and violence and lost their beloved. It is a sentiment condemned by Jesus, but how can we transcend it until we have acknowledged it?

Although many Psalms are filled with anger and despair, they always, with one exception, end on a note of hope and praise. They do anger really well. When we suffer, we may well be fuming with God. How dare God let this happen to me? And the Church does not say, like our former Prime Minister David Cameron to a woman MP, 'Calm down, dear.' It says, 'Let your anger rip. And we have the very best words to help you to do so.' When we feel deserted, alone and let down, we are given the words that Christ cried out on the cross,

‘Why have you forsaken me?’ (Ps. 22.1). The words of the Psalm express that rage and embrace it, so that it no longer isolates us since the words are shared by Christians and Jews all over the world and across all time. We are not left alone in our fury.

On the day before my father died, the whole family, my mother and his six children, gathered around his bed. I had just flown back from Jerusalem, and so the only book of prayers to hand was my breviary. So we passed around the book, taking turns to recite the Psalms. The Church gave us the words needed to express our confused emotions, overcoming our self-conscious timidity on such a solemn moment. We were given poetry composed thousands of years ago in the Middle East to voice what we felt and did not know how to say. We were in communion with all our brothers and sisters around the globe and through the centuries who have wept or raged as they lamented the loss of their beloved. But these songs do not leave us stuck there. The singer is carried by the movement of the song and swept out of the suffering and into joy, like a wave that carries the surfer onto the safety of the beach. No explanation is given. It just happens. This is the structure of each Psalm and of the whole Psalter, which ends with exuberant Psalms of praise. ‘Let everything that breathes, praise the LORD!’ (Ps. 150.6). If you can speak your sorrow or distress, perhaps you are ready to be carried beyond it. Every Psalm has a sort of hopeful dynamism, to which you can surrender.

The Baptist theologian and pastor Ian Stackhouse gives the moving example of the film *The Elephant Man*, set in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> A man who is hideously disfigured, a circus freak, is taken into care by Frederick Treves, a medical doctor. The ‘Elephant Man’, John Merrick, never says a word. Some people think that he is not really human. Treves is convinced that, despite his total lack of reaction, here is a human being like himself. Just when he is on the verge of giving up any attempt to

communicate, the man speaks, in perfect English, quoting the King James Bible version of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
 He leadeth beside the still waters.  
 He restoreth my soul:  
 He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
 I will fear no evil.

Even though he has seemed trapped in silence, all the while he had been nourished by living words composed thousands of years before. He knew the words 'by heart', and they had formed a heart to hope.

The singing of the Psalms interrupts the flow of the day. Dorothy Day confessed in her diary: 'Miss Jordan told me I look at people as though they were going to steal 5 minutes of my time! It makes me unhappy to give such an impression.'<sup>6</sup> I am sure that I give a similar impression when the bell summons me to pray four times in the day to the singing of the divine office. It usually happens when my writing is in full flood. It seems such a waste to slam on the brakes when at last inspiration has arrived. Or it is just the time when I need a nap or feel like a walk. But the point of these moments of poetry is precisely to interrupt our lives and remind us of the ultimate goal of all human existence, the praise of God. That is the end in terms of which all other purposes are judged. Four times a day in my community we stop whatever important things we are doing – preparing lectures, having a nap – to remind us what it is all for.

Actually, that is not strictly accurate. As members of the Order of Preachers, sometimes we must give the mission priority and miss communal prayers. St Thomas Aquinas admits that once he had to miss the Maundy Thursday services

to answer an urgent letter from the Master of the Order,<sup>7</sup> a swift response that I did not always receive during my time in that office! If one is responding to someone in need or has to catch a train to go and preach, certainly one should be absent from choir, or even sometimes if one is exhausted. But that does not nullify the fundamental point, that the shared pattern of our day is broken by times when the community gathers together to praise God, the ultimate fruition of our lives. The evocation of that final goal needs the lift of poetry to free us from the superficiality of everyday life.

It does not matter if one's mind sometimes is empty or even if one nods off. It is a prejudice of our post-Cartesian Western culture that something really important happens only if it occurs in your head: *Cogito ergo sum*. We often show what matters simply by what we do. We send birthday cards to our mothers, shop for the sick, cook a meal for our friends and so on. It does not matter what we are thinking about at the time. These actions make manifest where our lives are heading. We show this by going to choir even when we may feel that it is a waste of time, even if we drift off. An Egyptian monk said, 'If I see my brother going to sleep, I shall take his head and lay it gently on my lap.'<sup>8</sup> Not that I have ever had to do that so far. When St Thérèse of Lisieux was criticized for falling asleep in choir, she replied that a mother loves her child even when it sleeps.

#### SONGS OF HOPE

Ian Stackhouse discovered the beauty of the liturgy of the hours when he wandered into the church of St Gervais in Paris, where hundreds of people come to join in the daily singing of morning and evening prayer. He subsequently wrote the best book on the praying of the breviary that I know, one that has been of immense help in preparation of this chapter.<sup>9</sup> He makes the startling claim: 'It seems to me that the battle for civilisation will pivot on the outrageously simple challenge of living a day

well.<sup>10</sup> A day is not just twenty-four hours of chronological time, ticking relentlessly onwards. It is shaped by the rising of the sun and its setting, the sun towards which we are turned in worship, evoking the Christ who comes to shed light in our lives and whose final coming we await. Each time of the day has its significance: dawn, midday, evening and night. Each speaks to us of how we live the journey of a human life onwards, responding to the Lord's summons.

Pope Francis made an intriguing if slightly enigmatic remark about the priority of time over space in the Christian imagination:

Let us refuse to be robbed of hope, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress, 'fragmenting' time and changing it into space. Time is always much greater than space. Space hardens processes, whereas time propels towards the future and encourages us to go forward in hope.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian structure of time, the liturgical year and the daily liturgy of the hours keep the instinct of pilgrimage alive in us. Christian time is hopeful.

It is a mantra of the present time that we must live in the present time. This moment is the only one that exists. Live now! 'The present is God's present', and so on. But what is this present moment? St Augustine argues in his *Confessions* that the moment we begin to think about it, it evades our comprehension.

There is only a present as defined by its relationship to the past and the future: Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the

time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.<sup>12</sup>

We can only live the present moment with hope if our relationship to the past and future is healed, so that we remember well, live in expectation and so are at peace now. Henri Lacordaire, a nineteenth-century French Dominican, is often quoted as saying: 'Between the past, where our memories are, and the future, where our hopes are, there is the present.'

Stackhouse claims that the structure of the liturgy of the hours helps us to live a day well, to remember the past at Vespers, to forget and let go at Compline so that we may sleep, to turn to the future at Lauds, and so at midday prayer to live now. Each of these moments of prayer has its own joyful New Testament canticle – Mary's *Magnificat*, Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, Zechariah's *Benedictus* – which gives a special colour to that hour, each expressing its particular hope. The only exception is midday prayer, the prayer of High Noon, when Christians remember the crucifixion, when time seemed to stop and hope is hard to find.

The liturgy of the hours does not just express our hope. We live in hope-shaped time. In Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* we glimpse what this is like:

Codi, here's what I have decided: the very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most that you can do is to live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof ... Right now I am living in that hope, running down its hallway and touching the walls on both sides. I can't tell you how good it feels.<sup>13</sup>

The liturgy of the hours shapes a hope that we can inhabit, touching the walls on both sides. It is not just for the future but our present atmosphere, the live air we breathe.

In Genesis each day begins in the evening: 'And there was evening and there was morning, the first day' (Gen. 1.5). It still does with the vigil of all great feasts in the Catholic Church. When the dawn comes, it is a gift for which we have waited. We shall look at the 'outrageously simple challenge of living a day well', beginning with Vespers or Evensong.

*And it was evening ...*

The Biblical day begins in the evening, but no evening is an absolute beginning. Michel de Certeau SJ wrote that, 'in spite of a persistent fiction, we never write on a blank page, but always one that has already been written on.'<sup>14</sup> When I lived in Rome, I encouraged the members of the General Council to join me for a drink in the evening so that we could share what had happened that day. Sitting on the terrace overlooking Rome, sharing what had gone well or badly, helped us to let go of the day and move on. We need to share the joys of the day, but also the hard times and frustrations, otherwise they will haunt us and we shall not be free to live now and forward.

The canticle of Vespers, the *Magnificat*, is the song of a pregnant young girl at the beginning of a dramatic life that will be filled with suffering and joy, the premature and humiliating death of her son and the astonishing new life of the Resurrection. But this young woman prepares for this unimaginable life by remembering the great deeds that the Lord has done for her and for Israel. She remembers the promises of the Lord. It is only with that memory that she can live this strange moment that is the present, her mysterious pregnancy, and face the unknown future.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

(Lk. 1.46-55)

We too dare to grasp this present moment and its future unfolding if we remember that we do not have to launch ourselves from Ground Zero. We remember the great things the Lord has done for us and our predecessors in Jesus Christ. We are caught in the tide of God's love affair with humanity, which began long ago and sweeps us forward.

Mary exults in the Lord in a new song, but even this song is no absolute beginning but echoes the songs of her ancestors, especially of Hannah rejoicing in her pregnancy (1 Sam. 2). Only God speaks a word that is absolutely new. Our words are the inheritance of the past, Israel's songs, and pregnant with the future. When the French philosopher Michel Foucault gave his opening lecture at the Collège de France, a solemn occasion, he was aware of the burden of breaking the silence and initiating his teaching:

Rather than open with a word, I would have wished to be enveloped by it, and be carried beyond every possible beginning. I would have liked to discover, at the moment of speaking, a voice without name preceding me since a long time: it would have been enough for me to tag along, to follow the phrase, to nestle myself, without care, in its interstices, as if she had beckoned to me in holding herself, for an instant, in suspense.<sup>15</sup>

Christians dare to speak because we remember that our words 'tag along,' 'follow a phrase' in God's long conversation with humanity.

Not all memories are good. Some need to be faced with courage. The great prayer that embraces our most painful memories is the Eucharist, which was originally an evening prayer before it became the Christian morning sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> Jesus celebrated the Last Supper on the evening before he died, and it was in the evening in Emmaus, when the day was nearly over (Lk. 24.29), that Jesus broke bread for the disciples who had fled Jerusalem. The chaotic and drunken celebrations of the Lord's Supper in Corinth, which Paul criticizes so harshly (1 Cor. 11), probably occurred in the evening.

In the Eucharist we remember not only Jesus' gift of his body and blood but also the failure of the disciples and above all Peter's denial of his Lord. The earliest record of this painful memory is in Mark's gospel, written more than thirty years after the resurrection. If Paul had known of it, he surely would have hammered Peter for his failure. It took all those years for the Church to dare to remember all that happened on that night. If the tradition is correct, that Mark's gospel recounts Peter's memories, Peter himself dared to break the silence and tell of his shame. This was probably necessary at this time, because many Christians had failed at the time of Nero's persecution of the Church in AD 64.<sup>17</sup> Some had given up the faith and others betrayed their own brothers and sisters. Peter's shared memory of his own past shame helped them to face their own with hope and so to move on.

I gave a retreat in the old Seminary of the diocese of Cologne. The chapel is dedicated to St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (the Jewish philosopher Edith Stein after she became a Christian and a Carmelite nun). It is disconcerting to discover that it is designed to evoke the gas chamber in which she died in Auschwitz in 1942. It was built some thirty-five years after

the end of the war. It took all that time to dare to remember the terrible things that had happened, the same time that the disciples needed before they could remember what they had done to the Lord. It took that time for the Germans to remember fully the crimes of the Nazis and for the French to face the collaboration of so many with this brutal regime. I wonder if we British have yet dared to remember how we carpet-bombed Germany cities, creating firestorms that incinerated hundreds of thousands of innocent people. An Irish brother once said to me: 'The trouble is that you English never remember and we Irish never forget!' If this is true – and who I am to deny it? – then the English should go to Vespers more often and the Irish to Compline, as we shall see!

So in the evening at Vespers and in the Eucharist, at whatever hour it is celebrated, we dare to remember who we are and what we have done so that we can leave the past behind, and live now and onwards. We also recall the stories that haunt us, the stories that we possess but which possess us too. I think of an ancient brother I met in the Caribbean who could never let go of his indignation at not being given the chance of doctoral studies. Let go!

We can remember and be free because these are not just our private stories to be borne alone, but small stories within the great all-embracing story of the great things that the Lord has done for us. Peter could dare to remember his failure because it was not a private tale of shame but an incident in the good news of the gospel. All those memories, the ones we dare not face and the ones that hold us captive, can be laid on the altar at the offertory and left there, so that at the end of the Eucharist we step out freely.

*It was night ...*

At Vespers we let go by remembering. At Compline, at the end of the day, we enact a more radical letting go by forgetting. Its canticle is the song of old Simeon. He has held on and kept

watch, waiting for the Lord to come to the Temple. Now in old age, he can let go of his life:

At last. All-powerful Master,  
 You give leave to your servant,  
 To go in peace, according to your promise.

(Lk. 2.29)

We must let go of the day if we are to sleep. We must surrender control, and hand over everything to God. Pope John XXIII joked that he said to God each night: 'The Pope must go to sleep now, and so you, God, must look after the Church for a few hours.' Stackhouse writes: 'Night-time commits the ultimate heresy for moderns: getting us to stop. To sleep well one has to relinquish, to let go. And since letting go is not something we are good at, many of us don't sleep well.'<sup>18</sup>

We must let go of the worries of the day. When one wakes at 3 a.m., as I do often, fretting over what lies ahead, the lectures for which one has no ideas, this book, the expectations of people whom one fears to disappoint, one must turn it all over to God and accept his gift of sleep. Jesus slept in the boat as the storm raged, while the disciples panicked.

One must let go of the day's irritations and anger. St Paul says, 'Do not let the sun go down on your anger' (Eph. 4.26). In his book on the common life Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns: 'It is a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that every dissension that the day has brought must be healed in the evening. It is perilous for the Christian to lie down to sleep with an unreconciled heart.'<sup>19</sup>

Every night dropping off to sleep is an image of that ultimate letting go which is death. Some monks and nuns in the past slept in their coffins. We remember that one day we shall have to entrust ourselves to the one whom St Francis of Assisi called Sister Death. Many people need permission to let go, as did Simeon when he

saw the Christ Child. Flying home from Lourdes, I was just in time to be with my mother when she was nearing death. She was a dutiful person. She was ready for death, and joked about why God was taking so long, but when the time came she needed to hear someone say, 'It's alright, you may go now,' which I was there to do. This is our ultimate obedience. Someone, I hope, will one day say to me in turn: 'Timothy, you can let go now.'

We only really live now if we face our mortality. As long as death remains just a theoretical possibility, we have not understood the utter gift of being alive now and so prepared ourselves for the gift of eternal life. I first went to Baghdad in the time of Saddam Hussein, in 1998. There was a no-fly zone over the whole country, and so I had to fly to Jordan and be driven for seventeen hours across the desert. As always before sleep, I tuned into the BBC World Service, and learned that there might be a bombing raid by the Americans and British on Baghdad that night. It was irritating to think that I might be killed by a British bomb. The next morning I asked our brother Yousif Mirkis OP, now the Archbishop of Kirkuk, if he had been worried. He replied that the brethren had lived with death for so long that it no longer concerned them. What mattered was whether they would share in the resurrection!

'The Lord pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber' (Ps. 127.2). While we sleep, the new germinates in our hearts and minds. So often I have gone to sleep trying to resolve a conundrum and woken with the answer. Jesus said:

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.

(Mk 4. 26-9)

In letting go of control, we receive the secret fertility of God's word at work in us, so that in the morning we can be open to the future.

In spite of all the farmer's work and worry,  
He can't reach down to where the seed is slowly  
'Transmuted into summer'. The earth bestows.<sup>20</sup>

*And it was morning ...*

In Vespers and Compline we have faced 'the present of the past', daring to remember so as to be able then to forget. In the morning we live Augustine's 'the present of the future.'

Now, after a long night  
Of stillness and longing,  
on my brow, in the  
tiny furrow of my palm,  
thin lines of dew  
are forming. And what I  
had despaired of for so long  
is here. The sun,  
true to its vow, with  
prophecies of light and air  
wakes the horizon.  
I have come through  
after all. I have a new  
dawn on my shoulders. (Paul Murray OP<sup>21</sup>)

We are oriented towards the future. The building of the church is an embodiment of hope. We sing Lauds, which means 'praises', not just because it is good to praise God but because this is our final destiny and the fulfilment of our humanity. The canticle of the morning, the *Benedictus*, is addressed to a child,

John, by his father, old Zechariah, for it is to the young that the future belongs.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
 to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
 by the forgiveness of their sins.  
 By the tender mercy of our God,  
 the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow  
 of death,  
 to guide our feet into the way of peace.

(Lk. 1.76–9)

Dom Mark Barrett refers to the Zen master's concept of 'the beginner's mind':

The beginner is looking out for the signs along the way. He does not think he already knows, and remains willing and able to be surprised. There is something of what Jung might have called 'the *puer eternus*' in the person whose life has been marinated in the spirit of God, the 'eternal child' who is constantly capable of beginning again.<sup>22</sup>

The father of the prodigal son is such an 'eternal child', who welcomes his child back home. Together they will begin again, whereas the elder son remains trapped in the past. Teresa of Ávila wrote at the end of her long and busy life: 'It is we who have begun the work; it is up to those who follow to keep on beginning.'<sup>23</sup> Every new generation begins again, not from nothing but in our progress towards everything.

Brian Pierce OP tells of how one day, when he was living in a poor part of Lima, he awoke feeling low and went for a walk

through the grimy slums. He came across a couple of children joyfully playing jacks near the corpse of a dog. In this game one throws a ball in the air, and gathers as many of the metal jacks as one can before one catches the ball on the way down. Then he realized that there was no ball. They were improvising the game out of nothing, in the joy of a new morning, God's own children playfully creating *ex nihilo*.

Jesus rose very early to pray (Mk 1.35). It was early on Easter morning that he encountered Mary Magdalene in the garden, the new Adam at the beginning of a new creation. Early in the morning we rise to hear God's call to renewed discipleship. When Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, was a young bishop, speeding up the ecclesiastical ladder, he was an efficient administrator who got things done. One day he had dinner with three young priests and the conversation turned to the life of prayer. The young bishop confessed that he did not have much of one and asked their advice as to what he should do. They asked him, 'Are you sincere in what you request? Do you really want to turn this around?'<sup>24</sup> The reaction of those young priests convinced him that he ought to. From that day he got up earlier to devote the first hour of the day to the Lord. It was what transformed him from a Church bureaucrat into the holy person for whose funeral tens of thousands of people lined the streets of the city.

We rise early to hear the Lord's summons to open ourselves to the unexpected. But human beings often resist the new. We become settled in our habitual patterns and our accustomed weaknesses. Lauds opens with the 'invitatory Psalm' which summons us to listen: 'Oh that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts as at Meribah' (Ps. 95.7). But, like the Israelites in the wilderness, often we do not want to listen. We do not even want to get up. Dom Mark speaks eloquently of 'the landscape of reluctance'.<sup>25</sup> The muezzin calls the Muslim faithful to pray promising that prayer is sweeter than sleep.

Often it does not feel like that. When I was a young friar and a smoker, the hard choice was whether to grab another minute in bed or to get up and have a first cigarette before Lauds.

We do not all have the same pattern of life. Some are larks and others owls. Early morning Lauds is not for everyone, but the wisdom of the tradition is that for most of us it is then that we are more attuned to the fresh call of God. This is not possible if one is preparing breakfast for small children, getting them to school on time or commuting at an unearthly hour to work. Janet Martin Soskice, a Cambridge theologian and a mother, maintains that much spirituality is composed by monks who do not have these challenges: 'What we want is a monk who finds God while cooking a meal with one child clamouring for a drink, another who needs a bottom wiped, and a baby thrown over his shoulder.'<sup>26</sup> Soskice believes that coping with family life has its own contemplative dimension, as the parent learns attentiveness for the calls of the child. I believe that, whatever our life, somehow, even if only for five minutes, we need to consecrate the beginning of the new day.

A vocation is not just a one-off event. Often there is what John Hemmer, a Mill Hill missionary, calls 'the call within the call.'<sup>27</sup> St Paul is called to faith in his childhood. At Damascus he receives a more radical call away from violence, to follow the Lord whom he has persecuted. Isaiah's vocation as a priest is radicalized in his summons to be a prophet. Mother Teresa of Calcutta responded to God's call by joining the Sisters of Loretto, but this call was deepened when she founded the Missionaries of Charity and added a fourth vow, to serve the poorest of the poor. The monks in *Of Gods and Men* had all accepted their vocation to monastic life. As I wrote in an earlier chapter, the time comes when they realize that it demands an even more radical generosity than they had at first reckoned. Brother Christophe shouts, 'I did not become a monk in order to die.' The Prior replies, 'But you have already given your life away.'

Sometimes it may seem as though people do receive a second vocation. One of my brethren was happily married, and the father of four children. His wife died when he was in his early sixties, and he responded to the call to become a Dominican friar and a priest. Was this really a new vocation or a new stage in a single response to the Lord of life? Nurturing a vocation means keeping an ear open every morning for the fresh call, the next step and the deeper love.

*And it was day ...*

We let go of the past first by daring to remember at Vespers and in the Eucharist, and then by forgetting as we sink into the oblivion of sleep. In the early morning we have opened ourselves to the future. At midday, with the sun high in the sky, we learn to live now, the indefinable juncture of past and future.

Jesus was a man who lived now. He had intended to walk through a village, but he sees little Zacchaeus up the tree and he says, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for I must stay in your house today' (Lk. 19.5). He grabs the moment. 'Today, salvation has come to this house, for he is also a son of Abraham.' 'This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.' And above all in the beatitudes, 'Do not be anxious saying about tomorrow, "What shall we eat?" Or "What shall we drink?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all' (Mt. 7.31). Though the *Peanuts* cartoon reassures us: 'Don't worry about tomorrow. It's already today in Australia.'

St John Fisher was woken up in the Tower of London on the day he was to be beheaded. When he discovered that his execution had been delayed for a couple of hours, he asked if he could be allowed to go back to sleep for a while. That is living in the present moment!

But, as the desert fathers knew, living in the present moment is the hardest discipline. When I sit in meditation, much of the

time I am thinking about breakfast. When breakfast comes, I hardly enjoy it since already I am wondering what I shall say to the people who will come to see me that morning or about the lectures that I am preparing. But when they do turn up, I only half-listen; my mind is already turned to lunch.

Traditionally the Master of the Dominican Order meets every friar alone for about half an hour during his nine-year mandate. At the end of a long day of such conversations in Mexico, barely able to keep my eyes open, a brother who had studied at Oxford and was a friend of mine erupted, 'Timothy, that is the third time you have looked at your watch.' I learned my lesson and never did so again, though I placed a clock just behind the seat opposite me! What most impressed me in a long conversation that I had with Pope Francis was that he never looked at his watch. He attended to the only other person in the room.

When the brethren visited Bede Jarrett OP, the Provincial of England, a hundred years ago, he always appeared to be doing nothing but waiting for them. He was a famous preacher and retreat giver, the author of many books, and yet he was never working when the brethren came to his room. He was just there for them. It was only after his death that it was discovered that he wrote in his drawer, which could be closed the moment that someone came in. I have mastered the art of seeming to be immensely busy even when I have just been playing a game of FreeCell, hastily whipped off the screen and replaced by next Sunday's sermon.

For the desert fathers, midday was the time of *accidie*, 'a sour restlessness'.<sup>28</sup> According to the fourth-century desert father Evagrius Ponticus, it 'makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long ... and installs in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life, a hatred for manual labour'.<sup>29</sup> This is what the desert fathers called the noonday demon. Rowan Williams confessed to the temptation to think that, if only one were elsewhere, all

would be well. 'Somewhere else I could be nicer, holier, more balanced, more detached about criticism, more disciplined, able to sing in tune and probably thinner as well.'<sup>30</sup>

This is the typical experience of mid-life, ill at ease with who one has become. Like Dante at the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*, when 'in the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way is lost.' He comes to himself (*mi ritrovai*) as the prodigal son came to himself, and discovers the need to go home.

The desert fathers knew that in this moment of desolation one must come to oneself and abide where one is and as who one is. Abba Moses said: 'Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.' If we rush off somewhere else, we shall be like a bird that abandons its eggs and so prevents them from hatching.<sup>31</sup> This appears to contradict the hope of Lauds, the voice of the Lord summoning us to what is new. But we can only discern what the Lord asks of us if we do not flee from ourselves. If we face the person who we have become, we may hear the Lord summoning us to be the person he calls us to be. Stackhouse confronts us with the challenge:

We fear stopping; we fear the ordinariness that life outside the fast lane will mean; we fear our own company. One of the reasons we need to check our e-mails so often, or text so regularly, or watch television so frequently, is because the prospect of living with ourselves is just too frightening. But the consequences of living in such a fast-paced world are now beginning to become apparent. All over the place, both inside and outside religious communities, people are waking up to the fact that such a way of living is not only unsustainable but destructive.<sup>32</sup>

There is a high noon in the life of everyone who lives long enough, when we must accept that our lives are no longer

open to infinite possibilities. It is no longer realistic for me to have and raise a child or learn Mandarin, to fly a plane or run a marathon or learn the cello. Well, perhaps the cello. 'The American Dream', that one can be whatever one wants, was never true, and at some point in life this becomes obvious. The person that I am is the fruit of innumerable choices for good and for evil. I must face this person with open eyes because this is the person whom the Lord now loves and calls.

For Simon Tugwell purity of heart is this clear self-awareness in which we can rest and be at peace. He says:

It is the end of strain, even if it is not the end of struggle and agony. The strain, the impurity come from the refusal to acknowledge what is in us, the determination to treat ourselves as tame pets, instead of seeing that we are ruffians like the rest ... The way to peace is the acceptance of truth. Any bit of us that we refuse to accept will be our enemy, forcing us into defensive postures. And the discarded pieces of ourselves will rapidly find incarnation in those around us.<sup>33</sup>

If we refuse to acknowledge who we are, and suppress awareness of the unpleasant aspects of ourselves, we shall end up by finding those bits in other people and hating them. If we face the truth of who we are, we shall hear the Lord summoning this person, and not some idealized non-existent self, to come to him. In this 'today' we shall catch glimpses of the eternal day that the Lord has made, and rejoice in it.

## Conclusion

I began by asking how we can touch the imagination of our secular contemporaries with our Christian faith. Since we are all children of this age and shaped by its secular perceptions of reality, Christians too, if we are to live coherent lives, need to reflect on how the light of faith bears on all we do and are. Nothing human is alien to Christ.

I claimed that what subverts faith in God is not atheism or secularism as such, but what Adolfo Nicolás SJ called 'the globalization of superficiality'. Any civilization worthy of the name asks fundamental questions, such as why there is anything rather than nothing, and wherein human happiness lies. A certain flattening of the imagination, perhaps related to the modern media of communication with endless trivialized messages, has given birth to the wingless chickens of Flannery O'Connor and the abstract third leg of the chicken of Shigeto Oshida OP. This is the 'univocal mentality' of which William Lynch wrote so brilliantly. Anyone, of any faith or none, who engages with the complexity of being human, with falling in love, struggling to forgive, finding themselves in a mess, trying to make sense of their lives, is our ally. If we attend to their wisdom, there is a chance that they may be open to the richness of our faith. I have no expertise in literature or the creative arts. I have just used what has come to hand. Each chapter is the sketch of a book that someone else could have written better than I have done.

During this book we have seen that often we need to clear away prejudices about what Christians believe if we are to engage with our contemporaries. No, forgiveness is not forgetting; no, the teachings of the Church are not indoctrination. They liberate the mind and the heart. No, Christianity does not reject the body but cherishes its holiness, and so on. At other times we have tried to escape from the captivity of a picture, letting the fly out of the bottle, in Wittgenstein's image. How do we escape the seduction of violence, or the fascination with money, Mammon's Kingdom and the grip of the technocratic imagination? How do we discover that the stranger is our brother or sister? How do we keep alive a sense that we live in a world of gifts and that not everything is a commodity?

A key metaphor for this challenge has emerged in the course of this book, escaping from confinement into the fresh air. We began with Emma Donoghue's book *Room*, based on the true story of a young woman who was kidnapped and imprisoned in a shed with her child Jack, who grows up thinking that all of reality is just 'Room', until he escapes from imprisonment and discovers the world outside with its fresh air and bright colours. This struck me as a marvellous metaphor of the liberation of our imagination from the restrictions of 'the univocal mentality'. We go from black and white to colour.

All the traditional faiths are deeply poetic, summoning us to 'Unroofed scope. Knowledge-freshening wind',<sup>1</sup> in the words of Seamus Heaney. The perilous journey of the disciples to Jerusalem, not knowing what lies ahead, frees them from the constraints of their lives as Galilean fishermen, and leads them eventually to an empty tomb, the stone rolled away, all confinement transcended. Then they are ready to receive the fresh air of God's breath in Pentecost.

In the Christian imagination the body is not a prison from which we must escape. The body is open to love of the other, and to the incarnation of the one who is love. Much spiritual

formation is learning to peel our eyes, sharpen our hearing, read the complexities of the human face, live at our fingertips. Our openness is rooted in our senses, which turn us outwards in anticipation. A truly human home has open doors, welcoming the stranger. The liturgy opens a door to transcendence, a passage between heaven and earth.

'Openness' is a favourite word of liberal Christians. My repeated use of it may suggest a rather wishy-washy Christianity, anything goes. Not at all. The way to true openness is often through what is ordered and disciplined. Just as poetry is a highly rigorous exercise which blows a hole through the constrictions of a banal imagination, so freedom and release from confinement are attained through the demanding but unconditional friendship of Jesus. For those so inclined, it comes through the rigour of study which opens up the mysteries of God's presence. My hope is that this stress on both openness and order offers a way beyond the polarization between conservative and progressive, liberal and traditionalist, which so wounds the Church.

Finally, I have said just a little about how we can sustain a countercultural imagination. We spend vastly more time attending to the media than listening to the Word of God, or at least I do. Perhaps it is easier to keep alive a vivid religious imagination if one lives close to the annual miracle of nature's fertility. This is true also if one lives in a community that values the arts, poetry and song.

With the help of a Catholic Pope and a Baptist minister I have tried to see how we keep open the window of our imagination in the annual and daily cycles of the liturgy. The liturgical year celebrates how Wisdom 'mightily and sweetly' orders all of creation towards its fulfilment in God. All our different calendars are gathered under the umbrella of this fundamental ordering of our lives towards worship and praise. Liturgical time is structured by expectant waiting, not homogenous, empty time.

The daily liturgy of the hours helps us, as Stackhouse invites us, to live a day well, letting go of the burdens of the past and opening ourselves to the gift of the future and so able, more or less, to live now, in this moment, attending to the people before us and to what is given to us to do today. Few of us have the time to live the liturgy of the hours and its renewal of our hope. But other people have other poetry, other songs, to offer us nourishment as we keep on journeying and wake us from the sleep of banality.

I am deeply aware that the Christian imagination that I have sketched is mine, formed by my experience, my Catholicism, my age and background, my sex, and so is deeply limited. All that any of us can do is light our little beacon and hope that it provokes others to light theirs. In seventeenth-century Peru, responding to the suffering of the indigenous people after an earthquake, the Jesuits gathered together from the gospels the seven last sayings of Jesus on the cross and made a new form of devotion, based on the Ignatian exercises. This was a small new fire transmitting the good news of Easter.

A hundred or so years later, in 1785, Haydn was asked to compose music for these seven last words, for Good Friday in Cádiz Cathedral. His musical genius lit another beacon. I have mentioned that when I visited my father as he was dying in 1993, he asked if I could bring his music player to his hospital bed. Facing death he wished to listen to Haydn's 'Seven Last Words' and Mozart's Requiem. When I was asked to preach on the Seven Last Words in Seattle Cathedral, my father's final request helped me to light my own little beacon, *Seven Last Words*.<sup>2</sup>

A few months later I received a letter from a head teacher from the west of England, informing me that she had asked her students and staff to write a musical partially based on my book. Eventually four schools and over four hundred pupils became involved. I went to the Catholic cathedral in Plymouth

to hear it performed, and I was bowled over. These teachers and students had made something new out of these last words of Jesus. A CD has been released.<sup>3</sup> It had sparked their own creativity and made new poetry and song. They used a few of my texts, but the songs were their own composition. I did not always understand their lyrics. That did not matter. We set people's hearts burning most intently when we release their imagination in ways that we could have never anticipated and cannot ourselves even understand.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1

- 1 Stephen Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data*, Catholic Research Forum 1 (Benedict XVI Centre Publications, St Mary's University, Twickenham, 2016).
- 2 Neil MacGregor, *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples* (Allen Lane, London, 2018), p. x.
- 3 Memorandum written on 23 July 1857.
- 4 'Theology and Imagination', *Thought* 29/112, spring 1954, p. 66.
- 5 Adolfo Nicolás SJ, 'Depth, Universality and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today', lecture given in Mexico City, 23 April 2010; [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423\\_Mexico%20City\\_Higher%20Education%20Today\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423_Mexico%20City_Higher%20Education%20Today_ENG.pdf)
- 6 Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014), p. 39.
- 7 George Weigel; <https://eppc.org/publications/flannery-oa%C2%80%C2%99connora%C2%80%C2%99s-wingless-chickens>
- 8 Emma Donoghue, *Room* (Picador, London, 2010), p. 84.
- 9 *The Republic*, 514a–520a.
- 10 Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969), p. 818.
- 11 Seamus Heaney, 'The Skylight', *New and Selected Poems: 1988–2013* (Faber, London, 2014), p. 18.
- 12 Seamus Heaney, 'Lightenings', in *Seeing Things* (Faber, London, 2010).
- 13 Czesław Miłosz, 'Ars Poetica?', in *Selected and Last Poems: 1931–2004*, selected by Robert Hass and Anthony Milosz (Penguin, London, 2014), p. 93.
- 14 G. S. Viereck, 'What Life Means to Einstein', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 26 October 1929, quoted in Nicolas Steeves, *Grâce à l'imagination: intégrer l'imagination en théologie fondamentale* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2016), p. 17.
- 15 Robert Gilbert, *Science and the Truthfulness of Beauty: How the Personal Perspective Discovers Creation* (Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2018), p. 9.
- 16 Nicholas Spencer, 'Voyage from Faith', *The Tablet*, 14 February 2009, p. 9.

- 17 Paul Kalinithi, *When Breath Becomes Air* (Vintage, London, 2016), p. 169.
- 18 Zoë Heller, *The Believers* (Fig Tree, London, 2008), pp. 209–10. A mikvah is a bath used for ritual immersions in Judaism.
- 19 George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (HarperCollins, London, 2009), p. 329.
- 20 *De catechizandis rudibus*.
- 21 I am indebted to a conversation with Denys Turner for this story.
- 22 Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers*, intro. Richard Holmes (Fourth Estate, London, 2013), p. 267.
- 23 'Zen: the mystery of the word and reality'; <http://www.monasticdialog.com>
- 24 *Takemori Sōan: Teachings of Shigeto Oshida, a Zen Master*, compiled by Claudia Mattiello (Contiente, Buenos Aires, 2007).
- 25 William Lynch SJ, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*, intro. Glenn C. Arbery (ISI Books, Wilmington, IN, 2004), p. 146.
- 26 Steeves, *Grâce à l'imagination*, p. 234.
- 27 Robert MacFarlane, *Landmarks* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2015), p. 3.
- 28 George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Wordsworth Classics, Ware, 1994), p. 162. Quoted in Mary C. Grey, *The Spirit of Peace: Pentecost and Affliction in the Middle East* (Sacristy Press, Durham, 2015), p. 115.
- 29 David Jones, *The Anathemata* (Faber, London, 1952), p. 53.
- 30 'Pied Beauty', *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, selected and intro. W. H. Gardner (Penguin, London, 1985), p. 30.
- 31 He shared this with me in a private conversation.
- 32 Quoted in Tim Crane, 'Reduced to Clear: What Happens When a Religious Leader Takes On Consciousness', *Times Literary Supplement* [TLS], 27 July 2018, p. 12.
- 33 M. C. Howatson, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993), 'Heau'ton timōrū'menos', 77, pp. 260–61.
- 34 4 September 1908, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1907–1914*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Insel, Leipzig, 1933), p. 48. Quoted in Mark Patrick Hederman, *Dancing with Dinosaurs: A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Columba Press, Dublin, 2011), p. 84.

## CHAPTER 2

- 1 A sentence first attributed to Allen Saunders.
- 2 Quoted by Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe, *Thinking through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018), p. 103.
- 3 Rose Tremain, *Music and Silence* (Vintage, London, 2000), p. 385.
- 4 *Adversus haereses*, Book 4, Chapter 20.

- 5 From a lecture by Sister Mary Luke Tobin; <http://fatherlouie.blogspot.com/2012/12/mertons-last-words.html>
- 6 *Multiple Echo*, ed. Fergus Kerr OP and Timothy Radcliffe OP, with a foreword by Donald MacKinnon (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1979), p. 1.
- 7 T. S. Eliot, 'Murder in the Cathedral', Part One, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, London, 1973), p. 243.
- 8 William Boyd, *Sweet Caress: The Many Lives of Amory Clay* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015).
- 9 Graham Swift, *Mothering Sunday: A Romance* (Scribner, London and New York, 2016).
- 10 Frontispiece. It would be interesting to explore why Boyd gave this character almost the same name as a nineteenth-century American explorer who lived in the frontier between the world of the Native American tribal life and the American Wild West.
- 11 Boyd, *Sweet Caress*, pp. 447, 449.
- 12 Swift, *Mothering Sunday*, p. 132.
- 13 Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2011), p. 168.
- 14 Jonathan Sacks, *Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2015), p. 161.
- 15 The translation in the breviary.
- 16 *Jesus Christ Superstar*.
- 17 Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could be Normal?*, p. 23.
- 18 Mel McEvoy, from the draft of an unpublished poem, quoted here with permission.
- 19 M. M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability* (University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 1990), p. 1.
- 20 <https://parablesreception.blogspot.co.uk/>
- 21 Neil MacGregor, *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples* (Allen Lane, London, 2018), p. 283.
- 22 *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Darton Longman and Todd, London, 1994), p. 64.
- 23 'The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention', *Harvard Magazine*, November–December 2013.
- 24 'Verbum Domini', Post-Synodal Exhortation, Vatican, 30 September 2010.
- 25 Ben Quash, *Abiding* (Bloomsbury, London, 2012), p. 46.
- 26 *Not in God's Name*, p. 13.
- 27 Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills (Routledge, London, 2010), p. 14.
- 28 Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (Harper & Row, New York, 1973), p. 112.
- 29 Herbert McCabe OP, *God Matters* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987), p. 229.

- 30 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesiology of Liberation* (Crossroad, New York, 1993). Quoted in Kate Stogdon 'Nothing Was Taken from Me: Everything Was Given: Religious Life and Second Wave Feminism', in Gemma Simmonds CJ, ed., *A Future Full of Hope* (Columba Press, Dublin, 2012), p. 63.

## CHAPTER 3

- 1 Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lions' Den: A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2017), frontispiece.
- 2 Claire Fox, *I Find That Offensive!* (Biteback Publishing, London, 2016).
- 3 [http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/li\\_po/poems/16221.html](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/li_po/poems/16221.html)
- 4 Walt Whitman, 'Song of the Open Road', *The Complete Poems* (Penguin, London, 2004), p. 178.
- 5 Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Picador, Basingstoke and Oxford, 2006).
- 6 McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 307.
- 7 These quotations are from an unpublished talk by Lord Alton of Liverpool, given at Pusey House, Oxford, on Tuesday, 25 April 2017.
- 8 <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/5966>
- 9 Quoted in Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994), p. 29.
- 10 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2007), p. 230.
- 11 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 261.
- 12 W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* ed. Edward Mendelson (Faber, London, 1979), p. 50.
- 13 Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers*, p. 97.
- 14 Cf. Ceferinto Puebla Pedrosa OP, ed., *The Witnesses of the Faith in the Orient: Dominican Martyrs of Japan, China and Vietnam* (Dominican Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, Hong Kong, 1989), which shows the enormous cost to just one Province of the Dominican Order.
- 15 Mary Nona McGreal OP, *Samuel Mazzuchelli: American Dominican* (Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, 2005), p. 191.
- 16 Jean-Jacques Pérennès OP, *Passion Kaboul: le père Serge de Beaurecueil* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2014), p. 112 (my translation).
- 17 Pérennès, *Passion Kaboul*, p. 17.
- 18 St John of the Cross, *Poems*, trans. Roy Campbell (Penguin, London, 1960), p. 27.
- 19 Reading from the breviary for her feast day, 1 October.
- 20 Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers*, p. 80.
- 21 Quoted by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, 'Fiftieth Anniversary of Priesthood', in Daniel P. Cronin, *Priesthood: A Life Open to Christ* (St Pauls Publishing, London, 2009), p. 134.
- 22 See the previous note.
- 23 Abraham Verghese, *Cutting for Stone* (Vintage Books, London, 2010), p. 6.

- 24 'The Cave of Making'.
- 25 Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2018), p. 62.
- 26 Quoted in Jon M. Sweeney, *The Lure of Saints: A Protestant Experience of Catholic Tradition* (Paraclete Press, Cape Cod, 2004).
- 27 Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 2015), p. 201.
- 28 'The Power of Boundless Compassion', a talk by Gregory Boyle SJ, Boston College, 25 October 2012; [www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/stm/sites/encore/main/2012/Boundless-Compassion.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/stm/sites/encore/main/2012/Boundless-Compassion.html)
- 29 Gerry W. Hughes, *God, Where Are You?* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1997), p. 141.
- 30 Madeleine Thien, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (Granta, London, 2016), p. 457.
- 31 Ben Morgan, *Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Self* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2013), p. 101.
- 32 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, San Francisco, 1990), pp. 252f.
- 33 Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, new edn (William Heinemann and Bodley Head, London, 1971), p. 251.
- 34 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, p. 253.
- 35 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, p. 264.
- 36 Dorothy Day, *The Duty of Delight*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Image Books, New York, 2008), p. 3.
- 37 Quoted by Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (Lion Books, Oxford, 2003), p. 82.
- 38 Quoted by Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts* (Bloomsbury, London, 2014), p. 114.
- 39 *Macbeth*, Act V, scene v.
- 40 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 128.
- 41 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 155.
- 42 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 176.
- 43 *Summa Theologica*, 1, q1, a.2, ad. 2.

## CHAPTER 4

- 1 Lynch, *Christ and Apollo* p. 106.
- 2 William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', *Complete Writings*, p. 431.
- 3 Thomas F. Mathew, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. and expanded edn (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1999), p. 92.
- 4 David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999), p. 94. Brown's writing has been very helpful for this section
- 5 Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, p. 81.

- 6 Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Penguin, London, 1965), p. 305.
- 7 Eusebius, *History of the Church*, p. 306.
- 8 Translated into English. *A Pax Book*, preface by W. K. Lowther Clarke (SPCK, London, 1931), Chapter XXXVI.
- 9 Olga Hartley, *Women and the Catholic Church* (Burns and Oates, London, 1935), pp. 222–3.
- 10 The Pontifical Council for pastoral assistance to health care workers. Catholic News Agency, 10 February 2010.
- 11 Robert Calderisi, *Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2013), p. 208.
- 12 Henry Marsh, *Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2014), p. 43.
- 13 José A. Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Convivium, Miami, 2009), p. 158.
- 14 Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum* (Portobello Books, London, 2012), p. 35.
- 15 Richard Woods OP, *Wellness: Life, Health and Spirituality* (Veritas, Dublin, 2008), p. 10.
- 16 Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, p. 119.
- 17 *The New Criterion*, January 1926, p. 35.
- 18 Clive James, *Sentenced to Life: Poems 2011–2014* (Picador, Basingstoke and Oxford, 2015), p. 8.
- 19 Alex García-Rivera, *St Martin de Porres: The 'Little Stories' and the Semiotics of Culture*, intro. Robert L. Schreiter (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 1995), p. 80.
- 20 *Talks of Instruction no. 17*. Quoted in Richard Woods, *Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics*, intro. Timothy Radcliffe (Continuum, London and New York, 2011), p. 163.
- 21 Trans. Jeremy Leggatt (HarperCollins, London, 2008). Originally published in French as *Le Scaphandre et le papillon* (Robert Laffont, Paris, 1997).
- 22 Kalinithi, *When Breath becomes Air*. The author died in 2015, at the age of thirty-seven.
- 23 'A Doctor's touch'; [https://youtu.be/sxnlvwprf\\_c](https://youtu.be/sxnlvwprf_c)
- 24 James, 'Event Horizon', *Sentenced to Life*, p. 15.
- 25 Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. and introduction Suzanne Noffke OP (Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah, NJ, 1980), p. 38.
- 26 Pagola, *Jesus*, p. 166.
- 27 *Othello*, Act I, sc. i. Cf. Peter Murnane OP, *Archways to the Infinite: My Journey towards the Transcendent* (Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave, 2018), p. 152.
- 28 *Making Waves: A Thematic Review of CAFOD Supported Community Radio Projects in Latin America* (CAFOD, London, 2003), p. 19.

NOTES

CHAPTER 5

- 1 Timothy Radcliffe OP, *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (Bloomsbury, London, 2012), pp. 77–94.
- 2 Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1993), p. 53.
- 3 E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965).
- 4 Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700* (Penguin, London, 2003), p. 574.
- 5 Samuel Earle, 'Vatican 2.0: How Technology Companies Think That They Can Become God', *TLS*, 17 November 2017, p. 4.
- 6 Isabella Tree, *Wilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm* (Picador, London, 2018), p. 294.
- 7 Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2010), pp. 60–61.
- 8 [www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2015/09/24/on-social-media-issues-modern-cultural-images-to-spread-anti-modern-values](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2015/09/24/on-social-media-issues-modern-cultural-images-to-spread-anti-modern-values)
- 9 Jean Vanier, *Essential Writings*, selected and intro. Carolyn Whitney-Brown (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2008), p. 87.
- 10 *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Abacus, London, 2000), p. 8.
- 11 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979).
- 12 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, p. 70.
- 13 Thomas Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love: Letters*, selected and ed. William Henry Shannon (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1985), p. 294.
- 14 Quoted by Sarah Tirri, *Is This the Best that God Could Do?* eBookIt.com, 2011.
- 15 G. K. Chesterton, 'On Household Gods and Goblins', in *Coloured Lands* (Sheed and Ward, New York, 1938): <http://inamidst.com/stuff/gkc/goblins>
- 16 *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2006), pp. 35f.

CHAPTER 6

- 1 But cf. Hugo Rahner SJ, *Man at Play, or Did You Ever Practise Eutrapelia?*, trans. Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn (Burns and Oates, London, 1965). Rahner gives some interesting examples of similar ideas in the classical world which we do not have the space to explore here.
- 2 Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007), p. 102.
- 3 John Hooper, *The Italians* (Penguin, London, 2015).
- 4 MacGregor, *Living with the Gods*, pp. 122f.

- 5 Unattributed report in *First Things First*; <http://firstthings.org/importance-of-positive-male-role-models>
- 6 Dave Eggers, *What Is the What* (Penguin, London, 2008), p. 47.
- 7 Quoted by Seamus Perry in 'The Ear and the Air', *TLS*, 30 November 2018.
- 8 Henri Nouwen. *Prodigal Son* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994), p. 99.
- 9 Quoted in Nouwen, *Prodigal Son*, p. 36.
- 10 Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Constable and Robinson, London, 2010), Kindle location 1598.
- 11 Philip Larkin, 'This Be the Verse', *Collected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2001).
- 12 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Vintage Books, New York, 1994).
- 13 Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, p. 67.
- 14 Mona Chalabi, *Guardian*, 4 November 2013.
- 15 *Against the Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 22. *The Antenicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (repr. W. M. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), p. 455.
- 16 John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, intro. David Wyatt (Penguin Books, London, 1992), p. 215.
- 17 Simon Tugwell OP, *Reflections on the Beatitudes* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1980), p. 101.
- 18 C. Day-Lewis 'Walking Away', *Complete Poems* (Sinclair Stevenson, London, 1992).
- 19 *Walden*, quoted in Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (Vintage, New York, 1996), p. 94.
- 20 Zadie Smith, *Swing Time* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2016), p. 336.
- 21 Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, p. 576.
- 22 Sian Griffiths, *Sunday Times*, 5 March 2017.
- 23 Quoted in Galen Strawson, 'Brimming with X: LSD, Love and Losing the "Fat Relentless Ego"', *TLS*, 10 August 2018, p. 4.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems* (Faber, London, 2016), p. 288.
- 26 'The Benefit of Patience', *A Library of the Fathers*, trans. members of the English Church, vol. III, ed. John Henry Parker et al. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1839), p. 251.
- 27 Simon Tugwell OP, ed., *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1982), p. 90.
- 28 Prayer vigil with young people, 27 July 2013.
- 29 Sermon by Allan White OP, *The Acts of the Provincial Chapter of the English Province of the Order of Preachers* (The English Province of the Order of Preachers, Oxford, 2000), p. 66.

- 30 Pope Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2000), eBook, loc 673.
- 31 Quoted in Rowan Williams, *Silence*, pp. 29–30.
- 32 *Summa Theologica* II II 73.3.
- 33 Rahner, *Man at Play*, p. 9.
- 34 Quoted in Michal Oklot, ‘Maturing into Childhood: An Interpretive Framework of a Modern Cosmogony and Poetics’, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 27, 2007, p. 135.
- 35 Rupert Clive Collister, *A Journey in Search of Wholeness and Meaning* (Peter Lang, Bern, 2010), p. 115.
- 36 Louise Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (Harper Perennial, London, 2002), p. 74.
- 37 Paul Murray OP, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness* (Continuum, London and New York, 2006).
- 38 Murray, *New Wine*, p. 130.
- 39 Murray, *New Wine*, p. 147.
- 40 Quoted in Forest, *At Play in the Lions’ Den*, p. xiii.
- 41 Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday, New York, 1985), p. 1088.
- 42 Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994), p. 69.
- 43 Gabriel Chevallier, *Clochemerle*, trans. Jocelyn Godefroi (Vintage, London, 1936), p. 24.
- 44 Brian Pierce OP, *Jesus and the Prodigal Son: The God of Radical Mercy* (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2015). p. 110.
- 45 Torch.op.org, sermon for Christmas Day 2012.

## CHAPTER 7

- 1 Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make a Surprising Emotional Sense* (Faber, London, 2012), p. 45.
- 2 Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?*, p. 150.
- 3 MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, p. 600.
- 4 Opinion piece, *New York Times*, 15 April 2016.
- 5 Kindle Public Domain book, p. 166.
- 6 Susan Heller Anderson, ‘For Edna O’Brien, Writing is a Kind of Illness’, *New York Times*, 11 October 1977.
- 7 Stephen Hough, *The Final Retreat* (Sylph Editions, London, 2018), p. 69.
- 8 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 262.
- 9 Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge*, pp. 35–53.
- 10 Herbert McCabe OP, *Law, Love and Language* (Sheed and Ward, London and Sydney, 1968), pp. 115–24.
- 11 Quoted in Galen Strawson, ‘Brimming with X: LSD, Love and Losing the “Fat Relentless Ego”’, *TLS*, 10 August 2018, p. 4.

- 12 Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* (Europa Editions, New York, 2012), p. 142.
- 13 John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (Routledge, London, 2001), p. 14.
- 14 *Evangelii gaudium*, paragraph 284 Apostolic Exhortation, 24 November 2013.
- 15 *The Poems of Rowan Williams* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), p. 100.
- 16 Shirley du Boulay, *Teresa of Avila: An Extraordinary Life* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2004), pp. 250f.
- 17 'Lizard', D. H. Lawrence, *Poems*, selected and intro. Keith Sagar (Penguin, London, 1975), p. 193.
- 18 Quoted in Chrys McVey OP, *Dialogue as Mission: Remembering Chrys McVey*, ed. Prakash Anthony Lohale OP and Kevin Toomey OP (New Priory Press, Chicago, 2014), p. 38.
- 19 *Hamlet*, Act II, sc. ii.
- 20 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, p. 129.
- 21 [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/17/bataclan-paris-victim-helene-muyal-husband-antoine-leiris-killers-open-letter](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/17/bataclan-paris-victim-helene-muyal-husband-antoine-leiris-killers-open-letter)
- 22 Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, p. 128.
- 23 Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelbury, *Secrets Shared: The Life and Work of Sister Pauline Quinn OP* (Dogs and Jobs, London, 2016).
- 24 Stephen Cherry, *Healing Agony: Re-Imagining Forgiveness* (Continuum, London and New York, 2012), p. 190 and passim.
- 25 T. S. Eliot, 'Gerontion', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, London, 1969), p. 38.
- 26 Cherry, *Healing Agony*, p. 193.
- 27 Cherry, *Healing Agony*, p. 67.
- 28 Quoted in Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice*, p. 134.
- 29 George Herbert, from the hymn 'Let All the World in Every Corner Sing'.
- 30 Quoted by Eagleton in *Radical Sacrifice*, pp. 129f.

## CHAPTER 8

- 1 Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (SCM Press, London, 1992), p. 10.
- 2 'The Mercy of Mr. Arnold Bennett', *Fancies vs. Fads* (Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1923); [http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/Fancies\\_Versis\\_Fads.txt](http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/Fancies_Versis_Fads.txt)
- 3 Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007), p. 89.
- 4 *The Universe*, a Catholic newspaper, 5 September 1993
- 5 R. S. Thomas, 'Pilgrimages', *Collected Poems: 1945-1990* (Phoenix, London, 1993), p. 364.
- 6 Herbert McCabe OP, *Faith within Reason*, ed. and intro. Brian Davies OP (Continuum, London and New York, 2007), p. 9.
- 7 Cf. Chapter 1.

- 8 McCabe, *Faith within Reason*, p. 33.
- 9 Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, selected and ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1988), 2 August 1955.
- 10 Herbert McCabe OP, *God Matters* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987), p. 236.
- 11 Erika Rummel, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1985), p. 8.
- 12 Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Act II, sc. i.
- 13 Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints* (Orbis, New York, 2009), p. 37.
- 14 Quoted in Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, London and New York, 1995), p. 4.
- 15 Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, 5th rev. edn (Schocken Books, New York, 1995), p. 85.
- 16 Anthony Kenny, *Brief Encounters: Notes from a Philosopher's Diary* (SPCK, London, 2018), p. 97.
- 17 Quoted in Servais Pinckaers OP, 'Dialogue and Action for Peace', in *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Francesco Compagnoni OP and Helen Alford OP (Dominican Publications, Dublin, 2007), p. 141.
- 18 Pérennès, *Passion Kaboul*, p. 13, quoting Louis Massignon.
- 19 Pérennès, *Passion Kaboul*, p. 101.
- 20 Quoted by Michiko Katutani, 'The Death of the Truth: How We Gave Up on Facts and Ended Up with Trump', *Guardian*, 14 July 2018.
- 21 Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (Picador, London, 2007); Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle* (Vintage, London, 2013), vol. 1.
- 22 Wendell Berry, *Given: Poems* (Counterpoint, Berkeley, 2006), p. 127.
- 23 Unpublished communication with the author.
- 24 Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 2009), p. 130, quoted in Joshua J. Whitfield, *The Crisis of Bad Preaching: Redeeming the Heart and Way of the Catholic Preacher* (Ave Maria Press, South Bend, IN, 2019), p. 59.
- 25 *Liber Constitutionum et Ordinationum Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Curia Generalitia, Rome, 2010), 77. II.
- 26 Day, *Duty of Delight*, Kindle edition, location 271.
- 27 Leonard Cheshire, *The Light of Many Suns* (Methuen, London, 1985), pp. 5–6.
- 28 Teresa Benedict of the Cross/Edith Stein (1891–1942), Discalced Carmelite nun, martyr: [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_19981011\\_edith\\_stein\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_19981011_edith_stein_en.html)
- 29 For example, the final question of the first part of the *Summa* is the final question, 119. Article 2 asks whether semen comes from superfluous food rather than from the substance of the male parent.

- 30 <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/01/did-karl-barth-really-say-jesus-loves-me-this-i-know/>
- 31 For why this is not enough, see McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*.
- 32 G. K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 194), p. x.

## CHAPTER 9

- 1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47043831>
- 2 While tidying my room, a rare event, I came across a book of which I had no recollection, *No Journey will Be Too Long: Friendship in Christian Life* by José Tolentino Mendonça, trans. Mary John Ronayne OP (Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah, NJ, 2012). I was intrigued to find that I had written an enthusiastic preface for the book, and relieved to discover that I still agreed with every word that I had written.
- 3 Mendonça, *No Journey*, p. 16.
- 4 Cf. M.-D. Chenu, 'L'Orde de St Dominique: a-t-il encore sa chance?' An unpublished conference given in Toulouse, 11 October 1970.
- 5 Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT and London, 2013), p. 150.
- 6 [http://battlefields1418.50meps.com/point\\_du\\_jour.htm](http://battlefields1418.50meps.com/point_du_jour.htm)
- 7 Ana Carolina Hosne, 'Friendship among Literati: Matteo Ricci SJ (1552–1610) in Late Ming China', *Transcultural Studies*; <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/transcultural/article/view/11362/8707>; James V. Schall SJ, 'Matteo Ricci's "Maxims" and Friends: The Methods of the 16th-Century Jesuit Missionary to China Offer Lessons for Christians Living in Suspicious or Hostile Cultures?': [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3966/matteo\\_riccis\\_maxims\\_and\\_friends.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3966/matteo_riccis_maxims_and_friends.aspx)
- 8 Quoted in Schall, 'Matteo Ricci's "Maxims" and Friends.'
- 9 'Friendship among Literati', note 8.
- 10 Hosne, 'Friendship among Literati'.
- 11 Michael Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit, Scientist and Humanist in China* (De Luca Editori d'Arte, Rome, 2010), p. 91.
- 12 Jean Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond our Differences*, trans. Maggie Parham (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1997), p. viii.
- 13 Vanier, *Our Journey Home*, p. 33.
- 14 [http://www.jean-vanier.org/en/his\\_works/foundations/larcheds](http://www.jean-vanier.org/en/his_works/foundations/larcheds)
- 15 Servais Pinckaers OP, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr Mary Thomas Noble OP (T. and T. Clarke, Edinburgh, 1995), p. 434.
- 16 E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2010), p. 301.

## NOTES

- 17 'The Ethics of Global Relationships', in Richard Carter and Samuel Wells, ed., *Who Is My Neighbour? The Global and Personal Challenge* (SPCK, London, 2018), p. 18.
- 18 Alan Bennett, *The Lady in the Van* (Profile Books, London, 2015).
- 19 Cardinal John Heenan, *Not the Whole Truth* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1974).
- 20 McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 108f.
- 21 McCabe, *God Matters*, p. 108.
- 22 'Charity as Friendship', in *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed Brian Davies OP (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987), p. 21f.
- 23 Hanya Yanagihara, *A Little Life* (Picador, London, 2015).
- 24 Yanagihara, *A Little Life*, p. 73.
- 25 Yanagihara, *A Little Life*, p. 225.
- 26 Yanagihara, *A Little Life*, p. 675.
- 27 Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (Bloomsbury, London, 1997), p. 194.

## CHAPTER 10

- 1 Terrence Rynne, 'Contemporary Scriptural Exegesis Ethics on Jesus' Nonviolence'; [nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/contemporary\\_scriptural\\_exegesis\\_ethics\\_on\\_jesus\\_nonviolence.pdf](https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/contemporary_scriptural_exegesis_ethics_on_jesus_nonviolence.pdf)
- 2 Quoted in Fr John Dear and Ken Butigan, 'An Overview of Gospel Nonviolence in the Christian Tradition'; [https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/our\\_nonviolence\\_tradition.pdf](https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/our_nonviolence_tradition.pdf)
- 3 William H. Shannon, *Seeds of Peace: Contemplation and Non-Violence* (Crossroad, New York, 1996), p. 152.
- 4 Day, *The Duty of Delight*, p. 943.
- 5 Day, *The Duty of Delight*, p. 895.
- 6 Preaching at the Angelus, 18 February 2007.
- 7 Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (HarperCollins, London, 1997), pp. 438–54.
- 8 'L'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci', Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961), 'Paradiso', xxii, line 151.
- 9 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Doubleday, New York, 1966), p. 86.
- 10 Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 308.
- 11 Tolstoy said this after visiting an abattoir in the late 1890s, an experience that he records in 'First Step', his preface to Howard Williams's *The Ethics of Diet* (White Crow Books, Hove, 2010).
- 12 Quoted by Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 178.
- 13 Quoted by William H. Shannon, *Seeds of Peace*, p. 107.
- 14 Shannon, *Seeds of Peace*, p. 107.
- 15 Gary Younge, *Another Day in the Death of America* (Guardian Books, London, 2016), final page.

- 16 Younge, *Another Day* (Kindle edition), location 58.
- 17 Gregory Boyle SJ, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (Free Press, New York, 2010), p. 89.
- 18 Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, p. 268.
- 19 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 99
- 20 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 100.
- 21 Forest, *At Play*, p. 214.
- 22 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 96.
- 23 Younge, *Another Day* (Kindle edition), location 840.
- 24 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 63.
- 25 Tugwell, *Beatitudes*, p. 112.
- 26 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 82.
- 27 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 95.
- 28 'Kenyan Muslims Shield Christians in Mandera Bus Attack', 21 December 2015; [www.bbc.com/news/world/africa](http://www.bbc.com/news/world/africa)
- 29 Younge, *Another Day* (Kindle edition), location 808.
- 30 Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (Oneworld Publications, London, 2015), p. 72.
- 31 Seamus Heaney, '2 Settings. Xxi', *Seeing Things* (Kindle edition), location 1146.
- 32 Orrin G. Hatch, 'Children, Violence and the Media', A Report for Parents and Policy Makers, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, prepared by Majority Staff Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 14 September 1999.
- 33 Freeman A. Dyson, *Weapons and Hope* (Harper & Row, New York, 1984), quoted in William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (Continuum, New York and London, 2007), p. 69.
- 34 Younge, *Another Day*, location 75.
- 35 Younge, *Another Day* (Kindle edition), location 295.
- 36 Unpublished lecture.
- 37 Marilyn Robinson, *Gilead* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004), p. 66.
- 38 Robert Graves, 'A Dead Boche', *War Poems*, ed. Charles Mundye (Seren, Bridgend, 2016), p. 108.
- 39 Written on the walls of the room where he studied in the Institut Catholique in Paris.
- 40 Pope Francis, 1 January 2017.
- 41 Tugwell, *Beatitudes*, p. 115.

## CHAPTER 11

- 1 D. C. Schindler, *Communio*, fall 2006, p. 394.
- 2 James Rebanks, *The Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District* (Penguin, London, 2015), p. 9.
- 3 Rebanks, *The Shepherd's Life*, p. 282.

- 4 Alastair Bonnett, *Off the Map: Lost Space, Invisible Cities, Forgotten Islands, Feral Places and What They Tell Us about the World* (Aurum Press, London, 2014), p. 85.
- 5 Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keeper: Selected Prose 1971–2001* (Faber, London, 2002), p. 3.
- 6 Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?*, p. 59.
- 7 John McGahern *Memoir* (Faber, London, 2005), p. 64.
- 8 Seamus Heaney, 'A Sense of Place', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–1978* (Faber, London, 1984), pp. 131–49.
- 9 *Evangelii gaudium*, para 47.
- 10 Robert Frost, 'Death of the Hired Man', *The Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (Vintage Books, London, 2013), p. 34.
- 11 Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (Vintage, New York, 1991), p. 196.
- 12 Mary Jo Weaver, 'Sheed and Ward', *The US Catholic Historian*, vol. 21, Summer 2003, p. 17.
- 13 Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (Summit Books, New York, 1972), p. 110.
- 14 Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, p. 111.
- 15 Anthony Philpot, *Priesthood in Reality: Living the Vocation of a Diocesan Priest in a Changing World* (Kevin Mayhew, Bury St Edmunds, 1998), p. 88.
- 16 Yehuda Amichai, 'The Place Where We Are Right', from *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (University of California Press, Oakland, 1996).
- 17 Raymond J. Lawrence Jr, *Sexual Liberation: The Scandal of Christendom* (Praeger, Westport, 2007), p. 29.
- 18 Alexander Roberts et al., eds., 'Athenagoras, "A Plea for the Christians"', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983), p. 123.
- 19 Homily XLV on the Acts of the Apostles, 20.32, quoted in Fabio Baggio, 'Theology of Migration', *Exodus Series: A Resource Guide for the Migrant Ministry in Asia* (Scalabrini Migration Center, Quezon City, 2005), p. 21.
- 20 Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, *The Gurugu Pledge*, trans. Jethro Soutar (And Other Stories, Sheffield, 2017), Kindle edition, location 912.
- 21 Laurel, *The Gurugu Pledge*, Kindle edition, location 761.
- 22 Carlo Carretto, *Ho cercato e ho trovato*, Opere Di Carlo Carretto (Citadella, Rome, 2007).
- 23 <http://lukasvesely.tk/tag/carlo-carretto-ode-to-the-church>
- 24 S. de Beaurecueil, *Prêtre des non-chrétiens* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1968), p. 50.
- 25 *The Times*, 24 December 2011.
- 26 Rebanks, *The Shepherd's Life*, p. 204.

- 27 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/28/rowan-williams-shakespeare>
- 28 Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1973), p. 351.
- 29 Scruton, *Soul of the World*, p. 123.
- 30 *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. and intro. Suzanne Moffke OP, p. 359.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 364.
- 32 Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, given at St Peter's, Rome, on 22 February, the Feast of the Chair of Peter, in the year 2007, paragraph 51.
- 33 Eliot, 'Journey of the Magi', *Collected Poems and Plays*, p. 104.
- 34 A saying much beloved by Chrys McVey OP.
- 35 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Macmillan, New York, 1966), pp. 4–5.
- 36 *The Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis (Harcourt Brace and World, New York, 1966), p. 289.

## CHAPTER 12

- 1 Nicholas King SJ, *The Scandal of Christian Disunion* (Kevin Mayhew, Stowmarket, 2017).
- 2 Some scholars dispute that St Paul is the author.
- 3 In *Lumière et Vie* 45/5, December 1996, pp. 75–80, quoted in King, *The Scandal*, p. 9.
- 4 Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers*, p. 93.
- 5 Also in Mark 6.50 and 14.62.
- 6 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 64.
- 7 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p. 64.
- 8 Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013), p. 252.
- 9 Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003), p. 4.
- 10 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1996), p. 63.
- 11 *The Annotated Origin: A Facsimile of the First Edition of 'On the Origin of Species'*, annotated by James Costa (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London, 2009), p. 489, quoted in Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. xviii.
- 12 Allegedly spoken by Luther, though there is no hard evidence that he said this.
- 13 On 28 April 1967; see Edward Yarnold SJ, *They Are in Earnest: Christian Unity in the Statements of Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II* (St Paul Publications, Slough, 1982), p. 66. Quoted in King, *The Scandal*, p. 12.
- 14 King, *The Scandal*, p. 12.
- 15 *The Last Temptation of Christ*, trans. P. A. Bien (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1998), p. 373.

## NOTES

- 16 Thomas McDermott OP, *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching* (Paulist Press, New York, 2008), p. 68.
- 17 Letter 16 in *Le Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, ed. Pierro Misciatelli, vol. 1 (Giuntini Bentivoglio, Siena, 1922), p. 68.
- 18 Day, *The Duty*, Kindle edition, location 8042.
- 19 Patrick Jordan, 'Every Day, Yes or No', in *Not Less than Everything: Catholic Writers on Heroes of Conscience from Joan of Arc to Oscar Romero*, ed. Catherine Wolff (HarperOne, New York, 2013), p. 199.
- 20 Day, *The Duty*, Kindle edition, location 8211.
- 21 Murray, *New Wine*, p. 119.
- 22 Yves Congar OP, *Journal d'un théologien: 1946-1956*, ed. Etienne Fouilloux (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000), p. 271.
- 23 Dialogue 15, 54. Quoted in McDermott, *Catherine of Siena*, p. 217.
- 24 Catherine Wolff, ed., *Not Less than Everything: Catholic Writers on Heroes of Conscience, from Joan of Arc to Oscar Romero* (HarperOne, New York, 2013), p. 211.
- 25 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, Book V, Chapter 6.
- 26 Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, *An English Spring: Memoirs* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), p. 130.
- 27 'Is It Too Late to Save the World?', *Guardian*, 4 November 2017.
- 28 'Writers Gonna Write', *TLS*, 19 January 2018.
- 29 Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, 2013), p. 614.
- 30 John Berger, G. (Viking, New York, 1972), p. 129.
- 31 Acts of the Chapter of the English Province of the Order of Preachers, 1996.
- 32 Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (Vintage, London, 1994), p. 442.
- 33 Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 7.
- 34 See *Sententia super metaphysicam*, XII, 9, 2566, (Marietti, Turin, 1971), p. 599. Elsewhere Thomas notes that 'any truth no matter by whom it is said, is from the Holy Spirit (*omne verum, a quocumque dicatur, est a Spiritu Sancto*)'. *Summa Theologica*, I II, q.109, a.1, ad 1.
- 35 Unpublished poem by Scott G. Braathen, with the permission of the author.

## CHAPTER 13

- 1 Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgement* (Fount, London, 2000), p. 3.
- 2 Williams, *Christ on Trial*, p. 3.
- 3 Simone Weil, 'The Love of God and Affliction', in *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Crauford (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951), p. 63.
- 4 *Politics*, Book 1, 1254.

- 5 Directed by Steve McQueen and released in 2013, the film is based on the memoirs of Solomon Northup.
- 6 A Statement by Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, 12 September 2017.
- 7 Nicholas King SJ, private communication.
- 8 'I wake and feel the fell of dark,' *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 62.
- 9 Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Act II, sc. i.
- 10 Paul Murray OP, *Scars: Essays, Poems and Meditations on Affliction* (Bloomsbury, London, 2014), p. xv. I am deeply indebted to Paul Murray for much in this chapter.
- 11 Jean-Jacques Pérennès OP, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria* (Orbis Books, New York, 2007), pp. 243f.
- 12 Sister Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* (Vintage Books, New York, 1996), p. 37.
- 13 *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 62.
- 14 Weil, *Waiting on God*, p. 66.
- 15 Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man and the Truce* (Abacus, London, 1987), p. 15.
- 16 *Confessions* 3.6.11.
- 17 Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (SCM Press, London, 1966), p. 225.
- 18 Murray, *Scars*, p. 4.
- 19 *Independent*, 28 March 2015; [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/911-opera-between-worlds-envisages-what-happened-inside-the-towers-10139876.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/911-opera-between-worlds-envisages-what-happened-inside-the-towers-10139876.html)
- 20 Jason Caffrey, *BBC World Service Magazine*, 2 January 2016; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34292312>
- 21 A breviary is a book that contains all the liturgical texts for the Divine Office.
- 22 Spufford, *Unapologetic*, p. 16.
- 23 The word for 'end' is related to the word for 'completed.'
- 24 Scruton, *Soul of the World*, p. 145.
- 25 *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, trans. Helen Waddell (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1952), p. 177.
- 26 Scruton, *Soul of the World*, p. 146.
- 27 Marie-Joseph Lagrange OP, *Evangile selon St Marc* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1947), p. 385, n. 30.

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 *The Times*, 30 November 2018
- 2 Cf. John Rae, *The Agnostic's Tale* (Thistle Publishing, London, 2013).
- 3 Quoted in Tim Crane, 'Reduced To Clear: What Happens When a Religious Leader Takes On Consciousness,' *TLS*, 27 July 2018, p. 12.

- 4 George Herbert, 'Prayer I', *Poet to Poet*, selected by W. H. Auden (Penguin, London, 1973), p. 54.

## CHAPTER 14

- 1 Tim Winton, *Breath* (Picador, London, 2008), p. 42.  
 2 Winton, *Breath*, p. 43  
 3 'Caelica 83', Paul Kalinithi, *When Breath Becomes Air* (Vintage, London, 2016), frontispiece.  
 4 Kalinithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*, p. 200 (both quotations).  
 5 R. S. Thomas, *Collected Poems: 1945–1990* (Phoenix, London, 1993), p. 418.  
 6 Not here *ruah* but *neshama*.  
 7 Jacob Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 1988), p. 74.  
 8 C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903), p. 23.  
 9 I know that I use a different translation elsewhere in the book, but why be confined to one?  
 10 This is only one way of imagining the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We could have taken the image of fire.  
 11 Murray, *Scars*, pp. 79–80.  
 12 Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, pp. 54–8.  
 13 Brian Pierce, *We Walk the Path Together: Learning from Thich Nhat Hanh and Meister Eckhart* (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2005), p. 38.  
 14 William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act V, ii.  
 15 Quoted by Becca Rothfeld, 'Kangaroo Nunchakus: A Patchwork of Desperate Quirkiness', a review of David Sedaris, *Calypso* (Little, Brown, New York, 2018), in *TLS*, 22 June 2018.  
 16 Murray, *Scars*, p. 101.  
 17 Tomas Halík, *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, trans. Gerard Turner (Doubleday, New York, 2009), p. xiv.  
 18 Halík, *Patience with God*, p. xiii.  
 19 Halík, *Patience with God*, p. 29.  
 20 'I Am a One-Man Movement', interview by Daiga Rudjäte and Una Meistere, in *Arterritory*, 7 June 2017.  
 21 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1996), pp. 205–6. The end of the chapter on 'The Romance of Orthodoxy'.  
 22 Sermon 8 on the Song of Songs; [www.pathsoflove.com/bernard/songofsongs/sermon08.html](http://www.pathsoflove.com/bernard/songofsongs/sermon08.html)  
 23 *Summa Theologica*, 1a Q14 art 11.  
 24 Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2013), p. 227.  
 25 Verghese, *Cutting for Stone*, p. 396.  
 26 Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife* (Vintage, London, 2005), p. 503.

- 27 Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1997), p. 170.
- 28 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. David Young (W. W. Norton & Co., New York and London, 2006), p. 27.
- 29 McVey, *Dialogue as Mission*, p. 73.
- 30 Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Abacus, London, 1995), p. 750.
- 31 McVey, *Dialogue as Mission*, p. 113.
- 32 McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 94–5.
- 33 *Letters of Bede Jarrett*, ed. Aidan Bellenger and Simon Tugwell (Downside Abbey and Blackfriars Publications, Bath and Oxford, 1989), p. 190.
- 34 From the breviary reading for the feast of Sts John Fisher and Thomas More, 22 June.
- 35 Released in 2017, the film was directed Andy Serkis, from a screenplay by William Nicholson. It stars Andrew Garfield, Claire Foy and Hugh Bonneville.

## CHAPTER 15

- 1 Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation* (Routledge, Abingdon, 1994).
- 2 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (Gollancz, London, 2016), p. 6.
- 3 *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae 25, 4 and 5. Cf. McCabe, *Faith within Reason*, p. 108.
- 4 Day, *Duty of Delight*, Kindle edition, location 1766.
- 5 Jean-Louis Bruguès OP, *L'éternité si proche* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1995), p. 102.
- 6 Caryll Houselander, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic: A Caryll Houselander Reader*, ed. Marie Anne Mayeski (Sheed and Ward, London, 1991), p. 49.
- 7 'Thanks giving for the Body', *Thomas Traherne: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. A Bradford (Penguin, London, 1991), pp. 169–83.
- 8 William Blake, 'The Divine Image', *Complete Works*, p. 117.
- 9 Letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, quoted in Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, p. 131.
- 10 'Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu', *De veritate*, q. 2 a. 3 arg. 19. Here Thomas is arguing that this applies to the human psyche but not to the divine mind.
- 11 Quoted in Thomas Meaney, 'Politics vs aesthetics', *TLS*, 6 April 2018, p. 7.
- 12 Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (Vintage, London, 2005), p. 110.
- 13 Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (Routledge, Abingdon 1970), p. 71.
- 14 'Maxims on Love, 21', in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and R. Rodriguez (Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC, 1979), p. 675.
- 15 'Sermon 8, On the Third Commandment', *The Works of St Augustine*, vol. III, trans. Edmund Hill OP (New City Press, Brooklyn, NY, 1997), p. 244.

- 16 David Brown, *God and Grace of the Body* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), pp. 303, 307.
- 17 'I just want to see His Face.'
- 18 Often attributed to St Teresa of Ávila, probably erroneously.
- 19 Francis Spufford, *Golden Hill* (Faber, London, 2016), pp. 157f.
- 20 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, rev. edn (John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 1998), p. 23.
- 21 Scruton, *Soul of the World*, p. 97.
- 22 Auden, *Selected Poems*, p. 187.
- 23 Romano Guardini, 'The Spiritual Body', in *The Last Things*, trans. C. E. Forsyth and G. B. Branham (Pantheon, London, 1954), p. 61. Quoted in Murray, *Scars*, p. 32.
- 24 *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, translated with a foreword by Benedicta Ward (Cistercian Publications, Dubuque, IA, 1975), p. 7.
- 25 Brian Pierce OP, *Jesus and the Prodigal Son*, p. 22.
- 26 On this see Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge*, pp. 160–65.
- 27 Cf. *Summa Theologica*, II II 17.3.
- 28 Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Penguin, London, 2006), p. 181.
- 29 A favourite expression of Giles Hibbert OP.
- 30 Anthony Doerr, *All the Light We Cannot See* (Fourth Estate, London, 2015), p. 30.
- 31 Day, *The Duty of Delight*, Kindle edition, location 5474.
- 32 Orhan Pamuk, *My Name Is Red*, trans. Erdag M. Göknar (Faber, London, 2001), p. 112.
- 33 Enda McDonagh, 'Shared Despair', *The Furrow*, May 2002, p. 261.
- 34 Hough, *The Final Retreat*, p. 119.
- 35 Kristiaan D'Août and Peter Aerts, 'The Evolutionary History of the Human Foot': <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.499.2010&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- 36 <http://shannon.samexhibit.com/a-long-walk>
- 37 Simon Mawer, *Tightrope* (Abacus, London, 2016), p. 21.
- 38 Chet Corey, 'Footwashing', *National Catholic Reporter*, 9 April 2004, p. 16.
- 39 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 203.
- 40 Peter Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought* (Brill, Leiden, 2013), p. 30.
- 41 Bruno Hussar OP, *When the Cloud Lifted* (Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1989), p. 55.
- 42 *The Winter's Tale*, Act IV, sc. Iv.
- 43 'Grace', track 11 of U2's album *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000), quoted in David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacraments in Ordinary* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), p. 6.

- 44 'Per hominem Christum tendis ad Deum Christum.' Sermo 261. 7. *Patrologia Latina* 38 coll. 1202–1207 (my translation).

## CHAPTER 16

- 1 Frédéric Martel, *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy* (Bloomsbury, London, 2019).
- 2 R. S. Thomas, 'Adjustments', *Collected Poems*, p. 345.
- 3 Thomas Merton, *Asian Journal* (New Directions, New York, 1973), p. 308.
- 4 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jul/15/frank-cottrell-boyce-proms-lecture-what-point-culture-in-brexite-britain>
- 5 Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, Part II.
- 6 Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, para. 106.
- 7 Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, p. 27.
- 8 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 98.
- 9 Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, para. 108.
- 10 Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, para. 110.
- 11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963), para. 115, p. 48.
- 12 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, para. 309.
- 13 Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, verses composed while walking from Felpham to Lavant. *Complete Writings*, p. 818.
- 14 Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (Penguin, London, 2015).
- 15 Stephen Jackson, 'Catastrophism Is As Much an Obstacle to Addressing Climate Change as Denial', *OpenDemocracy*, 16 September 2016; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/author/stephen-jackson>
- 16 Naomi Klein, 'A Radical Vatican', *The New Yorker*, 10 July 2015.
- 17 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 263.
- 18 Quoted in Derek Schilling, 'L'Éternel et l'éphémère: temporalités dans l'œuvre de Georges Perec', *French Studies* (Oxford University Press, Oxford), vol. 66, no. 1, January 2012, pp. 113–14.
- 19 Quoted by Lauren Elkin, 'Lucid meet ludic', *TLS*, 6 April 2018, p. 12.
- 20 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 50.
- 21 G. K. Chesterton, *St Francis of Assisi* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1923), p. 106.
- 22 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, p. 163; trans. Phyllis Jestice and Matthew Sherry from *Pierre Claverie, Un Algérien par alliance* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000), p. 246.
- 23 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, p. 209.
- 24 Etienne Grieu SJ, 'Discovering Who God is in Caritas', in *Caritas, Love Received and Given: A Theological Reflection*, ed. Oscar Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga (Éditions St Paul, Luxembourg, 2011), p. 18.
- 25 David Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom: An Essay on Britain Now* (Penguin, London, 2013).

## NOTES

- 26 Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Canongate, Edinburgh, 2006), p. x.
- 27 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1957), p. 72.
- 28 *Timon of Athens*, Act IV, sc. iii.
- 29 David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, New York, 2011), p. 14.
- 30 The opening words of Chapter II.
- 31 Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. 4.
- 32 Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. xiv.
- 33 Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. 82.
- 34 Bastian Obermayer and Frederik Obermaier, *The Panama Papers: Breaking the Story of How the Rich and Powerful Hide Their Money* (Oneworld Publications, London, 2016).
- 35 Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Allen Lane, London, 2012), pp. 202–3, quoted in Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. 122.
- 36 Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. 142.
- 37 Marquand, *Mammon's Kingdom*, p. 150.
- 38 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 192.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- 40 Cf. Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2004).
- 41 For all of these examples, I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum, 'Sewage Lagoon', *TLS*, 12 October 2012, p. 3.
- 42 Elie, *The Life You Save*, p. 452.
- 43 Book 1, Chapter VIII. Edward Cocker (1631–1675) was the author of a standard book on arithmetic.
- 44 R. S. Thomas, 'The Hill Farmer Speaks', *Collected Poems*, p. 31.
- 45 Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Harper Perennial, New York, 1988), p. 33.
- 46 Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, p. 37.
- 47 Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, p. 121.
- 48 *Laudato Sí*, para. 2.
- 49 Sermon 68:6. Quoted in Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, p. 152.
- 50 Unpublished lecture given at the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice, Blackfriars, Oxford.
- 51 *Autobiography of Martin Luther King*, p. 286.

## CHAPTER 17

- 1 Pope Benedict, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2000), p. 66.
- 2 Paul Murray OP, 'Introit', *Rites and Meditations* (The Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1982), p. 10.

- 3 T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', from *Four Quartets*, in *Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 178.
- 4 Benedict, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 69.
- 5 Benedict, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 165.
- 6 Benedict, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 168.
- 7 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Schocken Books, New York, 1969), p. 261.
- 8 *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Middle Ages* (HarperCollins, London, 1971), quoted in G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: View of Time from Prehistory of the Present Day* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989), p. xi.
- 9 Timothy Radcliffe, 'Time and Telling: How To Read Biblical Stories', in *I Call You Friends* (Continuum, London, 2001).
- 10 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 59.
- 11 Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2003), p. 115.
- 12 George Mackay Brown, 'The Tarn and the Rosary', in *Hawkfall* (Polygon, Edinburgh, 2004).
- 13 'The Psychology of Vocation', in *The Disciples' Call: Theologies of Vocation from Scripture to the Present Day*, ed. Fr Christopher Jamison OSB (Bloomsbury, London, 2013), p. 218.
- 14 Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String* (Fount, London, 1979), p. 9.
- 15 *Day, Duty of Delight*, Kindle edition, location 546.
- 16 *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum, 1941–43*, trans A. J. Pomerans (Persephone Books, London, 1996), p. 129.
- 17 Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot* (Vintage Books, London, 1996), p. 13.
- 18 Pope Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, loc. 163.
- 19 Peter Schmidt, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, trans. Lee Preedy (Davidsfonds, Leuven, 2005), p. 7.
- 20 Pope Benedict, sermon, 21 August 2005, Marienfeld, Cologne.
- 21 His blog, 25 May 2016.
- 22 *Summa Theologica*, II.I, 2.
- 23 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993), pp. 35–6.
- 24 torch.op.org, 28 October 2012.
- 25 *Spe Salvi*, para. 5, 30 November 2007, Vatican City.
- 26 Harvey Cox, *The Market as God* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016).
- 27 Cox, *The Market*, pp. 4–5.
- 28 Cox, *The Market*, p. 7.
- 29 Cox, *The Market*, p. 256.
- 30 Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Picador, London, 1990), p. 91.
- 31 'Liturgy, Art and Politics', *Modern Theology*, 17 December 2002, p. 164.

## NOTES

- 32 Walter Cisek SJ, with Daniel Flaherty SJ, *With God in Russia* (Doubleday, New York, 1966), p. 198.
- 33 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1986), p. 80. Quoted in Justin Taylor, 'C. S. Lewis on the Theology and Practice of Worship'; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/c-s-lewis-on-the-theology-and-practice-of-worship/>
- 34 Lewis, *Reflections*, p. 91.
- 35 Lewis, *Reflections*, p. 97.
- 36 Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*, p. 426.
- 37 Translation of 'Oh sage, Dichter, was du tust?', by Jurg Schmidt and Paul Murray OP, quoted in Murray, *Scars*, pp. 20–21.

## CHAPTER 18

- 1 Quoted by Oscar William in *De Profundis*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, intro. Vyvyan Holland (Collins, London and Glasgow, 1966), p. 957.
- 2 Dom Mark Barrett, *Crossing: Reclaiming the Landscape of Our Lives*, 2nd edn (Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, NY, 2008), p. xii.
- 3 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1981), p. 263.
- 4 W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', *Selected Poems*, p. 83.
- 5 Ian Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours: Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World* (Pater Noster, Milton Keynes, 2008), p. 96.
- 6 Day, *Duty of Delight*, Kindle edition, location 1404.
- 7 Jean-Pierre Torrell OP, *Spiritual Master*, vol. 2, trans. Robert Royal (Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2003), p. 378.
- 8 Apopthegmata Patrum, Poemen 92 PG 65: 344, quoted in Simon Tugwell, *Prayer in Practice* (Templegate Publishers, Springfield, 1974), p. 32.
- 9 Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*; cf. the same author's *Praying the Psalms: A Personal Journey through the Psalter* (Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2018).
- 10 Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*, p. 13.
- 11 *Lumen fidei*, para. 57.
- 12 Book 11, Chapter 20, Heading 26.
- 13 Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (HarperCollins, New York, 2003).
- 14 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988), p. 43.
- 15 Michel Foucault, *Collège de France: ordre du discours* (Gallimard, Paris, 1971), p. 7 (my translation).
- 16 Pope Benedict, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, location 1066
- 17 Timothy Radcliffe OP, 'The Coming of the Son of Man: Mark's Gospel and the Subversion of the Apocalyptic Imagination', in *Language, Meaning and God*, ed. Davies, pp. 176–89.
- 18 Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*, p. 79.

## ALIVE IN GOD

- 19 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (SCM Press, London, 1992), p. 55–6. Quoted in Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*, p. 85.
- 20 Rilke, ‘The Sonnets to Orpheus, XII’, in *Selected Poems with Parallel German Text*, trans. Susan Ranson and Marielle Sutherland (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011), p.195
- 21 Paul Murray OP, ‘Beginning’, *Scars*, p. 129.
- 22 Barrett, *Crossing*, p. 48.
- 23 Quoted in McVey, *Dialogue as Mission*, p. 55.
- 24 Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace: Personal Reflections* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1998), p. 5.
- 25 Barrett, *Crossing*, p. 17.
- 26 Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphors, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), p. 23.
- 27 ‘What Theologies of Vocation Are to Be Found in the Bible?’, in *The Disciples’ Call*, ed. Jamison, pp. 9–28.
- 28 Barrett, *Crossing*, p. 53.
- 29 Quoted in Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*, p. 71.
- 30 Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes*, p. 84.
- 31 Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes*, p. 82.
- 32 Stackhouse, *The Day Is Yours*, p. 127.
- 33 Tugwell, *Beatitudes*, p. 117.

## CONCLUSION

- 1 Heaney, ‘Lightenings’, in *Seeing Things*.
- 2 Timothy Radcliffe OP, *Seven Last Words* (Continuum, London and New York, 2004).
- 3 *Seven Last Words Live at Exeter Cathedral and Buckfast Abbey*, Notre Dame Roman Catholic School, Plymouth, 2012. Musical Director and arrangements: I. Bailey; Artistic Director: A. Casey: 2012.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Riddell lectures were established in Newcastle University in 1928 to explore the relationship between religion and contemporary thought. I was honoured to be invited to give them in 2012 and talked about imagination. I was supposed to publish them, but my life got swallowed up with pastoral commitments, lectures tours and other writing, and so time sped by and I did nothing.

In 2016 I was diagnosed with cancer and operated on at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford. I am extremely grateful to Mrs Jennifer Graystone and the team at the Blenheim Ward for the wonderful care that I received. It was a fruitful time. I learned much about facing mortality, about the importance of touch in nursing and so much else. I am also grateful to my GP, Dr Mark O'Shea, for his generous care, and to the innumerable brethren, friends and relatives who helped me through the months of recovery, giving me books, DVDs, company and encouragement. I must especially mention David Sanders OP and Joseph Bailham OP.

I had to cancel all speaking engagements for a few months, and so I was able to take up again this long neglected topic of the Christian imagination, read, think (rather fuzzily) and begin to take notes and eventually begin to write the book.

I am grateful to Richard Conrad OP, Fernando Cervantes and Robert Gilbert, who read all or part of the final draft and made enlightening suggestions as well as saving me from making too much of a fool of myself. I am also profoundly indebted to Paul Murray OP, who gave me permission to quote his poetry and

who has been a good brother, a kind friend and an inspiration through many years.

Finally I thank Robin Baird Smith, my kind and patient editor, Jamie Birkett, Matthew Taylor, my eagle-eyed copy-editor, and all of the team at Bloomsbury for their encouragements and help.

Quotations from the Bible are taken, unless otherwise stated, from the New Revised Standard Version

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alison, James, *Undergoing God: Dispatches from the Scene of a Break-In* (Darton Longman and Todd, London, 2006)
- Amichai, Yehuda, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (University of California Press, Oakland, 1996)
- Angelou, Maya, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (Vintage, New York, 1991)
- Aquinas, St Thomas, *Sententia super metaphysicam*, XII, 9, 2566 (Marietti, Turin, 1971)
- Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979)
- Auden, W. H., *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Faber and Faber London, 1979)
- Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine*, vol. III, trans. Edmund Hill OP (New City Press, Brooklyn, NY, 1997)
- Ávila Laurel, Juan Tomás, *The Gurugu Pledge*, trans. Jethro Soutar (And Other Stories, Sheffield, 2017)
- Baggio, Fabio, 'Theology of Migration', *Exodus Series: A Resource Guide for the Migrant Ministry in Asia* (Scalabrini Migration Center, Quezon City, 2005)
- Bakhtin, M. M., *Art and Answerability* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990)
- Barrett, Dom Mark, *Crossing: Reclaiming the Landscape of Our Lives*, 2nd edn (Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, NY, 2008)
- Bauby, Jean-Dominique, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (HarperCollins, London, 2008) [originally published as *Le Scaphandre et le papillon* (Robert Laffont, Paris, 1997)]
- Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993)
- Beaurecueil OP, S. de, *Prêtre des non-chrétiens* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1968)
- Benedict XVI, Pope, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2000)
- Benedict XVI, Pope, 'Sacramentum caritatis', Feast of the Chair of Peter, Rome, 22 February 2007
- Benedict XVI, Pope, 'Verbum Domini', post-synodal exhortation, Vatican, 30 September 2010
- Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations* (Schocken Books, New York, 1969)

- Berger, John, G. (Viking, New York, 1972)
- Bernardin, Joseph Cardinal, *The Gift of Peace: Personal Reflections* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1998)
- Berrigan, Daniel, *Ten Commandments for the Long Haul* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1981)
- Berry, Wendell, *Given: Poems* (Counterpoint, Berkeley, 2006)
- Blake, William, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969)
- Blake, William, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2008)
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together* (SCM Press, London, 1992)
- Bonnett, Alastair, *Off the Map: Lost Space, Invisible Cities, Forgotten Islands, Feral Places and What They Tell Us about the World* (Aurum Press, London, 2014)
- Boo, Katherine, *Behind the Beautiful Forever: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum* (Portobello Books, London, 2012)
- Boulay, Shirley du, *Teresa of Avila: An Extraordinary Life* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2004)
- Boyd, William, *Sweet Caress: The Many Lives of Amory Clay* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015)
- Boyle SJ, Gregory, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (Free Press, New York, 2010)
- Boyle, Nicholas, *Sacred Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2004)
- Brown, David, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999)
- Brown, David, *God and Grace of the Body* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007)
- Brown, Peter, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1993)
- Bruguès OP, Jean-Louis, *L'éternité si proche* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1995)
- Bullivant, Stephen, *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data*, Catholic Research Forum 1 (Benedict XVI Centre Publications, St Mary's University, Twickenham, 2016)
- Burney, C. F., *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903)
- Caffrey, Jason, 'Shostakovich's Symphony Played by a Starving Orchestra', *BBC World Service Magazine*, 2 January 2016; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34292312>
- Calderisi, Robert, *Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2013)
- Carretto, Carlo, *Ho cercato e ho trovato*, Opere di Carlo Carretto (Rome, 2007)
- Catherine of Siena, *Le Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, ed. Piero Misciatelli, vol. I (Giuntini Bentivoglio, Siena, 1922)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Catherine of Siena, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. and introduction Suzanne Noffke OP (Paulist Press, New York, 1980)
- Certeau SJ, Michel de, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988)
- Chevallier, Gabriel, *Clochemerle*, trans. Jocelyn Godefroi (Vintage, London, 1936)
- Cherry, Stephen, *Healing Agony: Re-Imagining Forgiveness* (Continuum, London and New York, 2012)
- Cheshire, Leonard, *The Light of Many Suns* (Methuen, London, 1985)
- Chesterton, G. K., 'On Household Gods and Goblins', in *Coloured Lands* (Sheed and Ward, New York, 1938); <http://inamidst.com/stuff/gkc/goblins>
- Chesterton, G. K., 'The Mercy of Mr. Arnold Bennett', *Fancies vs. Fads* (Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1923)
- Chesterton, G. K., *St Francis of Assisi* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1923)
- Chesterton, G. K., *St Thomas Aquinas* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1943)
- Chesterton, G. K., *Orthodoxy* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1996)
- Cisek SJ, Walter, with Daniel Flaherty SJ, *With God in Russia* (Doubleday, New York, 1966)
- Coakley, Sarah, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013)
- Collister, Rupert Clive, *A Journey in Search of Wholeness and Meaning* (Peter Lang, Bern, etc, 2010)
- Compagnoni OP, Francesco, and Helen Alford OP, eds., *Preaching Justice: Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century* (Dominican Publications, Dublin, 2007)
- Congar OP, Yves, *Journal d'un théologien: 1946-1956*, ed. Etienne Fouilloux (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000)
- Corey, Chet, 'Footwashing', *National Catholic Reporter*, 9 April 2004
- Cottrell Boyce, Frank, 'What is the Point of Culture in Brexit Britain', *Guardian*, 15 July 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jul/15/frank-cottrell-boyce-proms-lecture-what-point-culture-in-brexit-britain>
- Cox, Harvey, *The Market as God* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016)
- Crane, Tim, 'Reduced to Clear: What Happens When a Religious Leader Takes on Consciousness', *Times Literary Supplement [TLS]*, 27 July 2018
- St Cyprian, 'The Benefit of Patience', *A Library of the Fathers*, trans. members of the English Church, vol. III, ed. John Henry Parker et al. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1839)
- Dante, Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961)
- D'Août, Kritiaan, and Peter Aerts, 'The Evolutionary History of the Human Foot': <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.499.2010&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Day, Dorothy, *The Duty of Delight*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Image Books, New York, 2008)

- Day-Lewis, C., *Complete Poems* (Sinclair Stevenson, London, 1992)
- Dear, Father John, and Ken Butigan, 'An Overview of Gospel Nonviolence in the Christian Tradition'; [https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/our\\_nonviolence\\_tradition.pdf](https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/our_nonviolence_tradition.pdf)
- Dickinson, Emily, *The Complete Poems* (Faber, London, 2016)
- Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Harper Perennial, New York, 1988)
- Dodds, E. R., *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965)
- Doerr, Anthony, *All the Light We Cannot See* (Fourth Estate, London, 2015)
- Donoghue, Emma, *Room* (Picador, London, 2010)
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1990)
- Dyson, Freeman A., *Weapons and Hope* (Harper & Row, New York, 1984)
- Eagleton, Terry, *How to Read a Poem* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007)
- Eagleton, Terry, *On Evil* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2010)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Radical Sacrifice* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2018)
- Earle, Samuel, 'Vatican 2.0: How Technology Companies Think That They Can Become God', *TLS*, 17 November 2017
- Egan, Jennifer, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Constable and Robinson, London, 2010)
- Eggers, Dave, *What Is the What* (Penguin, London, 2008)
- Elie, Paul, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003)
- Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* (Wordsworth Classics, Ware, 1994)
- Eliot, T. S., *The Complete Poems and Plays* (Faber, London, 1973)
- Erdrich, Louise, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (Harper Perennial, London, 2002)
- Ernst OP, Cornelius, *Multiple Echo*, ed. Fergus Kerr OP and Timothy Radcliffe OP, with foreword by Donald MacKinnon (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1979)
- Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Penguin, London, 196)
- Ferguson, Ron, *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift* (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 2011)
- Ferrante, Elena, *My Brilliant Friend* (Europa Editions, New York, 2012)
- Fischer, Louis, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (HarperCollins, London, 1997)
- Fitzgerald, Penelope, *The Knox Brothers*, intro. Richard Holmes (Fourth Estate, London, 2013)
- Fitzmeyer SJ, Joseph A., *The Gospel according to Luke, X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday and Company, New York, 1985)
- Fontana, Michael, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit, Scientist and Humanist in China* (De Luca Editori d'Arte, Rome, 2010)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Forest, Jim, *At Play in the Lions' Den: A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2017)
- Forster, E. M., *A Passage to India* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2010)
- Foucault, Michel, *Collège de France: ordre du discours* (Gallimard, Paris, 1971)
- Frost, Robert, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (Vintage Books, London, 2013)
- Francis, Pope, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, 24 November 2013
- Gaita, Raymond, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (Routledge, London and New York, 2002)
- García-Rivera, Alex, *St Martin de Porres: The 'Little Stories' and the Semiotics of Culture*, intro. Robert L. Schreiter (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 1995)
- Gilbert, Robert, *Science and the Truthfulness of Beauty: How the Personal Perspective Discovers Creation* (Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2018)
- Gibson, William, *Neuromancer* (Gollancz, London, 2016)
- Graeber, David, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Melville House, New York, 2011)
- Graves, Robert, *War Poems*, ed. Charles Mundy (Seren, Bridgend, 2016)
- Greene, Graham, *The Power and the Glory*, new edn (Heinemann and Bodley Head, London, 1971)
- Grey, Mary C., *The Spirit of Peace: Pentecost and Affliction in the Middle East* (Sacristy Press, Durham, 2015)
- Griew SJ, Etienne, 'Discovering Who God is in Caritas', in *Caritas, Love Received and Given: A Theological Reflection*, ed. Oscar Cardinal Rodríguez Maradiaga (Éditions St Paul, Luxembourg, 2011)
- Guardini, Romano, *The Last Things*, trans. C. E. Forsyth and G. B. Branham (Pantheon, London, 1954)
- Hahn, Scott *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2003)
- Halík, Tomas, *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, trans. Gerard Turner (Doubleday, New York, 2009)
- Harmless, William, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2014)
- Hartley, Olga, *Women and the Catholic Church* (Burns and Oates, London, 1935)
- Hatch, Senator Orrin G., 'Children, Violence and the Media', A Report for Parents and Policy Makers, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, prepared by Majority Staff Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 14 September 1999
- Heaney, Seamus, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–1978* (Faber, London, 1984)
- Heaney, Seamus, *The Redress of Poetry* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, London and New York, 1995)
- Heaney, Seamus, *Finders Keeper: Selected Prose 1971–2001* (Faber, London, 2002)
- Heaney, Seamus, *Seeing Things* (Faber, London, 2010)
- Hederman, Mark Patrick, *Dancing with Dinosaurs: A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Columba Press, Dublin, 2011)

- Heenan, John Carmel, Cardinal, *Not the Whole Truth* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1974)
- Heller, Zoë, *The Believers* (Fig Tree, London, 2008)
- John Hemmer, John, 'What Theologies of Vocation Are To Be Found in the Bible?', in *The Disciples' Call: Theologies of Vocation from Scripture to the Present Day*, ed. Christopher Jamison OSB (Bloomsbury, London, 2013)
- Herbert, George, *Poet to Poet*, selected by W. H. Auden (Penguin, London, 1973)
- Hillesum, Etty, *An Interrupted Life. The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941–43*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (Persephone Books, London, 1996)
- Hooper, John, *The Italians* (Penguin, London, 2015)
- Hopkins SJ, Gerard Manley, *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, selected and intro. W. H. Gardner (Penguin, London, 1985)
- Hosne, Ana Carolina, 'Friendship among Literati. Matteo Ricci SJ (1552–1610) in Late Ming China', *Transcultural Studies*, January 2011: <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/transcultural/article/view/11362/8707>
- Hough, Stephen, *The Final Retreat* (Sylph Editions, London, 2018)
- Houselander, Caryll, *A Rocking-Horse Catholic: A Caryll Houselander Reader*, ed. Marie Anne Mayeski (Sheed and Ward, London, 1991)
- Howatson, M. C., ed., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993)
- Hughes, Gerry W. *God, Where Are You?* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1997)
- Hurley, Michael D., and Marcus Waithe, *Thinking through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018)
- Hussar OP, Bruno, *When the Cloud Lifted* (Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1989)
- Hyde, Lewis, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Canongate, Edinburgh, 2006)
- Jackson, Stephen, 'Catastrophism Is As Much an Obstacle to Addressing Climate Change as Denial', openDemocracy, 6 September 2016; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/author/stephen-jackson>
- James, Clive, *Sentenced to Life: Poems 2011–2014* (Picador, Basingstoke and Oxford, 2015)
- James, Marlon, *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (Oneworld Publications, London, 2015)
- Jarrett, Bede, *Letters of Bede Jarrett*, ed. Aidan Bellenger and Simon Tugwell (Downside Abbey and Blackfriars Publications, Bath and Oxford, 1989)
- Jeremias, Joachim, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (SCM Press, London, 1966)
- St John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and R. Rodriguez (Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington DC, 1979)
- Johnson, Elizabeth, *Ask the Beasts* (Bloomsbury, London, 2014)
- Jones, David, *The Anathemata* (Faber, London, 1952)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Jordan, Patrick, 'Every Day, Yes or No' in *Not Less than Everything: Catholic Writers on Heroes of Conscience from Joan of Arc to Oscar Romero*, ed. Catherine Wolff (HarperOne, New York, 2013)
- Josipovici, Jacob, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 1988)
- Kalinithi, Paul, *When Breath Becomes Air* (Vintage, London 2016)
- Kazantzakis, Niko, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, trans. P. A. Bien (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1998)
- Kenny, Sir Anthony, *Brief Encounters: Notes from a Philosopher's Diary* (SPCK, London 2018)
- Kerr OP, Fergus, 'Charity as Friendship', in *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed. Brian Davies OP (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987)
- King, Martin Luther, Jr, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Abacus, London, 2000)
- King SJ, Nicholas, *The Scandal of Christian Disunion* (Kevin Mayhew, Stowmarket, 2017)
- Klein, Naomi, 'A Radical Vatican', *The New Yorker*, 10 July 2015
- Klein, Naomi, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (Penguin, London, 2015)
- Kuyper, Abraham, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998)
- Lagrange OP, Marie-Joseph, *Évangile selon St Marc* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1947)
- Larkin, Philip, *Collected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2001)
- Lash, Nicholas, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (SCM Press, London, 1992)
- Lawrence, D. H., *Poems*, selected and intro. Keith Sagar (Penguin, London, 1975)
- Lawrence Jr, Raymond J. *Sexual Liberation: The Scandal of Christendom* (Praeger, Westport, 2007)
- Le Goff, Jacques, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Middle Ages* (HarperCollins, London, 1971)
- Levi, Primo, *If This Is a Man/ The Truce* (Abacus, London, 1987)
- Lewis, C. S., *Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1964)
- Lewis, C. S., *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis (Harcourt Brace and World, New York, 1966)
- Lewis, C. S., *The Weight of Glory* (Macmillan, New York, 1966)
- Lewis, C. S., *Reflections on the Psalms* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1986)
- Lewis, C. S., *Surprised by Joy* (Collins, London, 1987)
- Liber Constitutionum et Ordinationum Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Curia Generalitia, Rome, 2010)
- Loewen Peter, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought* (Brill, Leiden, 2013)

- Lynch SJ, William, 'Theology and Imagination', *Thought* 29/112, spring 1954
- Lynch SJ, William, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*, intro. by Glenn C. Arbery (ISI Books, Wilmington, 2004)
- McBride, Denis, *The Parables of Jesus* (Redemptorist Publications, Alton, 1999)
- McCabe OP, Herbert, *Law, Love and Language* (Sheed and Ward, London and Sydney, 1968)
- McCabe OP, Herbert, *God Matters* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987)
- McCabe OP, Herbert, *Hope* (Catholic Truth Society, London, 1987)
- McCabe OP, Herbert, *Faith within Reason*, ed. and intro. Brian Davies OP (Continuum, London and New York, 2007)
- McCarthy, Cormac, *The Road* (Picador, Basingstoke and Oxford, 2006)
- McCullers, Carson, *The Member of the Wedding* (Penguin, London, 1962)
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *The Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (Penguin, London, 2003)
- McDermott OP, Thomas, *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching* (Paulist Press, New York, 2008)
- McDonagh, Enda, 'Shared Despair', *The Furrow*, May 2002
- MacFarlane, Robert, *Landmarks* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2015)
- McGahern, John, *Memoir* (Faber, London, 2005)
- McGreal OP, Mary Nona, *Samuel Mazzuchelli: American Dominican* (Ava Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, 2005)
- MacGregor, Neil, *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and Peoples* (Allen Lane, London, 2018)
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (Duckworth, London, 1981)
- McVey OP, Chrys, *Dialogue as Mission: Remembering Chrys McVey*, ed. Prakash Anthony Lohale OP and Kevin Toomey OP (New Priory Press, Chicago, 2014)
- Mandela, Nelson, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Abacus, London, 1995)
- Maraval, Pierre, 'The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East before the Seventh Century', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 56, 2002
- Marquand, David, *Mammon's Kingdom: An Essay on Britain Now* (Penguin, London, 2013)
- Marsh, Henry, *Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2014)
- Martel, Frédéric, *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy* (Bloomsbury, London, 2019)
- Martin Soskice, Janet, *The Kindness of God: Metaphors, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007)
- Mathew, Thomas F., *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, rev. and expanded edn (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1999)
- Mawer, Simon, *Tightrope* (Abacus, London, 2016)
- Meaney, Thomas, 'Politics vs Aesthetics', *TLS*, 6 April 2018

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Mendonça, José Tolentino, *No Journey Will Be Too Long: Friendship in Christian Life*, trans. Mary John Ronayne OP (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, and New York, 2012)
- Merton, Thomas, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Doubleday, New York, 1966)
- Merton, Thomas, *Asian Journal* (New Directions, New York, 1973)
- Merton, Thomas, *Hidden Ground of Love: Letters*, selected and ed. William Henry Shannon (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1985)
- Michaels, Anne, *Fugitive Pieces* (Bloomsbury, London, 1997)
- Midgley, Mary, *Science as Salvation* (Routledge, Abingdon, 1994)
- Miłosz, Czesław, *Selected and Last Poems: 1931–2004*, selected by Robert Hass and Anthony Milosz (Penguin, London, 2014)
- Morgan, Ben, *Late Medieval Mysticism and the Modern Self* (Fordham University Press, New York, 2013)
- Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (Routledge, Abingdon, 1970)
- Murphy-O'Connor, Cormac, Cardinal, 'Fiftieth Anniversary of Priesthood', in Daniel P. Cronin, *Priesthood: A Life Open to Christ* (St Pauls Publishing, London, 2009)
- Murphy-O'Connor, Cormac, Cardinal, *An English Spring: Memoirs* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015)
- Murray OP, Paul, *Rites and Meditations* (The Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1982)
- Murray OP, Paul, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness* (Continuum, London and New York, 2006)
- Murray OP, Paul, *Scars: Essays, Poems and Meditations on Affliction* (Bloomsbury, London, 2014)
- Nicolás SJ, Adolfo, 'Depth, Universality and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today', lecture given in Mexico City, 23 April 2010; [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423\\_Mexico%20City\\_Higher%20Education%20Today\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/ansj/100423_Mexico%20City_Higher%20Education%20Today_ENG.pdf)
- Niffenegger, Audrey, *The Time Traveler's Wife* (Vintage, London, 2005)
- Nouwen, Henri, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994)
- Nussbaum, Martha, 'Sewage Lagoon', *TLS*, 12 October 2012
- Obermayer, Bastian, and Frederik Obermaier, *The Panama Papers: Breaking the Story of How the Rich and Powerful Hide Their Money* (Oneworld Publications, London, 2016)
- O'Connor, Flannery, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, selected and ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1988)
- Oklot, Michal, 'Maturing into Childhood: An Interpretive Framework of a Modern Cosmogony and Poetics', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, American University Cairo, vol. 27, 2007
- Oshida OP, Shigeto, *Takemori Sōan: Teachings of Shigeto Oshida, a Zen Master*, compiled by Claudia Mattiello (Continente, Buenos Aires, 2007)
- Oshida OP, Shigeto, 'Zen: The Mystery of the Word and Reality'; <http://www.monasticdialog.com>

- Oz, Amos, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (Vintage, London, 2005)
- Pagola, José A., *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Convivium, Miami, 2009)
- Pamuk, Orhan, *My Name Is Red*, trans. Erdag M. Göknar (Faber, London, 2001)
- Pérennès OP, Jean-Jacques, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria*, trans. Phyllis Jestice and Matthew Sherry (Orbis Books, New York, 2007)
- Pérennès OP, Jean-Jacques, *Passion Kaboul: le père Serge de Beaurecueil* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2014)
- Perry, Seamus, 'The Ear and the Air', *TLS*, 30 November 2018
- Pickstock, Catherine, and John Milbank, *Truth in Aquinas* (Routledge, London, 2001)
- Pickstock, Catherine, 'Liturgy, Art and Politics', *Modern Theology*, 17 December 2002
- Pieper, Josef, *Faith, Hope, Love* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1997)
- Pierce, Brian, *We Walk the Path Together: Learning from Thich Nhat Hanh and Meister Eckhart* (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2005)
- Pierce OP, Brian, *Jesus and the Prodigal Son: The God of Radical Mercy* (Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2015)
- Philpot, Anthony, *Priesthood in Reality: Living the Vocation of a Diocesan Priest in a Changing World* (Kevin Mayhew, Bury St Edmunds, 1998)
- Pinckaers OP, Servais, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr Mary Thomas Noble OP (T. & T. Clarke, Edinburgh, 1995)
- Postman, Neil, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Vintage Books, New York, 1994)
- Postman, Neil, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (Vintage Books, New York, 1996)
- Prejean, Sister Helen, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* (Vintage Books, New York, 1996)
- Puebla Pedrosa OP, Ceferino, ed., *The Witnesses of the Faith in the Orient: Dominican Martyrs of Japan, China and Vietnam* (Dominican Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, Hong Kong, 1989)
- Quash, Ben, *Abiding* (Bloomsbury, London, 2012)
- Rachman, Tom, 'Writers Gonna Write', *TLS*, 19 January 2018
- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, 'The Coming of the Son of Man: Mark's Gospel and the Subversion of the Apocalyptic Imagination' in *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed. Brian Davies OP (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987)
- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, 'Time and Telling: How to Read Biblical Stories', in *I Call You Friends* (Continuum, London, 2001)
- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, *Seven Last Words* (Continuum, London and New York, 2004)
- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, *Why Go to Church? The Drama of the Eucharist* (Continuum, London, 2008)
- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (Bloomsbury, London, 2012)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Radcliffe OP, Timothy, *Stations of the Cross*, with art by Martin Erspamer (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2014)
- Rae, John, *The Agnostic's Tale* (Thistle Publishing, London, 2013)
- Rahner SJ, Hugo, *Man at Play, or Did You Ever Practise Eutrapelia?*, trans. Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn (Burns and Oates, London, 1965)
- Rebanks, James, *The Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District* (Penguin, London, 2015)
- Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1907–1914*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Insel, Leipzig, 1933)
- Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Duino Elegies*, trans. David Young, bilingual edn (W. W. Norton & Co., New York and London, 2006)
- Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Selected Poems with a Parallel German Text*, new trans. by Susan Ranson and Marielle Sutherland (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011)
- Roberts, Alexander, et al., ed., 'Athenagoras, "A Plea for the Christians"', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983)
- Roberts, Jennifer, 'The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention.' *Harvard Magazine*, November–December 2013
- Robinson, Marilynn, *Gilead* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004)
- Rothfeld, Becca, 'Kangaroo Nunchakus: A Patchwork of Desperate Quirkiness', a review of David Sedaris, *Calypso* (Little, Brown, New York, 2018), in *TLS*, 22 June 2018
- Rothschild, Hannah, *The Improbability of Love* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015)
- Rummel, Erika, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1985)
- Rynne, Terrence, 'Contemporary Scriptural Exegesis Ethics on Jesus' Nonviolence; nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/contemporary\_scriptural\_exegesis\_ethics\_on\_jesus\_nonviolence.pdf
- Sacks, Jonathan, *Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Hodder and Stoughton, London 2015)
- Sandel, Michael, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Allen Lane, London, 2012)
- Safran Foer, Jonathan, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Penguin, London, 2006)
- Schall SJ, James V., 'Matteo Ricci's "Maxims" and Friends: The Methods of the 16th-Century Jesuit Missionary to China Offer Lessons for Christians Living in Suspicious or Hostile Cultures'; [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3966/matteo\\_riccis\\_maxims\\_and\\_friends.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3966/matteo_riccis_maxims_and_friends.aspx)
- Schilling, Derek, 'L'Éternel et l'éphémère: temporalités dans l'œuvre de Georges Perec', *French Studies* (Oxford University Press, Oxford), vol. 66, no. 1, January 2012

- Schmidt, Peter, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, trans. Lee Preedy (Davidsfonds, Leuven, 2005)
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesiology of Liberation* (Crossroad, New York, 1993)
- Scruton, Roger, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2014)
- Sennett, Richard, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (Penguin, London, 2012)
- Seven Last Words Live at Exeter Cathedral and Buckfast Abbey*, Notre Dame RC School, Plymouth. Musical Director and Arrangements: I. Bailey; Artistic Director: A. Casey. 2012
- Shannon, William H., *Seeds of Peace: Contemplation and Non-Violence* (Crossroad, New York, 1996)
- Simmonds CJ, Gemma, ed., *A Future Full of Hope* (Columba Press, Dublin, 2012)
- Smith, Zadie, *Swing Time* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 2016)
- Spencer, Nicholas, 'Voyage from Faith', *The Tablet*, 14 February 2009
- Spohn, William C., *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (Continuum, New York and London, 2007)
- Spufford, Francis, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make a Surprising Emotional Sense* (Faber, London, 2012)
- Spufford, Francis, *Golden Hill* (Faber, London, 2016)
- Stackhouse, Ian, *The Day Is Yours: Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World* (Pater Noster, Milton Keynes, 2008)
- Stackhouse, Ian, *Praying the Psalms: A Personal Journey through the Psalter* (Cascade Books, Eugene, OR, 2018)
- Steeves SJ, Nicolas, *Grâce à l'imagination: intégrer l'imagination en théologie fondamentale* (Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2016)
- Steinbeck, John, *East of Eden*, intro. David Wyatt (Penguin Books, London, 1992)
- Strawson, Galen, 'Brimming with X: LSD, Love and Losing the "Fat Relentless Ego"', *TLS*, 10 August 2018
- Studzinski, Raymond, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 2009)
- Sweeney, Jon M., *The Lure of Saints: A Protestant Experience of Catholic Tradition* (Paraclete Press, Cape Cod, 2004)
- Swift, Graham, *Mothering Sunday: A Romance* (Scribner, London and New York, 2016)
- Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2007)
- Taylor, Justin, 'C. S. Lewis on the Theology and Practice of Worship'; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/c-s-lewis-on-the-theology-and-practice-of-worship/>
- Thatcher, Adrian, *Theology and Families* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2007)
- Thien, Madeleine, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (Granta, London, 2016)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Thomas, R. S., *Collected Poems: 1945–1990* (Phoenix, London, 1993)
- Tirri, Sarah, *Is This the Best That God Could Do?* eBookIt.com, 2011
- Torrell OP, Jean-Pierre, *Spiritual Master*, vol. 2, trans. Robert Royal (Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2003)
- Traherne, Thomas, *Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. A. Bradford (Penguin, London, 1991)
- Tremain, Rose, *Music and Silence*, new edn (Vintage, London, 2000)
- Tugwell OP, Simon, *Reflections on the Beatitudes* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1980)
- Tugwell OP, Simon, ed., *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1982)
- Turner, Denys, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, and London, 2013)
- Tyler, Peter, 'The Psychology of Vocation', in *The Disciples' Call: Theologies of Vocation from Scripture to the Present Day*, ed. Fr Christopher Jamison OSB (Bloomsbury, London, 2013)
- UNICEF, *No Place for Children*, 14 March 2016; [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SYRIA5Y\\_Report\\_COB.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SYRIA5Y_Report_COB.pdf)
- Vanier, Jean, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity beyond our Differences*, trans. Maggie Parham (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1997)
- Vanier, Jean, *Essential Writings*, selected and intro. Carolyn Whitney-Brown (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2008)
- Vergheze, Abraham, 'A Doctor's Touch'; [https://youtu.be/sxnlvprf\\_c](https://youtu.be/sxnlvprf_c)
- Vergheze, Abraham, *Cutting for Stone* (Vintage Books, London, 2010)
- Ward, Benedicta, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. with a foreword by Benedicta Ward (Cistercian Publications, Dubuque, 1975)
- Watson, Francis, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, and Cambridge, 2013)
- Wagh, Evelyn, *Brideshead Revisited* (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1973)
- Weigel, George, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (HarperCollins, London, 2009)
- Weil, Simone, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Crauford (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1951)
- Weil, Simone, *Waiting for God* (Harper & Row, New York, 1973)
- Weil, Simone, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. Arthur Wills (Routledge, London, 2010)
- White, Patrick, *Riders in the Chariot* (Vintage Books, London, 1996)
- Whitfield, Joshua J., *The Crisis of Bad Preaching: Redeeming the Heart and Way of the Catholic Preacher* (Ave Maria Press, South Bend, IN, 2019)
- Whitman, Walt, *The Complete Poems* (Penguin, London, 2004)
- Wiesel, Elie, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (Summit Books, New York, 1972)

- Williams, Rowan, *Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994)
- Williams, Rowan, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgement* (Fount, London, 2000)
- Williams, Rowan, *The Poems of Rowan Williams* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002)
- Williams, Rowan, *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert* (Lion Books, Oxford, 2003)
- Williams, Rowan, *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia* (SPCK, London, 2012)
- Winterson, Jeanette, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2011)
- Winton, Tim, *Breath* (Picador, London, 2008)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Culture and Value*, rev. edn (John Wiley and sons, Hoboken, 1998)
- Wolfe, Tom, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Picador, London, 1990)
- Woods OP, Richard, *Wellness: Life, Health and Spirituality* (Veritas, Dublin, 2008)
- Woods OP, Richard, *Meister Eckhart: Master of Mystics*, intro. Timothy Radcliffe (Continuum, London and New York, 2011)
- Wolf, Virginia, 'On Being Ill', *The New Criterion*, January 1926
- Wright, Scott, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints* (Orbis, New York, 2009)
- Yanagihara, Hanya, *A Little Life* (Picador, London, 2015)
- Yarnold SJ, Edward, *They Are in Earnest: Christian Unity in the Statements of Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II* (St Paul Publications, Slough, 1982)
- Younge, Gary *Another Day in the Death of America* (Guardian Books, London, 2016)
- Zborowski, Mark, and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, 5th rev. edn (Schocken Books, New York, 1995)
- Zeldin, Theodore, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (Vintage, London, 1994)

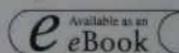
How can Christianity touch the imagination of our contemporaries when ever fewer people in the West identify as religious? Timothy Radcliffe argues we must show how everything we believe is an invitation to live fully. God says: 'I put before you life and death: choose life'.

Anyone who understands the beauty and messiness of human life – novelists, poets, filmmakers and so on – can be our allies, whether they believe or not. The challenge is not today's secularism but its banality.

We accompany the disciples as they struggle to understand this strange man who heals, casts out demons and offers endless forgiveness. In the face of death, he teaches them what it means to be alive in God. Then he embraces all that afflicts and crushes humanity. Finally, Radcliffe explores what it means for us to be alive spiritually, physically, sacramentally, justly and prayerfully. The result is a compelling new understanding of the words of Jesus: 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.'

**Timothy Radcliffe** is a former Master of the Dominican Order. Educated at Oxford and in Paris, he joined the Dominicans in 1965, and taught scripture at Blackfriars, Oxford, for many years. His bestselling books published by Bloomsbury include *What is the Point of Being a Christian?*, *Why Go to Church?* and *I Call You Friends*. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Oxford and is an itinerant preacher and lecturer.

£12.99 US \$18.00



Henri Matisse, 'La Danse', 1910

Artwork: © Succession H. Matisse/ DACS 2019

Image: The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum / photo by Vladimir Terebenin.