The Proceedings of the Inaugural National Symposium of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction

Exploring contemporary spirituality and its impact on the practice of spiritual direction

Friday 29 and Saturday 30 October 2010

Centre for Theology and Ministry

29 College Crescent, Parkville Victoria 3052
Forward


The Symposium sought to foster the professional study of, and academic research into, the impact of contemporary spirituality on the practice of spiritual direction. The Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD) invited academics, researchers, the staff of spiritual direction formation programs, spiritual directors, and other interested parties to participate in the two-day Symposium.

The Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD) thanks the Symposium’s speakers: Nancy Ault, Denise Brosnan, Cheryl Camp, Susan Campbell, Beverley Campbell, Anna Killigrew, Robin Koning, Janelle Macgregor, Marlene Marburg, Bernadette Miles, Robin Pryor, Beth Roberton, Ian Robinson, Peter Saunders, Di Shearer, P. Lucy Tierney, Stephen Truscott, Kaye Twining, Patricia Wait and Joan Wright Howie. AECSD also acknowledges Anne Powell for allowing her poetry to be included in this publication.

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As a spiritual direction community, we journey into the future with hope and gratitude. See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it? (Isaiah 43:19)

Marie Thompson
President
Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction
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Ignatian spirituality as ecclesial spirituality

A notable feature of contemporary spirituality is the distinction often made between spirituality and religion. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, a major resource for spiritual direction, can seem to confirm this dichotomy with its emphasis on seeking God in the inner movements of the heart. At the same time, Ignatius was very much a man of the Church, who included “Rules for Thinking and Feeling with the Church” (Sentire Cum Ecclesia) within the Exercises.

This paper argues that the Exercises are irreducibly ecclesial. They are not simply a program for personal spiritual growth if this is taken to mean such growth independent of the Church’s life. The argument does not depend on the Rules for Thinking with Church, which present their own hermeneutic difficulties, but proceeds by a detailed textual analysis of the main body of the Exercises noting the place of ecclesial elements throughout. It does so under five headings: the place of the Church in the Election; the doctrinal specification of the person of Jesus; the role of the sacraments; the communion of saints; and various traditions on which Ignatius draws.

**Keywords:** Ignatian spirituality, Spiritual Exercises, ecclesiology

Contemporary spirituality, in a number of its manifestations, strongly distinguishes itself from organised religion. This gets expressed in a variety of distinctions which readily become dichotomies: between Jesus and Church (Jesus – Yes; Church – No); between personal faith and doctrine; between immediate relationship with God and mediated relationship; between freedom in the Spirit and being bound by structures; between experience of God and unthinking acceptance of dogma. We find this kind of disjunction posited in some forms of New Age, Indigenous, ecological, charismatic, and eastern spiritualities. It is supported also by the general suspicion of institutions and their will to power.

Some would see the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola as supporting this alienation of personal spirituality from organised religion. After all, does Ignatius not emphasise that the Creator deals directly with the creature? Does he not tell us we can find God at work in the inner movements within our hearts? Does he not invite us on a journey into an intimate personal relationship with Christ? Moreover, there is little explicit mention of the Church in the main body of the Exercises themselves. Michael Buckley raises a number of questions arising from these realities. Do the Exercises confirm “this widespread alienation” by fostering “an indifference to the ecclesial community as something peripheral”? Or “does the Church function vitally in the radical encounter with God in the Exercises”? (Buckley, 1995, p. 442)

My answer to this last question, like Buckley’s, is Yes. Of course, at one level, if we look at the text of the Exercises in their entirety, that answer is evident. For the text ends with the

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rules *Sentire Cum Ecclesia* – for thinking or feeling with the Church – where Ignatius makes abundantly clear his views on the Church and its centrality. Even the inclusion of these Rules along with the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, which are rightly taken to be a key expression of Ignatius’ emphasis on personal discernment, gives us pause for thought about the dichotomies we have noted in some contemporary spiritualities. Still, I wish to argue in this paper from the main body of the Exercises, with only passing reference to these Rules. This is for three reasons. Firstly, the Rules are perhaps the most time-bound text in the Exercises, with their particularities tied very much to the Reformation disputes of Ignatius’ time. I certainly believe they contain an attitude to the Church which needs more emphasis in our time and in contemporary spiritual direction. But dealing adequately with them would require a precision of historical and hermeneutical analysis which lies beyond the scope of this paper. Secondly, it seems that, from the earliest days, the Rules have not been regarded as an essential part of the experience of the Exercises. Michael Ivens points out that the early Directories, which offer commentary on the giving of the Exercises, “insist that the rules be given not as a matter of course, but only to those who need them” (Ivens, 1998, p. 250).

Most importantly, though, by not basing my argument on the Rules *Sentire Cum Ecclesia*, I wish to make clear that the ecclesial sense of the Exercises does not depend exclusively on those explicit guidelines. Even had Ignatius not penned those Rules, the Exercises remain an ecclesial document, imbued with elements drawn from various aspects of the Church’s life. I will show this by offering a close reading of the text of the Exercises under five headings: 1. the Church’s role in the election; 2. the presentation of Jesus in ways that are doctrinally specified; 3. the role of the sacraments; 4. the communion of saints; and 5. various traditions on which Ignatius draws.

1. The Church in the election:

Outside of the Rules for Thinking with the Church, the most significant way in which the Church features explicitly in the Exercises is in the Election. This is the process by which the exercitant chooses a state of life or, if such a choice has already been made permanently, how to reform how one lives within that state. Ignatius outlines his basic criteria for what might be discerned about in his first point:

> It is necessary that everything about which we want to make an election should be indifferent, or good, in itself, and should be allowed within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church, and not bad nor opposed to her (Exx 170).*

Here, as Buckley points out, there are two criteria, each expressed first positively and then negatively. Anything we wish to make an election about should, first, be “indifferent, or good, in itself”, or, put negatively, should not be bad. This is fundamental. We discern between goods, or at least between things which are indifferent. We do not discern to do something immoral or bad, since discernment is about discovering where God is leading, and God never leads to evil. Given that this first criterion is fulfilled, there is another important criterion for Ignatius, situating the election within the life of the Church: what we discern “should be allowed within our Holy Mother the hierarchical Church” or, put negatively, not be “opposed to her” (Buckley, 1995, p. 444).

What is “allowed within” the Church is more literally translated by Buckley as what should “militate within” the Church – i.e. any way of life chosen needs to be “located within the
struggle engaging the Church” (Buckley, 1995, p. 444). This struggle is outlined in the Call of the King and in the Two Standards – the struggle which goes through the heart of each person as spiritual forces seek to shape our lives and decisions. Participation in the struggle of the Church on earth, the Church militant, conditions the validity of any choice we make in the election. “There is no room for the ecclesially indifferent” (Buckley, 1995, p. 444). This point is echoed in the third time for making an election where one “chooses as means a life or state within the limits of the Church, in order that he may be helped in the service of his Lord and the salvation of his soul” (Exx 177). We also catch a hint of it in the Rules for Scruples. When a virtuous person, desiring to do some good, is tempted not to follow it through because of possible vainglory, Ignatius presumes that what the person is wanting to do or speak will be “within the Church, within the understanding of our Superiors, and … for the glory of God our Lord” (Exx 351). If not, then we don’t even get to first base in terms of discerning.

Through his analysis of various images that Ignatius uses for the Church, particularly Spouse and Mother, Buckley will go on to conclude: “In sharing in the relationships between the entire Church and Christ, the contemporary exercitant is drawn into a deeper union with God, into a personal embodiment of the nature and the mission of the Church” (Buckley, 1995, p. 463). The reasons for that conclusion go beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to point for now to the reality that the Election, so central to the Exercises, is very much about how one is to live one’s life in Christ within the Church.

2. Jesus the Incarnate Redeemer:

The Exercises do not present us with a Jesus we can simply shape in our own image; nor does Ignatius simply direct us to Scriptural passages and suggest we do with them as we will. Rather, in the graces he would have us pray for, he presents a vision of Christ marked by the Church’s articulation of Christian doctrine. In particular, in terms of the person of Christ, we are presented with Jesus as God Incarnate, and in terms of his work, we are presented with him as the Redeemer who frees us from our sins.

The Incarnate God

The theme of Christ as God incarnate appears already in the First Week, in the Colloquy before Christ on the Cross. There I am to consider “how from Creator He is come to making Himself man, and from life eternal is come to temporal death” (Exx 53). This theme picks up pace, understandably, as we move into the Second Week with its focus on the life of Christ. In the Call of the King, Jesus is not simply human but is “King Eternal and universal Lord” (Exx 97) and the “Eternal Lord of all things” whom we pledge to follow and whose injuries, abuse and poverty we pray to share (Exx 98). The Contemplation on the Incarnation presents us with the Trinity contemplating the world and seeing humanity’s need for salvation. They determine “in Their Eternity, that the Second Person shall become man” (Exx 102) and set to work out “the most holy Incarnation” (Exx 108).

In this way, the scene is set for our encounter with Christ, the pre-existent Son of God now made flesh. In the colloquies of this week, I am to consider conversing with “the Eternal Word Incarnate”, with the aim of following and imitating him “so lately incarnate” (Exx 109). Moreover, the grace we pray for throughout this Second Week is “interior knowledge of the Lord, Who for me has become man, that I may more love and follow him” (Exx 104) or, as Ignatius puts it elsewhere, “to know the Eternal Word incarnate, in order to serve and to follow Him more” (Exx 130). When it comes to the Application of the Senses, we are to “smell and taste … the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity” (Exx 124).
The mystery of the Incarnation emerges also in the subsequent weeks when we are pointed to the ways the Humanity and the Divinity of Christ are at work. In the Third Week, we are directed to consider what “Christ our Lord is suffering in His Humanity” (Exx 195). The next point highlights the role of the Divinity of Christ in his Passion as we are led “to consider how the Divinity hides Itself, that is, how It could destroy its enemies and does not do it, and how It leaves the most sacred Humanity to suffer so very cruelly” (Exx 196). Once again, the Christ we are contemplating is the Incarnate One, fully human and fully divine, even if his divinity is hidden and holds back its power. At the same time, though He is God, Christ truly suffers, and “cruelly,” in His Humanity. The situation is very different in the Fourth Week where “the Divinity, which seemed to hide Itself in the Passion, now appears and shows Itself so marvellously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects” (Exx 223).

It is in the Fourth Week, too, that we find the following doctrinally-laden passage:

Christ expired on the Cross, and the Body, always united with the Divinity, remained separated from the Soul, the blessed Soul, likewise united with the Divinity, went down to Hell, and taking from there the just souls, and coming to the Sepulchre and being risen, He appeared to His Blessed Mother in Body and in Soul (Exx 219; cf. 311).

Ignatius directs us to a number of doctrines here. Firstly, Christ truly died. He experienced that separation of body and soul which all humans experience in death (cf. Exx 208). Secondly, despite this separation of body and soul, Christ’s humanity is never separated at all from his divinity – his body remains “always united with the Divinity” and his soul “likewise united with the Divinity.” That is, even in death, when his humanity is split asunder, the reality of the Incarnation, of the hypostatic union, can not be undone. Thirdly, after the Resurrection, Christ’s humanity is restored to its unity, and he appears once more as a unity of body and soul, the Risen Incarnate One.

The Redeemer

Besides the fact of the Incarnation, Ignatius also emphasizes the purpose of the Incarnation, which is our Redemption. He does so in a way which is strikingly similar to Luther’s pro me – that the Gospel needs to be heard and received as good news for me. Already this redemptive pro me is placed before us in the First Week, in that Colloquy before Christ crucified, where we are told that God became human “to die for my sins” (Exx 53). When we come to the Contemplation on the Incarnation, Ignatius notes the Trinity gazing on the world in all its brokenness and desiring, not to punish, but “to save the human race” (Exx 102). This decision is expressed in terms of redemption: “Let Us work the redemption of the human race” (Exx 107). Throughout the Second Week, then, we do not simply contemplate the Incarnate One as remote from my reality. Rather, Ignatius always directs us to “the Lord, who for me has become man” (Exx 104). In the Nativity scene, too, one is encouraged to reflect on the difficulty and labours of the Holy Family, all directed at ensuring “that the Lord may be born in the greatest poverty; and as a termination of so many labors -- of hunger, of thirst, of heat and of cold, of injuries and affronts -- that He may die on the Cross; and all this for me” (Exx 116). It is not simply the cross that is pro me, but the entirety of what the Lord has borne for us throughout his life and ministry, culminating in the cross.

The same ‘for me’ feature, of course, in the meditations on the Passion. There, in the first contemplation, I ask for the grace of “grief, feeling and confusion because for my sins the
Lord is going to the Passion” (Exx 193). In the course of the contemplation I am to consider how He suffers all this “for my sins” (Exx 197). In the second contemplation I ask for “tears and interior pain at such great pain Christ suffered for me” (Exx 203).

This theme of redemption continues in the Fourth Week, where we are urged to make use of whatever will help the soul “to be joyful in its Creator and Redeemer” (Exx 229). The Contemplatio invites us to be overwhelmed as we savour all that God has done for us. In the first point for consideration, I am directed again to Christ as Creator and Redeemer, being invited “to bring to memory the benefits received, of Creation, Redemption and particular gifts, pondering with much feeling how much God our Lord has done for me” (Exx 234). Likewise, the third point asks me “to consider how God works and labors for me in all things” (Exx 236). In all of this, Christ is not simply a friend, nor simply a prophet or good person to be imitated and edified by, but God Incarnate and Redeemer of the world.

3. Sacraments:

If the Exercises invite us contemplate the Christ whose true identity the Church’s teaching makes clear for us, so too do they lead us to involvement in the Church’s life through the sacraments, especially Eucharist and Reconciliation. For those wanting simply “to be instructed and to come to a certain degree of contentment of soul,” Ignatius encourages the director to offer some basic forms of prayer and to recommend that the person “confess his sins every eight days, and, if he can, … receive the Blessed Sacrament every fifteen days, and better, if he be so moved, every eight” (Exx 18). Retreatants “from whom not much fruit is hoped” should be given some simple exercises until they make their confession. Then they should be given some ways of examining their consciences and of going to confession more often than was their custom so that they might preserve the good they have gained (Exx 18). To those doing the 19th Annotation Exercises, Ignatius makes particular mention of giving points on how “to confess and to receive the Blessed Sacrament” (Exx 19). Later on, he will provide some of these points in his General Examen of Conscience, whose aim is “to purify oneself and to make one’s Confession better” (Exx 32).

Next, Ignatius turns to those doing the full Exercises. One benefit of their living away from their usual situation while doing the full Exercises is the ability to enter into the Church’s liturgy more readily, “to go each day to Mass and to Vespers” (Exx 20). Ignatius also points out the advantages of the retreatant making a General Confession at the end of the First Week – i.e. a confession of all the sins of one’s past life, whether previously confessed or not. The advantage is a “greater actual sorrow for all the sins and wickedness” in the context of the greater clarity about our sinfulness gained from the First Week exercises. This allows for a better Confession and hence a better disposition for receiving Communion, which is “an aid not only to not fall into sin, but also to preserve the increase of grace” (Exx 44).

Ignatius’ love for the Eucharist is evident in how he presents the Last Supper scene in three different places: Jesus gives us “His most Holy Body and Precious Blood” (Exx 191); he gives us “the Blessed Sacrament” (Exx 209); and he institutes “the most sacred sacrifice of the Eucharist, to be the greatest mark of His love” (Exx 289). Again, we are not simply presented with a Gospel scene and told to make of it what we will. Instead, Ignatius draws us into the significance of the scene in a way which links it to the sacramental and doctrinal life of the Church. His points for contemplating the two disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus make the same link when they speak of Jesus “giving them Communion” and of
these disciples sharing with the others back in Jerusalem how “they had known Him in the Communion” (Exx 303).

Finally, the Rules for Thinking with the Church urge us to “praise confession to a Priest” as well as reception of communion (“the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar”) at least once a year, though monthly is “much more” to be praised, and weekly is “much better” (Exx 354). So too are we to praise the frequent hearing of Mass (Exx 255).

4. The Communion of Saints:

The Saints

Another element of Catholic Church life which features prominently in the Exercises is devotion to the Saints. It is clear that they form a treasured part of Ignatius’ worldview, as we glimpse in the second exercise of the First Week where I am to situate myself, as a creature, within the whole universe of being. I do this by comparing myself to the whole of humankind; then comparing humankind “to all the Angels and Saints of Paradise”; then comparing the whole of Creation – humankind, Angels and Saints together – to God (Exx 58).

For Ignatius, the Saints are those who are present to and alive with Christ. Having been united intimately with him in their earthly life, they share with him the glory of the heavenly court. Also, we might note, they share with Christ in being the object of the “wailings, howlings, cries, blasphemies” of the damned (Exx 67). At three points in the Exercises, Ignatius places us in the presence of Christ and his saints in heaven. The first is in the crucial Contemplation on the Call of the King, where we are invited to offer ourselves completely to the “Eternal Lord of all things.” We make this solemn offering in the presence not only of Jesus himself, but also of Mary and “of all the Saints of the heavenly Court” (Exx 98). Soon after, in the Meditation on the Three Classes of Person, I again see “how I stand before God our Lord and all His Saints” (Exx 151). Further on, I enter into the culminating exercise of the Contemplatio aware of “how I am standing before God our Lord, and of the Angels and of the Saints” (Exx 232).

The Saints, though, are not merely present with Christ in the heavenly court. They are active – “interceding for me” as the Contemplatio puts it (Exx 232). In the First Week already we were led to wonder at how, despite my sinfulness, I have the support of these saints who “have been engaged in interceding and praying for me” (Exx 68). Moreover, Ignatius presumes that we are able to communicate with the Saints in general (Exx 3) and with Mary in particular, as we shall see further below.

Finally, drawing on his experience of the importance of the example of the saints in his own conversion, Ignatius sees the value of the example of the saints for those still in the Church militant. During the Exercises, especially during the Second Week when we are seeking to follow Christ more fully, we are encouraged to read “books of the Imitation of Christ, or of the Gospels, and of the lives of Saints” (Exx 100; cf. 215). Mary in particular is mentioned as worthy of imitation (Exx 248). Moreover, devotions involving the Saints – “relics of the Saints, giving veneration to them and praying to the Saints” (Exx 358) – are amongst those things to be praised by those who have a proper attitude in the Church.

In two places in his rules for dealing with scruples, Ignatius supports a point he is making by quoting saints. St Gregory on the value of being sensitive to one’s faults, and St Bernard on dealing with the voice of the evil spirit accusing us of vainglory when we wish to do some
good (Exx 348, 351). Ignatius also draws from more legendary accounts of the saints. In encouraging us to simplicity of life, he refers a story about Sts Joachim and Anna, the names tradition gives to Mary’s parents. This account claim that they divided “their means into three parts, gave the first to the poor, and the second to the ministry and service of the Temple, and took the third for the support of themselves and of their household” (Exx 344). Ignatius is also happy for us to contemplate scenes involving Scriptural characters but not mentioned in Scripture – e.g. the Risen Christ’s appearance to Joseph of Arimathea, which Ignatius notes comes from the lives of the Saints (Exx 310).

Mary
Within the Communion of Saints, Ignatius highlights Mary in a number of ways. The prayer to Christ in the call of the Kingdom situates him, as we have seen, in the presence of his “glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court” (Exx 98). Mary naturally appears in a number of the Gospel contemplations in the Second Week, particularly since Ignatius spends a considerable time on the Infancy narratives and hidden life (Exx 101-109, 110-117, 162, 263,264, 266,268, 269, 270, 271, and 276). We come across Mary as well in the Third Week at the foot of the Cross with John (Exx 297).

Ignatius also includes Our Lady in scenes which move beyond the biblical narrative. Scripture recounts Christ’s circumcision in only one verse (Luke 2:21), but the Exercises elaborate this with the following point: “They gave back the Child to His Mother, who had compassion for the Blood which came from her Son” (Exx 266). In the contemplation on the baptism, Christ first takes leave of his mother (Exx 273). And in the passion, Ignatius mentions Mary at the descent from the Cross (Exx 298), and would have us visit her house after the burial and reflect on her loneliness, grief and fatigue (Exx 208). In the Resurrection contemplations, Ignatius gives Mary particular prominence, with the first contemplation of the Fourth Week devoted to Christ’s appearance to her (Exx 218-225). This contemplation is further elaborated in the list of points for meditation later. There, Ignatius famously answers anyone who would challenge this addition by saying that this story “although it is not said in Scripture, is included in the saying that He appeared to so many others, because Scripture supposes that we have understanding, as it is written: ‘Are you also without understanding?’” (Exx 299). Any right-thinking Christian, in Ignatius’ view, would understand that, given Jesus’ intimate relationship with his mother, he would appear first to her.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Mary’s prominence in the Exercises is the important intercessory role she is given in the triple colloquies. When seeking a grace that is particularly crucial or that we particularly desire, Ignatius would have us speak first to Our Lady about this grace, asking her to intercede with her Son for it, and pray a Hail Mary. Then we are to go to Jesus, asking him to intercede with the Father for this grace, and pray the Soul of Christ. Finally, I go to the Father asking him for the grace, concluding with the Our Father (Exx 63, 147, 148, 199).

5. Various other ecclesial elements:

In this final section, I will bring together a number of diverse ways in which Ignatius in the Exercises draws on ecclesial elements of various sorts. The key point I am making is that the Exercises presume more than simply the retreatant and Jesus, but a whole ecclesial way of life from which Ignatius draws in a range of ways – the more significant ways already mentioned, and the following series of smaller ways which fill out the picture further.
Church councils
At one point, Ignatius quotes from the Third Council of Carthage (397), which determined “that the furniture of the Bishop be cheap and poor.” This text appears in the Rules for Giving Alms, and he uses it to emphasize the importance of living simply “in all manners of life.” Ignatius quotes this Council as a specification, in the teaching of the Church, of the Gospel call to a simplicity and poverty modelled after Christ “our model and rule” (Exx 344).

Order of the day and time
For Ignatius, the order of the day for the retreatant is based not just on the cycles of nature (“at midnight” or “at dawn” or “in the morning”) or on cultural patterns (“the hour of supper”), but also on liturgical rhythms. Thus prayer times are often correlated with “the hour of Mass” or “the hour of Vespers” (Exx 72, 128, 129, 133, 148, 159, 204, 209, 227). In a similar fashion, common prayers measure durations of time. We are to reflect for the space of an Our Father (Exx 75), or of a Hail Mary (Exx 73), or “the space of time one says the Our Father and the Hail Mary three times” (Exx 241).

Religious life
Ignatius presents religious life or the way of “evangelical perfection” as something about which a good Christian will be drawn to discern. His preamble to the consideration of states of life presents the state of “evangelical perfection” as one option to be considered (Exx 135). During the Exercises, it is true, the director must not influence the retreatant one way or the other, and the retreatant should be counselled not to make hasty decisions (Exx 14-15). But outside of the Exercises “we can lawfully and with merit influence every one who is probably fit to choose continence, virginity, the religious life and all manner of evangelical perfection” (Exx 15).

Traditional prayers
Ignatius does not see his emphasis on interior prayer, meditation and contemplation, and the unique action of God in each person as conflicting with a knowledge and use of traditional prayers. There is, of course, the Scriptural Our Father, which he recommends as a way of concluding most prayer exercises (Exx 43, 54, 61, 63, 71, 111, 117, 118, 126, 147, 198, 237, 241, 248). But there are also other prayers from the tradition, especially the Hail Mary and the Anima Christi or Soul of Christ which are recommended for use in the significant Triple Colloquy, as we have seen.

In the Exercises, Ignatius suggests two ways of praying traditional prayers which can deepen our appreciation of them. One is to pray slowly through the prayer, one word at a time, considering that word as long as one finds fruit there (Exx 252). The other way involves praying each prayer to the rhythm of one’s breathing, one word per breath (Exx 258). In this regard, Ignatius points to the three prayers already mentioned - the Our Father, Hail Mary and Anima Christi – but adds the Creed, expressing the core faith of the Church, and the Hail, Holy Queen, a traditional Marian prayer, used, for example, at the conclusion of the Rosary (Exx 253, 258). Furthermore, people can be encouraged to pray on other aspects of Church devotional life or teaching, such as the “Deadly Sins, Precepts of the Church, Five Senses, and Works of Mercy” (Exx 18).

Conclusion
We have seen, then, a variety of ways in which the Exercises are imbued with an ecclesial dimension even if we leave aside the Rules for Thinking with the Church. Elections are only to be made about things in harmony with the Church. Christ is presented in a way shaped by the Church’s doctrinal tradition - the pre-existent Son made incarnate for our Redemption and
now inseparably and fully human and divine. The sacraments are important and helpful aspects of Christian life to which retreatants are directed. The Church triumphant - i.e. the communion of saints, and particularly Mary - stands in solidarity with the Church militant, present, interceding, and offering examples to be imitated. Finally, we saw how Ignatius draws on other elements from the tradition, such as conciliar teaching or traditional prayers. All of this suggests in Ignatius an ecclesial mindset inextricably bound up with his passionate and personal commitment to Christ. It also suggests that this is what Ignatius hopes the Exercises will engender in those who do them - the same appreciation and love for both Christ and his Body in their unbreakable union.

* The translation of the Exercises used herein is the one listed below, by Elder Mullan. I have cross-referenced the standardized paragraph numbers to Mullan’s text, which pre-dates them. The citations are in-text in the form (Exx n) where ‘n’ denotes the paragraph number/s.

References

Plumbing the depths: theological reflection and spiritual direction

Nancy Ault*

It is a common practice today to separate spirituality from religion. In the western development of Christianity, this separation mirrors earlier divisions of theology into different disciplines. One of the consequences of these divisions has been to isolate spirituality from theology and more recently, spirituality from religion.

Concomitant with the separation of spirituality from theology and spirituality from religion has been the separation of heart and mind. Heart and mind, the affective (heart) and the cognitive (mind), are both important in prayer and spiritual life. To focus on experience and the affective dimension of spiritual life runs the risk of neglecting the cognitive, as represented by theological study and understanding whilst emphasis on thinking can lead to a denial or suppression of experience.

This paper examines the role of theological reflection as a method for developing theological depth and integration. It suggests that theological reflection provides a supporting framework through which heart and mind can be held in balance. Through locating spiritual direction within the pastoral spiral, it proposes that theological reflection may offer a bridge between spirituality and religion within the process spiritual direction.

**Keywords:** Spiritual direction, theological reflection, pastoral spiral

Introduction

Spiritual direction is at risk in a society which is turning increasingly to personal feelings to validate experience and justify decision making. The appeal to feelings and emotions enables marketers to sell religion and spirituality as consumer products. As a product among many, the wider contexts of religion and spirituality may fade from consciousness and be lost. What may happen is a slow drifting apart of thinking, the mind, from feelings, the heart, in a “pick and mix” culture (Carrette & King, 2005, p. 19). The separation of mind and feelings is not new within the western Christian tradition. However, the cost of separation is high. Feelings may disintegrate into sentimentalism and thinking into legalism. Hence, practices which facilitate the intentional integration of mind and heart can provide an essential counterbalance to dualistic forces.

This paper will examine the practice of theological reflection with respect to spiritual direction. As a way of facilitating this discussion, the separations of theology and spirituality and spirituality and religion will be considered briefly. Because both theology and spirituality

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can be interpreted in various ways, they will be looked at in preparation for an examination of spiritual direction and theological reflection. Finally, it will be suggested that theological reflection may serve as an integrative tool and the spiritual director act as a facilitator of theological thought. Although references in this paper are made to Christianity, the reflective process is not limited to Christian discourse. However, in other faith traditions and philosophies, the underlying presuppositions about the nature of reality will differ.

The separation of theology and spirituality and religion and spirituality

Within early Patristic theology, integration between theory and praxis was centred in the mysítkos, that is, the encounter with the living God in and through Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture and liturgy. Knowledge of God was inseparable from the life of faith. However, in the twelfth century, with the rise of Scholasticism, theology began to splinter and a division gradually grew between theology as a rational science and mystical theology as a theology of spiritual life. The division, by Thomas Aquinas, of his Summa Theologiae foreshadowed later divisions of theology into distinct disciplines. Within the Summa, spirituality was located as a subcategory of moral theology. By the fifteenth century, a Carthusian observed that “mystical theology and scholasticism were no more related than painting and shoe-making” (Sheldrake, 1998, p. 42). In the seventeenth century, spirituality was further divided into ascetical theology (relating to ordinary spiritual life) and mystical theology (relating to extraordinary experiences in the life of prayer). By the 20th century, theology, including spirituality, had become, as Schneiders refers to it, a “household” of specialised disciplines (Schneiders, 2006, p. 198).

During the 20th century, another dualism emerged with a distinction being made between religion and spirituality, as represented in statements like “I’m a religious person, I’m not spiritual” or “I’m a spiritual person, I’m not religious.” Definitions highlighting differences between religion and spirituality multiplied. For example, Len Sperry writes that “spirituality is more concerned with personal beliefs, meanings, and internal experiences, while religion tends to be focused on shared formalized beliefs and doctrines, rituals and externalized behaviours” (Sperry 1998, section 2, para. 6). According to Sperry’s description, spirituality is personal whereas religion is communal; spirituality is concerned with personal beliefs and experiences whereas religion is concerned with doctrines and rituals; and spirituality is internal whereas religion is external. Similarly, in the Handbook of Religion and Health, Harold Koenig, Michael McCullough and David Larson equate religion with corporate, objective institutions and contrast religion with personal, subjective spiritual life (Koenig et al. 2001, p. 18). Therefore,

To be religious conveys an institutional connotation, prescribed rituals, and established ways of believing; to be spiritual is more personal and experiential, and has to do with the deepest motivations of life for meaning and wholeness. The first is ‘official’ religion, standardised, and handed down by religious authorities; the second is ‘unofficial’, highly individualistic, religion ‘à la carte’… (Carrette & King 2004, pp. 31-32).

Although a distinction may be drawn between the institutional dimension of a religious tradition and the lived spirituality of an individual, this does not mean that one precludes the other as may be seen in the interplay between piety and religious belief, in past epochs of western Christianity. However, with the separation of spirituality from religion, a person’s spiritual life may drift among a smorgasbord of practices and unexamined beliefs.
In contemporary discourse, it is still argued that religious traditions can provide a fertile environment in which a person may grow spiritually. For example, when defining religion and spirituality, Koenig et al. recognise that a person’s spiritual quest may “lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community” (Koenig et al. 2001, p. 18). They recognize the potential for a dynamic interplay between spirituality and religion with its theological dimensions. Moreover, Sandra Schneiders suggests that religion and spirituality may be viewed as “two dimensions of a single enterprise, like body and spirit” (Schneiders 2003, p. 164). Although spirituality may be used in critique of religion, she argues that they are “essential to each other and constitute together, a single reality… partners in the search for God” (Schneiders 2003, pp.164-165). Hence, if religion and spirituality can be seen in partnership rather than as separate and irreconcilable, then their interrelationship may become a source of creativity for both entities.

Humpty Dumpty is invoked to describe the state of affairs both in theology and in spirituality. Sandra Schneiders refers to a theological Humpty Dumpty whose fall has led to a shattering of theology into multiple disciplines (Schneiders, 2006, p. 199) and Dorothy Rowe refers to spirituality as a Humpty Dumpty whose fall has resulted in a “word that means whatever the speaker wants it to mean” (Carrette & King, 2004, p. 32). One of the consequences of Humpty Dumpty’s fall is that terms such as spirituality and theology require some clarification.

**Spirituality**

The word ‘spirituality’ can mean many things. According to Walter Principe, spirituality can be used to describe lived experience; it can be concerned with “the formulation of a teaching about the lived reality” through writings, instruction and doctrine; and it can be applied to the academic study of both lived experience and teachings (Principe, 2000, pp. 47-48, italics in the original). In their examination of religion and spirituality, Hill et al., observe that the first level, spirituality as lived experience, may be orientated, towards God (supported by theology), towards the world (related to nature and ecology), or towards people (found in human potential movements) (Hill et al., 2000). Hence, the word ‘spirituality’ has a fluidity of senses in contemporary western discourse.

However, Walter Principe writes that in its early Pauline usage, “the ‘spirit’ within the human person is all that is ordered, led, or influenced by [the Spirit of God], whereas [the carnal] or “flesh” is everything in a person that is opposed to this influence of the Spirit of God (Principe,1983, 130). In this sense, spirituality refers to a life lived in harmony with the Spirit of God. Such a life might entail...

... a discovery of the true ‘self’ precisely in encountering the divine and human other—who allow one neither to rest in a reassuring self-image nor to languish in the prison of a false social construction of oneself. The truly life-bestowing other who beckons one into heightened wakefulness can also liberate one from the bitterly oppressive constructions of oneself enforced by dysfunctional families and broken societies. Understood in this sense, spirituality as the transformation and discovery of the self always happens in encounter, it is an activity constantly stirred up and sustained by the other who calls one out of one’s ‘self’ and into the truth of one’s mission in life, out of provisionality and into the adventure of incarnation. (McIntosh, 1998, p. 6)

In this exposition, God, as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, sustains life and calls the ‘self’ into a relationship involving transformation and transcendence. Moreover, this is not
a private relationship between God and a person but a relationship involving the “human other”. Thus, Christian spirituality, as lived within the Body of Christ in response to God’s call, embraces all dimensions of living. The invitation “into the adventure of incarnation” provides the background for spiritual direction.

**Spiritual direction**

If Christian spirituality is understood as living in harmony with the Spirit of God in a self-transcending process initiated and sustained by God, it might be argued that Christians are called to be contemplatives in action, that is, people who hearing the Word of God are transformed into God-bearers. As contemplatives, Christians are invited to become adventurers and wanderers “through deserts and paradises for which no maps exist...in strange areas of emptiness, of joy, of perplexity, and of admiration” (Thomas Merton 1978, p. x). Although the nature and process of spiritual direction has changed over the centuries, today spiritual direction is generally used to describe the practice of one person accompanying another person on this journey “through deserts and paradises”, intentionally attending to the ongoing spiritual life of one of the adventurers. Although, often focused on the individual, spiritual direction may also occur within groups and communities.

Different images such as companion, guide, midwife and host or hostess are used to describe the spiritual director. However, in Christian spiritual direction, it is God who ultimately directs; hence, a spiritual director is involved in a “twofold attention”—towards God and towards the directee (Carroll, 2002, p. 96). The spiritual director’s role is to cooperate with God rather than provide instant answers, affirm fantasy, impose belief or inflict the latest road map for spiritual life on the directee. The director is like a living signpost often asking disconcerting questions but equally, struggling with the realities of life in Christ.

The focus in spiritual direction is upon the directee’s relationship with God through a process of co-discerning the movements of the Spirit in the directee’s life. Through the process of discernment, a directee may grow toward self-transcendence, and “into the adventure of incarnation” (McIntosh, 1998, p. 6). Joann Wolski Conn describes authentic discernment in terms of three Fs: “fidelity to loving relationships, spiritual freedom, and fruitfulness in ministry” where “fruitfulness in ministry” describes “the person’s ability to forget himself [herself] for the sake of others” (Conn, 1999, p. 92). Carrol (2002) claims that spiritual direction is sacramental in that it pays...explicit attentiveness to the mystery of grace, to the voice of the living God, who grounds the personal existence of the directee and summons him or her to self-transcendence through God’s own self-giving love...At its heart direction is one of the ‘countless ways by which God uses material things [or persons] to reach out to us’ (Carroll, 2002, p. 97).

By naming spiritual direction as a sacramental listening to God, Carroll implicitly links Christian spiritual life with theology and the practice of theological reflection.

**Theology**

In Western Christianity, theology can be broadly used to describe several disciplines such as Biblical studies, church history, systematic and practical theology. However, theology can be used more narrowly to refer to systematic or dogmatic theology which is concerned with the study of the Christian tradition as it has responded, and still responds, to the encounter with God in a specific time and place. The classic Augustine-Anselmian definition of theology is...
faith seeking understanding (fides quaerens intellectum). Systematic theology seeks understanding through categories and themes which may be expressed in doctrines, creeds, catechisms and other writings (Schneiders, 2006, pp. 201-202). Systematic theology seeks to describe the generalised experience of Christian life and as such, provides an objective backdrop for particular, individual experience.

Randy Maddox draws attention to five dimensions of theology: first, theology provides a perspective from within which all a person’s life is orientated and lived; second, theology is involved with the task of Christian formation; third, as a consequence of materials produced to support formation, theology is involved with “normative theological reflection” as seen in debates and discourse; fourth, theology has an apologetic role of “engaging self-consciously those who question or reject Christian beliefs and practices”; and finally, theology has a responsibility to “train new generations within the community of believers to carry out the formative, normative, and apologetic dimensions” of the theological enterprise (Maddox, 2001, pp. 21-23, italics in the original). Common misconceptions about theology include that it is concerned with abstract reflection; that it requires specialised training; that theologians dwell in ivory towers and theology is disconnected from real live; and that it subverts the Gospel imperatives (Maddox, 2001, pp. 20-21). However, at one time theology and theological disputes captured the hearts and minds of people involved in all areas of life, as Gregory of Nyssa records about Byzantium at the time of the second General Council:

The whole city is full of it, the squares, the market places, the cross-roads, the alleyways...If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior... (Ware, 1964, pp. 43-44).

Theological discourse belongs to all Christians and the five dimensions described by Maddox reveal that theology encompasses both practical and theoretical elements in a dynamic partnership. In this paper, theology is employed in both the broad and the narrow sense. In order to understand how theology is being used, it is necessary to look at the pastoral spiral/cycle because it is here that the relationship between the different senses of the word can be seen.

The pastoral spiral/cycle and theological reflection

The pastoral spiral or cycle describes the movements from experience to a space of theoretical and reflective engagement with experience and then back to the stream of experience (Browning, 1991). Within the theoretical-reflective move, contemporary research, scholarship and knowledge drawn from disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, economics and politics etc. may be used to explore and analyse the initiating experience or situation. It is within this theoretical-reflective space that theological reflection occurs.

Reflection presupposes a distancing from an experience which enables a person to look at and examine the experience with some objectivity. Through the process of reflection, a person is enabled to transform experience into “knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and the senses, and integrate the outcomes into their own biographies” (Jarvis, 2004, p. 111). Not only does a person’s story arise out of reflection, but a person’s sense of being is also formed through the process of meaning-making and a deepening of understanding (Le Cornu, 2005).

Theological reflection is frequently considered in terms of an intentional conversation between individual or corporate experience and religious tradition (Killen & de Beer 1994).
The religious input to the conversation is theology, in its broad sense, as an “inclusive household” of disciples and theology, in its narrow sense, as systematic theology (Schneiders, 2006, p. 198). In this conversation, there are three main partners: God, the person or group and the experience of the tradition in its totality—past and present, corporate and individual.

Certain presuppositions about the nature of God and of the human being underlie the practice of theological reflection. For Christians, theological reflection rests upon the assumption of God’s action in the world. If this action is conceived as God’s address to humankind, then it invites a human response (McFadyen, 1990). Moreover, the implication of the incarnation of Jesus Christ means that this call and response occur in the mundus of everyday life. Located within the broader theological landscape which includes such disciplines as biblical studies and church history, the reflective conversation also involves theology in its more narrow sense of systematic theology with sub-disciplines such as ethics. Insights arising from theological reflection can be integrated into a person’s being and a person may grow in theological depth and understanding.

Developing theological depth is related to theological reflection but it is not synonymous with theological reflection. Theological reflection involves interrogating experience with theological questions. Many models and methods of theological reflection have been proposed. Whitehead and Whitehead (1995) advocate a model of theological reflection in which experience, tradition and culture, like intersecting circles, are brought into a conversation. Killen and de Beer (1995) describe four movements—entering an experience, attending to feelings and images, dialoguing these with tradition and identifying insights which are taken back into everyday life. Robert Kinast highlights five styles of reflection which arise out of the type of initiating experience, how this experience is correlated with the tradition and the emerging praxis (Kinast, 2000). The ministerial style is linked with church ministry, the spiritual style with Christian formation, the feminist style with women’s experience, the inculturaltion style with local and global cultures and the practical with society.

Killen and de Beer suggest that reflection upon experience can be entered into through the portals of tradition, actions in a narrative, personal positions (e.g. beliefs) and culture (Killen & de Beer, 1994). In their book Theological Reflection: Models, Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward (2005) describe several methods which illustrate different starting points and contexts for theological reflection ranging from the heart (personal feelings) to the vernacular (reflection from within local cultures). Whatever the portals or contexts of theological reflection, it is a process which involves attending to a moment, analysing the moment, drawing insights from the analyses, and acting upon the insights (Johnson, 2003). Theological reflection is not an end point, in and of itself: rather, its concern is Christian life and discipleship (Graham, Walton & Ware, 2007).

Theological reflection, spiritual direction and the pastoral spiral/cycle

As it has been seen, theological reflection involves asking theological questions. It is in asking these questions that a spiritual director may enable a person to plumb the depths of their spiritual life within a wider context of Christian discourse, both past and present. Such discourse has and continues to encompass the nature of God, the nature of Christ (Christology), the nature of the church (ecclesiology) and such themes as salvation, sin, grace and creation. Theological reflection can also provide a link to Christian understandings of the patterns of spiritual growth and the practices which nurture this growth.
The art of theological reflection is one of asking appropriate and useful questions and it involves intentional and critical engagement which may, at times, be challenging, liberating or affirming. Through reflection, underlying theological assumptions may be identified. Annice Callahan identifies six images which may emerge in ministry: the giver of all gifts (the person who cannot say ‘no’); the rescuer (the person who wants to save people from life’s challenges); the victim (the person who is used by others); the sharer of God’s gifts (the person who is open to receive and to share God’s gifts); the facilitator (the person who empowers others); and the wounded healer (the person whose pain has been transformed into compassion) (Callahan, 2000). Each of these images have theological, Christological, soteriological and ecclesiological implications which can generate probing questions. With respect to spiritual direction, it is not just a matter of a spiritual director listening and becoming aware of themes and metaphors in the directee’s narrative. Rather, the spiritual director is challenged to identify his or her own personal images. Hence, theological reflection can be engaged in at an intrapersonal level as well as within an interpersonal relationship.

In spiritual direction, intentional time is taken in order to reflect upon a person’s relationship with God, that is, in partnership with the spiritual director, the directee steps apart from the stream of everyday life to reflect upon and discern the movements of the Spirit. In this movement from experience to reflection and back to experience, spiritual direction demonstrates the modus operandi of the pastoral spiral/circle. Donald Schön, in his book The Reflective Practitioner observes two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. The word ‘relationship’ is a nominalisation of the verb ‘to relate’. Hence, it might be said that spiritual direction provides the space for reflection-on-action, where the action that is reflected upon is ‘relating’ with God, self and others. The reflective dimension of the pastoral spiral leads back into the experiential stream of life and with the insights that may have emerged through reflection-on-action, a person may be enabled, with practice, to reflect-in-action. For the Christian, reflection-in-action implies discerning the activity of God in the present moment—an encounter, and an awareness of that encounter, with the living God.

Spiritual direction, as reflection-on-action, can be informed by theology as a “household” of disciplines as well as theology more narrowly defined as systematic or dogmatic. Theological reflection can confirm or challenge the discrepancy between a professed theology (what I say I believe) and an operative theology (what I do) for both the spiritual director and the directee. Reflection can critique destructive images and theologies and support helpful images and theologies. Janet Ruffing (2000) advocates that spiritual directors facilitate their directees in learning to make theological connections with their experience. Consequently, spiritual directors require a degree of both spiritual and theological literacy.

Theological reflection is often construed as an intellectual process with only an incidental or superficial relationship to spiritual life and prayer. The different models and approaches to theological reflection illustrate that it can be a creative process rich in imagery and metaphor. Within the pastoral spiral, theological reflection occurs in a luminal space apart from the initiating experience. It has been suggested that spirituality is located at the boundary between experience and tradition (Sheldrake, 1995). This raises a question of whether there might be a common ground, a space of overlap and interweaving between theological reflection and spirituality as lived experience.


**Theological reflection and prayer**

James O’Conner and Elizabeth Meakes (2008), using an ethnographic approach, examined the similarities and differences between theological reflection and prayer amongst chaplains, pastoral counsellors, ordained and lay persons involved in community ministry and seminarians. Although there were some participants for whom prayer differed from theological reflection (32%) and others for whom the relationship between theological reflection and prayer was ambiguous (16%), for a substantial number of participants (52%), theological reflection and prayer were interrelated to the extent that it could be said that theological reflection merged into prayer (O’Conner & Meakes, 2000).

Theological reflection and prayer both involve the mind and the heart in a process that focuses upon God. One of the participants in the study claimed that prayer “is the deepest form of theological reflection” and another drew attention to the “mindfulness of prayer” (O’Conner & Meakes, 2008, p. 520). At the same time, it is important to be aware of the differences in the focus upon God, the relational dimension and the intention that exists between theological reflection and prayer. Prayer involves a dialogical involvement with God in which relationship is fundamental and the intent is to openly listen to God whereas, theological reflection involves thinking about God and one’s relationship with God in a structured manner (O’Conner & Meakes, 2000).

Although the context of pastoral care differs from that of spiritual direction, the findings of O’Connor and Meakes, suggest that there is a connection between theological reflection and prayer and that a merging between the two may occur in praxis. If one were to imagine a continuum with spirituality as lived experience with its associated affective content at one point and theology with its associated cognitive content at the another point on the continuum then at some place, the practice of theological reflection mingles, interweaves and merges through prayer, the two points of the continuum and hence, a cyclic dynamic emerges with lived experience informing theology and vice versa. Participants, in the study conducted by O’Conner and Meakes, sought intra-subjective (within themselves) and inter-subjective (with others) integration. Moreover, this integration moved towards transformation and change (O’Conner & Meakes, 2000). The model of Christian life which some of the participants found helpful was that of the early Church theologians.

**Plumbing the depths; ascending the heights**

At the beginning of this paper, the gradual separation of theology and spirituality was traced. In the early Church and in the Eastern tradition, the relationship between the cognitive and affective dimensions, mind and heart, have generally maintained a more integrated relationship where, according to Vladimir Lossky, “theology [dogma] and mysticism [personal experience of the divine mysteries] support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other” (Lossky, 1998, p.8). According to Lossky, “mystical experience is a personal working out of the content of the common faith” whereas, theology is concerned with a common experience which is open to all (Lossky, 1998, p. 9). In other words, theology, in both senses of the word, can provide a backdrop against which personal experience may be seen and interpreted and conversely, personal experience can provide material for theological analysis.

According to the Eastern tradition, the integration of mind and heart is not the goal of spiritual life: rather, integration leads towards deification, that is, union with God. De Bray: observes
that “theological reflection is a spiritual quest” (De Bray, 2001, p. 181). This quest or journey has been described in images of descent and of ascent: plumbing the depths, ascending the heights. Two of the pre-requisites for growing in theological depth are self awareness and the ability to critically reflect. Another pre-requisite is the attitude of the learner. To be a learner requires openness, an ability to be challenged, a curiosity and a desire to learn.

Gregory of Nyssa uses the word *epectasis* to describe the soul being continually pulled beyond itself into a deeper relationship with God through successive deaths to self and resurrections into a closer relationship with God. At each point, as the relationship with God deepens, there is discovery of “something heavy weighing on the soul” which needs to be released (Daniélou, 1979, p. 60). Through theological reflection, images and concepts of self and of God can be examined, challenged and transformed; a process which may lead a person still deeper into the depths of God, or using Gregory’s image, “in a movement of perpetual ascent” where “every ending is but a beginning, and every arrival but a new departure” (Daniélou, 1979, pp. 56-57, 69).

Bishop Theophan the Recluse writes that in prayer, “the principal thing is to stand before God with the mind in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life” (Ware, 1986, p. 1). Heart has several associations. It can mean the physical organ and it can mean emotions and feelings. Here, however, heart refers to “our innermost chamber, our secret dwelling place where God lives” (Rossi, 1996-2009, par. 20). Within this inner sanctuary, reason and feelings stand together, with awareness, before the Divine. Theological reflection, through attending to images and feelings and engaging these with tradition, provides a process in which mind and heart can be brought together, perhaps merge and be transformed into prayer.

Within the process spiritual direction, theological reflection may offer a bridge between religion and spirituality and between mind and heart. Both in theological reflection and spiritual direction, a person seeks to recognise the presence and action of God. Through theological reflection personal experience is brought into dialogue with religious tradition. Spiritual direction concerns a person’s relationship with God; theological reflection can help describe the nature of God either in positive or negative images. Through spiritual direction, it may be discerned that one’s relationship with God is interwoven with one’s relationship with other people and the world; theological reflection can show how one’s self images impact on all dimensions of these relationships. Theological reflection can provide input towards reflection-on-action in the praxis of spiritual direction. And as part of the spiritual journey, theological reflection can contribute towards the process of plumbing the depths of God or in another image, ascending the heights of self-transcendence and transformation, the process of *expecsis*.

**Conclusion**

Through the centuries in western Christendom, theology and spirituality have become separated. During the 20th century, for many people, spirituality became divorced from its religious frameworks. Such divisions and movements, run the risk of severing the reasoning mind from the affective heart and the favouring of one over the other. Within the practice of spiritual direction, theological reflection may function as bridge linking mind and heart, religion and spirituality. Ultimately, however, the limit of language is reached, at which point, mind and heart are enwrapped in the silence of prayer in the presence of the sacred, the mystery of God.
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Spiritual direction with the person with a life threatening illness

Denise Brosnan*

In this paper I am exploring ways in which spiritual direction may assist the person with a life-threatening illness. I propose spirituality for living with a life-threatening illness:

- Live in the present moment
- Live with gratitude
- Live with hope
- Find rest in God...nurture one’s soul
- Live in peace with God, self and others
- Forgive others and forgive self
- Live a balanced life
- Surrender

Keywords: spirituality, living with a life-threatening illness, spiritual direction

Introduction

Five years ago I sat opposite my GP and watched him stare at my blood-test results feeling his discomfort, as he told me that I had Acute Myeloid Leukaemia. In the next few sentences, he would talk about death and about chemotherapy. My life, as I knew it had changed. The next day I went into hospital and, since then have been involved with medical experts. What do the spiritual experts have to offer?

Spiritual Direction

When a person is faced with issues of life and death it is difficult to focus on other issues. What seemed important before diagnosis may seem less important or even irrelevant now. The spiritual director encourages the person with a life-threatening illness to bring whatever issues they want to the conversation. God is present in it all. (Hart, 2007). It is important to allow the person to be where they are at. The spiritual director listens in a compassionate manner.

I remember how difficult it was to pray when I had leukaemia. I was in hospital and I just looked at the greeting cards on the wall and I trusted that each card represented a prayer. Later, when I was recovering and still having some treatment, I had difficulty choosing a retreat. None of the themes seemed to mean anything to me. I seemed to be on a different

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journey to everyone else. I was invited by a retreat director to come and stay at the retreat centre and to feel at peace about where I was at. I was very relieved. I learned that hospitality is at the heart of Spiritual Direction. (Hay, 2007 & Nouwen, 1972)

**Spirituality and Living with a Life-Threatening Illness**

Over the past five years I have been reflecting upon what spirituality for living with a life-threatening illness might look like and now I am proposing the following:

**Live in the present moment…live one day at a time**

After I went into remission my medical specialist used to say to me *Make each day count.* Sometimes when a person is very ill, they may find themselves living a moment at a time. When a person lives in the present moment they learn to let go of concerns about the past and the future. They are truly present in what is happening in the now. Ellis (2003, p.139) reminds us that life is too short to be serious and that we have such a limited time in this world. Every minute is precious. Recently I was with two small children when they saw their first sunrise over the ocean. It was a moment of wonder for them and for me. Ellis tells us that we can learn from children to keep our inner child alive, to have more fun and to do things that make us truly happy.

*A suggested prayer: Breath Prayer*

In this prayer one focuses on one’s breath. Maureen Conroy encourages the use of this type of prayer.

*Reflection:*

*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.* (Matthew 6:34. NRSV)

*There where you are, you will find God.* (Mary MacKillop, 1871)

**Live with gratitude**

Having an illness can give us a sharpened sense of what, or often who, is most important. One’s whole life may be reviewed. Doors often close when one is sick as the person may be unable to work at the same level as before. Sometimes, as time goes on, other doors open. More time may be spent with loved ones, on a chosen hobby, going a long awaited holiday or eating more healthily.

*A suggested prayer: Journal daily blessings.*

*Reflection:*

*I will bless the Lord at all times.* (Psalm 34. NRSV)

*Gratitude is the memory of the heart.* (Mary MacKillop, 1907).

**Live with hope**

Petrea King (1992, p.7) has outlined the characteristics of long-term survivors of cancer. These include:

- *A refusal to accept the fatality of the disease*
- *A purpose for living.*
- *The ability to express feelings.*
• *A willingness to follow one’s own inner guidance for healing.*

I was fortunate when I was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia that I believed that the treatment would be successful. Many people were praying for me and I relied on the prayers of others. It is important to be surrounded, if possible, by positive people. After my treatment was over I was living on other people’s blood and platelets through regular transfusions. This continued for a year. I told myself I *do not have leukaemia any more so it is not fatal.* In prayer I imaged my bone marrow becoming more and more healthy.

Fortunately, I was eventually able to work as a School Pastoral Worker. Schools are very vibrant places fully of young, healthy people and I was further encouraged to live with hope. I enrolled in a Spiritual Direction Training Programme that has taken four years to complete. This was a great leap of faith since I was living one day a time.

*A suggested prayer:* Mandala or walking the labyrinth or Guided Visualization

**Guided Visualization**

While I was in hospital I used the power of visualization for healing. At one stage, during treatment, I was in ICU with blood poisoning and a low-white cell count. I was extremely ill and started to think I was dying. One of my friends came in and said: *You are going to get over this.* I realized that, if I was going to get over it, I needed to change my thinking. Instead of thoughts about dying, I started to visualize God’s grace flowing through me and through my blood-stream and taking out all the poison. I stayed with this visualization. Eventually my Specialist called in an Infectious Diseases Doctor and he replaced the antibiotics I was on and within a day or so I was on the road to recovery. The blood poisoning did leave my blood-stream as I had visualized.

Guided Visualization can be done in a prayer space with or without quiet music, in a hospital bed or at home … wherever we find ourselves. I believe it is important to keep God in the picture. It is always God who heals.

*Reflection:*

*And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?* (Matthew 6:27 NRSV)

*Be calm and full of confidence in God.* (Mary MacKillop, 1871.)

**Find rest in God…nurture one’s soul**

I was in an oncology ward for many weeks. I was amazed how many people spoke of God. Placing one’s self and one’s life in God’s hands makes a lot of sense.

At one stage I used to lie on the bed and imagine I was in a cocoon wrapped in God – God within me and God surrounding me.

*A suggested prayer: Praying with a chosen icon.*

Gibeau (1995, p.5) tells us:
Don’t analyse an icon, gaze at it, I was told. Gaze and let the icon gaze at you. Not being three-dimensional, it lacks the perspective that, in most Western art, enables the viewer to peer into the background; in contrast, the locus of an icon’s focus is the beholder.

It seems to me that this form of prayer is especially helpful for those who are not feeling well as it is often difficult to focus or pray when one is feeling unwell.

Reflection:
*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*
(Matt 11: 28-30 NRSV)

*Lean upon God.* (Mary MacKillop, 1873).

**Live in peace with God, self and others**
Walter Wink (2003, Pp. 58-60) tells us that the ultimate religious question today is: How can I find God in my enemy? For him there is no other way to God in our time but through the enemy, for loving the enemy has become the key both to human survival in the age of terror and to personal transformation. He tells us either we find the God who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, or we may have no more sunrises. Sometimes we may discover the enemy within. Do I love the unlovable within myself? Do I love the rejected one within myself? Am I at peace with myself?

*Prayer:* Meditation using a mantra e.g. *maranatha* or some other word such as *healing peace.*

Main (1988, p.57) tells us that to learn to meditate is to begin the process of making contact with the source of all being. What we have to discover is that this creative source is to be found within our own being, life and energy. Petrea King (1995, p.89) says that the practice of meditation is any activity which facilitates the experience of being fully aware in the present moment. With regular practice meditation brings a great sense of well-being, greater peace of mind and a relaxed body. Meditation also releases energy within the body which can be used for healing. King says that meditation can give us the impetus to implement and maintain a program for our healing. It affirms our own inner healing power and it activates the wisdom of healing within our body.

*Reflection:*
*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.* (John 14:27 NRSV)

*Goodbye forever to all old scores.* (Mary MacKillop, 1890)

**Forgive others and forgive self**
It is sometimes extremely hard to forgive others, however, forgiving others leads to compassion. King advises us to *acknowledge the resentment, forgive the person or situation, accept it, and move on.* Held resentments and bitterness cause stagnation and disease. King (1995, p.83) reminds us that it is we who suffer while we hold on to the pain and non-forgiveness.

To forgive ourselves is perhaps the greatest challenge of all. To forgive myself means to let the past be past. In this way we can learn from experiences and then approach each moment
as being fresh and new. King (1995) tells us that to constantly judge oneself for the past is to sacrifice the present and future to the fears of yesterday.

_A suggested prayer:_ The Our Father or a meditation on forgiveness.

_Reflection:_
*And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors._ (Matthew 6: 12 NRSV)

_Be full of forgiveness, hope and love._ (Mary MacKillop, 1873).

_Surrender_
When I was lying in hospital it came to me that two prayers were necessary. One was to give glory to God and only to God. The other was to surrender – to say _not my will but yours be done._

Tolle (2001, Pp. 129-130) tells us that surrender is inner acceptance of what is without any reservations. He differentiates between _life_ and _life situations._ Illness, for him, is part of a life situation having a past and a future. For him the art is to activate the redeeming power of the Now. Tolle states that as there are no problems in the Now and there is no illness either. Tolle extols us to _allow the suffering to force us into the present moment, into a state of intense conscious presence._ He urges us to _use suffering or, indeed, a major illness for enlightenment._ Tolle tells us that surrender does not transform what is, at least not directly. Surrender transforms the one who surrenders. When one is transformed, ones whole world is transformed.

Tolle goes on to encourage those who are ill or disabled not to feel that they have failed in some way. Instead, he urges us to become alchemists i.e. to transmute base metal into gold, suffering into consciousness, disaster into enlightenment. That one step is called surrender. Fear and Pain will be transmuted into an inner peace and serenity that come from a very deep place the _peace of God._

Tolle (2001, p.132) goes on to say that compared to that peace, happiness is quite a shallow thing. With this radiant peace comes the realization – not on the level of mind but within the depth of your Being – that you are indestructible, immortal. This is not a belief. It is absolute certainty that needs no external evidence or proof from some secondary source.

Tolle (p.136) also tells us that the acceptance of suffering is a journey into death. Facing deep pain, allowing it to be, taking your attention into it, is to enter death consciously. When you have died this death, you realize that there is no death – and there is nothing to fear. Only the ego dies.

Thornton speaks about the ‘guidance game’. According to the Oxford Dictionary, he says, ‘game’ means ‘having the spirit of a gamecock; full of pluck, showing fight, spirited’ – or ‘to die game; to meet death resolutely’. Thornton says that is the end-product of spiritual direction; if we can so guide others as to meet death resolutely, gamely, we have done our job well (Thornton, 1984, p.16).

_A suggested prayer_  
Praying with the Scriptures using Lectio Divina or Ignatian spirituality or drawing.
Reflection:
My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done. (Matthew 26:42 NRSV)

Let self be forgotten and let God’s glory, His will and the general good absorb our thoughts, deliberations and actions. (Mary MacKillop, 1898).

Reflections and activities

Some activities recommended for workshops, retreats or support groups could include the following:

* Meditation
* Honouring each person’s story – where is God in this story?
* Finding balance in one’s life. Asking the questions: What do I want more of in my life? What do I want less of in my life?
* A search for one’s own Spirituality in living with a Life Threatening Illness. Asking The questions: What supports me? What keeps me going?
* Where to from here? Asking the questions: What are my dreams and hopes for the future?

Conclusion

This assignment has reflected on the issues of how spiritual direction can assist the person with a Life-Threatening illness. It seems to me that being present in a caring and supportive manner is most important. The Director can take the lead from the directee thus offering true hospitality.

I acknowledge the wisdom I have received from Lyn Dunn during our sharing on this topic.

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Is Christian-Muslim interfaith spiritual direction possible?

Cheryl Camp*

The contemporary growth of interfaith dialogue is giving rise to the development of a new theology and spirituality of engagement among religions. Does this extend as far as the sacred space of Spiritual Direction? This presentation explores the possibility of a Christian-Muslim Spiritual Direction dynamic.

Keywords: Muslim, interfaith spiritual direction.

The 2009 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Melbourne symbolized contemporary global efforts to forge a new spirituality of interreligious cooperation at different levels of engagement. The deepest level is that of mutual transformation. The dynamic of Spiritual Direction provides one locus for that transformation. Is it possible between Christians and Muslims? In interviews with two Muslim women academics, they affirmed that it is possible for Muslims to receive spiritual direction from a Christian and for Christians to receive it from Muslim spiritual directors. However, their opinions were given with caution and a warning. In the case of a Christian directing a Muslim, it is essential that the process does not stray into the realm of theological doctrine, for despite some common ground, the differences are palpable, for example, in the concept of God. While much effort in Christian-Muslim dialogue is given to affirming that both faith traditions are monotheistic and therefore believe in the same God, the Christian doctrine of Trinity remains a stumbling block for many Muslims who see it as inimical to the essential Unity (tawhid) of God. To avoid this problem, it would be necessary for the Christian Spiritual Director to refer to God in the Islamic way, as “Allah”. It would also be essential for the Christian director to have some knowledge of Muslim spirituality in order to be able to enter into the world of the Muslim directee and actually ‘hear’ what was being said.

Muslim spirituality

The heart of Islam is submission (islam) to God. The Muslim comes to know God (Allah) through the divine revelation of the Qur’an received by the Prophet Muhammad. Reciting or listening to recitations of the Qur’an for Muslims is a deep religious experience and has been likened to the experience of Christians receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist. Renard (1996) says that for Muslims, pronouncing the Qur’an devoutly is having the Word on one’s tongue, receiving it most profoundly. The words of God and Muhammad are “a living presence, an atmosphere as pervasive as the air they breathe”. The five obligatory daily prayers, especially Friday prayers, consist of words from the Qur’an and movements that symbolize submission and waiting. Another role of Islamic prayer is to act as a protection against the ego (Brohi, 1991). Contemplation and faithfulness to the Sharia (Law) are inextricably conjoined. (Chodkiewicz, 1993).

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Islamic Spiritual Direction
Since the earliest times in Islam, spiritual direction was given by spiritual guides called Shaykhs who assisted seekers with the abiding inner work necessary for them to progress along the path towards union with God by helping them discern the blocks in their relationship with God. (Rahman, 2007). Through centuries of experience, the Shaykhs observed that people moved through a series of stages (“stations” or levels of spiritual experience) on this path. Often recognized as seven, particularly by the Sufis, the stations in ascending order are repentance, watchfulness, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust, and acceptance (the annihilation of the self or ego \([\text{nafs}]\) and union with God). Although many people may not reach the last and highest stage of complete submission to God, Ashraf (1991) says that does not completely destroy their possibility of drawing closer to God.

Christian-Muslim Spiritual Direction
Muslims come to spiritual direction with this background of spirituality. With this knowledge, the challenge for Christian spiritual directors would be to surrender their power to the ‘strangeness’ that Muslim directees bring, and enter into their world of spiritual experience. In this sacred space, mutual transformation can happen (Park, 2010).

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Psychodynamics and the giving of the Spiritual Exercises: a case study

Peter Saunders∗

As part of a Ph D thesis, this research explores the place of psychodynamics in the giving of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It aims to develop a deeper appreciation of the relationship between psychoanalytic processes and the giving of the Exercises through the experience of the director. This qualitative research has used semi-structured in depth interviews with 22 directors of the Spiritual Exercises from different parts of Australia. Of the directors interviewed, 11 were Jesuit priests, 3 religious woman, 3 laymen, and 7 laywomen. Ages ranged between 30 and 90 years. Some received the Exercises as a preached 30-day retreat, some as a directed 30-day retreat and some as a 30 week directed retreat. Most had no formal training to become directors of the Exercises. Some learnt as an apprentice with a supervisor, others since 1999 have been trained through the Arrupe formation program. Some have given the Exercises only as a 30 day silent retreat, others only as a 35 week retreat in daily life, some have given it both ways. Most have had little or no psychology training or experience of counseling or therapy. There were very different views expressed about the place of psychological or psychotherapeutic processes in the giving of the Exercises. Most had little knowledge of psychodynamic concepts, yet most have implicitly used psychodynamics in the way they related with their exercitants in the giving of the Exercises. In this case study, from the research, I explore the use of projective identification in the giving of the Exercises. The details of the case have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Keywords: Spiritual Exercises, projective identification, parallel process

Anne begins the 30 day retreat with her director, Jean. Anne is in her 60s and is an experienced woman in religious life. Jean is also an experienced religious woman from a different congregation. Anne begins by telling Jean that she has been in hospital recently with a kidney complaint and is still recovering. She has been looking forward to the retreat, she wants to renew her relationship with God. Anne reports that all is going well in her prayer of the first week of the Exercises. Anne says she has a good relationship with Jesus. Jean is not so sure, as she feels Anne speaks in a kind of “spiritual” way about Jesus, so Jean is wondering how deep her relationship with Jesus really is. Anne also speaks about recent losses in her life. Her father died in the previous twelve months. Jean notices that there is not a lot of affect when Anne is talking about this and also notices that she feels sad at Anne’s story. Jean is concerned that Anne’s grief is unresolved and if it is not acknowledged, it will inhibit her interior freedom during the Exercises. As the week goes on, Anne is getting more concerned about her health as she is waking up in the night with abdominal pain, but is not clear about what to do. Jean tries to help her with possible options, including having a checkup with a doctor. Jean notices that Anne finds it difficult to make a decision for herself about her self. It is becoming clearer that Anne is comfortable with making decisions to take care of others but not herself. Jean felt under considerable pressure to tell Anne what to do, which she resisted. With great difficulty Anne decided to go to the doctor, where she finds that her kidneys are okay. It appears it may have been anxiety.

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The Spiritual Exercises are a structured process of spiritual formation within the Catholic tradition. Ignatius of Loyola developed them through his own conversion experience in the 16th century and they have been widely used over the last 500 years. One of the key elements of the Exercises for Ignatius is his emphasis on the exercitant’s feelings throughout the retreat. He explains in Annotations,

> For it is not knowing much, but realising and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul. [An 2]

> As in all the following Spiritual Exercises, we use acts of the intellect in reasoning, and acts of the will in movements of the feelings: let us remark that, in the acts of the will, when we are speaking vocally or mentally with God our Lord, or with His Saints, greater reverence is required on our part than when we are using the intellect in understanding. [An 3]

(SE in Munitz & Endean, 1996)

Throughout the Exercises Ignatius encourages the exercitant to savour the feelings they are experiencing during the retreat. Ignatius is implying that the deep intimate experience with God is through our feelings. However, Ignatius was also aware, through his own experience, that our feelings can be deceptive. So we need discernment to assist us in becoming aware of our feelings, then understanding what they mean, and then choosing how to proceed appropriately towards God (Gallagher, 2005). What the Exercises do is invite the retreatant into a deeper experience of their self, and hence their emotional life. It is here that Ignatius believed we can become aware of the movements of the spirits.

In the story above, we see Anne coming with a good desire to renew her relationship with God. This is confirmed in her commitment to undertake the Spiritual Exercises. However within a short period of time we see that her director, Jean, is concerned about Anne. Jean is concerned about the way Anne talks about her recent grief and the way she talks about her relationship with God. To Jean, Anne is detached from her feelings. In fact it appears that Jean is experiencing the feelings that Anne can not. I believe that this does happen for directors when they are giving the Exercises. So how does a director understand what is happening, and what does she do with this?

When difficult things happen to all people in life it takes time for us to integrate these experiences into our self. These experiences are often associated with very difficult and often intense feelings. Sometimes, these can be too much to bear. So what do we do with them? One way is to seek help with them from someone else. This we often do unconsciously. For a small child this person is often the mother. The mother can often feel the distress of her child, when the child can’t acknowledge it to their self or to mother.

I think that this is what might be happening to Anne in the Exercises. Anne has had some recent experiences (the death of her father, and her own health scares) in her life that have been too difficult for her to integrate into herself. And with God we see that Anne has a limited relationship with God, reinforced by her experience in religious life. For Anne, Jesus is the Christ, the saviour, who she worships from a distance. He is the one you thank and apologise to when nothing is happening in her prayer. Why? Because she is not allowed to get angry with God. And just as she might have deep feelings about her own life, Anne may also have deep feelings about her relationship with God, but she is not able to acknowledge these
to herself. So what does she do, when the director is inviting her through the Exercises to experience these deeper feelings?

She splits off the feelings that she can’t bear at the beginning of the retreat and she puts them into her director to carry for her. This process is known in psychodynamic terms as **projective identification**. This concept was developed by Melanie Klein, a British psychoanalyst, in the 1940’s, and evolved out of Freud’s concepts of splitting, projection and introjection, in his work in the development of psychoanalysis. Bion (1962/1984) developed Klein’s idea further to suggest that at times the therapist allows him or herself to be a container for the patient to put unwanted feelings into, and that the work of the therapist is to contain these emotional experiences in such a way, that the patient experiences a sense of safety and trust. Over time the patient will take the uncomfortable feelings back in such a way that they are now more digestible and able to be integrated more fully into their self. So in Anne’s case she projects the difficult feelings, e.g. of sadness and anger, into Jean. Jean did feel the sadness and anger that Anne couldn’t. Projective identification is a form of communication whereby, in psychoanalytic terms, the patient is trying to convey to the therapist “a state of mind that cannot be verbalised by the patient” (Joseph, 1987, 72). In this case, Anne wants Jean to truly know what she is feeling. What it is really like for her. But she can’t speak it yet. Nevertheless Anne responds to Jean’s compassion as her director by trying to communicate with her unconsciously what it is like for her. She projects into Jean the difficult feelings that she can’t bear at this point of the Exercises. Anne unconsciously draws Jean into identifying and experiencing what she is splitting off and projecting into her.

One of the impacts of projective identification can be that it depletes the projector. We see an example of it towards the end of the first week when Anne is getting more concerned about her health condition. Having split off particular feelings into Jean, Anne doesn’t then have the necessary emotional energy to help her to make good choices. When Anne begins having abdominal pains towards the end of the first week, Anne is filled with anxiety, but no anger. She is fearful and wants Jean to make the decision for her as to what to do. Jean feels this transference pressure from Anne intensely. Jean acknowledged her countertransference was also strong, feeling very frustrated with Anne for not being able to make good decisions to take care of herself. It takes considerable effort on Jean’s part to remain neutral. After a couple of days of this intense situation, Jean is asking Anne, “What do you want to do?” Anne eventually says she wants to go to the doctor. This happens and with tests her anxiety is relieved when the doctor says there is not a problem with her kidneys.

Why do the health issues of a retreatant matter so much in the retreat? Well at a practical level, the director wants to be sure that the retreatant is physically well enough to do the Exercises. However, at a spiritual level, as a director I am also interested in the meaning of everything that happens to the exercitant during the Exercises. Ignatius knew this in the daily Examen that he asked the exercitant to pray during the retreat. The purpose of the Examen is to reflect on where has God been present in my day? This implies that at a spiritual level everything that happens in the exercitant’s day in the Exercises is meaningful. Part of the work of the director is to assist the retreatant to attend to what happens so they can come to appreciate the meaning. These meanings are the clues to the movement of the spirits in the retreatant. What is the Holy Spirit drawing them to appreciate more, to change, to listen to, to act on?

So why is all this psychological understanding of what’s happening to the exercitant important? Can’t we just focus on what is happening to the exercitant’s relationship with
God? My research is finding this was commonly the stance taken in the past by directors of the Exercises. Quoted to me on a number of occasions was Ignatius’ advice to the director in the Annotation 15,

...when seeking the Divine Will, it is more fitting and much better, that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in future. So, he who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the centre like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord. (SE in Munitz & Endean, 1996)

Directors have interpreted this over the years that the director is not to get in the way. So why focus on what is happening in the psychodynamics between the director and the retreatant? I believe it is important because as we focus on what is happening to the retreatant with the director, it can give the director clues as to what is happening with the retreatant’s relationship with God. I believe that they can be understood as parallel processes. Parallel process is a concept that evolved out of psychotherapy and supervision, whereby a therapist dealing with a difficult situation with a client, goes to supervision and unknowingly acts out the issue of their client with the supervisor (Sachs & Shapiro, 1976; Brown & Miller, 2002). If we think about it in the Exercises, the retreatant acts out their dilemma in their relationship with God through their relationship with their director.

In Anne’s case, her image of Jesus as the distant Christ leaves her with feelings of unworthiness. Anne wants to experience Jesus’ love, but like an anxious child, she is wary of rejection, so can only approach Jesus with feelings of devotion. Negative feelings, such as frustration and anger, are not allowed with Jesus. This is not the true relationship Jesus sought with his disciples in his life on earth, nor is it what he seeks with us now. Jesus seeks a relationship that is based on honest acknowledgement of who we are and being able to communicate that with him. Ignatius came to know this through his own experience of his relationship with Jesus. In the Exercises Ignatius is inviting the retreatant to own all of who they are with Jesus. If the director is able to pay attention to the psychodynamics that can unfold between him or her and the exercitant, then they can assist the retreatant to become more consciously aware of their true feelings and to help them own them without fear and guilt.

How does a director do this? By learning to listen to their own feeling responses in their relationship with their retreatant and to appreciate that they can provide valuable information as to what is happening for the exercitant. This is a shift from seeing the transference projections of the retreatant and the director’s countertransference responses as something to be wary of in the Exercises (Barry, 2003). Projective identification invites the director to become more aware of their responses to the exercitant and then appreciating and using them to help the exercitant. In Jean’s case this was facilitated through supervision during the giving of the Exercises. It gave Jean a chance to stop and reflect on what was happening to her in the retreat, not primarily so she could examine her own personal issues that might be being induced by the projective identification, but more to help her to appreciate what it might be telling her about what she is containing for the retreatant at that point in time. It also helped her to manage her feeling responses with the retreatant in the direction sessions, rather than overreacting from her countertransference.
Projective identification is a particular aspect of the transference relationship that can occur between the director and exercitant during the giving of the Exercises. I believe it can be a helpful concept to assist the director to understand what is happening for the exercitant during the Exercises. If the director can learn to become aware of these dynamics, they can use them to assist the exercitant to deepen their relationship with their self and God.

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Using Bernard Lonergan’s cognitive method in discerning self as self-in-relation

Many writers I read on the topic of spiritual direction suggest that a goal of spiritual direction is supporting and encouraging directees in the development of a sense of self as self-in-relation with God and the world. While most writers call for a holistic approach, few offer concrete strategies for combining heart and mind, body and soul, or for assisting directees in articulating their emerging sense self as self-in-relation. Some, in fact, deny the effectiveness of cognitive approaches in the affective domain and the application of cognitive methodologies to religious experience, whereas I propose that the cognitive process of identifying and naming experience is essential to understanding self and making decisions and life choices.

Seeking a sense of self-in-relation necessitates a surrender of the autonomous self while seeking to affirm inner authority and authenticity, and connectedness with God and others. It involves examining patterns of past experiences and objectifying feelings, longings, intuitions, fears, guilt, shame, needs and desires. Bernard Lonergan’s cognitive methodology offers a schema for exploring recurrent life patterns in ways which can sit within discernment beside scripture, theology, tradition, and the recalling of past life-giving relationships. The method focuses on the conscious feelings which precede knowledge, then processing those conscious feelings in order to act authentically. I suggest that the outcome creates opportunities for exploring the acquired learning about self, God and others in everyday life with fresh insights.

**Keywords:** discerning self as self-in-relation

Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was a Canadian Jesuit priest, theologian and philosopher. A background in Ignatian thought and practises are evident in his work. In 1957 he published his ground-breaking work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* and in 1973 his *Method in Theology*. In these works he identified an empirical method of all human knowing. Essentially, his method has three levels – experiencing, understanding and judgement. From these three levels Lonergan explored ethical or moral action. He proposes that incremental development in knowing oneself results in self-transcendence. I will explore how this might be effective within a Spiritual Direction relationship.

William Barry and William Connolly (1981) perceive that a long-held division between theology and spirituality began to change in the 1970s and 1980s. They consider Bernard that Lonergan’s self-transcendence method, as he it described it in *Method in Theology* (1973),

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* Janelle Macgregor is a Uniting Church minister and practising spiritual director. This paper arises from postgraduate research undertaken in ministry practice at Murdoch University, 2009-2010.
significantly contributes to that shift by reclaiming religious experience in theological terms. Lonergan’s self-transcendence method is based in the experience of being in love with God. Barry and Connolly describe Lonergan’s method as identifying a human inclination for self-transcendence. They conclude: “the religious component is supplied when I can say that this capacity has been actualized, that is, that God is in love with me and I with him (sic)”.

Nevertheless, Barry and Connolly stop short of exploring the contribution Lonergan’s method of self-transcendence might make to Spiritual Direction. Perhaps this is because they do not acquaint ‘religious experience’ with the cognitive processes that Lonergan advocates. Joseph Allen (1994) sits with Barry and Connolly in characterising Spiritual Direction as primarily concerned with ‘religious experience’. Allen notes that

Lonergan adds that the phenomenon of repeated experiences, observed by the director and directee alike in the extended process of dialogue, can be a sign that God desires an avenue of entrance into the person’s life (1994:70).

He proposes that experiential elements cannot be address through cognitional processes. By referring to Lonergan’s method, I will argue that experiential elements can be addressed through cognitional processes.

Lonergan proposes a method of self-transcendence is concerned with identifying the conscious feelings which precede knowledge, then processing those conscious feelings in order to act authentically. Lonergan develops his self-transcendence method as “the concrete and dynamic unfolding of human attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility” (1973:24).

It is a foundational principle in Lonergan’s thought that “human development is not only in skills and virtues but also in holiness” (1973:116). Lonergan argues that development in holiness requires self-transcendence, that is, a movement beyond the self to engagement in God’s world. Lonergan defines intellectual and moral self-transcendence as different notions, yet part of the same cognitive process. Intellectual self-transcendence occurs when individuals achieve knowledge, acquiring some new information which re-shapes the self. Moral self-transcendence is attained by acknowledging what is universally worthwhile and thus acquiring a principle of what is good – focusing beyond the self towards to others. Lonergan’s analogy for self-transcendence is falling in love - making space for another in one’s life, be it interpersonal, intimate love or love for human welfare.

Movement in holiness, then, is the questing of an integrated wholeness of self whereby the individual comes into relationship with God through the giving up of self to allow God’s goodness to be at work in and through the individual and, hence, in human society. Lonergan’s concept of holiness is not simply the attainment of a personal spiritual awareness of a relationship with God for the benefit of the self. Lonergan proposes that when individuals move towards a self-sacrificing love for others they achieve a level of “human good [which] becomes absorbed in an all-encompassing good” (1973:116). In so doing, individuals shift from the value of individual good towards the good that humankind can achieve. This requires the individual to envision goodness as a value that originates in God, not in self, nor even in humankind. Lonergan explains:

to conceive God as originating value and the world as terminal value implies that God too is self transcending and that the world is the fruit of his self-transcendence, the expression and manifestation of his benevolence and beneficence (1973:116).
If God is self-transcending, then others and the world must also be the object of love/Love. Lonergan portrays God as dynamic and eternal rather than as omniscient and omnipresent. Thus, when individuals are fully engaged with God, they participate in the dynamic and the eternal that is God. For Lonergan then, moving towards holiness is moving beyond the personal, beyond the immediate, even beyond the contemporaneous, to participate in God’s life in the world. Moving towards holiness requires progressive awareness of the mystery of God.

The desire to engage in the mystery can best be described as faith. Lonergan insists that faith is borne out of grace. Beyond the knowledge we gain through experience and various forms of learning about God and our life in God, is the knowledge that comes through “the discernment of values and the judgments of a person in love” with God because this love is the dynamic nature of God within us. Lonergan contends that faith is such further knowledge when the love is God’s love flooding our hearts. To our apprehension of vital social, cultural, and personal values, there is an added apprehension of transcendent value. The apprehension consists in the experienced fulfillment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actual orientation towards the mystery of love and awe (1973:115).

According to Lonergan, people have an innate desire for self-transcendence and he asserts that “authentic persons [achieve] self-transcendence by their good choices” (1973:115). His thesis is that good choices are the outcomes of the cognitive methodology of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. For Lonergan, self-transcendence not only moves towards justice for, and within human society, but also has a redemptive benefit for human society. A confident sense of self-in-relation is knowing self-in-relation. Self-in-relation incorporates being in love with God, others and the world with increasing awareness of peace and justice in personal life and in community. Self-transcendence is the capacity to recognize and participate in God’s creative and redemptive activity in all of creation. Knowing self as self-in-relation is the outcome of self-transcendence. The development of a sense of self-in-relation can be facilitated by a process of discernment in Spiritual Direction. Lonergan’s concept of self-transcendence and his cognitive methodology for exploring recurrent life patterns sits effectively beside scripture, tradition, and life-giving past relationships within discernment. Lonergan’s methodology is valuable in the discernment process because it enables directors and directees to shape their conversation using the schema to assist directees to articulate their incremental understanding and to explore the consequences of their acquired learning about self, God and others for everyday life with fresh insights.

In a contemporary application of Lonergan’s concept of self-transcendence, Len Sperry argues that “historically, holiness was the defining characteristic of spiritual theology while goodness was the defining characteristic of moral theology” (2002:68). Sperry observes that there was a split between morality and spirituality because morality became associated with rightness rather than goodness, whereas spirituality was connected with interiority and separateness. In that view, “everyone was expected to manifest goodness but only a few would achieve holiness” (2002:61). Sperry laments what he perceives as a decline in moral theology in Christianity, suggesting that ethical and moral theology not only became absent in worship and preaching, but also in Spiritual Direction. He concludes that the individualism which so characterised Western life in the twentieth century also fostered spiritual narcissism, and he claims that people are now pursuing Spiritual Direction to seek resolution of moral concerns in addition to addressing matters of meaning and purpose, wholeness and well-being in their lives. For Sperry, holiness involves living ethically. Living ethically means
“practicing right speech and right action” and includes dealing with residual emotions from previous unethical behaviours. He suggests that this leads to emotional wisdom. Emotional wisdom involves mastering and reducing toxic and painful effects such as fear and anger; fostering positive attitudes such as gratitude and generosity, and cultivating such positive emotions as love and compassion. The goal is neither indulgence nor repression of emotions, but rather appropriateness, balance, and equanimity (2002:65).

Sperry claims that “wisdom is a liberating spiritual capacity” by dissolving one’s delusions about oneself, especially the delusion of autonomy. Sperry explains emotional wisdom as being about “mediating the presence of God in one’s environment” and growing in concern and compassion for others. Growing in compassion includes self-care; self-care includes building self-esteem. As the ego diminishes, compassion increases. Emotional wisdom, then, is the ability to balance self-love and love of others.

Sperry nominates self-care and compassion among other virtues that are necessary for achieving this balance between self-love and love of others. In addition to self-care and compassion, Sperry proposes charity and holiness, prudence, trustworthiness, fidelity, justice, fortitude and courage, constancy and endurance, temperance and physical fitness as virtues. He explains trustworthiness as practicing honesty, fairness, truthfulness, loyalty, dependability, humility; fidelity as practising friendship and mutuality; temperance as moderation in all behaviours with balanced approaches to physical appetites. Sperry explains prudence as listening to experience, seeking counsel, anticipating consequences and being open to the unexpected. Thereby, prudence is exercised when egoism diminishes.

Sperry also explores Lonergan’s notion of transformation in six dimensions of the self – the affective, moral, socio-political, intellectual, somatic and religious. The affective dimension of transformation includes taking responsibility for one’s own emotional life with all its feelings, passions, intentions and regrets. In affective transformation, forgiveness inaugurates a new level of conscious integration because feelings of anger and fear, shame and guilt separate individuals from God. The moral dimension of transformation addresses principles of justice and calls on individuals to evaluate practical consequences within everyday living. The socio-political dimension of transformation incorporates challenging what may be normative systems in society wherever those systems fail to uphold principles of justice, human rights, and the integrity of persons. The intellectual dimension of transformation requires “that individuals acquire a sufficient grasp of the theological issues and controversies surrounding their faith tradition to formulate their own position” – in other words, to personally appropriate the beliefs and tenets held within their tradition (2002:120). The somatic dimension of transformation addresses matters of wellness and wellbeing, inasmuch as wellness and wellbeing may or may not include physical health. Wellness and wellbeing, however, do include developing life-affirming attitudes to sexuality and cognitive and emotional vitality. The religious dimension of transformation is commitment to developing a relationship with God and participating in God’s life in the world.

Walter E Conn considers the desire for self-transcendence as constitutive of personhood (1998). Conn sees a creative tension between autonomy and interdependence. He explains that psychology has identified a dynamic relationship between “the desire for separation, differentiation and autonomy” and “the desire for attachment, integration and relationship” (1998:74). As such, self-transcendence is a natural yearning to engage in a relational reality. Like Barry and Connolly, Conn finds the process of self-transcendence best described in
Bernard Lonergan’s method of self-transcendence wherein Lonergan explores self-transcendence as a cognitive enterprise. Unlike, Barry and Connolly, Conn takes up Lonergan’s method and relates it to Spiritual Direction, noting that Lonergan’s method makes no distinction between heart and mind. Conn argues that the aim of Spiritual Direction should lie in companioning people to accumulate a sense of self-transcendence by assisting them to address their limitations and inhibitions in building relationships. In order to progress in self-transcendence, individuals must understand self-as-subject and explore the possibilities and potentials of achieving an integration of self with the desire to transcend self. Conn defines self-transcendence as the “movement beyond self in an effort to bring about the good of others” (1998:35). He describes authentic self-transcendence as including moral transformation wherein “we shift our criterion of decision from self-centred satisfaction to neighbor-oriented value” and as “escaping our egocentric gravity” (1998:36). Consistency can only occur when one is in love with the object (God and other) rather than with the subject, the self. Being in love requires a complete surrender of autonomy, and that surrender of autonomy is the Gospel’s call to live in God’s life. It is not the surrender of self, but the surrender of autonomy that is the marker of being in love with God and others.

Lonergan defines method as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results” (1973:31). By operations, Lonergan is referring to the means of proceeding or progressing through his proposed methodology. The operations involved in the method require intentional engagement in a cognitive process which is both hierarchical and incremental, yet also create a functioning unity. The precepts of Lonergan’s method - being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible – are interrelated. Being attentive refers to the empirical level of consciousness and deals with data acquired through sensory awareness – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and imagining. It is at this level that we also speak and move. Being intelligent refers to using the data acquired through attentiveness to inquire, conceive or formulate ideas, concepts and hypotheses about the data. At this level, we begin to express our understandings and the implications of what we are expressing. Being reasonable attends to evaluating which explanations and insights best fit experience, noting that experience accumulated through external sensory data remains experience until it is named. Being reasonable – or making judgements - does not add to explanation but simply affirms or denies the value of the experience which has been named or understood. In making judgments we are
able to assess the reliability of our sources and the relative worth of the information. Being responsible – or making decisions - then completes the process. Decision results in action which is subsequently undertaken in relation to the goods and values that have been discerned in the process. Dunne acknowledges that patterns become identifiable and cumulative through this method.

Dunne suggests that, as Christians, we live in two worlds – the secular and the religious (1985: vii). We have two minds about the world and two languages with which to describe the world. Secular language is adversarial in style, while religious language images a loving God. With our two languages we continually contend with the quantitative against the qualitative, the material against the spiritual, and the ever-changing against the constant. Dunne argues that, as a consequence of these dichotomies, we are bewildered about our purpose in life, our place in the world, and our personal goals. We experience difficulty in processing our experiences and our understandings when we are unable to name our feelings and longings or to identify the recurrence of patterns in new events or predicaments. In our “double-mindedness” we are convinced of the constancy of God’s authority and love, “but confused about how [authority and love] enter the human order” (1985:8). Dunne concludes that a fully integrated spirituality, achieved through the precepts described by Lonergan in his cognitive methodology, absorbs these dualisms. Thus, the most fundamental moral action is to obey the transcendent precepts within us. To obey these precepts we must learn to identify them and name the experiences that underlie them.

Using Lonergan’s method in Spiritual Direction is a three-fold practice of discerning self-in-relation with God and others, articulating an incremental understanding of self-in-relation gained in conjunction with the process of discernment, and exploring the consequences of that acquired learning about self, God and others for everyday life. To find self-in-relation with God requires a surrender of self. Such a surrender necessitates relinquishing the notion of autonomy from God and others and, as Allen suggests, accepting that our true nature is embedded in God’s nature. If we accept that our true nature is a constituent of God’s nature then seeking our shape and size, direction and purpose in the world – who we are - can bring us to ask how we may live our lives in God’s life. As God’s life is love in and of all creation, then the goal of spiritual direction will be to facilitate the movement of directees beyond concerns for self to concerns for others and for the world within God’s creative design.

While surrender carries the negative connotation of capitulation, Conn explains that surrender is not the giving up of self but the giving up of autonomy. Kathleen Fischer offers a positive consequence of this giving-up (1990). She calls it connectedness. Connectedness includes the acquisition of a new image of self-in-relation. She observes that

previous systems of science and philosophy portrayed the world as a collection of atomic and separate particles which were joined together, much as we assemble the parts of a machine. We could choose to relate to others, but such relationships were accidental to our being since we were already whole and complete without them. Community was a second order reality which we could enter into if we wished (1990:3).

In the twenty-first century we can no longer conceive of community as a second order reality. In recent decades the physical and social sciences have produced far too much evidence of interrelatedness for autonomy to still be acceptable. As Gary Bouma comments, “having reached its peak of influence in the late twentieth century, the myth of the autonomous self is receding as a dominant framework for considering most aspects of life” (2006:11). Similarly,
Conn sees the surrender of autonomy as the Gospel’s call to live in God’s life, and Fischer claims connectedness as a Gospel imperative. Fischer urges that community is Jesus’ gift of the Spirit outpoured at Pentecost to the gathered assembly of diverse peoples. For Fischer, connectedness is not a choice, it is a given. She insists that the choices we have are not whether to be part of community but how we will relate within community - “whether our relationships will be characterized by love or hate, healing of destruction, fear or trust” (1990:6). That is, whether or not our relationships will be life-giving for us and for others.

If discernment, as Fischer argues, is a process of attuning ourselves more closely with God’s purpose for our lives, and connectedness with God and others is part of God’s purpose, then directors must explore with directees their self-image as interrelated persons, as opposed to being autonomous persons, in all of their environments. Fischer also contends that Spiritual Direction must attend to the directees’ inner authority and authenticity. Authority and authenticity comes from knowing who we are - the beloved of God, incorporated into God’s life in the world. The development of self-image as an interrelated person must assist directees to affirm inner authority and authenticity.

Lonergan’s self-transcendence method necessitates surrender of the autonomous self while seeking to affirm inner authority and authenticity. Lonergan proposes that self-transcendence emerges from the experience of being in love with God. Being in love with God images God as Love in and of all creation; thus, being in love with God means being in love with others and the world. As we have seen, Lonergan argues that grace escorts people into faith, and faith propels people to engage in the mystery of faith. In discerning self-in-relation, the judgements of the person in love – decision-making, risk-taking, life choices - increasingly align with God’s values. Engagement guides the process of discerning the values and judgements “of the person in love” (1973:115). The values encountered in this engagement are God’s values – love in and of all creation.

Spiritual direction encourages directees to be open and responsive to God’s leading in the development of their dialogue with God. When we apply Lonergan’s notion of self-transcendence to Spiritual Direction, it is possible to reach the following conclusions. In order to companion directees in growing in openness and responsiveness to God’s leading, directors must assist directees in discerning self-in-relation, or being in love with God. To begin this process directees must accept they are the beloved of God and that God awaits relationship. Conversations in Spiritual Direction assist directees in eliciting and affirming meaning and purpose in their relationships with God and with others through examining patterns of past experience, identifying experiences in scripture and tradition, and addressing the ambiguities between what is hoped for and what is real. Directees must learn to trust their past experiences, life patterns, intuitions and longings, and develop confidence in their developing dialogue with God. As confidence grows so will their ability to articulate their incremental understanding of self-in-relation. By articulating their increased understanding of self-in-relation, gained in conjunction with their awareness of progress in self-transcendence, directees will commence exploring the consequences of their acquired learning about self, God and others as it is applicable to everyday living. As Dunne writes the movements of transcendent love always have reference to this world. So the question of what fruits religious experience brings forth does arise. But not simply as a test of whether the experience came from God. Rather, the ultimate purpose of getting spiritual direction is that we might cooperate with God’s action in the world. Love-inspired action binds us far more intimately with the
end-point of our transcendent love than merely experiencing inner movements does (1985:218).

Lonergan cautions that self-transcendence method is not comfortable; rather “it is a matter of heightening one’s consciousness by objectifying it” (1973:14). Objectifying feelings, longings, intuitions, fears, guilts, shame, needs and desires is not an easy task for anyone, and one that most people have few skills in accomplishing. We can conclude, therefore, that conversations between directors and directees must address this task of objectifying a sense of self in family and friendship, in workplaces, in church communities, society, as regards race, gender, socio-economic status and the influences of politics, as well as in the affective domain. Lonergan’s approach to gaining objectivity about self is contained in his cognitive methodology, following the precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible. These precepts provide a schema which is useful in Spiritual Direction. Lonergan’s operations, or progression through the precepts, are hierarchical and incremental. Lonergan describes his methodology as identifying the conscious feelings which precede knowledge, then processing those conscious feelings in order to act authentically. My concern is primarily with the knowledge we acquiring about ourselves from conscious feelings. Unconscious feelings may arise in this process and may be addressed in conversation between directors and directees. In some instances, Lonergan’s cognitive methodology may even assist directees to bring unconscious feelings to a conscious level. However, when particular attention to unconscious feelings is required in Spiritual Direction, the boundaries between Spiritual Direction and counselling begin to blur. Where directees require counselling, and directors are not trained in counselling, I recommend referral. I am not proposing Lonergan’s cognitive methodology as a tool or strategy for dealing with issues at an unconscious level.

Being attentive requires directees to identify and name sensory experience. Sensory experience includes both physical experience and emotional experience, especially where emotional experience has actual or associated physical manifestations (for example, happiness, affection, fear, shame, anxiety, depression). Being intelligent leads to understanding as directees use the information acquired through identifying and naming experiences at the first level, then connect the resultant information with new experiences to create fresh understandings. Being reasonable is the stage when judgements are formulated from the newly acquired awareness of self. Making judgements occurs prior to making decisions about self and the directions to take. Being reasonable affirms or denies the value of past experience and its usefulness for decision-making. It is at this stage that directees can incorporate the goods and values in human life which originate in God with scripture, tradition, and recalling life-giving relationships from the past. Being responsible means taking actions which are consistent with being in love with God and others - applying the goods and values. These goods and values are appropriate to actions which focus on living as self-in-relation. As I noted earlier, Lonergan asserts that self-transcendence brings freedom because persons who achieve self-transcendence are no longer preoccupied with fulfilling their own needs, or in competition with others. Indeed, he stresses that self-transcendence not only moves towards concern for others but also has a redemptive benefit for humankind.

A confident sense of self-in-relation is knowing self-in-relation. Self-in-relation incorporates being in love with God, others and the world with increasing awareness of peace and justice in personal life and in community. Self-transcendence is the capacity to recognize and participate in God’s creative and redemptive activity in all of creation. Knowing self as self-in-relation is the outcome of self-transcendence. The development of a sense of self-in-relation can be facilitated by a process of discernment in Spiritual Direction. Lonergan’s
concept of self-transcendence and his cognitive methodology for exploring recurrent life patterns sits effectively beside scripture, tradition, and life-giving past relationships within discernment. Lonergan’s methodology is valuable in the discernment process because it enables directors and directees to shape their conversation using the schema to assist directees to articulate their incremental understanding and to explore the consequences of their acquired learning about self, God and others for everyday life with fresh insights.

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Liberating feminine spirituality –
bringing women into a broad space

Beth Roberton

The patriarchal domination of women’s faith in conservative contexts has disempowered women’s significant faith-experience through limiting ways of knowing God to those that are personally engaging in a masculinised paradigm. Such limitations stifled the validation of women’s self-actuated faith.

The aim of this study is to hear the stories of Australian women about their experience of faith throughout their life journeys and to hear authentic recounting of the value of a spiritual direction space enabling a feminine spirituality to emerge. The social narrative research methodology which is used in this study is intentionally open-ended, using a feminist research approach based on relationship and story-telling. Each narrative is analysed through looking at early religious experiences, life chaos events, growing spiritual awareness or shifts and the role of spiritual direction within that story.

The validation of feminine ways of engaging faith is found to be facilitated by characteristics of the spiritual direction process. The outcomes consistently reported are of reclaiming personal identity and faith agency, each contributing to a maturing spirituality profile. A theory of spirituality which is dynamic and evolving within life’s contexts, and which connects with the sense of inner authority for one’s relationship with the divine, benefits from the openness of the spiritual direction space. Participants believe such support liberates from expectations of the rightness or acceptability of relationship with God imposed by an externalised framework. Personal truth emerges from within through expanding an interiority freed of the fears and constraints of former religious patterning.

Keywords: feminine spirituality; conservatism; spiritual direction

In the last two decades there have been significant advances in women’s participation in religio-political aspects of governance and priesthood in some faith communities. However, outside of the systems level of religious life the struggle for validation of personal faith experiences remains subject to the affirming principles elucidated by the system in which a woman fellowships. With the focus on the nature of the faith-experience of women, the initial stimulus for the investigation was the acknowledged disempowerment of women in conservative faith communities that are normally contained within a patriarchal system.(Slee, 2000)

The project was interested in the effects of a lack of acknowledgement of personally significant faith experiences within the conservative community environment and how faith-validation evolved in later life. Invalidation was taken to be a core issue. The thesis proposed that the process of spiritual direction is particularly helpful to those who have experienced being disempowered in a conservative system. It creates a space in which defensiveness, developed as a result of responding to the corporate shadows of a patriarchal milieu, can be

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recognized and relinquished without fear of judgment. The uniqueness of the listening space is its openness to a Spirit-led self-discovery process, a judgment free openness that can embrace the corporate shadow effects that hold a directee in fear of self-disclosure. This face of disempowerment that manifests as fear of self-disclosure leaves a long lasting imprint on the development of personal spirituality.

In this study, interviewees were not questioned about their sense of ‘spirituality’ as an objectivist investigative study. Rather, a feminist approach to the research was adopted where story-telling forms the core of the inquiry. The intention was to hear the lived experience of faith development through women’s narratives as a means of uncovering a feminine mode of meaning-making. It was hoped that the scripts would reveal the personally-lived reality without it requiring any definitive structure to legitimate their authenticity. Even the idea of reinterpreting the story script into a particular ‘model of spirituality’ seemed to evade the riskiness of a qualitative approach. Therefore, there was a genuine desire to hear women’s stories about their experience of encountering the Transcendent within the spiritual direction space. Working within the relationality of a feminine approach allowed the experiences being narrated to be affirmed as authentic.

Participants were included in the study if they had attended a conservative Protestant fellowship sometime in their early religious experience. What began as an interest in the benefit of spiritual direction to women from Reform faith traditions became a wider awareness that conservatism is defined by the nature of the inherent structure of the organization rather than specific Christian denominations. There were similarities in the descriptions given by participants about their early faith community experience even though there were a variety of denominational backgrounds represented. The second criterion for inclusion in the study was experience of one-on-one spiritual direction, either long or short term. The reported benefit of spiritual direction was remarkably similar regardless of the nature of the conservative experience.

From the stories of women interviewed, there were two commonly mentioned benefits of the spiritual direction process: the development of a sense of self-hood, through a more intimate connection with true identity, and a consequent adoption of a deeply held personal faith-agency.

Comments from women were expressed with conviction, indicating how significant these two aspects had been in their personal growth and wellbeing. Words like refuge, openness and freedom were used in talking about benefits of spiritual direction, whereas words like closed, boxed, set or rigid were often used to characterize their early church experiences. For example, one woman expressed the value of the spiritual direction space in terms of refuge - ‘It was a refuge in the sense that I could start to be who I was more fully . . . I kept things to myself elsewhere and I think that was the refuge; I didn’t have to carry it by myself anymore.’ Another talked about openness – it allows me to ‘be open, as open as I can be, so there is a freedom there.’ In the experience of openness, a complementary sense of being accepted was valued: ‘there is a deep acceptance of people. That’s what I experienced. It allows you to open up because it is a safe place.’

For many women, true identity was often connected with freedom and that freedom implied a freedom from the wariness developed because of inhibitions around being truly themselves: ‘It is permission to see what’s happening now and how I feel, how I react. Whereas before, you don’t feel; you don’t have your own personal reaction.’ Another reflected on how the
inhibitions impacted their relationship with others: ‘I think it has come as grace that has enabled me to be with others and be freer, through spiritual direction.’ The openness and freedom then facilitated women exploring their foundations for belief and spirituality, one that is embedded through personal ownership and commitment. They became agents for their own spiritual condition.

Claiming responsibility for one’s own faith brings empowerment. Faith-agency is countercultural to a conservative approach if it empowers the faithful to hold different experiences as true in their own right: ‘That’s the empowerment and that’s the freedom. Why is it OK for me to do that? Because I feel empowered to do it through my conversation with God and I feel OK about doing that and that’s part of who I am. I am much less worried about what other people think than what I am able to discern. That is partly where the empowerment is . . . Somehow it has all come together so I can listen to God in my life. I can confirm the voice of God. It was an empowerment; it was spiritually empowering for me, and my sense of self.’ In this case, the pilgrim has come to value trusting the affective engagement with God and consequently experiences the liberty of owning her truth. Similar responses to being liberated were expressed as, ‘No box around my soul, my spirit. The should’s and the should-not’s are not there. Man puts the structures and strongholds there but I believe I can to be free to walk with God in a way that nourishes me.’ and ‘I felt it was Ok for me to tell God all these things and he was not going to turn his back on me. So then I started being able to be honest to God – obviously he knew, but I felt that I could tell him anyway and it was such a relief. From that point on I started to get a lot better.’ So the honesty, liberty and empowerment characterise the movement from faith-conformity to faith-agency.

These two outcomes of the study suggest awareness of a life-frame perspective might be useful when considering how to proceed in bringing women’s faith experiences into the public arena of a conservative religious fellowship. The lack of public acknowledgement and validation of personally held certainties about transcendent experiences impacts upon faith development early in life. A core issue for women’s validation is the belief that they have a voice – their story is ‘heard’- particularly by significant others. (Gilligan, 1982) The impact is amplified when someone held in high relational regard, like an elder or pastor, is dismissive or trivializes personal faith expression. (Halligan, 1990) A common reality in a conservative environment is the invisibility of the feminine voice through invalidation, and consequent belief by women that stories about their spiritual encounters are insignificant to the wider community. Generally, they are irrelevant to the belief system constructs. Therefore, a corollary of this stance is that any development of feminine spirituality as unique in its own right is also muted.

Moving toward a feminine perspective on spirituality is significant because it is ‘inherent in [a woman’s] call to wholeness, to holiness, to completion, to transformation.’ (Fiand, 1987, p. 58) Finding an arena in which one can voice deeply held certainty is pivotal to this natural movement toward transformation. Women who encounter such an arena, one that offers freedom and openness, then find connections to a rich innate repository of spiritual wellbeing: ‘It’s one that allows the spirit to be there, to be present, for God to be present . . . and there are no walls around it. The space is one of health or refreshment, love, acceptance and the aspects of God as God is. It’s a space that doesn’t have boundaries.’ The feminine aspect of spiritual development is part of the wider consideration of spirituality that uses different modes of engagement.
One contemporary expression of ‘spirituality’ is ‘one’s personal relation to the sacred or transcendent, a relation that then informs other relationships and the meaning of one’s own life.’ (Sinnott, 2001, p. 199) This reflects a growing societal awareness of meaning-making as a significant, yet underrated, influence throughout life. Wellbeing includes how people connect with their sense of the Ultimate (however that is named) as a means of making sense of life. Studies in psychology and other helping professions are beginning to acknowledge spirituality as a member of an integrated ‘big picture’ which has been hitherto neglected. Its inclusion in professional therapeutic contexts is seen to have significance for wholeness and wellness. (Berg, Crowe, Wong, & Siebert, 2010; Moon, 2002; Yee, 2005)

Within conservative Christian faith communities, the will to take a ‘big picture’ view of the faith development of its adherents as a life task is constrained by the goals and vision of the community paradigm for witnessing to its particular doctrinal stance. The word ‘conservative’ represents a style of faith community in which the rules of the community are based on a clear understanding of a belief system and inferred consequent behaviour, often in a rigid, hierarchical structure. (Grenz, 2002) The immediacy and urgency framed by Biblical exhortations to witness in Christian conservatism leaves little room for valuing individual perspectives on long-term growth and maturity. Such a purpose-orientated approach is driven by the patriarchal desire for the dominance of rightly held beliefs and success evidenced by expanding congregational size. This affects all members of the community and faith as a personal and intimately held motivation for life is at best presumed, and mostly ignored. In a context that values male participation more highly, women’s faith grounded on personal experience becomes a parallel paradigm, one that suffers under the overburden of more highly valued goals. As in many other historical epochs, the experience of being marginalized forces women’s attention on relating to the holiness present in one’s own experience – at least they have a say in that and ownership which cannot be controlled by others. (Cohen, Geller, Gottlieb, Greenberg, & Sabath, 1998; Jantzen, 1995)

The idea of an evolving feminine spirituality from a life-overview perspective seems irrelevant against the urgency of the exhortation to ‘go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.’ (Mark 16:15 NIV) Such exhortations to faithfulness become part of an unspoken way of being that is assumed by the community, part of the community shadow that implies doubt and faithlessness if one raises questions around obedience or about implementation. Exhortations become burdens shrouded in guilt. One participant spoke of it as ‘when you are in a box any aberration becomes guilt and judgement and failure’ and another commented that ‘you had to be very careful to follow the “correct” way of life, seeing everything the “correct” way, meeting expectations.’ Consequently, the feeling of not measuring up extends to not being ‘a good Christian’ and questioning of one’s faith, a sentiment echoed in this response: ‘You have failed as a Christian because you haven’t depended on God for the strength to stay, or whatever it might be. So I’m not a good Christian.’ The goal of long term spiritual development seems to be undermined by perception and innuendo leaving those who earnestly desire to serve God feeling guilty.

Such guilt creates a deep seated shame, which can be compounded by the shadow created by a family living out of the church’s expectations. One woman ‘feared the shame of not fitting the mould. I was anxious about keeping up an appearance and keeping up the mould of what a good Christian should be. . . It was my family voice. It was the church environment I grew up in. . . You would hear a sermon about love or compassion, but at home that wasn’t being carried out. At home we lived under shame, guilt and fear – and we had to be perfect as well!’
The implications of what is being asked of the faithful manifest in women in two different ways. Firstly, exhortations in terms of ‘how’ to live out what is required remain in the realm of knowledge and implied action. This is rarely integrated into the interior world of meaning-making that connects motivation and passion to reality. One participant said, ‘I began to think to myself, I know a lot about God, but I don’t really know God . . . I know all the stories, but I began to wonder about how much I knew God and what that meant.’ A sad outcome of this disconnect is described as such: ‘Well it’s false. I got good at playing the game. There are rewards in playing the game . . . I didn’t rebel and it worked for me because I got a lot of acclamation and was affirmed for my compliance. There was affirmation and reward in complying so I played the game really well. I’m not sure how much was genuine – I think I wanted it to be; I didn’t want to rebel. But it worked for me and if something works for you, you continue to play the game.’ This type of coping strategy must imply that the injunctions to believe and act are somehow kept at arm’s length from living with integrity.

An alternate response came in participants speaking of a dichotomous spiritual life, knowing that their community experiences did not connect with the deeply held personal faith-experiences. For example, ‘Having said all these things, looking back I was quite lucky because I was having my own experiences of God. Little things were coming through to me. I don’t know why, but I was getting my own messages from God. I would often be in my room and feel this presence and almost feel like I was out of my body. I had my own faith happening despite all this.’ For some, there was an underlying sense of knowing God despite the church environment, particularly through being in nature; ‘my deepest memories for me of my relationship with God being a reality [was when] I used to ride my pony out in the bush . . . I remember riding this horse out and thinking the world is so beautiful . . . being in love with life and the world and God. But it wasn’t nurtured very much, so that’s how I nurtured it – being alone in the bush.’ The natural rising of an intuitive sense of God is seen by Fiand as a ‘commitment to truth as it emerges from within. One does not receive the truth, nor does one give it. One stands in the truth as experience, as it emerges, and one surrenders to that wherein one is held.’ (Fiand, 1987, p. 61)

Here is the contrast between a spirituality that uses masculine modes to construct understanding to exhort and the needs of a feminine spirituality that uses feminine modes of engagement to aid meaning-making.

Patriarchal systems are characterized by a particular mode of engaging with spiritual life. Feminine spirituality assimilates faith using modes of engagement that are operationally different from what is legitimated in patriarchal systems. The dominant, rationalized, theological approach in a patriarchal hierarchy processes information using objective systems and intellectual frameworks. It remains affectively aloof from the subject matter through abstraction and ideology. Following Carl Jung’s lead, one may name this as a masculinised approach to information processing. Characteristics include need for power, control and domination.(Storr, 1983) However, Jung’s model proposes both masculine and feminine traits in each individual; gendered characteristics result from using a preferred mode of engaging with the world. ‘In the feminine part of ourselves we partake of nature, reality, and specificity, while in our masculine part we stand above nature at the level of objectivity, abstraction, and ideal.’ (Rockwood Hudson, 1998)

If it is accepted that ‘feminine’ cognition engages modalities for filtering information and experience that are different from masculine modes, it follows that differences will occur in the way faith is formed in men and women.(Ranft, 2000) Following Carol Gilligan’s work
(Gilligan, 1982), British theologian Nicola Slee found that feminine modes of knowing use different preferred processes for integrating information into their cognitive faith frameworks and that this is significant in faith formation, what Slee calls faithing. A feminine approach uses an affective or emotive engagement with information, conversation with significant others, connectedness and groundedness to the earthed reality of their existence and is comfortable using metaphor to language spiritual experience. (Slee, 2000) Most contrasted with an intellectualized or abstracted approach is the way the feminine is more able to invoke mystery or hold what is not known without full knowledge being conditional to faith. Feminine spirituality will be drawn to a relationship with the Transcendent through validating emotive experiences that are bodily encountered in the ordinariness of daily life, whether epiphany experiences or simply heightened awareness intuited through metaphor. The work of Gilligan and others demonstrated that a feminine mode is more likely to be situated within a care and nurture framework, rather than a control or justice framework. (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995)

With these differences in mind, Schneiders’ definition of spirituality brings a more feminine approach to defining spirituality in which value is a core element. Schneiders defines spirituality as ‘the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives. . . It is personal-lived reality that has both active and passive dimensions.’ (Schneiders, 2003)

In a context of conservative patriarchy and women’s faith-experience, very few elements of this definition make sense. In a conservative paradigm the immediacy of the belief system’s goals supersedes the ‘project of life integration’ of Schneider’s definition. There is little room for personal faith development as a goal and to be focused on nurturing one’s inner delight in transformative experiences brings a guilt burden of selfishness. Schneiders’ term ‘self-transcendence’ would be acceptable within the adopted doctrine of sanctification, as long as the personal change was demonstrably in line with the corporate expectations of sanctified behaviour. And there is no liberty to choose ‘the ultimate value’ one perceives - notions of fixed absolutes prescribe all values. (Bruce, 2002) Therefore, it is difficult to see how these two different approaches may coexist within one system.

Definitions like the one used by Schneiders are generic enough to include any life stance or religious persuasion. Moving into a feminine aspect of taking a life stance grounded in personal experience, one that ultimately values the movement of the Spirit within existential reality, a person can be gently released from ‘how it ought to be.’ For one participant the shift was visualised as ‘not a pointing, accusing finger, but hands and arms that . . . hold me. That’s a huge change.’ This participant’s language allows her to express herself in the feminine mode of nurture, demonstrating how naturally this aspect of the meaning-making process is evoked in women.

However, an impasse remains if one is conformed to an overarching paradigm of a bounded space. The strength of spiritual direction is the quality of the space which is offered to the pilgrim. When contrasted with the bounded space of a conservative environment described above, the spiritual direction process can offer a confidential, judgement-free openness in which personally valued transcendent experiences can be voiced. For example one person said, ‘It gives me freedom and encourages me to be where I am spiritually with God and to allow freedom to grow in that, and to explore my faith without any boxes or perimeters.’ A spiritual director listens to what is voiced in a stance of open acceptance, mindful of their own challenge to hold a non-judgemental space for the other. In this place, the developing
spirituality of the pilgrim can be liberated to speak without the fear of ‘not measuring up’ to any accepted norms of faith expression. Relaxing into this space loosens the tension emanating from internal voices about perfectionism: ‘I relaxed in that I didn’t fear the shame of not fitting the mould. I felt less anxious of keeping up an appearance and keeping up the mould of what a good Christian should be.’

For women who have lived under patriarchal authority, fear is a prime limiter to openness. When people have been conditioned to play a game of acceptability, freeing the self from corporate shadow behaviours takes courage. (Bendroth, 2001) Unconscious fears are nurtured by perceived retribution or judgement, whether or not this is expressed consciously, leading to behaviour modification that includes suppression of emotional engagement. Norris describes the value of emotional engagement as the means to ‘better appreciation of the role of embodiment and emotion in the development of religious experience.’ For Norris, the religious experience is primarily a body state ‘in the sense that it cannot be learned through merely thinking, reading or reflection.’ (Norris, 2005, p. 183) The intuitiveness of the feminine mode of knowing is attuned to inner movement and perceptiveness.

Therefore, a feminine spirituality which is using the tools of grounded, bodily reality that engages emotively with experience cannot develop fully if encultured in a masculinised environment of intellectual engagement with religious information, as the emotional content of faith experience is seen as invalid. Those who perceive the emotion of their faith as important are consistently invalidated by the conservative environment, often through dismissal or ostracising – the most common responses to women demonstrating or voicing emotional experiences of the divine. Such emotional responses may be contained in spiritual practices that are outside of an accepted norm. One respondent passionately rejected the dismissal of her use of silence. She parodies her minister’s implication that silence was dangerous, saying ‘it is dangerous because I’m not telling you how to interpret things. I can give you the text and I will tell you how to interpret it. But there is a danger if I let you interpret the text on your own or if we just sit silently before the text because who knows what is going on in your mind! I haven’t told you the correct interpretation that I know with my twenty years of study!’ The deep seated cynicism in such comments reflects some of the anger arising from invalidation.

The psychological implications of consistent invalidation are well researched, and include impoverished emotional development. Some respondents became conscious of the lingering effects of growing up in a conservative environment. The specific influence of religious patterning was reported by one respondent as ‘when you are a very small child you develop a grid of thought processes that your thoughts naturally follow. The grid is hardwired into you as an adult as well; information that comes to you just follows those lines again. So the things that come up for me are from my childhood, particularly “You’ve done it wrong.” Only if you produce a perfect looking, perfect acting persona are you worthy of God’s love.’ Others also reported an internalized imperative to be perfect: ‘I feel I have to do the right thing; I have to not hurt other people; I feel I have to put other people before my well being. I have to be perfect . . . all those things have made such an impact. All those things are in every cell of my body and it’s really hard to change.’ The imperative to be perfect underpins the fear of self-disclosure in case one is then judged to be inadequate or a failure.

In order to reawaken emotional experience, a space for validation must be present. In a space in which a spiritual director can listen to deeply moving, intimate connections to profound experiences without dismissal, judgement or control, self-validation results through a pilgrim
hearing their own voice and re-entering the spiritual experience – it is ‘a particular quality of emotional processing’ in which ‘recalled emotions are refelt in the present’ that leads to spiritual meaning-making. (Norris, 2005, p. 182) Consequently, ‘spirituality [develops] in a unique and personal way analogously to the way individuals develop their common humanity into a unique personality.’ (Schneiders, 2003, p. 4)

Conclusions

The most commonly mentioned outcomes noted by women participating in this project were that the spiritual direction process enabled the development of a sense of self-hood through a more intimate connection with true identity and a consequent adoption of a deeply held personal faith-agency. By liberating feminine modalities that are intuitive and able to engage a measure of openness to varieties of spiritual experience, a judgment-free spiritual direction space can facilitate the transformative development of a feminine spirituality. Past participation in conservative religious paradigms leaves shadow effects of fear of self-disclosure and disconnect with their own intuitive connection with God. These effects are counter to the work required to engage women’s affective faith experiences, experiences of the transcendent they know to be real.

Therefore, a conundrum exists for women who fellowship in a conservative faith community where such personal inner work cannot be voiced. Expectations about compliant behaviour and obedience have left lasting patterns of disconnection with the modes of being female. Without engagement in the emotive content of spiritual experiences, the inhibition to speak openly about personal faith remains.

The positive encouragement to come from this work is the naturalness with which woman engage with their feminine mode of spirituality if they are given a place in which to hear themselves voice their own experiences and have those experiences validated. ‘I think it is the time that another human being gives to really touch authentic spiritual encounter together; to authenticate, to validate . . . validate God’s work in my life and to give voice to that and to encourage me in that journey. So that validation is probably a very, very important thing for me . . . and time to do that.’ Validation in an unbounded space is enhanced by the spiritual director’s openness to trust the gentle work of God in growing and maturing a feminine aspect to meaning-making in all of life.

Affirmation of the benefits of this approach is captured by one participant: ‘It’s validated my whole experience. It doesn’t have to be validated by other people, although, I’ve been very validated by my spiritual director. It’s about me and my relationship with God. To be able to feel really close to God in different ways . . . Being drawn to God, my spirit being revived and refreshed in many, many different ways is the validation for me. It would be really nice to have people who catch this freedom to be able to be on a journey that is really satisfying for them.’

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References


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The desert as spiritual director

Anna Killigrew

This paper reflects on responses from retreat participants who have experienced WA wilderness, indicating new understandings of their identity, purpose, focus, their communities and their God.

**Keywords:** Australian Wilderness Desert Spirituality

When people come to the desert-fringe and spend at least four days immersed in the environment with us at Koora Retreat, they report significant life-changes that emerge from their experience. It seems that it is the desert itself that is ministering as their spiritual director. I have asked what the desert does for them, and have recorded their responses. I have considered these reported effects of the wilderness as it impacts on the practice of spiritual direction.

How people arrive and settle in is influential on their experience. At Koora they have a ‘soft’ interface with the undisturbed wilderness with its flora, fauna, big skies, underground life and the vagaries of the weather. Many find that they are driven by the Spirit to walk out into the wilderness and be themselves there. Being able to receive their environment with loving attention, gratitude and acceptance, holding it without the desire to possess it, raises within them the sense of being attentively open to the present moment, to what is.

How people establish a relationship influences their experience. The wilderness does not have humanly constructed patterns of relationship. It provides a timeless base away from the distractions of human interpretation and influence. So those who walk within it are freed to enter the creative grace-filled relationship that God establishes with them there. The sheer strangeness or otherness of the surroundings moves people off balance so that new ideas or insights can be engaged in creative combinations.

How people engage with sincerity and truth influence their experience. Walking in the wilderness gets people’s energy flowing, releasing ‘stuck-ness’ and bringing to mind the ways in which they and/or their community are not walking in God’s ways. This walking is physically difficult enough to fully engage the concentration so that the unconscious can be released to shed light on life’s conundrums. The wilderness in its nakedness is a fruitful environment in which to attend to our own sinfulness and repent.

How people are heard influences their experience. The wilderness offers an eloquent silence. Because the desert just ‘is’, those within it are free to be who they are too. They describe the experience as being naked, being at-one-with God, as finding their true selves, being able to

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slough off the false selves as their spirit yields to God, free from competition or striving after acceptance, recognition or acclaim. Being heard this clearly, allows people to hear themselves as they really are.

How people receive encouragement influences their experience. The wilderness provides the same mysterious and beautiful space to all conditions of people. It exudes sustainable, strong, resilient life in the midst of its fragility, complexity of life-forms and ability to flourish with low water, high temperature range, and ancient leached soils. This presence allows those within it to drop all pretence, all masquerade, and be real, frail, mortal, yet beloved offspring of the living God, able to choose life.

How people are connected to the resources of communities of faith through the ages influences their experience. The tradition upholds the efficacy of the wilderness experience for Moses, Aaron and Miriam and the released Israelite slaves, Hagar, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul and the desert mothers and fathers of early Christian life. The tradition provides us with wilderness wisdom forged in these experiences; containers that hold the water of life in the desert sands of our world. Daily liturgy and readings from scripture forge a framework within which to make sense of the interface between the desert experience and the life issues of the retreatant.

How people return to their daily living influences their experience. Forming and living in community in the wilderness, praying together and sharing stories about how to live well, reinforces each person’s apprehension of Holy Mystery and grounds all of life in attentiveness to God’s purposive presence. Because the wilderness is free of our human constructs, it enables a return to the essentials of living as it is intended to be. People can return to their daily lives with this bread for the journey.

In all these aspects of Spiritual Direction, the desert provides a presence that allows the person within it to get on with the meaning and purpose of living. People who have experienced the desert as their spiritual director report that they return from their experience refreshed in their sense of self, community, environment and God, and committed to live with new insights, decisions, understandings.

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This paper could not have been produced without the enthusiasm and honest reflections of the 130 people whom I asked for responses to the question, “How is the desert your spiritual director?” during the six months of retreats at Koora Retreat Centre, Boorabbin, Western Australia, from April to September 2010. I would never have written anything without the thought-provoking, reflective conversations I have with my life partner, Peter Harrison. And I thank Ian Robinson for suggesting that we make a contribution to this symposium from the unique position of living and working as spiritual director and retreat leaders in the wilderness.
Banksia lullfitzii
Encountering God's grace as maternal embrace

Joan Wright Howie

As a starting point for my research, I describe an experience of maternal embrace from my own life experience in which I sense the grace of God at work. Maternal embrace is motherly holding, where a mother's body can be physically holding, enclosing or protecting. Maternal embrace also extends beyond the physical to emotional and spiritual nurturing, enabling and enduring. Maternal embrace surges forth with the strongest impulse of love, nurture and protection, which is not limited to the biological mother.

Maternal embrace is not necessarily gendered either. Men can share with their children an embrace that echoes the qualities I describe here as maternal embrace. Maternal embrace is, however, a feminine metaphor reflecting the feminine characteristics of the human personality, energy and attributes. Feminine metaphors are much needed in a cultural context where masculine images and metaphors have been in predominance. Indeed, God's maternal embrace of humanity has many scriptural references, the most well known being God's longing to gather her children to her breast like the mother hen with her chicks huddled under her wing (Luke 13: 34). Building upon the Biblical precedents and expanding on my own experience, I intend to reveal the power of maternal embrace as metaphor for the embodied experience of grace.

Keywords: grace, encounter, embrace

Introduction

During my years of parenting three young children, I have developed a growing sense of God's grace present in and through my experience of mothering. Many statements are made about God's grace in Christian life and liturgy. We pray for and call upon God's grace and offer thanks for God's graciousness. When asked, however, to name and reflect upon encounters with God's grace, the church can become strangely quiet. We call upon our God to be present in worship, respond to petitions in prayer, feed us in the Eucharist and bestow blessings upon us. Yet, stories of encountering God’s of grace in daily life might be viewed with suspicion. Can the grace described by Christian theology as freely given, be encountered in human experience? Could it be that my experience of parenting reflects the qualities of God’s gracious maternal embrace?

Grace is not merely a description of God's disposition, it is God's act of self-giving. Grace also has an effectual sense in that it becomes effective in the lives of human beings. Grace inspires gifts in people in the form charismata, grace gifts (Rom. 12: 6). In this sense, grace is both the action and the fruit of God's self-giving. Rahner (1968) defines God's grace as the action and out working of God's self-communication. God reveals God’s self in creation by God’s grace.

In the context of the ministry of spiritual direction people frequently describe moments of sensing the grace of God in daily living. Spiritual direction nurtures the desire to attend to

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God’s grace by observing both God’s action and the fruits of God’s self giving. To be led by the Holy Spirit and live by God’s grace is a fundamental aspect of Christian faith. Indeed, ‘all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God’ (Rom. 8:17). The ministry of spiritual direction provides a setting for a contemplative dialogue between ‘pilgrim’ and ‘guide’, where the focus is on listening for the movements of God’s grace in the pilgrim’s daily life. Spiritual direction begins, as Reiser (2004) reminds us, with the assumption that ‘God continues to communicate the divine presence and life to human beings.’ The safe, contemplative space of spiritual direction provides a pilgrim with a discerning environment in which to test and explore experiences for signs of the fruits of God’s grace.

This paper begins with an example of a reflection on my experience of encountering God’s grace during the daily course of mothering. As I explored my sense of God’s grace in the moment, I discovered the metaphor of maternal embrace. Maternal embrace is motherly holding, where a mother’s body can be physically holding, enclosing or protecting. The maternal embrace also extends beyond the physical to emotional and spiritual. Maternal embrace surges forth with the strongest impulse of love, nurture and protection, which is not limited to the biological mother. Maternal embrace is not necessarily gendered either. Men can share with the children in their lives an embrace that echoes the qualities I describe here as maternal embrace. Maternal embrace is, however, a feminine metaphor reflecting the feminine characteristics of the human personality, energy and attributes.

After sharing a story from my own experience of mothering, I briefly describe the theological debate about, and implications of, suggesting this is an experience of God’s grace. A theology of encountering God’s grace is proposed and I consider the experience of maternal embrace as a metaphor for encountering God’s grace. Finally I explore three motifs of maternal embrace: the nurturing, enabling and enduring embrace as elements of God’s gracious embrace.

A lived experience

I was suffering. I’d been through six months of conflict in my workplace, which left me feeling battered and abused. At last, on holiday, my defenses down, I could no longer hold back tears. I felt myself crumble under the weight of accumulated stress and found myself retreating from the company of others. Yet, as the mother of three young children, wife and manager of a household, I could not remove myself completely. I was called back into the tasks of daily living by my family. In my fragile state, they stepped around me carefully. Feeling drained of energy, weak and hopeless, I wondered how I would survive this sense of desolation.

Then one evening I noticed that something in my sense of self had shifted. I felt lighter and more present to the people around me. That morning I’d woken feeling confused and stressed, but by the evening I felt more relaxed. I sensed a movement, a weight had been lifted; I felt more alive again. A sense of despair had been replaced by one of hopefulness. I lay in bed that night and wondered how the shift had happened. I prayed an ‘Awareness Examen’ prayer and turned my awareness to God as I recalled the events of the day.

As I prayed and reflected back on the day, my thoughts rested at the time after lunch when I took my 18-month-old son into the bedroom for his afternoon sleep. I held him chest to chest; his little arms clasped strong and tight around my neck. I could feel the caress of little hands as he pulled me closer. I sat on the bed and began to relax. Slowly I leaned back and lay down
on the bed as he held me. I felt the bed receive us as we embraced each other. With his little 
form pressing onto my chest, a thought crossed my mind: 'This might be what it feels like to 
be embraced by God'. And there, for a while, we waited. Aware of the need to put my son to 
bed, I sat up, completed the task and left the room.

When I reflected on this experience it became clear to me that in this embrace, my son and I 
embodied the transforming grace of God. The idea that this might be what it feels like to be 
embraced by God shifted from being a thought to becoming knowledge, from an idea to an 
awareness. It is a moment which could easily pass unnoticed, diminished or hidden as are, I 
suspect, many such moments. Instead, I feel compelled to claim this moment as an encounter 
with God's grace.

**Encountering God's grace**

In the introduction to a collection of essays on the experience of God, Hart (Hart and Wall 
2005) describes the spectrum of debate among theologians and philosophers about the human 
experience of God. Metaphysical theologians argue that God as an infinite being cannot be 
experienced by finite human beings. They also argue that an individual person’s experience is 
by nature subjective and that subjective experience cannot provide normative information for 
teology. To suggest that human beings can experience God is criticized as reducing theology 
to anthropology.

In contrast, others reminded us that if God is not accessible to human experience then 
teology is nothing but empty words. The scriptures, after all, are grounded in stories about 
human beings experiencing God. The life of the church is full of references to humanity 
encountering the life of the divine.

Navigating a path through the debate about the experience of God is a foundational task in 
establishing a theology of spiritual direction, but is not the focus of this paper. I propose, 
however, to consider the implications of attending to any human experience of God in the 
context of a theology of grace. Indeed, as Reiser (2004) states, the ministry of spiritual 
direction presumes a theology of revelation of God’s grace.

Although there are many accounts of people claiming to have experienced God, the finite 
human being cannot experience the infinite. Rather than speak about experience of God, it is 
more accurate to describe the Christian narrative forming us in relationship with God (Hart & 
Wall 2005). An experience with God is an encounter or lived event in which human beings 
can become aware of God’s grace revealed. The focus shifts from the human subject 
encountering a divine object, toward awareness of God as subject acting in relationship with 
humanity. Paul Tillich (1996) offers a passionate call not to start with objectifying God, but to 
start with the ultimate concern of human beings: the personal desire for the divine:

> Let’s not start with the question of God, for people of our objectified world take God 
as an object whose existence or non-existence is debated like that of another galaxy. This 
denies the divinity of the divine. Let us start instead with what we have, what we really are – our ultimate concern, which is implied in everything positive and negative in our life. Let us start here … our most personal experience … Thus the vertical line of the divine enters the horizontal dynamics of human history.

God’s self-revelation and the human encounter with God’s self-communication are best
described in terms of inter-personal relationship. Haight, (1990) states that moments of grace will be described as inter-subjective communication with the transcendent Other. Revelation begins with God, so the experience will come from outside the person as an impression, which invites interpretation. An encounter with God’s grace will be in continuity with the history of Christian interpretation. The moment will also have some impact on reorientation of the soul as a response to awareness of encountering God’s grace. Haight (1990) states that ‘Christian revelation does not appear as knowledge about God as about an object, not even as knowledge about a transcendent person. Rather Christian revelation takes the form of a personal encounter with a divine subject.’ The human experience with God, therefore, invites human beings to grow in attentiveness to revelations of God’s grace.

Spiritual direction provides intentional space to attend to God in prayer. God is met as absolute subject, whom we cannot control or conjure. We listen for God who comes to us not as an experience, but in our experience. God comes as revealed in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection as the mystery of Christ living with us. Edwards (1983) describes the encounter with grace as a gift of something, which transcends us and breaks in upon our day-to-day existence in a mysterious way.

There is not space in this paper to explore the historical development of the theology of grace. Instead Dreyer (1990) provides a summary: God is the source of grace and grace is the gift of God’s very self. Grace is initiated by God, not people, and is given freely. Grace is given in the love of God, not earned through human merit. Grace can lead people toward: participation in the mystery of God; lives which celebrate the love of God; a transformation towards acting lovingly; an enhanced sense of wholeness or connectedness within self and creation; and confidence and hope in the eschatological promises of God. Grace is corporate and functions to connect people with one another and with the life of the Trinity. In this way grace transforms human experience of sin, evil, egoism and lack of love. This outworking of grace is described by words like ‘salvation’, ‘redemption’ and ‘justification’. Nothing is excluded from grace and every reality has the potential to be touched by grace.

When attending to God in spiritual direction, any event could be seen as opening to the mystery of Christ. A mother embracing and being embraced by her baby could be considered nothing more than a physical act. Or, the event itself could be observed with an awareness of divine presence as touched by mystery. Mother and child embracing across the vast ground of Christ’s suffering and love, their very beings constituted as ‘being with’ and ‘attending to’ divine presence, divine grace. In that small embrace, the embrace of grace wraps around them both, bringing healing and transformation.

**Maternal embrace: a metaphor for encountering God’s grace.**

The encounter with grace is a complex event, which may be examined as metaphor. The word ‘metaphor’ literally means ‘to carry over’ and can provide a fruitful tension by holding different ideas together even when they may appear contradictory (Cunneen, 1991). McFague (1982), defines metaphor as a means of describing or speaking about something or event which is lesser known using something better known as a descriptor. Thinking metaphorically invites observing a thread of similarity between two things that are not the same.

In her work on metaphorical theology, McFague (1982) argues that metaphor not only aids our language for God, but also is essential to it. There is a grave risk of identifying God with the words we use to describe God. In this sense, religious language can become idolatry. If we
turn God into the metaphors we use to describe God, we place idolatrous limits on God. The affirmations we make about God do not limit God. God transcends every metaphor.

A metaphor for describing encountering God’s grace can emerge in an individual and can also gain wider appeal and become a form for ordering more universal experience. McFague (1982) calls these dominant metaphors a model. For example, the metaphor of father has become a model for God, which she suggests becomes a ‘comprehensive ordering structure with impressive interpretive potential.’ As people seek to speak of what we glimpse of the divine mystery, there is no other language to speak of it but that of metaphor.

The phrase maternal embrace can be understood as a metaphor when seeking to describe experiences of God’s grace. To employ McFague’s (1982) definition, there is a thread of similarity between the two dissimilar events: encountering God’s grace and the maternal embrace. The language of one ‘greater known’ experience, maternal embrace, can be understood as a metaphor to carry over and inform awareness of something about a ‘lesser known’ experience, God’s grace. While they are not identical, they are metaphorically and existentially related.

The experience of maternal embrace is a vital part of human living. As active participant in the ongoing work of creation, our mother’s bodies join with God in the art of creation. Every person begins life carried in the all-embracing womb of a mother. We are formed in the image of God and born into the world, helpless, in need of nurture, yet full of potential (Gen. 1: 26-27). We are born into the waiting embrace of our mothers, fathers and community, all of whom form the body of Christ embracing us. We are embraced by a maternal energy and strength that calls communities to nurture new life. In her beautiful book of photographs Mother and Child, Dorr (1972) describes the everlasting story of the embrace welcoming new life at birth:

The story is from everlasting to everlasting. Yet when it happens to you, that your new-born child is laid, for the first time in your arms, it is the whole miracle of creation and your heart cries out as did Mary’s: ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord.’ You know without being told that you are as near to touching the divine mystery as one may come in this life.

Employing the metaphor of maternal embrace to describe encountering God’s grace, seeks to offer a symbolic idea of the kind of embracing experience people need and long for. The maternal embrace includes the reality of what it means to offer mothering, in all its messiness and self-sacrifice. Maternal embrace is offered by one who listens to us; shares herself with us; and, in the process, enables us to become the people we are called to be; and then lets us go. The metaphor of maternal embrace reflects the characteristics we use to describe God’s grace. Grace reflects the free gift of God’s covenantal relationship with humanity of love and mercy. And through God’s grace we grow into the graces given to us (1 Cor. 3: 10). Through grace we grow into our calling (Gal. 1: 15) and giftedness for living. The metaphor of maternal embrace is a helpful way to describe God’s grace experienced as blessing, giftedness and intimate relationship with God.

Profound psychological, spiritual and social damage can occur when children do not experience maternal embrace. There has been extensive research into the importance of babies bonding with the primary caregivers. Cunneen (1991) cites educational psychologist Winnicott’s Attachment Theory, which highlight the fundamental importance of the ‘holding
environment’ of *maternal embrace* at every stage of the life span in fostering human development. Attachment Theory describes the implications of experiencing *maternal embrace* to psychological health and development.

Beyond the loss of our physical mothers, we continue to need to give and receive the kind of embrace Cunneen (1991) describes as ‘good mothering’. We need to participate in and receive the kind of embrace that helps us rediscover vital connections integrating our spirituality and our living, our personalities and our experience. Cunneen (1991) identifies three essential elements of good mothering: nurturing, enabling and enduring. In what follows, I draw on Cunneen’s elements of mothering as a structural framework for exploring the metaphor of *maternal embrace*.

**Nurturing**

The nurturing *maternal embrace* provides a safe space in which the vulnerable child can be free to grow emotionally and physically. The womb is the first space of nurturing *maternal embrace*. The embracing mother’s lap ideally provides the primary place of nurture. As children grow, learn to walk and explore they move from the safety of their mother’s lap, but frequently return to the nurturing embrace for comfort and protection.

Exploring the spirituality of mothering, Chester (1989) writes about the physical changes women experience in pregnancy and early parenting that prepares them to provide a *maternal embrace*. The embracing mother’s lap ideally provides the primary place of nurture. As children grow, learn to walk and explore they move from the safety of their mother’s lap, but frequently return to the nurturing embrace for comfort and protection.

Discovering how to provide a nurturing *maternal embrace* for a vulnerable newborn requires the kind of intuitive thinking Raphael (1976) describes as ‘matresence’. This is not the task of an engineer. Logic is not enough to provide a baby with *maternal embrace*. Ideally, mothers bond with their baby in the hours after birth through skin-to-skin embrace, eye contact, voice, and the embrace of breast-feeding. Over the months of early parenting, mothers learn to read their babies intuitively and the baby develops a fundamental trust necessary for healthy living. Thomas (2005) affirms the ‘fuzz’ of early parenting that aids the essential bonding process, opens an ability to ‘think with the heart’ and creates space for the *maternal embrace*. There are many scriptural examples of God providing the nurturing, womb-like *maternal embrace*.

Staubli and Schroer (2001) explore the Hebrew word *rehem*, meaning female lap, uterus, or womb and remind us that God’s womb is referred to just as frequently in the Hebrew scriptures as the word for heart. *Rehem* provides the root of the word *rahem*, which means to have compassion, mercy or sympathy. The Psalmist describes God acting as a midwife ‘You kept me safe on my mother’s breast’ (Psalm 139: 13-16). God’s compassionate and merciful attitude toward Israel is compared with that of the mother’s love for her child. God is described as having motherly emotions that sustain God’s relationship with Israel, even when Israel is rebellious and turns from God. God’s nurturing *maternal embrace* is given even more generously than the powerful nurturing embrace experienced by mothers.

The nurturing aspect of *maternal embrace* is frequently represented in Christian art in the
image of Mary with the infant Jesus on her lap. From the safety of the maternal embrace, the infant Jesus faces the world. The nurturing maternal embrace is a place from which new life sees limitless possibilities. Mary represents the protective nurturing grace of God. She holds in her lap the fruit of God’s promise, the Christ, the one in whom God’s vision for creation will be restored.

Enabling

The maternal embrace also enables children to grow in freedom and become adults. As children learn to crawl and walk they venture from their mother’s lap to investigate their environment and learn skills for living. Confident of the nurturing they have received, children are enabled to step towards independence. Cunneen (1991) describes the enabling maternal embrace that ‘trusts her children to be independent, knowing that the relationship between them must constantly change if all are to grow and form new communities.’

Alongside the nurturing maternal embrace, the enabling elements of maternal embrace are also reflected in the scriptures as a feature of God’s grace. Ramey Mollenkott (1994) explores biblical images of God as feminine. She notes that alongside the biologically feminine images of God as birthing or suckling humankind, there are many descriptions of God providing an enabling maternal embrace in the action of traditionally women’s work. Ramey Mollenkott (1994) highlights the way in which God provides for humanity through activities that could be done by men or women, but the gender roles of Biblical times would have only attributed to women. God is frequently described doing distinctively female activities. God shares the patient, yearning and tenderness of maternal love and does the kind of work done by women for centuries. God is engaged in female parenting: ‘I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms, yet have they not understood that I was the one looking after them’ (Hosea 11: 3-4). God provides an enabling embrace for Her human children in the acts of feeding (Ezek. 3: 1-6), baking bread (Mat.13: 33), guiding (Ps. 73: 23), protecting (Ps: 121: 1), healing and disciplining (Hosea 11), comforting (Isa. 66: 13), teaching (Prov. 22: 17), washing (Ezekiel 36: 25), clothing (Gen. 3: 21), wiping away tears (Rev. 21: 4). These are activities of maternal embrace that enable children to live, grow and act in their community. In some cases the embrace may not be physically present, yet these are all activities in which there is an enabling emotional and psychological embrace.

The enabling embrace of God is also described in the scriptures using images of God as mother eagle. God is described in Exodus as bearing ‘...you up on eagles wings’ (Ex. 19: 4); and in Deuteronomy: ‘As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead Jacob’ (Deut. 32: 11–12. K.J.V.). The image of God as mother eagle describes God’s relationship with her children as one offering an embrace that enables the young to fly from the nest out into the world and become self-sustaining. Ramey Mollenkott (1994) describes the way in which mother eagles take their young on their wings and then swoop down so the young are forced to fly on their own. She will stay close and swoop under them again when they cannot continue on their own. The mother eagle provides, on her wing, the enabling maternal embrace human beings also need as we take up our own independence and freedom.

God, like the mother eagle, actively empowers Her young. She enables us to move from the nurturing nest to take flight on our own wings, hunt for our own food, live in freedom and survive. The enabling maternal embrace provides a safety net when we are falling, home when we feel lost and healing when we are wounded. The maternal embrace enables us to
recover and return to face the challenges ahead.

**Enduring**

The enduring embrace is also an aspect of *maternal embrace*. Mothers continue to embrace their children even to the point of enduring great suffering. Ruth’s commitment to Naomi is an example of an enduring *maternal embrace*. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah were all widowed and living in a foreign land in a time of famine. When Naomi decided to return to her homeland, she encouraged her daughters-in-laws to return to their own mothers. Orpah goes, but Ruth ‘clings’ to Naomi saying: ‘do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die’ (Ruth 1: 16-17). Ruth’s commitment to Naomi is an example of an enduring *maternal embrace*. Here, the *maternal embrace* is a commitment until death. Although children become adults, leave home and live well beyond their mother’s physical embrace, the connection between a mother and her children endures beyond death, even in this example of a non-biological relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law.

Naomi and Ruth offered one another another an enduring embrace in the context of a patriarchal culture in which widows had no status or protection. Ramsey Mottenkott (1994) quotes Trible’s research describing women as nonentities. These women had no brothers or sons to offer them shelter. In a culture where there was no one responsible to ensure that their lives endured, they only had the *maternal embrace* they embodied for one another. At the heart of Ruth’s embrace of Naomi was a commitment to Naomi’s God. Ruth embraces God and God embraces Ruth. As these women walked in God’s embrace, they found a husband for Ruth in Boaz and Ruth had a son Obed, thus their lives endured and were renewed. Their embrace not only endured for their lifetime, but Ruth became the great grandmother of King David and in turn one of the foremothers of Jesus.

The *maternal embrace* is a commitment until death. Although children become adults, leave home and live well beyond their mother’s physical embrace, the connection between a mother and her children endures beyond death, even in this example of a non-biological relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law.

Another biblical image of the enduring *maternal embrace* has been depicted in religious art as the Pieta. This image depicts the moment Jesus is taken down from the cross and held in His mother’s arms. Cunneen (1991) describes Jesus’ mothers enduring her own extreme suffering, ‘the mother continues to hold her son, refusing to abandon Him in death and disgrace, as most of His followers do’. Mary not only suffers with her child, but also continues to hold Him through His suffering. A mother’s enduring embrace is a powerful metaphor for God’s compassionate grace.

**Conclusion**

Grace is described by Haight (1979) as: ‘how God deals with people concretely in this world … [and] the way in which God’s love manifests itself in the life of human beings.’ People encounter God’s grace in daily living. Indeed, as Beattie (2003) reminds us, we are called to embody grace: ‘[W]e are called to be graced creatures who, as beings alone before God and as beings who are never truly alone, are invited to participate in the divine life of Christ in all its mystery and coming to perfection.’ Beattie (2003) suggests it God’s love, tenderness and
desire can become known to us in God’s maternal embrace which is the root of revelation and transformation. It is through awareness of God’s embrace that we are transformed. Thus, it is through grace that we become creatures who are able to respond to the invitation to participate in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. Maternal embrace acts as an important metaphor for the embodied experience of grace.

The ministry of spiritual direction invites people into safe, contemplative conversation where the focus is to develop discerning awareness of grace in daily life. As we listen for the grace of God, spiritual direction assumes that grace can be embodied in human experience and that the stories people bring to spiritual direction may indeed be stories of encountering God’s grace. Some caution is rightly called for when claiming an embodied experience of grace. It is problematic to state that one is experiencing God. We can, however, describe an encounter with God’s grace.

[Encounter with God] is awe and rupture; because it involves encountering the Other, it contains the possibility of peril; and it is the realization that our homes and familial and intellectual, have no ground on which to stand. It occurs without theatre more often than not, in and around and through ordinary events … We could testify to it, were our mouths not caked with silence because of it: how can one make sentences out of that which upsets our entire way of thinking and being? (Hart & Wall 2005)

This study of maternal embrace confirms it as a rich metaphor for the encountering God’s grace. Maternal embrace offers the nurturing, enabling and enduring embrace reflected in the Christian scriptures, theology and traditions, and the human encounter with the grace of God. Our ability to give and receive of ourselves in reciprocal relationships of human and divine love, tenderness and desire is well represented in the metaphor of maternal embrace. The nurturing, enabling and enduring aspects of the maternal embrace reflect our capacity for constant revelation and transformation.

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Empowerment through poetry in giving and receiving the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius

Marlene Marburg

Poetry, more than any other multi-dimensional writing, shows rather than tells story in a succinct and focused way. The poet experiences the process (of writing and editing), the content and the form of her poetry as revelation and often prayer. She uses word-images, sketches or impressions to invite the reader (and/or hearer) to engage with an experience in which poet and reader listen for the shared story. The reader brings his personal gendered story, feelings, thoughts, culture and values to the poem. The writer does not tell the reader what to experience or what to think. Without conscious imposition, preaching or bias, the poet who remains at balance [15] offers the poem to the reader to continue musing. In this way, poetry can speak to the contemporary spiritual seeker who is suspicious of traditional religious pedagogy. Poetry offers a pedagogy valuing experience and process as ways of knowing and learning. This paper presents poetry consistent with the graces of the Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. The experience of writing, reading and listening to poetry is fertile ground for spiritual direction.

Keywords: poetry, Spiritual Exercises, religious experience

The poetry experience

The character of poetry

In trying to identify the character of poetry, mid-19th century American poet, Emily Dickinson, says this (Lahman, 2000):

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?

As Emily Dickinson encounters poetry, she encounters her capacity to respond to word-stimuli. She approaches the poetry with openness. She is aware of a physical response – an altered state of consciousness. The words of the poem touch into something she feels and knows deeply. Her feelings inform her as much as her knowledge of language. If she chooses, she can explore the content of her experience. She can come to understand how the words of the poem have opened her psyche and spirit to resonate with her personal story. She can come to know what aspects of her history or culture, what desires, fears, gifts or propensities interplay in her response to the poetry.

Emily Dickinson speaks of a spiritual experience in so far as her heightened awareness draws her towards authenticity. When she asks ‘Is there any other way?’ she affirms her reliable touch-points of knowing: coldness and a feeling of being disconnected from her head. When

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she is re-connected to her ‘head’ again, she is able to use poetry to articulate her experience. She *shows* rather than *tells*.

**Contemporary spiritualities**

This conference asks participants to reflect on contemporary spiritualities and their impact on the practice of spiritual direction. By way of cursory comment, and from my experience as an Ignatian spiritual director, I meet many people who hear the call of God in their lives and desire to know God and follow Christ in service. People often minister in communities beyond the local church. Their lack of church attendance indicates the decreasing relevance of traditional church worship in their lives. Responses to church have receded from their religious consciousness.

Contemporary spiritualities attract people with a strong social conscience; people who give no ear to platitudes. They would rather *show* than *tell*. The popularity of spiritual direction is a response to changing spiritualities. Although not a replacement for church, spiritual direction has responded to contemporary spiritualities in ways that churches have not. People come to spiritual direction wanting to discover their unique giftedness so as to serve God meaningfully through these gifts.

The Ignatian maxim to ‘find God in all things’ makes sense to contemporary spiritualities, and Ignatian spirituality endeavours to adapt the Exercises to specific contemporary needs [#18].

**The poetic way**

The poetic way of spiritual direction is one of these responses. It offers a deep listening to a person’s experience as he or she expresses it in multiple levels of language. It explores the metaphors a person uses, and refrains from prescriptive and overly literal language which tends to make God in our own image. The poetic way nurtures spiritual direction as a contemplative and sacramental space. While it honours clarity, it abides ambiguity and is in awe of mystery. It encourages process rather than product, journey rather than destination. It is my view that this poetic way of listening comes naturally to people called and formed as spiritual directors. The poetic way is fundamental to Ignatian imaginative contemplation of which I will speak later.

Although the poetic way does not always use poetry in a formal way, I find poetry helpful in a variety of situations in spiritual direction. Over recent months I have used it as a self-supervision tool to express my responses to a spiritual direction interview. It has been a source of revelation and freedom. It has been prayer.

Poetry as prayer or tool of prayer is compatible with the Exercises, and has the potential to create an environment in which the primary goals of the Exercises, and the content of the Principle and Foundation [#23] are nurtured and sustained. The First Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises (Fleming, 1996) states that,

> by this name of Spiritual Exercises is meant every way of examining one’s conscience, of meditating, of contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally, and of performing other spiritual actions, as will be said later. For as strolling, walking and running are bodily exercises, so every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and...
find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul, is called a Spiritual Exercise.

By this definition, reading and writing poetry is a spiritual exercise which prepares, nurtures, or sustains a person in moving towards an expanding life in grace and freedom. In [#2], Ignatius advises the giver of the Spiritual Exercises to stand back in order to allow inspiration to come to the exercitant by means of his or her own engagement in prayer. Poetry allows the person to be present to their own feelings, judgments and their own imaginative processes. Ignatius says also in [#2] ‘For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul.’

Empowering companionship for the Spiritual Exercises

The journey of the Spiritual Exercises invites all into the Kingdom of God to experience the privileged relationship with God and others, and the responsibility which comes with it. John Dominic Crossan offers a new terminology for the Kingdom of God. He calls it the ‘companionship of empowerment’ (O’Murchu, 2009). I think ‘companionship of empowerment’ aptly describes the freedom sought through the journey of the Spiritual Exercises. I have found that poetry also offers a companionship of empowerment.

In the interests of showing rather than telling, I would like to invite you to pray with poetry and to hear it as God’s invitation to accompany you. Three things might help: openness, willingness and indifference to what might happen. For those of you who are familiar with the Spiritual Exercises, the poetry touches into one or more of the graces of the Four Weeks of the Exercises. Consistent with [#3] of the Spiritual Exercises, I invite you to turn your gaze upon God. Robert Marsh (2004) in the title of his article describes this disposition as Looking at God looking at you.

Disposition Days

The first poem Baby’s First Breath invites a person to a prayerful disposition. It speaks of the hope of the Spiritual Exercises.

Baby’s First Breath

In her first breath,
through wide and eager mouth,
baby draws whatever comes;
whatever fills the emptiness
of that first hunger.
In the cells of her tiny self, baby distinguishes oxygen, the lesser part of air, to cool the crying need,
and the universal spirit comes in to dance greater and lesser steps, filling her with baby-ness, and all she needs to be herself.
And, at the going out, her mother’s breath resumes warm streams of consolation,
babbling aspiration
inspiration
and the universe is changed.

**Week One Love**

The grace of the First Week of the Exercises is to know oneself as loved by God in spite of broken relationships with God and others. *Kanyini*, (Marburg, 2007) is a First Week poem about aboriginal dispossession. It juxtaposes black and white, so as to restore holiness to notions of black as evil and white as pure. Kanyini means literally to keep, or to have. In a figurative sense it is the sense of connectedness through caring and responsibility that underpins life. Because aboriginal life is tied to the land at every level of meaning, colonial invasion annihilated their connectedness to law, country, work, family and spirit. The antonym to Kanyini is ‘Kawalinyi’ which means to lose sight of an obligation (Aboriginal Art and Culture, 2008). This is the counter-spirit we are asked to confront in Week One.

**Kanyini**

My shadow is black
across the surface of
the land I look down
thrust upon you
my hatred of things
black things which
obscure colour distort
beauty

My shadow puts me on stilettos
cat-walking the earth
It makes me run
makes me speak too fast too much
makes me think
I can beat its growing
presence into night
It is never noon-day

but for 38,000 years before Christ
night was not night for you
night was as the light

black and blended
you belong to the land
keepers in the noon day
as midnight

You are
the ochre of the land white
witchetty grub honey
of the ants emu
on two feet hop
of kangaroo

Long the night
engulfed by my shadow, you
cannot find your way struggle
to retrieve the ark in yourselves
when once you carried it

It carried you
Kanyini
heads held high
at one with nakedness and plenty
drunk from the nipples of Kanyini
mother earth

No eyes can see
no ears can hear Kanyini the heart
grieves Kanyini the longing is
Kanyini the spring and seasons
from which you know north and south
west and east

You are the land
decimated You are
the prophet passionate
voice in your body
the spirit truth
we try to discipline
to whiten
I listen

The black prophet speaks
consoling words
Lie down
with your black and flattened selves
Be light as noon-day

Through Kanyini I was connected to intense feelings about this issue. The poem helped me to a poignant hearing of the power of fear to distort life. It asked me to face my own fear and failure, and to be dissatisfied with superficial listening to the voice of those who suffer.

**Week Two relationship**

Persons in Week Two of the Spiritual Exercises pray for the grace to know, love and follow Christ. Ignatius encourages the exercitant to enter the scripture text; imagine the scene, see, hear, smell, taste, touch and feel what it is like to be there; and above all to allow one’s spiritual senses to encounter Jesus. *The Last Day* is an imaginative contemplation about the relationship between Jesus and the woman with the haemorrhage in Mark 5.25-34.
The Last Day

1
The woman wrestled
morning dreams
Tired she rose not bothered
by hunger. Today
one way or the other
was her last
the last day
blood would drain from her
shrinking painful body

She opened the latch smiled at the
door’s squeaking hinges
stepped onto the noisy street
pulled a soft grey veil around
her eyes. Bright sun on
her face lit
jagged contours and
the theatre of deep
plump memories played
friendship
marriage
man-touch
splash-washing pots
wearing and
weaving

Past worrying
about whispers and blood-soaked clothes
she must find strength to be
focused

Every gesture and movement
conserved for one
momentous touch

2
He was three deep
Her heart recognized him and
quickened in the seeing

The shrill and lift of crowd
swamped her
left her
dizzy light
she reached out
the tips of her fingers
falling feeling
a wisp of warmth
from the hem of his garment

He turned stood
strong against
the moving crowd

*Who touched me*

Scared and sacred moment
last moment
of encounter
for which she dared not ask

Longing words
scarred in blood
and shame emptied
from her

*I touched you*

_You did_ he said

The gift to me in *The Last Day* was a growing awareness that a woman who believes in Jesus, receives more than she imagines. Before I wrote the poem, I did not know that my touch could move Jesus. In a real way, the poem has moved me towards a deeper understanding of my own humanity, the humanity of Jesus and the human need for touch and relationship.

**Week Two Awareness**

The Spiritual Exercises draw a person to discern the difference between what brings life and what takes it away. This next poem *Friday 8 pm in China Town* (Marburg, 2010) is stark and confronting. It speaks about choices.

**Friday 8 pm in China Town**

Through the picture window
in Latrobe Lane, we see her
post-pubescent poverty,
blue-white skin pressed against her bones,
lifting her knitted mini-dress above her waist,
her knickers to her ankles.
She squats beside the rubbish bin,
relieves herself;
the cloned friend helpless
to create a cubicle.
My husband locks eyes with me,
closets us against a crass response.
We eat our banquet, wondering
when she had her last meal, and
if she has had it.
Week Three Sorrowing

Third Week exercitants pray for the grace of compassionate presence in solidarity with the suffering. The poem *Thirst* shows the struggle and outcome of saying ‘yes’ to God.

**Thirst**

In the clinic, the derelict
was fraught with fever, enough
to make a dog salivate. I
x-rayed him, asked him to wait.

He panted, disturbed his
burdened chest, coughed
from somewhere deep,
and asked for water.

With the door open, he sat
on the bench in the toilet-sized change-room.
Dehydrated flesh sagged from his bones.
He fiddled with clothes, confused
about the order of things.
His watch had stopped.

*My eyes are gritty*, he said,
as if it was a question.
Then he dressed himself dizzy
with checks and holes.

I washed my hands.

He waited on the verandah
for the rain or something to pass.
I did.

*Could you take me to the station?*

*Sorry. It's against policy.*

He understood ‘policy’
referenced daily
to his exact, polite pleading.

*Sorry* pulled at my mind,
stopped the car.
I motioned him to come.

His eyes
in habitual reverence,
honoured me in a way that
shamed my fear.

And when he said *bless you,*

I received the cup of water,
astonished by my thirst.

This next Third Week poem, *Thomas’ Wounds,* reflects on being with Thomas as he grieves the loss of his friend, Jesus.

**Thomas’ Wounds**

1.
I flee with Thomas
wounded
with every separating step

I refuse to be in the locked room
grief-stricken
and enraged

_Do not play with me_
_Do not say Jesus is alive_
_I am trying to grieve his death_

2.
I resist Thomas’ hand
In it my own poor grip slips
not because I don’t believe
but because Thomas puts his hand
deeply in
wounds

Wounds are for feeling

for knowing
I cannot save myself

As I wrote this poem, Thomas and I offered mutual friendship. I grew in awareness that grief is to be honoured and suffering has its own consolation.

**Week Four Simplicity**

Surprise, joy and simplicity are typical graces of the Fourth Week. The exercitant prays to rejoice with Christ in his resurrection joy. I offer this last suite of poems as a window to that joy. May the poems speak for themselves.
Heaven in All Things

1
In the vegie-market
beside her mother’s trolley,
the little girl sits on the floor.
To lullaby arms
she whispers holding-words
tenderly
totally she hears
delight
gurgle
from her string of onions.

2
On his belly stretched out in the sandpit
manipulating Master of the Universe
and his dark opponent Skeletor,
he asks What is heaven?
I reply Happiness with God.

I see he knows something.
It stirs him, bubbles
like a tropical spring.
He jumps in, says
I am in the earth
of heaven.

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"God is in this place –how awesome!"
Spiritual direction and the significance of place.

Robin Pryor*

The role of reflection on scripture is well established in the companioning of directees, notably so in the Ignatian tradition, among others. The role of “God’s other book”, creation, has received much less attention. In the case of regular sessions of spiritual direction following a directee’s spiritual journey, place may have little or only passing significance. On the other hand, the physical setting of a retreat over a number of days, a week or more, may have quite a profound impact on the directee and enrich the evolving conversations with a director. While the focus continues to be on the directee’s prayer and ongoing formation in the Spirit, this experience may be quite differently nuanced if the retreat is located in a desert, mountains, or in a river or island location.

This paper, drawing on the author’s experience of offering retreat leadership and spiritual direction in a range of geographic realms, will explore the possible connections between the significance of place, and the apophatic/kataphatic spectrum of prayer. The focus is on the situating of “place” in the phenomenology of prayer. The starting point is that God is understood as the dwelling place of the world (and cosmos), rather than vice versa. The immanence of the Spirit of Christ in time and space means that prayer, theological reflection, and conversations with a spiritual companion, happen in the particularity of place, earthed in an experienced landscape of God’s good creation.

Keywords: Spiritual direction, Place, Apophatic/Kataphatic

Introduction

After his dream at Bethel (Gen.28:10-22), Jacob exclaimed “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it …How awesome is this place!” An excellent opening for a spiritual direction conversation on retreat! Casey in his book The fate of the earth (1997) has traced the demise of interest in ‘place’ and the growing fascination with ‘space’. Space here is understood as something unlimited and open-ended, while place “solicits questions of limit and boundary, of location and surrounding”. Casey further argues (1993, xiv) that “In the past three centuries in the West –the period of ‘modernity’—place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed…A discourse has emerged whose exclusive cosmological foci are Time and Space”.

The growing protest at this prevailing discourse has, in a range of disciplines including Philosophy, Cultural Geography, Anthropology and Psychology taken the path of a phenomenological approach (Tuan, 1977, 1974/1990; Inge, 2003, 13ff). This signals a rejection of the rationalist bias that has dominated Western thought since Plato, in favour of a reflective attentiveness to an individual’s or community’s “lived experience”, and addresses the experience of Being itself. This shift of emphasis invites the possibility of attending to the nuances of our experience in specific places, alongside the traditions of practice and theological dogma, typical of retreats and the foci of spiritual direction in

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such a context. Malpas (1999) argues that the significance of locale is not summed up in our (exterior) experiences of place, but in the grounding of our (interior) experience in place. ---the particularity of place resonates with and impacts upon human experience, reflection on that experience, and indeed on our em-placed identity.

Perhaps poets have better understood this than theologians ---they apprehend landscape not just as picturesque or daunting or as an example within creation, but as companionable and even ‘humanising’ (e.g. Wordsworth and; Murray, 2002; and see Heaney, 1984, 145; Bate, 1991; poet Mary Oliver in Mann, 2004). James McAuley (1986) wrote

“…Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,
Cast flames upon the earth; raise up contemplatives
Among us, men who walk within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land…”

The poem is about the “evanescent sense” of searching contemplation, and the reaching of “the eyes of the heart” into the “created mystery” that is the presence of God in the land of Australia. It is about the physicality of the created and ever-evolving landscape, drought-ridden, flood-prone, bushfire destroyed and regenerated, the “sunburnt country” which invites exploration of an outer terrain, even while we seek our bearings for the inner journeys of the Spirit (Pryor, 2006a).

Aboriginal Australians have much to teach us about place-identity and the essential spiritual connection with country (Swain, 1993, 39; Ungunmerr, 1995; Budden, 2009). The contemporary rediscovery of pilgrimage (‘mobile retreat’) is a third way in which the phenomenology of experience, of em-placed ritual and prayer, is once again linking place and spirituality, the physical and the emotional (Turner & Turner, 1978; Pryor 1999, 2006b, 2009).

While in many ways place has become desacralised and modernity has weakened the forces of attachment to place, individuals who must construct meaning for themselves in the world still draw selectively upon traditional spiritual and mythical worldviews, and continue to attribute specific meanings and active responses to places, irrespective of the subjectivities involved.

For Heidegger, the human person is a dasein, literally a ‘being there’, so that placedness is of the essence of humankind (Heidegger, 1958; Malpas, 199, 6; Inge, 2003, 18). His goal was a reintegration of earth, people, and an invigorated spirituality, a triadic model focused around the notion of dwelling. I.e. how people make their house a home, or, we might argue, make a short-term retreat location into a place of spiritual-emotional habitus (Lane, 1998, 10; 2002). The intimate connection between spirit and place, and between landscape, theological reflection and spiritual formation, is having to be re-woven in this post-modern era, and the remnants of the Reformation’s separation of theology from the material are yet to be deposed (Sheldrake, 2001).

A phenomenology of prayer

In A history of Christian spirituality, Holmes (1980) developed what he called “A phenomenology of prayer” In a major survey of spiritual formational practices across the whole of the Christian era, and across all major regions and traditions, Holmes concluded that two spectra helped summarise the immense range of historical material. He depicted this visually as a circle with four quadrants marked by horizontal and vertical axes. The model also recognised a certain tension between the quadrants, and the need for balance, or a corrective of excesses such as those found in rationalism, pietism, quietism, and encratism (Figure 1).
The horizontal is the apophatic/kataphatic spectrum, based on the degree to which a specific ascetical practice advocates an emptying (apophatic) or imaginal (kataphatic) approach to prayer and reflection. **Apophatic mysticism**, the *via negativa*, stresses the radical difference between God and creation/creatures, the unknowability of God except by negation, and the ineffectiveness of the intellect and the senses; God is mystery, and is to be experienced only in the dark silence of infused contemplation.

**Kataphatic** refers to the *via positiva*, the approach to experience of God through the senses, and emphasises the metaphorical connections between God and creation/creatures; concepts, images, and symbols provide ways of articulating our experience of a God who comes to us in incarnation and epiphany rather than in negation. In practice, and theologically, we may find ourselves at different places on the spectrum over time, and there is an invitation in many retreat settings to explore other ways of approaching God than those that are most familiar in our own tradition or in our personal experience to date.

The vertical axis refers to the speculative/affective spectrum, based on the degree to which a spiritual practice of prayer emphasises the use of the mind (speculative), or the heart or emotions (affective). Here too, an individual is likely to shift locus over time, and hold diverse strengths within their practices of spiritual formation.

Images of God have always been crucial in the dialectics of spirituality and in the ministry of spiritual direction and retreats. The apophatic way is that of the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston, 1973; Turner 1995), wordless, imageless prayer. The kataphatic way typically emphasises the concreteness of images, icons, imaginative meditation on scripture, or “reading the book of creation” (Newell, 1999).
A further way of highlighting the contribution of different traditions to the rich tapestry of Christian prayer and formation is to overlay the six great spiritual “streams” identified by Foster (1998) on a modified version of the Holmes model.

This resulting ‘spirituality map’ (Pryor, 2006a) has proved a helpful tool in spiritual direction and retreats, to visually situate, and invite tentative articulation to, a retreatant’s experience, their sensitivities and risks, and their challenges for ongoing spiritual formation. The map is especially useful in sharing in group spiritual direction sessions.

**The apophatic/kataphatic spectrum and the significance of place**

The focus here is the situating of ‘place’ in the phenomenology of prayer, especially in regard to the horizontal axis. The starting point is that God is understood as the dwelling place of the world, rather than vice versa. The immanence of the incarnation of Christ in time and space means that prayer, meditation and worship, wherever they occur, happen both in a particularity of place, yet within the life and presence of a transcendent God. Because experiences of immanence function within a larger theology of transcendence, and both are essential and integral, *apo-phasis* and *kata-phasis* must be seen as interrelated and inter-penetrating rather than as opposing and separate approaches to God. There is a spectrum and interaction rather than a dichotomy of spiritual practice and response.

The ‘poles’ serve to critique all experiences of prayer and all epiphanies of the divine. The apophatic critiques the religious imagination’s construction of meaning in place, and the kataphatic critiques the tendency to abstraction and dis-embodiment of divine encounter, and is a reminder to de-mythologise any final dependence on place as defining God’s presence (see Schneiders, 1998, 23-25). As Jeremiah informs us, God is elusive and cannot be domesticated even for spiritual purposes (Jer. 7:4), and Stephen was clear that God could not be confined by a temple or houses made by our hands (Acts 7:48), let alone a landscape of God’s good creation.

While acknowledging the ‘overlap’ along the spectrum, Table 1 summarises some further characteristics of the two traditions which have sought to deal with spiritual experiences and the religious imagination, and to understand a transcendent God who meets us in incarnational immanence, in specifics of time, place and Person. The Table, a ‘dense summary’, would require much unpacking to guide its use in a specific retreat context.

The Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* provide one of the primarily kataphatic paths to prayer and reflection in a retreat context (Fleming, 1987; Hebblethwaite, 1987; Netherwood, 1990; Hughes. 1996; Au, 2010). “Finding God in all things” is a typical description of Ignatian spirituality and the exercises. They provide a structured way of seeing, hearing and perceiving our experience, which is where God is to be found through the use of all our five senses as well as in speculative and affective ways, and profoundly through the use of inspired imagination.
Table 1: Some characteristics of the apophatic/kataphatic spectrum. (Pryor 2006a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apophatic</th>
<th>Kataphatic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ultimate placelessness of God-encounters</td>
<td>Essential placed-ness of God-encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic of suspicion in experience –dis- placement</td>
<td>Hermeneutic of attention/retrieval in experience --em-placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to contain the mystery of encounter</td>
<td>Celebrating the power of encounter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticising inadequacy/inappropriateness of image</td>
<td>Delighting in image, rootedness of imagination in our being created in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong critique of imagination itself</td>
<td>image/imagination of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discerning God’s presence as always beyond place and time and our attempts to describe</td>
<td>Discerning God’s presence in the “thisness” of particular places (Sheldrake, 2001, 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkness and cloud more likely to signal encounter</td>
<td>Light, colour and texture of place important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious of the data of the senses</td>
<td>Fosters the use of the 5 senses in the (re)construction of place e.g. Ignation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of critical insight in</td>
<td>Spiritual Exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“deconstructing” every imagined place we (might) seek to enter, prophetic judgement demands image-lessness</td>
<td>Importance of imagination in “constructing” every place we enter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus absconditus –God is free, inaccessible, unbounded, access never guaranteed</td>
<td>Deus incarnatus –God is accessible in the places of our lives and we rightly look for this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insignificance of place to Christian spirituality</td>
<td>Importance of place in Christian spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting point: we can’t comprehend the numinous, experience of presence is solely of God’s making</td>
<td>Starting point: we are drawn to experience/reflect on the numinous, metaphor &amp; image important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values the natural world but it is never an adequate way of apprehending the mystery of God</td>
<td>Values biblical and historical evidence understood as “em-placing” the experience of the divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment and stripping of concreteness of image</td>
<td>Embrace of image, metaphor, analogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of subjectivity of experience of God</td>
<td>Celebration of intersubjectivity of experience of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The notion of ‘composition of place’ is Ignatius’ way of earthing a retreatant’s biblical reflection and prayer firmly in the specifics of place (e.g. a narrative in the life of Christ and his followers), while also opening him/her to mystery from beyond programs and structures. The prayer of lectio divina fosters the movement from the (re)construction of place in the imagination, towards meeting God in the human heart, that is, a pilgrimage to interiority via the sacramentality of experience and place. Place is understood as a necessary means or reminder, not as an end in itself: it acts in anamnesis (I Cor 11:24-25) to usher the retreatant into the presence of God. Landscape holds multi-layered ‘memory’ far greater than its geological formation alone. Incarnation and transcendence, light and dark, physicality and mystery all find their place ---“the total felt-environment of the particular mystery of Christ’s life (to be contemplated) in whatever ways it can be most vividly mine”, this is the setting for prayer (Fleming, 1987, 30). It should be noted that The Cloud of Unknowing, resorts to imagery: anyone who climbs “the lofty mountain of contemplation through sheer brute force will be driven off with stones”. We are even exhorted to “pretend to hide your heart’s longings from the Lord…”, a response (however unrealistic) dependent on the use of one’s imagination (Johnston, 1973, ch.9).

**Retreats in the natural landscape**

How might a retreat experience and accompanying spiritual direction be influenced and enhanced by its geographic setting? How might the setting provide a helpful contribution to prayer and reflection in a specific landscape, given the inevitability (and gift) of contextualisation of a retreat experience?
Prayer, like the rest of life, happens in the context of time and space, and space can be addressed as conducive to or as detracting from prayer (Stoney, 1992; Vennard, 2000). I have felt shut-in, confined and unmotivated to pray in a gracious old Retreat House, and equally so in a modern, comfortable chapel. And I have felt drawn to contemplation in a drafty old farmhouse on Bardsey Island off the Welsh coast, on the pebbly shore of Columba’s Bay on Iona, and on the red desert near Uluru. The prayer and its fruits did have something to do with stillness and quiet, helpful spiritual direction, and a lot to do with a deep sense of the numinous, as it were coming to meet me, in particular places and times. I can psychologise about ‘what was going on’ within myself, and I can spiritualise any setting, but in the end it is often how I choose to view the setting, and the attentiveness I bring to the experience, that most impacts the praying and reflection that happens.

Imagination is very much part of the Ignatian Exercises, as of other approaches to scriptural meditation and retreat experience. We need imagination to begin to discern the presence of God in another person to whom we are not otherwise attracted (”love your neighbour as yourself”). Similarly, we need the capacity to ‘image’ a particular place: this landscape, however barren, polluted, or home to victims of society, is nevertheless created by a loving God who calls us to pray in the Spirit with this groaning part of creation. It is basic that a ‘retreat’ is about attending better to God’s presence in the here and now, not about escaping from the world --- whether the ‘here’ is a house or a hill, a place of beauty or of environmental degradation. It is a matter of noticing that God is present in this place, calling us to respond in life-giving ways which will sometimes have to do explicitly with the unique physicality of the place.

*Lectio divina* provides a way of attending to God’s presence in my relationship with a place, as well as a gospel narrative. In my relationship with this retreat location, perhaps Cape Barren Island in Bass Strait, I am invited into: first, meditation, a prayerful, receptive listening to the Spirit’s guidance in this relationship; second, a testing self-examination as I am taken aside, searched and challenged, and brought to a new understanding; third, discerning prayer as I seek to respond to the Word of God which confronts me in this landscape (e.g. historic dispersal but survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people). Here is joy and pain, adoration and confession. Fourth, there is contemplation. Depending on what the Spirit has drawn to my attention, I may (need to) find a place and way of resting in God’s presence, a place of healing or restoring my soul, in loving attentiveness to God.

Finally, as I consider the next phase of my life, I hear the invitation to incarnate the fruits and graces of this time of prayer in action, perhaps seeking reconciliation, deepening my relationships, or caring for the land. Incarnational prayer carries forward with it memory, image, insight and commitment. It draws deeply on the wells of scripture, tradition and experience, and is sometimes mediated in unexpected ways by the particulars of place. Literally finding an ancient well on the hillside on Bardsey Island became the turning point for me at mid-retreat in 1991.

There are times on retreat when what we have gathered up in prayer and using all our God-given senses in the particular place and time, triggers a welling-up of a heart-felt response that can only be described as discovering a choraphylia, a concrete love of place (cf topophylia, Tuan, 1974/1990). It is in such places that God desires to encounter us. “Pools of silence”, indeed vast reservoirs of God’s love, are there to be discovered in this thirsty land.
Conclusion

Bachelard (1994) in his philosophical study refers to the “felicitous space” where one may “seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped…the space we love...” It is to this wealth of creative imaging, of the exploration of connectedness and God-valuing, to which a retreatant is invited in the Australian landscape. Bachelard (1994, 183) also uses the phrase “intimate immensity”, words capturing both the interiority and exteriority of a retreat experience. He quotes the poet Rilke: “The world is large, but in us/ it is deep as the sea”: this is to be accessed in rest and day dreaming, in memory and imagination, in striding the hillside or sitting beside a creek, in biblical study and theological reflection, in meditation, and in contemplation on the awesome grandeur and fierce terrors of creation.

A retreat leader’s preparation is principally to do with imagining and praying for

• the “felicitous space” of the retreat setting,
• prayerful openness to the one/s who come, and
• the expectation that in liminal moments of the Spirit’s choosing, the “intimate immensity” of God’s presence will touch their shared lives.

The leader, the retreatant, and the place interconnect their joyful and painful histories, their hidden mysteries, and their cautious hopes that they will touch the hem of the garment of the Spirit’s presence in this place. What Bachelard called “felicitous space”, others might call “sacred space” or “holy place” in the sense that others are known to have encountered the sacred, the holy, the Person of Christ through the Spirit, in that place.

Whatever one’s understanding of symbolic landscape and views on the old dualism of sacred/profane space, each person brings imagination, intention, disposition, and prior experience to the place of their intended retreat. Even before you meet the spiritual director or retreat leader, you meet the place, crossing the bridge or entering through the gateway or driving along the entrance road. Already the place is coming to meet you in all its physicality, ambience and invitation, bidding you, symbolically and literally, to “sigh and slow down”. Already the trees offer an inviting avenue of creation’s greeting and the folds of the landscape, even a flat sparseness, draw you into its embrace. The tiredness and ‘baggage’ of the past days are still there, there may be particular anxieties or assumptions about what is to come, but the hands of godly hospitality are already reaching out from this set-aside place.
Figure. 3: Physical threshold and spiritual liminality: Bridge over Yarra River, Millgrove, entrance to Pallotti College Retreat Centre R J Pryor, 5/2004

However one comes to a particular place, be it a chapel, a beach, a mountain top, that place is in effect being carved out in one’s spiritual imagination and emotional space as a place of openness to encounter with God. Its very place-ness is an invitation and its physicality a reminder that here in this landscape the Incarnation is already happening for those with hearts to feel, and hands to touch. We are not just imagining Jesus walking the lakeside, but allowing ourselves to become composed (Latin: literally “to be put in place”), in situ, for what is to come in God’s economy of revelation. To become composed, in place, is a necessary starting point for the quiet attentive state of mind and heart which are most conducive to deep listening prayer. The support of a spiritual companion, who seeks to listen “the life-giving presence of God into articulation” in the directee (as the AECSD vision statement has it) engages the profound relationality of God, person and place.

Retreat ministry in carefully chosen natural landscapes and conducive physical settings has great potential for connecting God and nature, the senses and landscape, earthed ecological awareness and liminal moments of spiritual epiphany, intellectual endeavour and creative responses in music, song, poetry, journaling and the like. Landscape and music are perhaps especially evocative in a retreat setting, even primordial forms of mediation, as both have the capacity to “earth” and “awe” us (Ruffing 1997; McFague, 1997, 91ff, 164ff).

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Listening to stewards of God’s mysteries: life texts, metaphor and the construction of identity

Beverley Campbell*

Ordained ministers have been set apart to act as ‘stewards of God’s mysteries’ (1 Corinthians 4:1). They have been called to carry out the complex tasks of ministry, within congregations, or with those on the margins of society. Ordained ministers are encouraged to seek spiritual direction to assist them in discerning their call and in staying true to their vocation. The spiritual director plays a key role in supporting people in this process of discernment around issues of identity and the meaning of ordination. This paper presents the research I am undertaking as the Sanderson Scholar, based at the Uniting Church Centre for Theology and Ministry, in Melbourne. It is a small-scale oral history project in which I draw on the interview transcripts of ten Uniting Church ordained ministers of the Word, deacons or ministry interns in the first two years of ministry, to explore Bakhtin’s idea of dialogic struggle and the self-in-process. Taking on the identity of ordained minister or deacon, is neither a smooth, nor a straight forward process; it often involves struggle as ordained ministers strive to negotiate that space they have been set apart to occupy. The paper explores the ideas of metaphors for self, the importance of imaging, and ‘but’ statements as examples of the self-in-process. Whereas the examples used as illustration might be read as reflecting ambivalence or uncertainty about the participants’ identity as ordained Minister, they might also be read as situations requiring discernment and ethical choice, where participants act according to their understanding of the role of ordained minister or deacon.

Keywords: ordination, identity, dialogic self

To begin with a quote:

Esther This is hard now. I've given up on my other one. I had one about the deep sea and fish below the surface that I didn't know what they were, but I've let go of that one now. (Have you?) Yes, so it's now, it's almost like a tribal thing. I don't know how to think of it now. Because it's, it's a funny thing because there's so much happening...I have to wait a minute to get a proper image. (yes) There's a lovely thing, I've seen it actually, I've seen it in the past few days, a couple of times, a flock of birds flying around, in a beautiful clear sky, with everything else happening. (yes) So this lovely big cloud of birds flying around together which would allow for birds to take off and other new birds to come in, (yep) and the birds that are flying together in something bigger that's connected between heaven and earth, sort of, you know, all there together. (yes, that's a nice one) Well, there's no big bird, leading it. (laughter)

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* Beverley Campbell PhD is an adult educator who has worked for many years in the adult literacy and basic education field in Australia. In that time, she has been involved in teacher training and in professional development and is particularly interested in questions of professional identity formation. She is using the theory and methodology from her study of professional identity in adult literacy teachers to research questions of identity in newly ordained ministers in the Uniting Church.
It's all being led by the Spirit and so able to move together in some way, (yes) with each free and it's sort of like Trinitarian.

This quote comes from one of the interviews I have conducted for a research project I am undertaking as the Sanderson Scholar based at the Centre for Theology and Ministry. This image illustrates several points that I want to make in this paper – the value of the use of images in reflection, Esther’s search for the right felt sense (Gendlin 1978) in the image, the image as an example of dialogic struggle, and the image, reflective of a self-in-process, as part of Esther’s narrative imagination. I will return to this quote of Esther’s a little later.

In their formation, candidates for ordained ministry are given many images for leadership, many of them biblical. A very different image from Esther’s flock of birds, is the image ‘stewards of God’s mysteries’, the title of my paper. From 1 Corinthians 4:1, it says, ‘think of us, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries’. This reading was part of a recent ordination service for two ordinands for minister of the Word in the Uniting Church. The image was given as part of the charge, as these two people entered a new phase of ministry - the call to be stewards of God’s mysteries. It is a role that, out of God’s grace, they have been called to fulfil. It is a daunting task, preceded by many years of discernment, formation, discipline and reflection. Ordination is not undertaken lightly and it is not a task that ordained ministers can fulfil alone. The image ‘stewards of God’s mysteries,’ is just one of many images that shape the narrative of ordained ministry. This, with other images becomes part of an identity, which sets some apart. These images come to form part of a narrative imagination which is about ministering to others, to the world and for God. You might, as spiritual directors, be accompanying those who are newly ordained in this task of stewardship. This requires not only supportive direction, but creative listening, as you explore with them how they are choreographing that space in which ordination has placed them.

I write, not as a spiritual director, but as an adult educator, who is familiar with some of the approaches used in spiritual direction and who might be able to offer some new ones. I have taken to referring to this project as narrative inquiry rather than research. I situate my approach to narrative inquiry along with similar approaches which emphasise the social along with the personal, the situated nature of narrative, the performative element of narrative and the discursive nature of narrative (Brockmeier & Carbaugh 2001).

In this paper I aim to do several things. I will give a brief overview of my project of narrative inquiry, I will give a short history of the Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin and his theory of dialogism and how that accommodates my research interests related to identity and subjectivity, I will make a few points about identity and identity theory, I will look at some examples of metaphors for self which resonate with my project, I will give some examples of images used by participants in the interviews and how these reflect a self-in-process, and I will finish with some transcript excerpts, examples of dialogic struggle, which I have come to call ‘but’ statements.

I take a multidisciplinary approach to explore the notions of identity and struggle in relation to being newly ordained. I draw on discourse theory, feminist theory, identity theory, and Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, among many influences, in this study of identity among newly ordained clergy. Bakhtin developed a particular theory of language, called dialogism. For Bakhtin dialogism starts with the word, every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates…Discourse is inherently dialogic, utterances are always in complex ways responses to other utterances.
In particular I explore several strategies which have helped me to identify issues around the concepts of identity, self and subjectivity, and in particular the idea of the dialogic self. Bruner differentiates between the narrative mode of thought and the well-formed argument, which he says, ‘are different natural kinds’ (1986:11). This project sits in the narrative mode and I have drawn on narrative theory and identity theory to frame my questions: How do participants construct their lives, particularly in relation to their ordination narratives? How do they create themselves in the process? What larger narratives shape their personal stories? How do these stories convey a sense of self-in-process?

In their publication, *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001) say, ‘The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others organise our senses of who we are, who others are, and how we are to be related.’ My interest is in the particular strategies, or literary devices, that people use in their stories of being newly ordained that people tell about themselves, to construct their personal narrative. How are participants constructing their sense of self as they encounter new experiences and as they enact ordained ministry for the first time? What images and metaphors do they use to tell their stories?

**About the project**

In this project of narrative inquiry, I interviewed ten newly ordained ministers or ministry interns in the Uniting Church, eight women and two men, ranging in age from thirty to sixty three. Of the ten people interviewed, two were ministry interns, two were interns in the ministry of deacon, and the remaining six were in various stages of their first year of ordination. A ministry intern in the Uniting Church refers to someone who has completed requirements for ordination and who will spend a probation period in a placement under supervision, preparing for ordination. In my ethics clearance approved by the Melbourne College of Divinity, I agreed to keep the identities of the participants confidential. This I have attempted to do, even though the pool of participants is small and easily identifiable, in a relatively small organisation like the Uniting Church in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. So in the spirit of this project, and so I can refer to them by name rather than number or initial, I have given the participants biblical pseudonyms.

The interview transcripts have provided the data for interpretation. Freeman in his book, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* calls them ‘texts of lives, literary artefacts,’ (1993:7). I have treated the interview texts as literary artefacts, with a view to the question, how might this text be seen as ‘history in person’? (Holland et al 1998). As well as viewing this project as a narrative inquiry it could also be described as an oral history project, in which the personal stories of the participants are situated within the stories of the wider social and cultural context.

**Bakhtin applied**

The person whose work has provided me with the most satisfactory theory of self is the Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin lived from 1895-1975 and has been variously described as philologist and philosopher, cultural theorist and semiotician. Bakhtin’s work was carried out in early twentieth century Russia, a difficult time intellectually in that country, and it was to become increasingly so for anyone who was critical of the regime, which Bakhtin was. Bakhtin was part of what has become known as the Bakhtin Circle, which he formed with several other scholars, including Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov. Although he was writing in the early twentieth century in Russian, his work has only been translated and accessible to the Western World in the last forty years. In that time he has
become best known for his theory of dialogism and what he called the dialogic self. Michael Holquist, a Bakhtin scholar, says of Bakhtin’s theory of ‘dialogism’ that it was one of the great paradigm shifts of the twentieth century (1990). In her book Christianity in Bakhtin, Coates describes Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism in this way, ‘all of life is a dialogue, a dialogue between person and person, person and nature, person and God… I think that the kingdom of God is between us, between me and you, between me and God, between me and nature; that’s where the kingdom of God is’ (Kozhinov 1992 quoted in Coates 1998:8). In this on-going dialogue, what is the place of the ordained minister? I see the ordained minister of the Word or deacon as being situated in a metaphorical middle space, a between space, situated between God, the people and the world, where they have been given the gifts for ministry with which they might facilitate and interpret this on-going dialogue.

Dialogic self

Bakhtin’s theory of self was so radical, because it moved theories of the self away from understandings of the Enlightenment self which privileges an essentialist self, and a self that is rational, autonomous and individual. Primarily Bakhtin’s theory of self is dialogic and relational; the I of the self becomes more fully itself as it goes out to the other. As Bakhtin put it, the I authors itself as it goes out to the other. This notion of self and other is similar in many ways to Buber’s exploration of the I-thou relationship, but I have noted one major difference between the two. Buber did not foreground language in this I-Thou relationship, but for Bakhtin language is paramount. For Bakhtin, language plays a pivotal role in the formation of subjectivity. In her introduction to the Bakhtin Reader, Pam Morris, defines how Bakhtin understands subjectivity: ‘Subjectivity is thus produced on the ‘borderline’ where inner experience and social world meet, and they meet in signs - in words,’ (1994:12). Bakhtin also said that the words that we use are half someone else’s, but that we take them and make them our own. This process of subjectivity formation often involves struggle; as we make words our own, we re-interpret them in the light of our personal world view, personal philosophical or theoretical framework. In this way, words and concepts become socially contested.

To return to the quote I started with. This is a good illustration of a dialogic struggle, which is both personal but also part of the wider social-cultural context. To recall Esther’s image of a leaderless flock of birds. This image represents a struggle about leadership, at the personal level about what model of leadership to exercise in a congregation, but at the same time it reflects a struggle in the wider church over leadership styles and tension between lay ministry and ordained ministry. How is it possible to exercise leadership in a so-called non-hierarchical, conciliar structure like the Uniting Church? How to resolve the dilemma of balancing wanting to be one of the flock, whilst having been set apart for ordained ministry? How to honour those who are exercising lay ministry, without exercising the power that is perceived to accompany the role of ordained ministry? As Esther says ‘there is no big bird,’ but the struggle for her is how to balance this desire to be just another member of the flock against others’ expectations of the presence of ‘a big bird’?

The concept of the dialogic self, the dialogic I, belongs to this theory of dialogism. I have applied this understanding to show how the ordained minister might be thought of as a dialogic self. In their call to ordained ministry they have been called to occupy, what I have called, the middle ground, and to interpret and to facilitate this on-going dialogue. But this role often involves struggle as ordained ministers endeavour to choreograph this complex middle ground, that space they have been set apart to occupy between God and the people.
Identity theory

I want now to make just a few points about identity and identity theory. Postmodernity has called into question many things, not the least being the question of identity. Identity theory and questions of identity and the related ideas of personhood, self and subjectivity have become the focus of many disciplines. Post-colonial and cultural studies, feminist studies, and cultural anthropology all have different and often conflicting understandings of the self to add to the mix of how to speak about identity in a postmodern world. This questioning of identity has destabilised the very concept of the self. Several different definitions of identity will give you a flavour of how I understand this concept. Fitzgerald in his book *Metaphors for Identity*, defines identity as ‘the academic metaphor for self-in-context (1993:18). I have already mentioned Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogic self, but there are others I reference in my work. Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist and sociologist, defines identity this way, ‘Identity is a process of ‘…becoming…’ rather than ‘being’ (1996:4). For feminist theologians the self is also a relational self, ‘a self that is embodied, passionate, relational and communal,’ (Plaskow and Christ 1989:171). Another dimension is added to the definition provided by Langellier who says ‘Identity is a performative struggle,’ (1999:31). In an extension of this performance metaphor, Freadman incorporates a weaving metaphor to talk about how identity is formed, ‘…we all produce representations of ourselves, we constantly perform as weavers… (2001:17).

For another group of writers the personal nature of identity is embedded in the social-cultural context of its times. Holland et al define identity as, ‘a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations,’ (1998:5). Stuart Hall reiterates the personal and social aspects of identity, ‘precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies,’ (Hall & Du Gay 1996:4). This entwining of the personal with the social is reinforced by Jerome Bruner, who writes ‘It can never be the case that there is a ‘self’ independent of one’s cultural-historical existence,’ (1986:67). Campbell & Harbord also stress the inseparable nature of the personal from the social, when they say, ‘autobiography is never about the self as an isolated project, but about a self known through and embedded within a network of social relations that confer identity and meaning.’ (2002:12). Identity, self and subjectivity are inseparable concepts. Freadman defines subjectivity as something like, ‘what it feels like to be me,’ ‘the “texture” of my consciousness, how it feels to have my experience of the world rather than someone else’s (2001:329). Identity formation is a process of becoming, where the personal is situated in different specific social contexts. In this project, as the participants recount their personal narratives, they not only speak their identity, their subjectivity, they perform it as well, as they weave together threads of their life with the social discourses available from their wider context.

Uniting Church struggles

The personal stories that the participants tell in the interviews are not told in a vacuum. These stories or narratives of ordination are also situated in the context of the wider Uniting Church, of the wider church universal and in the context of a post modern, post Christendom Australia. The participants’ own narrative imaginations echo some of the discourses, metaphors and images from these wider contexts. Because this is a project about being ordained, these ten personal narratives also reflect their positioning in the biblical narrative. Many of the images and phrases they used could be traced to this source.
The Uniting Church is a broad church. The name acts as a container for many different theologies and liturgical styles. Because it is such a broad church, it also contains many struggles and tensions — around theologies, liturgical styles, music preferences, the issue of lay vs ordained clergy, ordained ministry or ministry of deacon, ministry intern vs ordained minister or deacon, to name just a few examples. The interviews also show that there is a discourse associated with ordination. Participants use key terms such as ‘ordination’, ‘authority’ and ‘set apart’ with slightly different interpretations. They have become socially contested terms. The use of these terms can also lead to dialogic struggle, sometimes reflected as an inner struggle, or sometimes as struggle with an other.

Metaphors and the narrative imagination
A self is constituted through story. Metaphor plays an integral role in the authoring of self in the process of subjectivity formation. Lakoff and Johnson stress the pervasive nature of metaphor in everyday language. Metaphor frames our conceptual system, and thus our thinking and our actions, (1980). In his study of autobiography and the self that is portrayed through telling one’s life, Freadman’s takes as his central metaphor ‘the self as weaver of threads’, (2001:284). He calls these ‘metaphors of self-constitution… a pivotal or controlling metaphor in an autobiography that express an understanding of what the – or a- self is like,’ (p.38). There are other metaphors for self – life as journey, life as battle, life as cycle, life as fabric, life as tapestry, around which life stories are told (Campbell 2005). Freeman (1993) uses another metaphor to talk about self and autobiography, that which he calls ‘rewriting the self’. In telling stories about ourselves in life narrative or personal histories or autobiography, we are rewriting the self that has already been written. The idea of the self-in-process suggests a dynamic process of continuity counter balanced with change. Metaphors for self-constitution provide for this continuity, but also allow for re-tellings and new versions of significant life events.

I have chosen one interview transcript, to illustrate examples of metaphors for self used to recount parts of a life narrative and to construct an identity. These examples come from Esther’s interview, where she uses the metaphors of life as journey, ‘where people ultimately have to get the tools to navigate themselves and not rely on the expert,’ ‘in terms of ministry placement down the road,’ ‘it’s given me this whole path of wonderful ideas to delve into,’ ‘they’ve got to trust me in terms of helping them and encouraging them to move in a direction that they might not be ready to go in,’ ‘I think the way forward for us is going to be,’ ‘sometimes they are so stubborn in the faith journey,’ a sporting metaphor, ‘a bit more runs on the board,’ a construction metaphor, ‘because it’s the building blocks,’ and life is a battle metaphor, ‘I sort of wrestled with this question.’

Because these metaphors for self have become such a naturalised part of everyday speech they often go unnoticed. They are worth listening for, however, as they can often give insight into intentionality and agency and so provide opportunities for further reflection.

Imaging
I want now to move from metaphors for self constitution to different images participants draw on in the process of recounting their ordination narratives. Sometimes these images occur spontaneously, as participants search for an apt description or image that matches what they are trying to capture. At other times the images offered are in direct response to an explicit question I ask about what image they would choose to encapsulate how they see their
ministry. They are calling on images from their narrative imagination to illustrate a particular point.

The publication *God’s Whimsy*, is a collection of reflections by feminist theologians. It has much to say about the importance of using images in reflection, that an image focuses in a way that is different to ordinary language. I just want to make several points about the importance of imaging, from the Mudflower Collective:

- *We do not come to see...just by looking but by training our vision through the metaphors and symbols that constitute our central convictions.*

- *Imaging is basic to appropriating our experience.*

- *Images call for interpretation...*

- *Images are usually more complex than concepts...*

- *Imaging enables a process of holistic expression and communication...*  
  (The Mudflower Collective 1985:157-158)

The theologian Stanley Hauerwas, says of the importance of images and metaphors, *Story incites story, as I tell this story among my friends, listen to them tell theirs, and in turn, tell a few of my own, the stories develop images and metaphors that give shape to a spirituality adequate to pastoral work...a right image silently and inexorably pulls us into its field of reality, which is also a field of energy.* (quoted by Eugene Peterson 1992:6)

Finding the ‘right image’, as Hauerwas suggests, does not always happen immediately, as the following excerpts show. Participants move from one image to another in attempts to convey meaning, or to encapsulate an experience. Esther starts out with the analogy of childbirth to convey a sense of what it is like to prepare for the birth of her first placement. She then moves to a comparison with a wedding and marriage, to convey a sense of the on-going nature of this commitment.

**Esther** …and as to how, how I could have been better prepared? I don't know, you know. It's funny 'cause you think, on the one hand, you're loading up the student or the intern minister (yes) with as much training as possible before sending them out is sort of one strategy but it probably is sort of like the child birth analogy where you can read as many books as you like, but nothing quite prepares you. But not only for the birth which is really the least of your problems, but for this new human being who's totally dependent and who's just sucked your independence right out of you. (laughter) And so like, how do you prepare for the birth of the placement and you know, the on-going, not the wedding of the service of recognition but the marriage of the on-going life together, and even just how to manage it. I don't know if it's possible to get more training of this but I'm looking at it.

In this next excerpt Miriam also moves between images to describe her role as ordained minister. A prophylactic is a preventive or protective measure to avoid disease. With her use of the term prophylactic, she begins with a medical image. She then moves to the image of a compass and a reading of true north to convey a sense of what her ordination has set her apart
for. The repetition of the image of true north suggests that she has found the right image for the felt sense of what she wants to communicate.

Miriam …and so, as a kind of prophylactic against that, we ask particular people in whom we discern gifts to not worry about…some of those other things, the paid work a bit, and to spend time studying the scripture and studying the world and coming to us every week with a reminder, a moment to re-orient our compass back to our true north. (yes) So in one way that is performing a function that is me saying, when push comes to shove, 'I am in charge of worship and there's a reason why, other people might do things, but we need to make sure that we're still talking about true north here,' (yep) and I've been resourced to do that…

These spontaneous images were in contrast to the images given in response to my explicit question about naming an image for their ministry.

Susannah I have this picture of wings, I think, that it's just like a, yeah wings. (mm) They're sort of like a comfort and shelter and guiding.

Timothy Yeah, that’s an interesting question. Um, mmm (pause) Well I suppose, like as you say, there’s lots of biblical images like shepherd and king and prophet and all those sorts of things that are associated with ministry. I would probably, if I had to choose one I’d probably plug for the priestly sort of image because I do see it all coming together in the liturgy and that’s for me the most important single thing that the minister does and it’s where I feel most at home and where I feel most that I am actually being a minister, (yep) and have confidence that I’m doing it right, which is less the case elsewhere I suppose. So yeah I suppose I would choose that image if I had to choose one but I wouldn’t want to choose because I think the fact that there are so many different images is because you can’t narrow it to a single one (yes it’s got many facets hasn’t it?) yeah.

Elizabeth Oh scales (scales?) (laughter) (oh that’s a nice one) without giving it a lot of thought that’s the one that jumped into my mind (yes, that’s a nice one) but I can’t just please all the people all the time. I have to be very careful to avoid doing that (yes) so I tell them how I feel and that I cannot choose that hymn because it is in total conflict with what I’m about to preach. (right, yes, yes) So I’m quite open with them. (yes) When you get older you can be more open.

Hannah This is my image. (holding up a small sheep) (laughter) It’s a sheep dressed up as a shepherd. I actually took this to Presbytery to say that I still, at Theological College, Randall Prior said to us, ‘There is only one good Shepherd,’ and I said, ‘Oh, OK, if there’s only one good Shepherd and that is Christ, then what’s our role? Because we sometimes take the stead of Christ, (yes) but I also want to chew on the thing in the Basis of Union that we all have gifts and skills for ministry. (yep) So this is my image and it sits on my bookshelf to remind me that I am one of the flock. I will never be the good Shepherd, that Jesus is the good Shepherd but that sometimes my role means that I carry my staff on Jesus’ behalf, (mm) so a sheepy shepherd is, I think, (laughter) a good image for me to understand that kind of in-between nature of being one of the flock, but having to take on Christ’s role at times.
Miriam Mm, I think, I don't know if it's an image, like being a pointer, sort of, you know, like a reminder, (mm) a pointer beyond me (yes) and yet that's something important about who I am and how authentic I am that helps with the pointing, but it's never about pointing to me.

B There's that wonderful Grünewald painting of John the Baptist, with a very long finger. (yeah, yeah, like that) (laughter) He's got a finger about that long. (yeah)

Each image is worthy of further exploration but I want to make one point here about these images. Except, perhaps, for the first image of the wings, the other images contain within them, a subjective dilemma, a dialogic struggle, the possibility of two subjectivities which offer different ways of being in the world.

‘but’ statements – points of struggle
I want to finish by looking at what I have called ‘but’ statements, which, in a different way to the previous examples, illustrate dialogic struggle. These statements are examples of the speaker deliberating between two different subjective positions. As the speaker makes the statement they are weighing up the possibilities for action, which appear to be in tension. The use of the word ‘but’ conveys a sense of oscillation between these possibilities. In these particular statements the word ‘but’ is used multiple times to indicate that the speaker feels that they have had to make a choice between one subject position or the other. Or that they are still in the process of choosing between these two positions they are weighing up. These but statements might be read as examples of a struggle of a self-in-process. Subjectivity is formed by choosing from the possibilities offered by the different subject positions available. This is not limitless as there are also constraints on the range of subject positions available. Although these are personal stories of struggle, they might also be interpreted as examples of some of the social struggles of the wider Uniting Church. This is particularly relevant to the first example. This is an embodied example of the struggle in the Uniting Church between the role of Minister of the Word and Ministry of Deacon. How are they different? Should they be seen as different ministries?

Rebeccah Well, I actually like preaching, (yes) but I’m not probably going to end up doing much of it. (right, right) Something really draws me to preaching (yes) which I know sounds a bit weird, seeing as I’m a deacon candidate or about to be deacon intern, (yes) but in the placement I’m going to I probably won’t be doing all that much, (right) but I do feel drawn to speak…

The next two examples represent more of an existential challenge – whether to follow the call to ordained ministry or pursue a different professional path.

Timothy So, yeah basically I never looked back during that year (period of discernment), but there was one big decision I had to make and that was whether to go on to do doctoral studies in music because I had a ready made, cut and dried topic (right) which I was really keen to do, but I did decide ‘no, that wasn’t really my vocation’, and that was the right decision, but that was the main sacrifice… I mean I could do something on church music but I’m not interested in that so I’ve been very conscious of, I still, I don’t regret it, I don’t think it was the wrong decision but I’m still very sorry about that (yes) because it’s still something that I would love to do but the fact is it would have been three years of my life going down a path that wasn’t
going to be my future and you just have to make a choice. (yes) Um so I still feel it was the right decision.

Miriam I decided I was going to go and test out secular employment so I went and worked for a university (right) which was a, I mean it was a great job, but it was quite telling, 'cause I felt, I think I did feel a sense of call to ministry, but I sort of felt that everybody in the church was just nice and so they were just saying nice things to you about, 'You're good at this, you should keep doing it.' (right) 'We'd be quite happy with that,' so I wanted to kind of test other parts of my life and what I felt called to, (yep) but it became evident that, though it was a good and worthwhile job, it wasn't what I was made to do…

We are faced with such dilemmas on a daily basis. Sometimes they are minor and do not involve great struggle, but at other times they are major existential challenges or issues of faith, requiring discernment and ethical judgements, as we grapple with inner struggles about which way to act or how to resolve them. ‘But’ statements provide a window into the personal dilemmas with which people struggle and are often a source for further reflection.

Conclusion
The small sample of interview excerpts presented in this paper illustrate how they might be used in a more comprehensive analysis of the dialogic self and the self-in-process. In this paper I aimed to show you how participants make use of image and metaphor to construct an ordination narrative. At the same time these narratives reflect a self which is involved in dialogic struggle. The ten interview transcripts contain many such examples of dialogic struggle. Ordained ministers engage in on-going dialogue on many fronts, in dialogue with God, with the biblical texts, with what the Uniting Church says about ordination, in inner dialogue with themselves, in ecumenical dialogue, with the people they serve, and with the world.

The interviews paint ten miniature portraits of ministry in ten different contexts. Their stories show some of the issues preoccupying these particular people as they move into ministry. But these personal narratives are embedded in the wider social discourse, so that the dialogic struggles, alluded to by participants are also part of the bigger canvas of the wider Uniting Church context, in which they exercise ministry. These personal narratives will also provide opportunity to explore some of the many cross currents, to do with faith, with theology, with liturgical style, constitutive of the Uniting Church today.

The call to be stewards of God’s mysteries, as ordained Minister of the Word or deacon is a complex task. I looked at three categories of literary or poetic devices the participants used to construct a sense of an ordained self, a self-in-process. I talked about metaphors for self which accommodate the idea of self-in-process. I gave several examples of images and metaphors used by participants to construct their personal narrative. Lastly I looked at what I have called ‘but’ statements as examples of a dialogic self. These examples illustrate that the role of ordained ministry is full of struggle, of either an inner nature or of an outer nature, as ministers engage in on-going dialogue. These examples might be read as reflecting ambivalence or uncertainty about the participants’ identity as ordained Minister or deacon. I would rather read them as situations requiring discernment and ethical choice, where ministers act according to their interpretation of the Gospel and their understanding of the role of ordained Minister or Deacon. These instances often convey dilemmas or tensions as
participants describe situations, with which they struggle. Spiritual direction provides an opportunity to identify and, rather than to resolve, to reflect on the nature of these struggles.

References


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This paper is the result of an action research study of a small collaborative ministry team working within a large Catholic religious institution. The research explores the experience of group members as collaborators through a systems psychodynamic perspective in an attempt to uncover what enables and what disables collaboration. Findings suggest that collaboration is enabled when the primary spirit is clear in the minds and hearts of all members of the collaborative ministry team; mutual recognition and encouragement of difference override the need for a proliferation of defensive external boundaries; hierarchical structures become minimal. Difference is not only accepted but encouraged and subsequently brings life, creativity, energy and inspiration into the group. In contrast, collaboration is disabled when mutual recognition is not present, inequitable influence in the management and access to resources enters the group stirring up anxiety, fear, and in turn activating defensive hierarchical structures that inhibit creativity and create collusion. The ministry of spiritual direction is well equipped to help organisations explore the concept of primary spirit in their organisational development, and to them evolve into a collaborative group with one body, one spirit, one mission whether secular or religious in their institution.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Primary Spirit, Organisational Spiritual Direction, Organisation Dynamics

**Preface**

Two thousand years ago Paul, a Roman Jew and zealous follower of Jesus Christ, wrote a letter to the community at Corinth in which he explored the complexities involved in creating communities held together by the Spirit rather than a set of complex laws. In this letter, we can see this newly formed Church grappling with the task of evolving from separate and exclusive communities of Jews, Greeks, slaves and free into one body, with one Spirit, which Paul describes as the body of Christ. Paul uses this metaphor to explain that each member of the body comes with their own particular giftedness; each member contributes to the forming of the whole; no part is more important than the other; and each part is essential to the healthy functioning of the whole.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone….Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many……As it is, there are many members, yet one body…..Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:1-27 – NRSV 1993)

One can imagine what it was like for Paul dealing with this diverse community of people. Each group

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have their own long-standing traditions and laws that required rethinking if they are to live and work together as one community and continue the work of Jesus.

Although knowledge of organisational development and unconscious processes within groups has increased considerably in the past two thousand years, it would seem the way human beings organise themselves into groups involves the same complexities and difficulties that prompted St. Paul to write his treatise. Today the Catholic Church faces increasing pressure to adapt existing hierarchal and patriarchal structures to a more inclusive model that meets the needs of a continuously changing world. Resistance to change is strong and in tension with a genuine desire of the Church to live as one body, with one Spirit, with one mission.

This research was conducted in a secular university for a secular audience. It revealed that sharing a common primary spirit is central to the success of any organisation, in particular those who choose a collaborative organisational model. Primary spirit exists prior to religion and has a place in every organisation. An engineer faced with this possibility asked, “How could an engineering firm have a primary spirit?” Perhaps members of the engineering firm could be asked to get back in touch with why they first studied engineering, what gave them the passion to succeed in this study. We might be able to identify the primary spirit of an engineering firm as being connected to a common desire to understand and construct complex structures that will be safe and enhance our world.

Spiritual directors could contribute significantly to secular organisational development and the exploration of primary spirit, helping to build a world premised on collaboration and shared meaning rather than competition and fear.

Introduction

Human beings have struggled with the complexity of living and working collaboratively since the beginning of time. Even so, the fact is that human beings do live in community and much of what they do is a joint performance conducted by them in community. These communities are interconnected with each other and the environment in which they exist. They impact each other by their action and non-action and survival depends on mutual recognition and care. We live in a time when change in these environments has never been so rapid and the impact of change on communities so challenging. Eric Trist (1997) invites us to think about this change:

The World is in transition between an industrial and post-industrial order. The degree of change involved is as great as that which, during Neolithic times, produced what Gordon Childe (1942) called the “urban revolution” when cities and written language first arose on a background of settled agriculture, irrigation and metallurgical advance…….Our present pattern is not an end state, but a way station to a post industrial order which will be built on radically different premises. It is quite possible however, that we may not succeed in negotiating this passage, in which case there is a number of doomsday scenarios available to suggest what might happened to us. (Trist 1997, p 517).

Change impacts upon the environment’s economic, technological, organisational, urban, political, socio-cultural and ecological aspects. Trist claims possibilities for the future will be created by choices we make today, and that by taking an active rather than a passive role in creating this future we will contribute to the shape of change.

The Catholic Church although on the surface may appear to believe itself as unchanging, clinging to existing institutional, patriarchal and hierarchical structures is not immune to this dramatic change. The church stands at a critical time in its life with diminishing numbers attending services and a dramatic fall in new vocations to celibate priesthood and religious life. While there is some evidence to suggest the Church might be dying there are also glimpses of new life emerging and adaptation beginning. But can existing hierarchical and patriarchal structures of power and authority within the Church adapt to new organizational models that enable collaboration and change to occur?
The purpose of this research was to uncover the essential elements of collaboration; what enables collaboration, what disables collaboration and how current structures inhibit or encourage collaboration. Using collaborative and participative action research, we explored the experience of staff, board members and associate members of a collaborative ministry team. Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality (CCIS) is a small work of the largest order of male Catholic priests, deacons, brothers and scholastics in the Church, the Society of Jesus. The team at CCIS, made up of lay, religious and Jesuit spiritual directors has been working collaboratively over the past fifteen years. The energy and supportive environment within the team is palpable. This environment not only empowers the team in their work together, but also seems to permeate those attending the centre.

Context of this Research

The Catholic Church and their religious orders are organised in patriarchal and hierarchical structures that are exclusive and closed to outsiders. The Society of Jesus (founded in 1540) is the largest religious order of priests in the Catholic Church today with approximately twenty thousand members worldwide who live and work in one hundred and twenty countries across all continents (O’Malley, 1999). Members of the Society are known as Jesuits, and to join them you must be male, make a lifetime commitment, and take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

At their peak there were over three hundred living and working in the Australian Province. Today there are one hundred and fifty six Jesuits of which seventy are actively engaged in work. It is predicted that by 2019 this number will decline to as low as thirty active Jesuits. This rapid decline in membership is accompanied by an increase in interest from others (who are not single celibate males) to join in their work. The Jesuits have been asking for some time how they can open their doors to collaborate with these ‘others’ without disturbing the status quo and identity of the existing order of the Society of Jesus.

In 1995, at the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, a document was produced entitled Decree 13—Cooperation with the Laity in Mission. This Decree called all members of the Society of Jesus to cooperate with laity and be at the service of laity in their ministry, work towards the formation of laity and to empower the Church of the laity in particular within their own Works.

Cooperation with the laity is both a constitutive element of our way of proceeding and a grace calling for individual, communal, and institutional renewal. It invites us to service of the ministry of lay people, partnership with them in mission, and openness to creative ways of future cooperation. The Spirit is calling us as men for and with others to share with lay men and women what we believe, who we are, and what we have, in creative companionship, for the help of souls and the greater glory of God (GC 34 Decree 13: 360.26).

The Australian Jesuits responded generously to this invitation and placed lay men and women into leadership positions within their works. The Jesuit Director of CCIS worked actively to incorporate lay into the spirituality ministry at CCIS and established a formation program for spiritual directors in the Ignatian tradition called the Arrupe Program that formed both Jesuits and non-Jesuits to work together in the ministry. It was this foresight that enabled effective collaboration to evolve at CCIS and today ninety-five percent of all people working at CCIS are graduates from this program. The Australian Provincial, Fr Mark Raper SJ made the following observation:

This shift in power relationships was realised at CCIS in March 2005 with the appointment of the first non-Jesuit, non-religious, female Director of a Jesuit Retreat House in Australia (and one of the first in the world). The spirituality ministry is fundamental to the mission of the Society and the appointment of a non-Jesuit/non-religious to this position cut right across the traditional organizational structures of
the Society of Jesus and the Church in general.

At General Congregation 35 held in Rome in 2008, the Society issued another Decree on working with laity – *Collaboration at the Heart of Mission*. This Decree reconsiders the challenge of Jesuits to work collaboratively with laity but it seems in some ways that the Society has lost confidence in doing so:

Since GC 34 we have learned much. In some regions the development of collaboration has been limited because the participation of lay people in the local Church is minimal…….

Furthermore, our own uncertainty, born of the changing face of our ministries in a time of growing collaboration, has led to some hesitation and even resistance to a full engagement with the call of GC 34 (GC 35 Decree 6 : 4).

Jesuits and non-Jesuits working at CCIS share a common love of God (some diversity in understandings of God is tolerated) and a commitment to Ignatian spirituality. For almost five hundred years the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius have inspired and been the vehicle of transforming the lives of Christians in many countries, just as they helped shape the lives and mission of the first members of the Society of Jesus. Ignatius recognised that the human person is deeply influenced by unconscious forces and disordered attachments that impair a person’s ability to make good decisions leading to freedom. Therefore we need to exercise our spirit in the same way we exercise our bodies:

For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments (Sp. Ex. [1]).

Mission and service in the Ignatian mode is seen not as an individualistic enterprise, but as work done in collaboration with Christ and others. Ignatian spirituality as it is lived within the team at CCIS has enabled a high degree of psychosocial awareness at both an individual and a corporate level in all team members. As the data began to emerge within this research, it very quickly became apparent that it is Ignatian spirituality as primary spirit that is at the heart of collaboration at CCIS.

The Theoretical Framework for the Research

The following is a brief overview of systems psychodynamics theory and the development of thought around primary task, primary risk and primary spirit which apply to this research and in particular to the dynamics of collaboration as explored within this paper.

**Systems Psychodynamics**

Open systems theory is the understanding that organisms, as well as human organisations and societies are open systems. (Bertalanffy 1945 – 68 in Stacey 2007) They consist of a number of component systems that are interrelated and interdependent and are connected to environments of which they are part. Stacey (2007) explains that each subsystem has boundaries that separate it from other systems and each system or subsystem. In the case of an organisation, there are people who occupy roles and form relationships and conduct activities both within their part of the system and with other parts of the system and subsystems.

Systems import and export all manner of things such as materials, information, other people, emotions, money. The study of an open system, therefore, involves paying attention to conscious and unconscious processes at each level of the system, including boundaries, relationships and the environment surrounding it. The study of system psychodynamics takes into account the interrelationship of various parts of the mind, personality, or psyche as they relate to mental, emotional, or motivational forces especially at the subconscious level and therefore takes into account the behaviour of complex systems (both conscious and unconscious) at a systemic level.
Primary Task - Primary Risk – Primary Spirit

Bion’s (1961) central thought is that in every group there are two different ways of behaving, the sophisticated work group and the basic assumption group. The sophisticated work group deals with the real task of the group and each member belongs to the group to see that the purpose (task) of the group is fulfilled. Basic assumption groups on the other hand relate to the distinct emotional state of the group, which is usually hidden from the group’s awareness. These groups give meaning to and elucidate the behaviour of the group to the extent that it is not operating as a work group. (Rioch, 1970). All groups of people have these two aspects;

i) some task they are trying to perform together; and
ii) at the same time an emotional atmosphere in which they are trying to perform the task.

When uncertainty and anxiety arise in the group, basic assumption behaviour can corrupt the task and take over the group. Bion describes three forms of basic assumption behaviour – dependence, fight/flight and pairing and a fourth basic assumption of oneness was added by Turquet in 1974.

The concept of task as central to the functioning of an organisation is further developed by Miller and Rice (1967) who identify that each organisation has “a primary task – the task that it must perform it if is to survive” (Miller and Rice, 1967 p.25). The primary task of an organisation makes concrete the institution’s actual operating goals focussing on what the organisation will do. It uncovers people’s practices rather than their beliefs (Hirschorn, 1999).

An organisation faces strategic challenges when change in its environment complicate its ability to accomplish its inherited primary task and, at such a point in history, it faces the prospect of taking a primary risk (Chapman, 1999). When we think about the primary risk we might ask ‘why does this organisation appear to be drifting?’ The primary risk is the felt risk of choosing a wrong primary task, that is, a task that cannot be managed. The risk is an emergent property of the enterprise’s existing relationship to its environment, and the primary risk is embedded in the situation shaping both actual choices as well as the psychological responses to them. Hirschorn states that:

Rigidity in behaviour, belief, or character may mask an underlying experience of chaos or at least confusion. The chaos in turn is likened to impulses or wishes which cannot be acknowledged consciously but which continue to exert a force on one’s psyche (Hirschorn, 1999 p.5)

Bain and Bain (2002) open up the notion of primary spirit to supplement the concept of primary task in an organisation:

When the primary task of a group, or organisation, becomes saturated, primary spirit can be said to be missing or disconnected from primary task. The potentiality to bring something new into being is not possible, and there is simply an activity, which people so engaged are likely to think of, after a while, as meaningless (Bain and Bain, 2002 p.100).

Primary spirit exists before values, and gives meaning to primary task. It is that part of an organisation which is life-giving to the individual, group and organisation. Bain defines primary spirit as “that which breathes life into an organisation; the animating principle.” He goes on to say that primary spirit is “absolutely fundamental to organisational existence” and “is the underlying meaning for people connecting around a particular primary task” (Bain and Bain 2002, p100).

As this research unfolded, it became clear that where primary spirit is mutually recognised by members of the collaborative group, primary task is enabled and defensive behaviour minimised. In contrast, collaboration is disabled and defensive behaviour mobilised when the primary spirit ignored and primary task becomes corrupted.
Essential Elements of Empowering a Collaborative Ministry Team

The data collected in this research revealed that collaboration in the ministry team at CCIS has clearly been enabled. Members of the team have a deep sense of being validated in their work, of belonging to the team, of being encouraged and a genuine participation in the shared primary task. This is held together by a very deep sense of shared primary spirit, which is embedded in their love and commitment to Ignatian spirituality. In order for primary spirit to be held by the system itself as a whole, it must be mutually recognised within all parts of the system. Harding (2006) building on the work of Jessica Benjamin claims that mutuality is a precondition for collaboration.

Intersubjective theory contends that selfhood is intrinsically found in mutual relation with others. In this other is experienced as a separate, independent self... through asserting oneself and being recognised the other self is affirmed. This is a reciprocal or mutual process. Intersubjectivity requires recognition of reliance on others and simultaneous recognition of our own distinctiveness. Inherent in the theories are many paradoxes: dependence and separation; destruction and creativity; likeness and difference; otherness and togetherness... Mutual recognition challenges us to simultaneously manage the tension associated with experiencing our dependence on others, and our independence (Harding, 2006 p.1).

Within the ministry team at CCIS mutual recognition is apparent. Both Jesuits and non-Jesuits have a sense of belonging, awareness that their contribution is recognised and valued, freedom to use their gifts and a deep sense of call to this shared mission. Difference is not only permitted but encouraged “I have different gifts and I contribute those gifts” and a deep sense of belonging felt by all “I feel like I am at home, I have found a place where I can be who I am”.

Outside of the team at CCIS, mutual recognition is difficult to achieve and dependency and fear of destruction can become disabling to the group. Clearly non-Jesuits are dependent on the Jesuits to do the work. They provide the facilities and the 25% of the finance for the ministry to continue. Equally Jesuits are dependent on the non-Jesuits who provide human resources, passion and a commitment to the ministry. When mutual dependency is not acknowledged, primary spirit cannot be recognised in the other and collaboration is disintegrated. I suspect that until the Society of Jesus can welcome, embrace, support and encourage the lay vocation with the same energy and commitment that it gives to the Jesuit vocation, we will merely remain employees rather than collaborators. On the other hand when mutual dependency is acknowledged and a shared primary spirit present within the collaborative, then this tension can become energy for mission and change allowed to emerge.

The research revealed that communication between Jesuit and non-Jesuits was at times distorted and very difficult, disabling collaboration. Creating a ‘communicative space’ to explore the system and a willingness to be surprised by hidden connections in the system, can transform what begins as a ‘knot in the gut’ to ‘a space in the mind’. ‘Communicative space requires consideration of affectivity, and the holding of an emotional space for people to connect symbiotically with each other’ (Newton and Goodman, 2009 p. 291). At one point in the research, members were invited do a role drawing. Role drawings ‘helps an individual to uncover the several layers of meaning they use to define the role’ (Borwick, 2006, p. 13). In this way, ‘the focus is on the conscious and unconscious assumptions on which the individual construes and forms his or her role’ (Sievers and Beumer, 2006, p. 75). It gives us a sense of the metaphorical ‘organisation in mind’ which represents the emotional and unconscious aspects being held by an individual (Reed and Bazalgette, 2006, p. 43). This is distinct from what might be thought of as the ‘actual organisation’.

When the role drawing below was first described, it showed the organisation as an oppressive system of hierarchy pressing down on the organisation weighing down any potential and suppressing growth. Within the communicative space provided, the group explored the fact that this CCIS has been enabled in spite of this top down structure. Then one participant suggested we turn the drawing on its head. When the drawing was inverted, it revealed a strong structure that has enabled this ministry to emerge from within as a collaborative group with great energy and potential. This shift in perspective enabled
the group to feel the expansiveness of this ministry and the generosity of the organisation that had enabled this.

Communicative space provided through this research also helped the group to explore the strengths that Jesuits bring to the collaborative. Barry SJ (2004) claims that Jesuits are at their best when they live with tension. For example, Jesuit theologians are at their best when they experience the tension of being faithful to the Roman Catholic Church whilst at the same time searching for new ways to express the truths of faith in a different age and culture. Jesuits are invited to be men *in* the world but not *of* the world, to be disciplined men who are

- purified of inordinate attachments to worldly values, yet actively engaged in the world;
- distinguished by their poverty, yet able to carry out their apostolate among the wealthy as well as among the poor;
- chaste and to be known as chaste, but are expected to be warm and loving companions along the road, that is, outside of cloister;
- of passion, intelligence, initiative and creativity yet responsive and obedient to superiors;
- committed to the people and institutions with which they are involved, yet able to move quickly to whatever place superiors send them;
- men who believe that God’s Spirit communicates directly with individuals, including themselves, and thus who are discerning regarding the movements of their own hearts, yet also men distinguished by disciplined obedience and fidelity to the institutional church (Barry, 2002 p.5).

The group then realised that these tensions are also present in non-Jesuit members of the team. They show an acute awareness of their inordinate attachments, work for very little financial gain, are highly intelligent, creative, passionate, deeply committed to the ministry and have a profound faith in God and of God’s action in the world. It is this way of being and sense of interiority that gives incredible energy to the work at CCIS. Eddie Mercieca SJ is the international Jesuit leader of the Ignatian Spirituality ministry. In a recent newsletter he stated:

> It is sharing our secret treasure, our interiority. It is this that guarantees our social commitment to the poor and to justice; it is this that gives us our perseverance ... Collaboration in mission is the future not only of the Society of Jesus in all its apostolic endeavours but of the whole church... If we are honest we will affirm that we Jesuits started to collaborate out of need, out of the lack of Jesuits in our works. It is now that we are discovering collaboration as a grace. It is now that we are doing it as a reality we ought to work towards. What began as a need we
discovered later to be a norm, something that should be, a principle. Lay persons - men and women - bring to our works professionalism, a sense of reality, the meaning of daily life with its hard work and thanksgiving. We Jesuits contribute a sense of mission, a way of doing things, our deep motivation, our vision, perseverance and faithfulness in difficult moments - and our lives. (Mercieca 2009)

One Jesuit interviewed during the research stated “I wonder whether as a Province we have done enough individual and corporate growth in terms of collaboration” and that this is manifested within the organisation as things being “always about money?” The data collected suggests that what is really going on is that Jesuits are feeling stretched by the declining number of Jesuits to do the work with many doing the work of two or three Jesuits. When non-Jesuits are taken into the organisation to do this work, the cost of wages escalates and makes many of the works unsustainable. The consequence of this is that the Australian Jesuits currently heavily subsidise this work. The current culture of religious institutions is to not charge much for services provided compounding this issue and is a structural issue that must be addressed. At a recent gathering of spiritual directors this issue was discussed.

There isn’t a layperson in the ministry who can make a living out of being a spiritual director. They only way lay people are able to participate in this ministry is by having a partner (husband etc) who can support them in this work. This limits the sort of people who are going to be able to take up being in the ministry. If they don’t come from the context where they have support behind them, they cannot be part of this ministry.

The data also revealed that there are many such issues that need to be given a ‘communicative space’ so that they can be explored. Providing such a space would enable the corporate growth in awareness of how collaboration is being both enabled and disabled. Not having a voice in decisions made about infrastructure, resources, finances, creates a dependency model, rather than a mutual or equitable model and disables the capacity of individuals to collaborate. It would seem that it is not the lack of resources that inhibits collaboration, but the lack of ‘voice’.

**Conclusion**

At the conclusion of this research I was left with an image, which I drew and have reproduced below, of collaborative ministry and a deep sense of what it means to exist in collaborative team.
Collaborative ministry evolves from a deep centre, a primary spirit that attracts diversity and creativity in which individuals commit to shared goals and objectives to which they have freely chosen. Primary spirit as an attractor creates a strong and clear internal boundary; external boundaries are permeable and welcoming. The felt sense of shared roots increases with proximity to the centre, but there is freedom and space for people to move in and out. Mutual recognition of primary spirit in those attracted to the centre enables trust, confidence and a desire to commit to the shared vision. Hierarchical structures are there only in so far as they support the shared mission and are at the service of the primary spirit and collaborative decision-making is given right of passage wherever practical. The shadow and felt sense of annihilation is present at all times and where communicative space is created for the shadow to be explored, it becomes an energy stream creating tension in which new life can be created. Where this communicative space is not present, collaboration is disintegrated into power struggle, and primary spirit is compromised for the purpose of survival on one part of the collaborative body rather than whole.

It would seem that Mercieca (2009) agrees with this image of collaboration:

Collaboration in mission moves and grows in concentric circles: from the one who is just looking for a job and stays on because he or she feels good about it, to the one who shares the foundational experience, the language, the vision and mission.

One of the great mistakes we could make is to think that we might find the perfect and permanent way of being in collaboration that no longer needs constant care. A living organism requires attention and care to all of its facets. Difficulties will arise when concrete structures and thinking do not allow the organism to evolve and to adapt to the changes in the external environment. Evolution is painful. This research shows that collaboration can emerge in places where tension is present provided there is mutual recognition of a shared primary spirit and a communicative space to explore the dynamics of the collaborative.
Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge the generous contribution of my co-researcher Kaye Swanton, the staff at RMIT, in particular Dr Wendy Harding and Professor Susan Long and the students in the Masters of Applied Science Organisation Dynamics class.

I am incredibly grateful to the team and associates of Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality for the very generous and spirited way in which they engaged in this research.

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Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks
a Tool for tending the Sacred.

P. Lucy Tierney*

This paper will juxtapose six epic journeying cycle stages with six Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks. Both stages and frameworks tend the sacred inner journeying/transformation processes.

**Keywords:** Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks; epic journeying cycle; tending the sacred

To set a wide “sacred” experience context, I invoke Smith’s (1983) statements:

Discernment of Spirits is the attempt to deal in faith with the sundry emotions, feelings, stimuli, sentiments, mental and emotional states and tendencies, and action-oriented ideas, all of which tend to influence the shape and direction of our lives.

and

Discernment of spirits is a cooperative venture of God and man working as one. It is a co-seeing and a co-willing, in many instances at least.

Figure 1 depicts metaphorically aspects of inner landscape experiences.

![Figure 1: Inner Landscape Context](image)

Figure 2 represents metaphorically the action and outcome of God at work “co-seeing” and “co-willing” as Smith (1983) so cogently notes.

*Patricia Lucy Tierney, RSJ, co-ordinates Virginia Waters Self-Care - an inner wisdom consultancy service.
Figure 2: Metaphor representing God at work in us.

Whether we are aware of it or not, invitations to “co-see” and “co-will” with God are operative in human experience in general and in epic journeying cycles and Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks in particular. Another way of understanding these dynamics is to regard our inner journeying as reflecting the universe story: we are being birthed to wholeness in God, i.e., a “sacred journeying”.

In Table 1, column one is a pictorial listing of some of the “Inner Landscape Context” elements depicted in Figure 1. Listed also are possible pathways of access between three levels of spirituality in Celtic tradition named by John O’Donohue (1997) – The Inner Landscape, The Invisible World, The Divine Imagination. Column two enumerates Gendlin’s (1978) six step inner healing process of “Focusing”. Column three lists Conroy’s (2010) process headings to engage in a contemplative/evocative mode of spiritual direction. Each listing gives some insight into God at work in us through human experience and process.
### Table 1: Inner journeying processes comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathways to deeper reality headings</th>
<th>Gendlin’s six steps</th>
<th>Conroy’s process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner experience forums</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inner Landscape</strong></td>
<td>clear a space</td>
<td>underscoring</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the felt sense</td>
<td>paraphrasing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Invisible World</strong></td>
<td>finding a handle</td>
<td>noticing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resonating</td>
<td>savouring</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Divine Imagination</strong></td>
<td>asking</td>
<td>reliving</td>
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<td></td>
<td>receiving</td>
<td>God’s presence</td>
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<td>reactions</td>
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<td>and responses</td>
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Figure 3 is a metaphoric representation of a universal human inner developmental pattern. “survival strategy” “inner Self awareness ‘wipeout’”

![Figure 3: Metaphor for patterns of awareness.](image)

Everyone has a personal pattern of preferred awareness which is, at first, experienced as a given not a pattern. To maintain this given, a “survival” strategy develops. At the same time, unconsciously, a part of the inner Self doesn’t receive attention – an inner Self awareness “wipeout”. It is from this inner Self awareness “wipeout” that the nucleus of conscious inner
journeying arises, e.g., the initial unease that begins epic journeying cycles and is, as well, the basis for True Self outcomes within Enneagram wisdom frameworks. Other namings of this phenomenon are: sacred wounding (Houston 1987), shadow (Johnson 1993), chief feature (Gurdjieff 1910), second task of life (Rohr and Hudson 2008), inner child (Bradshaw 1990).

Table 2 correlates a thumb-nail sketch of epic journeying cycle stages, as evidenced in *The Never-Ending Story*, and six Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks.

| Table 2: Epic journeying cycle stages correlated with Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks |
|---|---|
| **The Never-ending Story** epic journeying cycle stages | **Enneagram Wisdom Frameworks** |
| 1. A call beyond our knowing and experience | 1. drive overdrive |
| 2. Setting out | 2. paired strategies |
| 3. Big struggles along the way | 3. arrows |
| 4. Help along the way – Luck Dragon | 4. wings and affirmations |
| 5. Something is left behind | 5. affirmations |
| 6. Something new comes to birth | 6. 3 centres integration |

*The Luck Dragon and Bastian rejoice.*

Figures 4 – 6 outline diagrammatically detail of the Table 2 correlation from an Enneagram “5” group perspective. Figure 5 uses “The Investigator” as type descriptor (Riso 2003).
5 balancing movement: be involved 8 strength..aggression
7 joy..escaping pain
5 perceptive .. withdrawal

5 drive = to know

EWF: Arrows: - against balancing - with more driven

Figure 4: Arrows and balancing movement plus affirmation 1 for “5” group

Loyalty .. anxiety
perceptive .. withdrawal
4 Original-er .. melancholy

. some characteristics of each adjacent number

EWF: WINGS – major and minor ... reverse in balancing
affirmation – 2 ...Lucy Tierney

Figure 5: Wings plus affirmation 2
THE INVESTIGATOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation:</th>
<th>Drive:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wisdom</strong></td>
<td><strong>To Know</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **beauty** | LLQ | The Explorer |
- **objectivity** | Fr | The Thinker |
- **inventive** | M Att | The Observer |

| 7 joy.. | 8.. balancing more driven ..7 | Withdrawal |
| perceiving | .. | |

**Figure 6:** Summary of framework outcomes for “5” group including affirmations 3 – 7

Tables 3 and 4 are summaries of a “5” group integration pattern and groups 1-9 integration patterns respectively.

**Table 3:** 3 centres and integration outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centres</th>
<th>Integration outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>head</td>
<td>Without “tending the sacred”, I, a “5” live in my head: “intellectual” potential – 5, 6, 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gut</td>
<td>Through “growth” choice for “strength”, I, a “5” integrate gut (becoming involved): “instinctual” potential – 8, 9, 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heart</td>
<td>Through “wing” emergence of “creativity” and in-touchness with feeling, heart: “emotional” potential becomes integrated for a “5” – 2, 3, 4.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Summary of Enneagram integration patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration patterns: arrows, wings, and balancing movements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Another mathematical patterning:

7 into 10 gives a repeating decimal number: 0.142857142857...

EWF: “4” goes to “1” for growth and to “2” in non-growth
“1” goes to “7” for growth and to “4” in non-growth
“7” goes to “5” for growth and to “1” in non-growth ...

(7 groups)

+ Noted in the table above: 3..6..9 6..9..3 9..3..6

Grun (2004) writes, “Entrance into the unconscious, going into one’s inner depths, produces renewal and spiritual re-birth”. Presence to epic journeying cycle stages and Enneagram Wisdom Framework patterns enhances a human capacity to “co-see” and “co-will” with God, i.e., “tending the sacred”.

Acknowledgements

Figure 1: Artwork by Sr Rosa, a Canossian Sister. Interpretative wording and arrows by P. Lucy Tierney, rsj.
Figure 2 and Figure 3: Public domain illustrations.
Figure 4, figure 5, and table 1: extracts from PowerPoint presentations of the Enneagram by P. Lucy Tierney, rsj.
Figure 6: extract from “The Enneagram: Nine Groupings General Characteristics” an Enneagram “Tool” sheet: content by P. Lucy Tierney, rsj, technological layout by Larry O’Toole.

References

The influence of spirituality as an academic discipline on the understanding and practice of spiritual direction

Stephen Truscott*

This paper investigates how the recent emergence of spirituality as an academic discipline may influence the understanding and practice of spiritual direction. The review presents how spirituality developed from its origins to its current status as an academic discipline, indentifying three levels within contemporary spirituality.

A definition of spiritual direction is derived from the threefold schema through the interpretative framework of Aristotelian teleology. A directee's spiritual experience is identified as the material object of spiritual direction. The formal object of spiritual direction is the particular aspect of the phenomenon attended to. This particular aspect is the transformational, relational process of a directee with what is Ultimate as perceived by a directee. The spiritual director is the ‘agent’ who attends the directee’s transformational relational process by means of the director adopting a contemplative stance towards the directee’s relational process with Ultimacy.

The implications of recent academic research within the field of spirituality for the practice of spiritual direction are explored. The works of John Mostyn (1996) and Stephen Truscott (2007) are discussed. Mostyn identifies a threefold anthropological-theological movement within a directee. The contextual parameters that a director attends within a directee’s experience include four arenas: the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, the societal and the environmental. Truscott investigates the similarities and differences in the developmental influences that shape the contemporary practice of beginning and advanced directors.

Keywords: spirituality as an academic discipline, spiritual direction

Introduction

Spirituality has recently emerged as an academic discipline. The issue of how this may influence the understanding and practice of spiritual direction is addressed. A review is undertaken of how spirituality developed from its origins to its current status as an academic discipline. How the current exposition of spirituality may contribute to the understanding of spiritual direction is examined. The second section discusses how recent academic research within the field of spirituality may enhance the practice of spiritual direction.

Origins of ‘spirituality’

The word ‘spirituality’ has an extensive semantic range. Its origins are traced through the French spiritualité to the Latin spiritualitas that find its roots in the biblical semantic domain of pneuma, the Greek noun for spirit (Waaijman, 2002). Saint Paul contrasts the word ‘spirit’ with sarx, which equates with flesh (Principe, 1983). Sarx refers to the spiritual disposition that correlates with the unclean spirit to which the gospels refer: “fornication, gross indecency and sexual irresponsibility; idolatry and sorcery; feuds and wrangling, jealousy, bad temper

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and quarrels; disagreements, factions, envy; drunkenness, orgies and similar things” (Gal 5:19; cf. 5:15-26; 6:3) (Waaijman, 2002, p. 362). Walter Principe (1983) offers an interesting reflection that the ‘flesh’ could be a person’s “mind or will or heart as much as or even more than the physical flesh or the body if the mind, will, or heart resist the influence of the Spirit” (p. 130). In contrast, *pneuma* (Spirit) is the Spirit of God that draws people towards “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5: 22). Thus, Paul’s distinguishes between *sarx* and *pneuma*. This distinction highlights that an essential element of the term ‘spirituality’ is the energetic relationship between the divine Spirit and the human spirit (Waaijman, 2002). Kees Waaijman’s comment prompts a concluding observation. It is important not to identify *sarx* with the human body or to suggest that ‘spirit’ equals good and ‘body’ equals evil. *Sarx* describes the whole person from the perspective of creaturely existence that is frail, mortal, prone to sin, and hostile to God (Byrne, 1986). The spiritual and unspiritual struggle of Paul in Romans 7:14 - 8:4 is that of *pneuma* and *sarx*, of responsiveness to the Divine invitation in tension with resistance to God’s Spirit.

A notable semantic shift in the use of the term *spiritualitas*, a Latin derivative of *pneuma*, developed in the twelfth century. This shift emerged through the growing influence of a new philosophical movement known as scholasticism. The term *spiritualitas* began to take on the sense of the rational creature as opposed to the non-rational creation. Thus the spiritual (rational) lay in contrast to the material (non-rational) (Sheldrake, 1991). By the thirteenth century, this newer philosophical notion of what was *spiritualitas* stood alongside the older Pauline meaning (Principe, 1983).

From the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, two directions emerged about the term *spiritualitas*. First was from a sociological viewpoint. The scholastic distinction between the rational (spiritual) and the non-rational (material) grew to encompass, in the widest and most external sense, what belonged to the clergy (Waaijman, 2002). Waaijman (2002) suggests the term spiritual referred to “the ecclesiastical as opposed to the temporal order; the authority of the church as opposed to that of the secular authorities; the clergy as opposed to the laity; spiritual goods as opposed to material possessions” (p. 363). As this ecclesiastical designation of *spiritualitas* grew in prominence, its earlier philosophical and theological sense declined (Principe, 1983).

The second direction emerged from a psychological standpoint. The scholastic difference between the rational (spiritual) and the non-rational (material) developed to include an understanding of spirituality as pertaining principally to the sphere of the inner life (Waaijman, 2002). The focus of such interiority was upon purifying one’s motivations, noticing one’s affectivity, analysing one’s feelings and clarifying the intentions of one’s will (Waaijman, 2002). Thus, spirituality was confined to the interior life, the sphere of the heart, a place of inwardness, the interior states of the soul (McGinn, 1993). It referred to a person’s interior life and in particular, the affective elements of the relationship with the divine.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this process of dichotomising the rational (spiritual) and the non-rational (material) was further emphasised by distinguishing higher and lower forms of spirituality (Waaijman, 2002). A spiritual person evolved into a definition of someone who strove for perfection beyond that demanded by living an ordinary Christian life. The term *spiritualitas* became associated with some of the excesses of quietism (Sheldrake, 1991). The unfortunate consequences were that it nearly disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century (Principe, 1983). Partly in reaction to this excess, a new approach came
into vogue that linked an individual’s striving for perfection with the theoretical dogmatic categories of ascetical and mystical theology (McIntosh, 1998). These two terms were clustered sometimes together under the broader heading of ‘spiritual theology’ to describe the mechanics of the spiritual search (McIntosh, 1998). Despite much agreement prevailing on the value of categorising spiritual development into its ascetical and mystical components, a difference of opinion emerged. This difference was about whether the ‘ordinary’ (ascetical) way of Christian living and the ‘extraordinary’ (mystical) way were either completely separate from or contiguous with each other. These categories remained the preferred terms in academia until the middle of the twentieth century (McGinn, 1993).

**Contemporary understanding of spirituality**

There has been a paradigmatic shift in the general approach to theology that has influenced the contemporary understanding of spirituality. Formerly, theological reflection was considered an exact body of knowledge. It drew heavily from the rich tradition of the past. Contemporary theology, however, draws more upon human experience as a reliable resource of divine revelation to respond to the issues of the present and the future. This shift from the old emphasis on tradition to the contemporary importance of experience induced a movement from the fixed categorised notions of ‘spiritual theology’ to a more fluid view of ‘spirituality’ (Sheldrake, 1991). The focus of this modern understanding of spirituality is not so much on defining what perfection is. This current approach increasingly endeavours to look at the profound mystery of human development within the framework of a vibrant relationship with the Absolute (Sheldrake, 1991). This emerging sense of spirituality is being far less supported “by a sociologically Christian homogeneity of its situation; it will have to live much more clearly than hitherto out of a solitary, immediate experience of God and of [God’s Spirit] in the individual” (Rahner, 1085, p. 21). This broader existential approach to spirituality is concerned with articulating the transcendental experiences of believers, regardless of their social, cultural, or religious backgrounds (McIntosh, 1998).

**Contemporary spirituality distinguishes three levels of spirituality**

The first level concerns the experience itself (McGinn, 1993) that transpires at a real or existential level (Principle, 1993). At this level, spirituality is a fundamental aspect of human being, which is not immediately evident (Downey, 1997). At this deep spiritual core, people encounter the transcendent dimension of their being. They connect to ultimate reality (Cousins, 1990). People build the capacity to develop beyond themselves in relationship with others and with God in understanding, liberty, and love (Downey, 1997).

The second level of spirituality concerns the lived actuality of this first level (Principe, 1993). Spirituality in this second dimension seeks to integrate all aspects of human experience in the pursuit of integration through self-transcendence (Downey, 1997) rather than restricting its concern to the interior life (Sheldrake, 1991). At this second level, spirituality incorporates the particular social and inculturated spirituality through which a person engages his or her spirituality (Principe, 1993). This second level is often associated with beliefs, rituals, symbols and various schools or traditions of Christian spirituality (Principe, 1993). This level of spirituality is concerned with prayer, spiritual accompaniment, the different maps of the spiritual journey, and the means of progress in the spiritual ascent (Cousins, 1990).

The third level is simply the practical or academic investigation of the two prior levels (Principe, 1983). It is necessarily interdisciplinary (Dreyer, 1994). It takes note of contextual issues such as feminist concerns, the link between prayer and social justice, the wisdom of
classical spiritual texts, developmental psychology, and personal experience as the starting point of scholarly reflection (Wolski Conn, 1989). Thus, in the contemporary use of the term spirituality, three levels of understanding are distinguished. From this contemporary understanding of spirituality, the paper examines how the threefold schema may contribute to the understanding of spiritual direction.

**Defining spiritual direction**

A definition of spiritual direction is derived from the threefold schema through the interpretative framework of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE). Aristotle conceived of things having four causes or explanatory factors. The four causes offer answers to four questions that one might ask about something, for example, a breakfast table:

1. What is it made from? Wood (material cause);
2. What is its form or essence? The pattern or blueprint determining the design of the breakfast table (formal cause);
3. What produced it? The agent producing the breakfast table, perhaps a carpenter (efficient cause);
4. For what purpose? To have a table at which breakfast can be eaten (final cause).

Applying Aristotle’s fourfold framework; there are four interconnected ways to define spiritual direction. First, a directee's spiritual experience is identified as the material cause of spiritual direction. This phenomenon correlates with the first level of spirituality that concerns the experience itself. This experience transpires at a real or existential level within the directee. Second, the formal cause of spiritual direction is the particular aspect of the phenomenon attended to. This particular aspect is the transformational, relational process of a directee with Ultimacy as perceived by a directee. Third, the spiritual director is efficient cause, the ‘agent’ who attends the directee’s transformational relational process. Fourth, the director adopts a contemplative stance as a means of attending to the directee’s relational process with Ultimacy, the final cause. The last three elements pertain to the second level of spirituality; the actualization of the directee’s lived spiritual experience.

The above definition academically investigates the two prior levels of spirituality. They are the experience itself that transpires at a real or existential level and the lived actuality of this first level. This definition purports to correlate with the third level of spirituality. From this understanding of spiritual direction, this paper defines spiritual director, directee, contemplative stance, and contemplative attitude.

**Spiritual director**

A spiritual director contemplatively attends a directee’s intentional relational process with Ultimacy. The director assists a directee to contemplatively notice and engage a directee’s transforming experience of encounter with Ultimacy from within the breath of a directee’s life experience.

**Directee**

The ‘directee’ engages in a process of being accompanied by a director primarily to deepen his or her relationship with what is Ultimate.
Contemplative stance and contemplative attitude

Firstly, to ‘contemplate’ is to attend to and engage with the presence of what is Ultimate at the core of one’s life. Secondly, ‘stance’ is defined as the approach a director takes to a directee. ‘Contemplative stance’ is the way a director notices and attends to the transforming engagement between a directee and what is Ultimate within a directee’s life experience. ‘Contemplative stance’ refers to a director’s relationship to a directee. ‘Contemplative attitude’ refers to a director’s and directee’s attention to and engaging with their own personal experience.

Discussion

This paper has explored how the recent emergence of spirituality as an academic discipline may influence the understanding of spiritual direction. The development of spirituality as an academic discipline was detailed. Its contemporary threefold expression was elucidated. A definition for spiritual direction was proposed with corresponding descriptions of spiritual director, directee, contemplative stance and contemplative attitude.

The following points are worth discussing. Spiritual direction is principally relational in nature. In this relationship, the focus of the director is to attend contemplatively to the interior movements of a directee. The notion of spiritual accompaniment expressed in philosophical terms may not appeal to some spiritual directors. Subjectivity is absent in this definition. Defining spiritual direction through a philosophical lens offers a particular insight into spiritual guidance. It invites a director to clarity of focus as to what a director is specifically attending to when accompanying a directee. This precision offers a director the opportunity to be more intentional in exercising his or her contemplative stance towards a directee. Such lucidity makes it easier to distinguish spiritual accompaniment from the therapeutic stances that underpin such professions as counselling, supervision, psychotherapy etcetera.

Contemporary spiritual direction is becoming more inclusive in its approach. For example, Spiritual Directors International (1999) advocates spiritual accompaniment as attending “the holy around the world and across traditions” (p. 2). Such an inclusive approach to spiritual direction suggests that for a contemporary definition to be effective (regardless of how well it might be articulated within a particular religious or cultural context) it needs to be construed in a way that transcends many contexts. Given these parameters, the definition this essay proposes may fulfil this criterion. It does so by proposing that a director attends the directee’s transformational, relational process with what is Ultimate as perceived by the directee. Such a formulation might well honour the particular sensibilities of many religious and cultural contexts. At the same time, it does not restrict itself to the particularities of any one context. Thus this definition presents as being an inclusive, contemporary approach.

This proposed definition of spiritual direction might well encapsulate an inclusive and contemporary style. Further, it may offer some degree of clarity as to the nature of spiritual direction. However, an assumption underlying the use of Aristotle’s teleology warrants examination. Aristotle’s interpretative framework has limit currency in a postmodern world. Current thinking hesitates to subscribe to the notion of a metanarrative with universal application. While conceding this objection, the interpretation of the threefold schema of contemporary spirituality through the Aristotelian framework may still offer a helpful insight into spiritual direction.
A further limit to this proposed definition warrants discussion. In earlier literature, spiritual accompaniment traditionally encompassed the spiritual direction of a single directee and later, attending individuals within a group setting. Accompaniment now includes the accompaniment of the corporate soul or the group spirit of an organisation. This could well be a genuine context within which spiritual direction might be practised. However, it must be acknowledged that the definition expounded in this paper is limited to attending the individual spirit of a person. It does not address attending the corporate spirit of an organisation. While acknowledging this limitation, further research warrants a broader definition of spiritual direction that is relevant to both individual and organisational settings.

Implications of recent academic research for the practice of spiritual direction

It is noteworthy to acknowledge the extensive research conducted in this field. Only the works of John Mostyn (1996) and Stephen Truscott (2007) are discussed for the purpose of this paper.

John Mostyn

Mostyn’s insightful work clearly differentiates between the levels that a spiritual director needs to be aware of while adopting a contemplative stance towards a directee. His insight grew out of a discovery made by him and his colleagues. Traditional spiritual direction “tended to be privatistic, focusing only on the directee’s vertical relationship to God and prayer” (Mostyn, 1996, p. 1). From their discovery, Mostyn and his associates began to develop a new style of spiritual direction. Over a period of three years, they developed an experiment to broaden spiritual direction’s scope to include a “focus on the social structures which influence and are influenced by the directee” (Mostyn, 1996, p. 1). Besides attending to directees’ intrapersonal world, Mostyn foresaw the need for encompassing other contextual dimensions of human experience. This included the interpersonal, societal, and environmental spheres. Foundational to his work was the awareness that the presence of ‘Mystery sometimes called God’, can arise in any of these four social wholes, not just within the privatistic intrapersonal dimension. In developing this approach, Mostyn drew upon the work of Berger (1967), Muelder (1966), Berger, Luckmann and Thomas (1967), and other personalist theologians and social philosophers. Mostyn relied heavily on the anthropological theology of Karl Rahner (1962). From this revisionary perspective, Mostyn suggests directees begin by talking about the concreteness of their daily lives. This is the ‘whatness’ of their lives. He perceives the concrete human experience that constitutes this level in terms of four arenas: the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, the societal, and the environmental (See Figure 1 below).
The intrapersonal is the personal or intra-psychic aspect of human experience. This includes everything from the ‘skin in’ for example, dreams, internal thought processes, personal history and sexual orientation. The interpersonal is what occurs in the interaction between two or more people such as in friendship. The societal is the influences associated with organisational, cultural or customary factors where there are formal role relationships shaping how people think, feel and act. The environmental refers to the influence of the natural or created world. These four arenas are separate domains. A connection, ‘simultaneity’, flows between them. Once grace occurs in one arena, it generally flows to the others. It may take time to emerge in the person’s life. Waiting for the emergence of grace is necessary. People enter their human experience through these four contextual doorways. The processing of this experience occurs at different, deeper levels.

What a person shares initially with his or her director is usually at the first level of disclosure. This top level, called ‘objective’, ‘conceptual’ or ‘interpretive’, is where most people live at all times. This level constitutes common perceptions and values. Life is related to in terms of its conceptualisation or interpretation. The spiritual director’s role is to listen for the interior movements a person may encounter within the shared concrete experience. This second level, the ‘reflexive level’, “includes those events, situations and moments that break the conscious conceptual flow and make us stop, look and listen” (Mostyn, 1996, p. 180). These reflexive moments occur in all four arenas at any time of day or night. This ‘reflexiveness’ has the power to make one pause and consider the moment and its meaning. At this stage, rather than staying with the ‘whatness’, the role of the director is to enable a person to stay with the ‘howness’ of their experience – their feelings. After a directee has stayed with this experience for a while, a director observes how the directee moves down to encounter, at times, the deepest level that Mostyn (1996) calls “non-thematic” (p. 181). At this level of “being-in-existence”, the “Mystery sometimes called God” is contactable (Mostyn, 1996, p 181).
Discussion

Mostyn’s contribution is twofold. Firstly, he encourages the director to be present to an unfolding, threefold anthropological-theological movement in the contemplative process of attending the content of a directee’s experiences. The first movement comprises the objective, conceptual or interpretive level. The second is the reflexive level. The third movement is the experience of encounter with Mystery at the non-thematic level.

Mostyn’s second contribution expands the contextual parameters of the paradigm within which a director attends a directee’s experiences. The director is encouraged to attend to more than a singular intrapersonal perspective of human experience. He or she is invited to be present to the unfolding movement of the ‘Mystery sometimes called God’ in other arenas of human experience: the interpersonal, the societal, and the environmental. Mostyn’s approach is valuable as it comprehensively articulates the levels of engagement that lead to an encounter with Mystery. It assists the director to discern the level at which to accompany a directee.

Stephen Truscott

Truscott (2007) has observed the resurgence in the practice of spiritual direction since the 1970s. A significant number of people worldwide have discerned their call to this work. This has initiated a rapid growth in formal and informal formation programs in spiritual direction across the Western world. Various national and international professional bodies have formed to sustain spiritual directors in their formation and practice. The literature in this field concerning spiritual direction has expanded as commentators reflected upon their work of spiritual accompaniment and the new developments emerging in practice.

Currently there are effectively two groups of spiritual directors: those beginning their practice, and those who are advanced well beyond their initial formation and early practice. Perceiving this distinction, Truscott investigated similarities and differences in the developmental influences shaping their respective practices. The study concluded that two developmental influences affect the practice of contemporary spiritual directors:

1. their capacity to adopt a contemplative stance towards their directees; and
2. their contextual awareness of the factors that fashion the dynamic of accompaniment.

In defining ‘contemplative stance’, ‘to contemplate’ according to Truscott is to attend to and to engage with the presence of what is ultimate at the core of one’s life. ‘Stance’ is the approach a director takes to a directee. Therefore, ‘contemplative stance’ is the way a director notices and attends to the transforming engagement between a directee and what is ultimate within a directee’s life experience.

Associated with the contemplative stance is the director’s contextual awareness of the factors that fashion the dynamic of accompaniment. Contextual awareness is the ability to notice and incorporate circumstantial influences. These influences can be either internal or external to the process of spiritual accompaniment. These may have some bearing on shaping the overall process of spiritual direction. For example, contextual factors may include:

- whether spiritual direction occurs within an individual, group, or corporate setting;
- the theological framework within which the process of spiritual direction occurs;
- the impact of traumatic experiences on both the directee and spiritual director;
- the degree to which sexual issues may affect how spirituality is lived and articulated;
- the effect of alcohol and substance abuse; and
• the influence of aged, health, and cross-cultural issues.

The research found that the dual factors (contemplative stance and contextual awareness) shape beginning and advanced directors. The former, however, impacts more on the practice of beginning directors and the latter affects more advanced directors.

This interrelationship can be compared to the act of a person using a magnifying glass to gaze upon a precious stone. By finely adjusting the focus of the magnifying glass according to its optimum focal length, the precious stone can be seen more clearly.

In this analogy, the person is the spiritual director. The precious stone is the transformational, relational process of the directee with what is ultimate as he or she perceives it.

The magnifying glass is the director’s contemplative stance. The optimum focal length is analogous to the contextual factors that shape the process of accompaniment.

This image could be applied to the relational process of a ‘spiritual direction encounter’ in which a spiritual director takes a contemplative stance (that is to say, takes up the magnifying glass). The spiritual guide directs his or her contemplative focus towards the transformational, relational process of the directee with what is ultimate (focuses the magnifying glass on the precious stone).

The director finely adjusts the focus of his or her contemplative stance by considering relevant, contextual factors. This equates with finely adjusting the focal length of the magnifying glass to its optimum length to appreciate fully the precious stone. This allows both the director and the directee to gaze on the directee’s relational process with what is ultimate. Simultaneously, the directee embraces - and is embraced - by the transformational power of this encounter.

Discussion
Truscott’s research contributes to the practice of spiritual direction. His findings identify what is similar and different in the developmental influences that shape the contemporary practice of beginning and advanced directors. He identifies two key developmental influences namely, the capacity of directors to adopt a contemplative stance to their directees, and their ability to be aware contextually of the factors that fashion the dynamic of accompaniment. Both influences shape beginning and advanced directors. Notably in Truscott’s findings, the former impacts more on the practice of beginning directors and the latter more affects advanced directors.

The significance of Truscott’s findings is that they seem to bear directly on the initial formation of directors in terms of their admission and on the development of the curricula of formation programs and their management. They hold invaluable implications for the ongoing formation of directors. They are equally beneficial for professional associations of spiritual directors and their journals. For a detailed consideration of these applications see Truscott, 2007 pp. 380 – 387.

This new area of research has made a valuable contribution to the study of the contemporary practice of spiritual direction. However, its limitations need to be acknowledged. The qualitative sample for this research project was taken in Perth, Western Australia, in a developed country. The groups could be generally classifiable as middle-class (both
economically and socially) with the majority being tertiary educated. It would reasonable to suggest that the responses underlying the focus group participants’ are more attuned with the individualistic self “with its emphasis on autonomy, self-development, precedence of the individual’s goals over those of the group” (Malina, 1996, p. 74). Other cultural backgrounds raise the issue of the collectivist (dyadic) self. Culturally this is found where persons predominantly define themselves in terms of the groups in which they are embedded. Group goals precede those of the individual. Self-awareness depends on group embeddedness. A person needs others or another to know who one is. Malina (1996) cites Triandis in noting, ”70% of the world’s population are collectivistic” (p. 78). These considerations may have some bearing in relation to the concerns driving this study and its conclusions. A further avenue of research could be a cultural setting where the collectivist self is the general norm. From within this perspective, there could be an examination of the nature and extent of its impact on contemplative stance and contextual awareness. It would be interesting to examine would such a study share the same emphasis as the findings of this study with regard to beginning and advanced directors.

The phrases ‘the capacities to adopt a contemplative stance’ and ‘to be aware contextually’ represent overarching categories are open to the critique of being over simplified. These terms may have purposely been oversimplified for this initial research into the similarities and differences in the developmental influences that shape the contemporary practice of beginning and advanced spiritual directors. Further research into these two broad categories could be refined and explored in more depth. Regardless of its limitations, this initial study opens up new areas of research that would particularly benefit the initial and ongoing formation of directors.

Conclusion

This paper explored how the recent emergence of spirituality as an academic discipline has influenced the understanding and practice of spiritual direction. The review traced how spirituality developed from its origins to its current status as an academic discipline. A definition of spiritual direction was derived from this schema through the interpretative framework of Aristotelian teleology. From this definition of spiritual direction, corresponding descriptions for spiritual director, directee, contemplative stance and contemplative attitude were developed.

The second part of the paper discussed how recent academic research within the field of spirituality has enhanced the practice of spiritual direction. The works of John Mostyn (1996) and Stephen Truscott (2007) made a valuable contribution. Mostyn identified a threefold anthropological-theological movement within a directee. The contextual parameters that a director attends within a directee’s experience include four arenas: the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, the societal and the environmental. Truscott investigated similarities and differences in the developmental influences that shape the contemporary practice of beginning and advanced directors.

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If anyone thirsts – tapping some sources for a transformative desert spirituality

Ian Robinson*

The ‘desert journey’ is a popular metaphor for a passage of life. However, it may be a disembodying metaphor, since few Australians physically go to there. Of those who do go, most find a rich spiritual renewal. Desert spirituality is a river of life. However, in this era of renewed interest in spirituality, especially through environmental affiliation, there is both timidity and entrenched resistance. This paper examines several resources which help or hinder access to the river.

Most studies of desert spirituality have focussed on the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the Christian tradition, and the Australian Indigenous peoples, both groups being desert dwellers. What can this say to those 84% of Australians who live in towns, on the coast? The rich resource that they offer must be accessed in other ways. Commonly, access has been through a return to the practice of Christian meditation. This paper suggests, however, that a journey of Immigrant and Indigenous pilgrims taken together in ‘country’ may be a significant opportunity for both. Other competing or complementary forms of desert spirituality are named. A neglected pair are Hebrew bible and Christian bible. More popular are the resources from the Desert Fathers and Mothers and the renaissant Contemporary Christian Contemplatives. None of these four will be pursued here. The ‘other’ spiritualities to be examined are: Colonial, Classical, Aesthetic, Indigenous, Earth based, and Spirit of Place.

Such a study has significance for notions of discipleship and mission important in the Christian tradition. It has added significance for the church which, like ancient Israel, has forgotten its own desert tradition.

**Keywords:** desert, spirituality, Australia, colonial, Indigenous, literature, environment

**Introduction**

For several reasons, it is timely to explore the desert. Recently, a wide spread new interest in the significance of deserts has begun. For example, 2006, the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, the National Museum held a major exhibition on Deserts. Since 2003, a Desert Knowledge Centre in Alice Springs, affiliated Australia-wide with over thirty research centres and over thirty institutional partners. It has just renewed and revised its mandate. Recognising that of the global land surface area, 30% are deserts: ‘This makes them the largest natural form of landscape in the world.’ (Martin, 2004, 16) Australia contributes 11% of that desert area, and is the driest inhabited continent. (Desert Knowledge Australia Fact Sheet) Our desert could be a spiritual gift to the world.

Australians travel there in increasing numbers, and among Four Wheel Drive travellers surveyed in Queensland and Victoria, ‘desert environments were preferred by around 70% of

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respondents’. (Taylor, 2006) Further, this preference holds significant meaning. In an unpublished conference paper, Peter Kaldor (2003, 1.12) found from a community survey in Australia:

Around 23% of Australians feel they have a strong spiritual connection to the land, with 33% aware of the life force present in forests, oceans and ecosystems and 44% feeling that being in tune with nature is important to them.

Clearly, a spiritual response to the desert land is becoming more important. However, the rationalist tradition of western culture and church still makes it hard to think about, and therefore impossible to sustain or nurture. The notion of ‘spirituality’ is multi-layered and, to some it is new and frightening territory. Therefore, their explorations into spiritual meanings of wilderness or desert remain at a beginning.

What is a desert?

What is a desert? It does not help that people are constantly misled about the desert. To some a nostalgic ‘outback’, for others, a source of endless mining wealth, or to others the ‘red centre’ with pictures of bare sand dunes populated by 4X4 vehicles in which ‘you can drive wherever you like’. (Miller, 2006, 11) These ‘urban myths’ are misleading about the land of Australia and, as a consequence, the self-understanding of Australians. The desert is the major element in Australia’s physical existence. Arid and semi-arid lands, which together are called ‘desert’, comprise 70% of Australia by area. The imposing physical risk and the enormity of these environments shapes the people we are and the people we are trying to help. ‘Desert’ is not a metaphor in Australia.

Many desert travellers report that their expectations of the desert had been wide of the mark. In several ways, they are invited into profound change. A sense of nurture falls into place beside the harshness. It is profoundly counter-cultural. Travellers experience a reversal of some of the more dominating attitudes of urban culture, usually called ‘civilisation’ (from the Latin ‘civis’ for ‘city’), which only sees desert as ‘desolate’, ‘god forsaken’ or ‘unforgiving’. Nor can the desert be tamed – it has to be lived with humbly like the weather. In modern ‘civilisation’ the major task has been to bring the land into ‘order’ and usefulness to humans, and to make it conform not just to human needs but to expanding ‘wants’ in material, elitist or ego-istic terms. Going further, this civilization has sequestered vast amounts of domestic and industrial waste. Global warming, however, and the decline of fossil-fuel stocks now threaten the entire edifice of that civilisation. Many lack the inner resources to meet the threat of change or the call to self-imposed limits. Therefore, in the twenty first century there is both a great need and a marked fear of exploring a more transformative inner source. A desert journey is just such a profound source of change.

But it is not going to be easy. We are starting from behind. In church and society there are competing spiritualities of the land which act as a bank of values and ideas that shape our responses. This paper seeks to list several extant resources for the task of pursuing an Australian desert spirituality. A neglected pair are Hebrew bible and Christian bible. More popular are the resources from the Desert Fathers and Mothers and the renaissant Contemporary Christian Contemplatives. None of these four will be pursued here. The ‘other’ spiritualities to be examined are: Colonial, Classical, Aesthetic, Indigenous, Earth based, and Spirit of Place.
Colonial spirituality

We are not the first in Australian history to frame a wilderness spirituality. Several early autobiographical accounts of non-Indigenous’ encounters with Australian areas of remote wilderness are illuminating.

In the early phase of exploration of the desert several common attitudes arose:

An emotional recoil or abhorrence from the strange sights and forms of the landscape.
The deep need to create a classically heroic history in a new land, especially for men.
The colonial attitude summarised as *terra nullius* or appropriation for imperial wealth.
The pursuit of spiritual enlightenment through symbols of the sublime.

These four attitudes are said to characterise the period up to 1945.

Can we pause for some perspective on this? While aesthetics and gender may lie behind the early aversion to the interior of the continent, Colonial attitudes of dominance over the land and oceans produced exaggerated plans for land clearing, which in turn hastened the extermination of the Indigenous people as well as soil degradation. The glory of that vision and the deep obstinacy with which it was held against all evidence, suggests a core value of religious proportions, a spirituality of the land, though acquisitive and materialistic in its expression. Social Darwinism and the Enlightenment ideal of utility are still with us.

Classical spirituality

Beyond this example, Haynes argues that a desert spirituality of another particular kind was quite present, somewhat semi-Christian, but essentially Classical. The desert was seen in several ways:

a. The desert could be a divine testing ground, on the same scale as the trials of Samson and the Odyssey of Ulysses, or Christ’s temptations in the wilderness. ‘The wrath of God is upon this place’ wrote Captain Sturt (1844). A religious statement in an explorer’s journal may not naively be taken as a statement of personal spiritual response, but as a classical reference.

b. Explorers made claims to Providence on the one hand but on the other they could be Deists, believing in a non-intervening god. For instance, this very ambiguous statement of Giles:

   *By the blessing of Providence, we now had sufficient water for the purpose, …and keep pushing on west, and trust to fate, or fortune, or chance, or Providence, or whatever it might be*, that would bring us to water beyond…[Then by a series of ‘mistakes’ they happened upon the spring which he later named Queen Victoria Spring] …It may be imagined how *thankful we were* for the discovery of this only and lonely watered spot, after traversing such a desert. (*italics added*) (Giles, 2004)

   In a deistic theological environment, and with scientific enterprise very high on their agenda, the explorers’ concept of Providence was that it is possible but unlikely.

c. Their inward responses to the land were often called ‘Sublime’, an established poetic and theological concept at this time, based ‘upon an intuitive and mystic recognition of the reality of the soul…in this unknown object, delight and fear, opposites by nature, are united.’ (Monk, 1960, 43-44) It is a word denoting inner depth and higher values, a confident anti-empiricism tinged with visceral fear.
These three public religious sentiments published in edited journals may not have been the whole of their responses (Captain Sturt kept two journals, one personal, one public), but they are evidence of a Classical semi-Christian spirituality of the desert that has been present in Australian culture and has not gone.

**Aesthetic spirituality**

We turn from an era of exploration to one of expression. Early colonial paintings often represented the outback country from the vantage of hilltops where the explorer surveyed a verdant plain, lords of all they surveyed, just waiting for the farmer and the sheep that would make them wealthy. They were expressions of part of the Colonial or Classic Spirituality. A new aesthetic is emerging in post war Australia, a new openness, but it is far from unanimous.

First, the visual arts. The popular artist Hans Heysen opened a great door of appreciation in 1936. He began to use new techniques of perspective that captured the big landscape, and a controversial choice of colours, in order to paint the Flinders Ranges in drought. It had been 75 years since anyone had painted desert landscape, and that artist had died trying.

The post war generation of artists struggled between this new appreciation and old colonialist abhorrence. For instance, Sidney Nolan (1917-92) painted large red-brown landscapes which were inspired by inland travel by air. Albert Namatjira (1902-59) painted soft scenic water colours that were inspired on the ground by his homeland on the Finke River. They had contrasting visions of the same place of Central Australia and yet both achieved international success. This was the beginning of what journalist Meacham called a ‘red shift’: ‘we’ve gone from thinking about the Australian desert as “the dead heart”…to calling it “the red centre”, something vibrant, colourful, with a rich Indigenous culture…”

However, Colonial and Classical values still create a contested sphere, both internally and externally. e.g. Despite Nolan’s new-found sympathy for the desert landscape, his ‘Burke and Wills’ series, while parodying the ‘heroic’ mythology of the explorers, perpetuated the myth of the all-threatening thirsty inland. Burke and Wills had in fact finished their days beside a permanent water hole. Nolan’s work left one part of colonialism but stumbled on another.

At the same time, the desert inspired other artists in divergent ways. Russell Drysdale (1912-1981) and Jon Molvig (1923-1970) began to incorporate human figures in the landscapes. Moving from particulars to abstraction, Arthur Boyd (1970’s) used the barren desert as a symbol for the barrenness of materialistic society. The desert was just an abstract idea.

Still other artists are located ‘in’ the desert as a particular place to be appreciated including Robert Juniper, Lloyd Rees, John Wolseley and John Olsen. The latter said of Lake Eyre: ‘when I am out there there’s empty fullness’. These and other artists of the late twentieth century drew upon spirituality, with connections to western Christian and, more often, eastern Buddhist and Taoist traditions. Realism, symbolism, populated, empty.

The same post WW2 trends can be seen in poets and novelists who first captured the mystic lyricism of coast or inland, for example, Judith Wright the poet, Patrick White the Nobel Prize winning novelist, the novelist Randolph Stow, the poet Les Murray, novelists Tim Winton and David Malouf. Elaine Lindsay (2000) adds Barbara Hanrahan, Thea Astley and Elizabeth Jolley.
But they had predecessors. We may add the novels from the 1920’s, Catherine Martin (1847-1937) and Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969) who challenged the assumption of men’s mastery over the desert. Not just the view of women, the Englishman Grant (E.L.G.) Watson, in his early 20’s, came from Cambridge to study the anthropology of the Aborigines, but became fascinated by the anthropology of Europeans exposed to the desert. He tried ‘to come to terms with the desert as a metaphysical experience’. He wrote in his autobiography:

‘I witnessed daily the power of magic…I only just snatched myself back in time to be able to half-believe in the conventions of Europe… I had entered the animism of the savage mind, and had found within those mystical, sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious.’

He pictures the desert and its Indigenous culture as a profound subversive force against European thinking. So it is.

Together they represent a trend towards a more authentic sense of place, even a recognition of ‘my place’ whether on the coast or in the land. They describe a deep sense of belonging that forms an intuitively spirituality, whose transcendence is measured in strictly material terms as ‘timelessness’ not as God. Authenticity, pardon the pun, appears to be self-authenticating.

One cannot speak as confidently of Australian film. Desert usually provided nothing more than an other-worldly setting, like apocalyptic Mad Max, or dread Picnic at Hanging Rock, thus continuing the aesthetic of ‘abhorrence’. There were exceptions to this. In the 1955 film Jedda, 1967, Journey out of Darkness, Walkabout (1971). More recently in Japanese Story as so often in this era under consideration, the characters interacted with an Asian worldview, but the great reversal in this plot is that this time it was the Australian who has something to offer to the East, her sense of being ‘at home’ contrasted with his fearful fascination. The compass has turned and represents a new confidence in the Australian sense of place. From my view, it is over-confident and needs other perspectives and sources. Art conveys truth in metaphor, and that can be helpful, but metaphor is not presence.

**Indigenous spirituality**

We may often read of a new and widespread appreciation of aboriginal art, indeed there is a renaissance in that field. Rover Thomas and Emily Kame Kngwarray were among the first of many Indigenous artists to fetch high prices in exhibitions around the world and later within Australia. Since Carollup (Western Australia) in the 1940’s, and Kintore and Papunya (Northern Territory) since the 1970’s, and others, many Indigenous communities have found this to be one new way to retain control over their spiritual stories, to represent their culture and to make a livelihood in remote communities.

The colonial tension has been evident, however. The Carollup art school was closed down through the ‘forced transfer’ by the Education Department of the school teacher who had encouraged their works. The Papunya movement has been harmed by a commercial company which has taken their name and has been accused recently of taking advantage of artists’ social hardships. And all these only achieved fame through international attention persuading Australian blindness to change. These are two evidences of continuing colonialism, which King called a ‘cult of forgetting’. Nevertheless, from this artistic revival among communities many people have come to learn about the land-spirit connection in traditional cultures.

How may this deep understanding about connection be carried forward? The literature suggests that people physically make a journey together, to explore spirituality ‘side by side’.
For example, both Peasley and Chatwin gave personal narratives of desert journeys with Aboriginal people. They recounted the strong spiritual connection with the land, that the traditional ‘songlines’ must be sung in rituals in order to re-create the land, that there is a severe Law obligation upon the initiated to do this, and that one’s birth-country holds one in a sacred bond. These insights have been evident through anthropology for some time but the stories of Peasley and Chatwin brought them to a wider audience, and these have been followed by others. By making a journey through Aboriginal country these two travellers went part way into an Aboriginal spirituality of the land.

However, they were unlikely to go very far, for several reasons. Firstly, few Westerners would choose to believe literally in the creation narratives of Tjukurrpa, nor wish to practise an elaborate reverence for the spirits of long dead ancestors.

Beyond such literalism, Tacey cited Rodney Hall who provided another way that is ‘side by side’. Hall wants us to discover a new dreaming, to re-enter the dream of nature, not by stealing the Dreaming [sic] from the Aboriginal people, but rather by drawing on the unconscious sources of creativity within the psyche itself….He has nothing occult or metaphysical in mind, … [first, white people need] to erode the hardened layers of rationality, which may then give rise to a spontaneous spiritual transformation from within. His theme is that living side by side with Aboriginality can set our own dreamings going.

Noting that such a journey was put forward as a form of engagement, and that it must tackle the supremacy of western rationalism, other resources are needed before persons could proceed at greater depth to a ‘spontaneous spiritual transformation’. Tacey added the suggestion that travellers will be better able to engage in learning from Aboriginals if they have first sought their own roots in their own spiritual heritage or country of origin. For many Australians this connection is already lost but for many it holds potential.

The willingness of immigrant Australians to be open to Indigenous spirituality and culture is a challenge. The process does not proceed as ‘spontaneously’ as Hall hoped. The anthropologist Stanner (1979) said ‘white man got no dreaming, but David Malouf spoke of the distinction between the Indigenous peoples who have a land-based dreaming, and the Immigrant peoples who have a sea-based dreaming. Immigrants’ sense of identity and belonging, that is, were determined in relation to the sea from which they came to southern shores. His version of sea-dreaming is unnecessarily emphatic about remaining near the coast and not needing to go inland. Tim Winton (Lands Edge (1993)) expresses the ‘sea-dreaming’ so well that it graces the entry of the Fremantle Maritime Museum from which it is sourced:

There is nowhere else I’d rather be, nothing else I prefer to be doing. I am at the beach looking west with the continent behind me as the sun tracks down to the sea. I have my bearings.

Positioning himself between these two ‘dreamings’, Philip Drew chose the verandah as a metaphor - a place of looking outwards and not inwards, for those 84% of Australians who live near the coast.

Ours is an arrogant reluctance, as relative newcomers, compared to the Aborigine, to accept Australia on its own terms. This, in turn, has condemned us to remain as outsiders in our own country, a people cut off from our principal source of identity – the land.
Alongside what he named forcefully as an ‘arrogance’ and ‘condemned’ outlook, he described the concept more ambiguously with terms like ‘makeshift’ and ‘provisional’, ‘defensive interval’, ‘outlook’, ‘refuge and protection’.

‘...the veranda maintained the duality of an English identity in a new country. The veranda, in this respect, was a quintessential colonial gesture made by an insular people intimidated by unlimited space and wider horizons.’

Nevertheless, Drew is sympathetic to the veranda as an image for the actual history of Australian identity and attitudes. The theologian Steven Pickard took the verandah image even further as a positive symbol for a ‘spiritual life that resonates with an Australian setting.’ Tracy Spencer however showed from collected narratives that the verandah was not a place of open engagement but had in fact been a place to assert dominance, the boss’s place. From this perspective, Drew, Pickard, Malouf and others were not going far enough to respond to Hall’s call to walk ‘side by side’ with Indigenous people in order to catalyse a spirituality of the land. They already have their spirituality and it is in a house at the beach.

Perhaps they are ‘beginning where they are’, and taking a step away from Eurocentric or Yankee-centric or ‘Outback’ mythology. Nancy Victorin-Vangerud took this path during her sojourn in Australia. However, Drew’s and Pickard’s ambivalence and Malouf’s rejection of the opportunity of the desert suggests that it is a restated aversion to the particular kind of risk that is implied in travelling through the desert or in building sufficient understanding with Indigenous Australians. They may have simply re-worded the spirituality of the colonists.

There are three further blockages that impede progress in learning from Indigenous spirituality – reductionism in cross cultural communication, the role of secrecy in Aboriginal knowledge and the sensitivities around the ongoing survival situation for Aboriginal communities. Few realize that a journey and conversation about spirituality may actually be the breakthrough that is needed in order to build lasting mutual trust and understanding.

**Earth-based spiritualities**

Just as new techniques in art and film made a new sensibility possible, new technologies of vehicles and communications have made it possible to discover the desert anew. They open up the country but, as the literature so far has shown, they do not open the mind or heart.

A number of studies have described emergent trends in Australian spirituality both within and outside organized religion, in the wake of the late twentieth century collapse of the dominance of rationalism. Some research has showed a menu of options to assuage a spiritual hunger, (Raiter, 2003, 77-102) others have shown an environmentally-motivated deep concern for the earth (Osborn, 2001). A large number described a desire for connection with the sea and the land that is necessary before we can live a more simple life together on a sustainable planet.

These pursuits are not religious, and not monotheist. From her closing chapter, Kohn might have added that this pursuit is done with a commitment to personal autonomy, gender equality and interfaith relationships. (Kohn,2002,211-213) An example of a ‘new believer’ is Amy E. Dean (1997). Her goal is to help the reader restore a ‘profound ecospiritual connection, a relationship with nature that can help you to connect or reconnect to your natural community, your inner spirit, and yourself.’ (Dean, 1997, 10). She offers ten principles with not a hint of the transcendent among them. Nevertheless, she is missional, ethical, pro-active, appreciative and autonomous and is an alternative nature-based spirituality.
David Tacey, in addition to his suggestions for an aesthetic-based spirituality, is another who has sought a renewed spirituality arising from Australian soil. Tacey, 1995, 13, 160-161) He noted the irony of a nation of coastal dwellers seeking a spirituality of the land, when he recounts a personal conversation:

‘Here was a Melbourne poet (unnamed), still at the edge of this great continent, and consequently, still excluded from its emotional and mythopoetic resources… in a sense, he had never arrived in Australia.’ (Tacey, 1995, 27)

Tacey concurred with Cavan Brown (1991, 216f) and Belden Lane (1998) that a self-sacrificial leap had to be made, before one made an entry into appreciation of otherness. He sought the ‘re-enchantment’ both of the soul and of worldview wherein persons appreciated the importance of the spiritual dimension of life which therefore influenced both private and public life.

How could this begin? Tacey named four avenues – literature, ancestry, depth psychology (Jungian) and some other categories of spirituality, though he consciously avoided traditional forms of religion (1995, 63, 204):

‘…much of what has passed for spirituality in history has indeed been marked by transcendentalism, disdain for the world, and a negative attitude towards the body, sexuality, nature and passion. This is where important new work has to be done.’

A Swiss framework may not gel with Tacey’s other concern to see an authenticity that arises from the soil. Tacey, 1995, 25) But the appeal to Jung’s archetypes was one way that Tacey could lift spirituality from the subjective private realm to the public realm.

‘We arrive at a transpersonal dimension with immediate and enormous ramifications for society, politics, and the environment.’

Raiter, Kohn and Tacey have all described an emergent secular spirituality. It holds to a code of ethics which is accorded ultimacy, provides a sense of life-call, urges people to be proactive in social and environmental action and forms short-term communities of common-interest. It is not a spirituality that is waiting to be informed by Christian religion, but borrows its terms and values without its structures or its God. (Moore, 1995; Dowerick, 1998)

A summary of the menu which many contemporary Australians are unconsciously using for their spiritual enquiries may include:

**Mystery**, which would predominate over Enlightenment rationality and to some extent over Western materialism. There is a suspicion of the Bible;

**Connections** in human relationships and with nature, which would predominate over religious and academic organizations and dogma. They would seek a sense of reverence for the earth;

**Appreciation** of ‘the Other’, who is different from oneself, which would predominate over patriarchy, judgmentalism, competition or tribalism. It would include gender equality, the privileging of relativist pluralism, and an inter-faith perspective.

**Experience**, which would be more authentic than just concepts, and spiritual experience would be satisfying if not directly therapeutic. The immediacy of the role given to experience is in some ways opposite to ‘mystery’.
Autonomy and self-determination, which would predominate over a shared habitus, and historic wisdom. This privileges the principle of consumer-choice and exaggerates the politics of democracy.

These characteristics act as a values-filter for the ways that contemporary Australians might approach spirituality. They mirror the trends described by Haynes since post WW2 of an emergence of spiritual perspectives in desert art and literature.

**Spirit of place**

Both the emerging trend in spiritualities and the Australian cultural history have indicated that a stronger spirituality of place can emerge. Travellers often report a spiritual experience in the desert. As one friend said about her visit to Uluru, ‘I am the least religious person I know, but something definitely spiritual happened to me at Uluru, and no one can tell me different.’ (Anonymous, 2004) One journalist concluded, after attending a birthday party in a desert night, ‘I’ve been here before and felt the magnetic pull of the landscape… But I still haven’t fathomed how a place so empty can feel so complete?’ (Guilliat, 2001) These secular spiritual people made their profoundly positive statements somewhat in personal self-defence. The sacred in their life was a kind stranger.

There are a number of ways that a Spirit of Place has been explored:

a. A widespread interest in ‘Sense of Place’, a caring attitude to the place where one feels one belongs.

b. Christian Theology of Nature has made a number of new beginnings in recent decades.

c. The popularity of Pilgrimage is rising in many traditional places e.g. to Compostela in Spain.

We do not have space here to pursue these, but some brief comments may help. For example, John Cameron aims to foster a sense of place with sufficient depth that it can motivate a sustainable environmental ethic and engage with people about the continent we share. ‘Reconnecting and reanimating the world has great healing potential’, Cameron said, ‘while the denial of a deep connection with land produced alienation and loss in both the land and the people’. (Cameron, 2002, 14)

The environmental scientist Peter Cock (2003, 171) echoed this view, concerned that motivation can not be sustained, when involved in the environmental movement, *without* a personal eco-bonding. An example of this is from a novel by David Malouf (1978 96):

I must drive out my old self and let the universe in. The creatures will come creeping back... then we shall begin to take back into ourselves the lakes, the rivers, the oceans of the earth, its plains....then the spirit of things will migrate back into us. We shall be whole.

Whereas ‘sense of place’ is a new concept to many, theologies of Creation are not. The church has always had much to say about attitudes to Nature, including many arguments about evolution and bioethics that are either initially or actually inimical to that theology. Theologians in this generation have begun to develop six distinct fronts in the recovery of a Natural Theology:

2. Creation-spirituality. Matthew Fox (1983) reconstructed spirituality in tune with Creation but demoted the doctrines of redemption and church in favour of indigenous spirituality and of humanity in general. In Australia, Eugene Stockton took a middle way: ‘Wonder is a way open, not only to followers of conventional religion, but also to the agnostic, the unbeliever, the searcher, the carer.’ (Stockton, 1998, 22)

3. Theology of aesthetics. Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1905-1988) sought to redress the balance in history of a theology focused on truth (knowledge of God) or goodness (righteousness, holiness and justice). Despite the biblical emphasis on ‘Glory’, he said, ‘the aesthetic dimension of theology has been gradually purged from western theology.’ (Garver, 2004, 2)


5. Everyday spirituality. Natural Theology must interact with theologies of the everyday where people actually live. In Australia, the Zadok Institute (Hynd et al 2006), and in particular Ian Barns (1996 29): ‘A theology of everyday life does not involve simply legitimising people’s ‘responsible’ involvement in a capitalist society’.


It is too soon to see what these six ventures in Natural Theology produce in the context of an ailing and diverse planet, but it is unlikely in this generation to be an overarching meta-narrative that claims to interpret all contexts.

This leads to another renaissant and formative discipline - pilgrimage, a sacred journey to a sacred place. Since the anthropology of Victor Turner (1967) observed the deep transformation that issues from a ‘liminal’ experience, the study and practice of the stages of pilgrimage has named:

1. Entering the journey, preparing oneself, facing the rigours of travel and the dangers both physical and emotional.
2. Being on the journey, which may include performing rituals of arrival at a sacred place or simply the sense of journeying onwards until the mind switches over to the homeward journey.
3. Returning home, which can be more dangerous than the outward journey. Arriving home may be the most difficult stage of all.

Clearly this applies to the desert journey, whether to a specific location such as Uluru, or in gaining a sense of the sacred site that is the whole desert, gradually becoming known in its immensity in every day of travel and in its majesty in every sunset and night of stars.
Interpretation

These competing interpretations are present to the mind and culture of travellers in desert and wilderness, and must be negotiated as well as discerned. Belden Lane suggested that the convergence of geography and spirituality worked by analogy, ‘an inexplicable correspondence emerged between outer forms and inner self’. In so doing he was consciously connecting with the hermeneutics of analogy which has been a theme in Christian theology and desert communities since Origen of Alexandria (185-254CE), who was himself an ascetic in North Africa, and one of the early influences in the rise of the Desert Fathers. Lane offered no further explanation of the efficacy of this ‘analogy’. ‘Emptiness offers answers of its own. Deep speaks to deep.’ (Burgoyne 2001)

Whatever the process of discernment, experiential risk is essential to this process. For Lane, the element of risk in going to the desert is an invitation to respond to the self-emptying God by one’s own best selflessness. ‘How much can you give up? The desert asks. And how much can you love? Only in offering the severest answers to these two questions does one ever discover, at last, the solace of fierce landscapes.’ (Lane 1998 230) In the courage to respond deeply to the desert by the loss of ego, there is an uncovering of a great capacity for love, and a great solace.

Conclusion

Desert Spirituality has significance for notions of discipleship and mission important in the Christian tradition. It opens valuable resources for Australian practices and offers the means of ongoing personal transformation. By reversing the polarity of ‘possession’ it provides new perspectives for engaging with the challenges to sustainability which threaten the world community. It has added significance for the church which, like ancient Israel, has forgotten its desert tradition.

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A contribution to our understanding of contemplation in a postmodern world

Patricia Wait*

This paper offers insights from my continuing research on meeting God, or contemplation, in the writings of Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross. After providing a general overview of Christian mysticism, I focus on the notion of “wound” in Julian’s and John’s writings. For both of these mystics, “wound” is a “wound of love” (Jn 19:34-37), and a place for meeting God and being transformed. Like Julian and John in their writings, spiritual directors assist directees in entering their wounds.

Keywords: contemplation, Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross

Meeting God in contemplation

Julian of Norwich and John of the Cross
Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century Englishwoman, lived a solitary life in an anchorage attached to St Julian’s church in Norwich. John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century Spanish Carmelite priest, assisted Teresa of Avila in the Carmelite religious reform. Both Julian and John are regarded as spiritual guides in the Christian mystical tradition, and I ask: What can their writings tell me about meeting God? My way of entering Julian’s and John’s texts is to examine what they say about wounds, wounding and woundedness, because wound for both Julian and John means wound of love and is a place for meeting God and being transformed. But first, what does “meeting God” mean in the Christian tradition?

Meeting God
Scripture contains many illustrations of humankind encountering God. In the Tent of Meeting, Yahweh spoke with Moses “as a man talks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). In the Song of Songs, the divine Lover calls, “Come then, my beloved, my lovely one, come” (Song 2:13). Jeremiah is powerless to resist Yahweh’s overtures: “You have seduced me, Yahweh, and I have let myself be seduced; you have overpowered me: you were the stronger (Jer 20:7-9). The apostle Paul was “caught up into Paradise and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being” (2 Cor 12:4). The Johannine writings proclaim a God of love who lives in us, and in whom we live.

In post-scriptural times, on his way to being thrown to wild beasts in Rome in 107, Ignatius of Antioch wrote of his desire:

I am yearning for death with all the passion of a lover. Earthly longings have been crucified; in me there is left no spark of desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me, “Come to the Father” (Divine Office, 2006).

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Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century monk, bishop (briefly, till he fled), and hermit, comments charmingly that in contemplation thoughts and meditation cease: “They are like a flutter of impudent birds. Let their activity cease… for the Master of the house has come” (Clement, 2002). Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) (1987) describes the visits of the Bridegroom, in which, “as soon as he enters in he stirs my sleeping soul. He moves and soothes and pierces my heart”. The late Middle Ages, a time of institutional crisis very like our own, saw a flowering of mysticism, which provides the context for Julian of Norwich and the later John of the Cross. Since then, the secularizing effect of the Renaissance, the Reformation concern with orthodoxy, and the crowning of science and reason in the Enlightenment, meant that for some centuries mysticism was generally regarded as esoteric and dangerous, before scholarly re-engagement in the twentieth century.

Garcia (2010) provides a recent definition which bears pondering:

The mystical experience, whatever its expression may be, seems to have for its main objective the search for a union that breaks through the confines of the “ego”. In this way, it immerses itself in a lived reality, which is mystical union. The mystical experience is essentially a divine pathos (divine passion) which means to ‘experiri’ (to experience) the presence of God and to suffer, to feel, to accept His transforming action in us, and thus, it is a bond, a relationship, “a loving glance”, a loving contact with a reality which is immensely appreciated and conceived as the secret, most intimate centre of one’s existence and as its permanent source which causes the mystic to exclaim: “O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul in its deepest centre!” (St. John of the Cross, Living Flame of Love).

Garcia is suggesting that Christian mysticism is a wounding, transforming, ego-freeing, painful and ecstatic search for union with God (living flame of love) who is found within us.

Like late medieval times, our present age is seen as an age for mystics. Labelled “postmodern”, contemporary culture and spirituality is marked by a sense of loss and disillusionment about the ability of scientific method to solve problems and ensure world progress. Postmodernism criticizes “overconfidence in the powers of reason to establish definitive meaning [because] all human attempts to grasp ‘truth’ are culturally conditioned, contingent, and morally flawed as well as intellectually partial” (Sheldrake, 2010), which leads to suspicion and rejection of social systems, religious certainties and institutions. An absence of dogmatic authority means that “in all its variety and pain, our ordinary human experience becomes the immediate context for God’s self-disclosure” (Sheldrake, 1998). There is interest in human consciousness and the cosmic God. For postmoderns, God is the absent God, well known to mystics, and articulated by Christ, the mystic of mystics, in “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34). According to Sheldrake (2010), Thomas Merton (1915-1968) epitomizes the postmodern spiritual and intellectual pilgrim wanderer, whom Michel de Certeau (1992) describes as the mystic, “drunk with desire … who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is not that; one cannot stay there nor be content with that… It makes one go further, elsewhere”. For mystics, God has always been holy mystery: the very terms are related.

While today’s new cosmologists find spiritual meaning by starting with creation (Cannato, 2010), the Christian mystical tradition, looking at the same questions, has a somewhat different approach, and starts with the mystics’ prayer experience of God. For example, Julian’s theology is built on her understanding that God is love, and she struggles through her fears and dreads to oneness with this God of love. John of the Cross’s theology emanates from
his romance with God the Lover. Thus, in his prison he composed his Johannine inspired “Romances”, followed by his “Canticle” which is the story of his journey to transforming union with a hidden God. Julian’s and John’s theology is Christocentric (with Christ’s passion as a starting point) and Trinitarian. Traditionally, Christian mysticism is concerned with the wounded Word, expression of God “in the beginning” (Jn 1:1), who gives us the “Spirit of truth… [to] lead us to the complete truth” (Jn 16:13). Edward Schillebeeckx (1981) argues that the Christology of every age, including ours, has Jesus of Nazareth as its touchstone and starting point, because “the Christian faith entails not only the personal living presence of the glorified Christ, but also a link with his life on earth; for it is precisely that earthly life that has been acknowledged and empowered by God through the resurrection.”

**Entering the wound in Julian’s and John’s texts**

In my doctoral thesis, I use a *lectio divina* approach (as of traditional monastic exegetical theology) to research what Julian and John write about meeting God. I examine passages which focus on wounds. For both mystics, a wound is a wound of love and is integrally related to the climax of John’s gospel where Christ’s pierced side symbolizes God’s love lavished upon us: “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water... [and] scripture says: They will look to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:34-37). In John’s gospel, Christ dies because of the rejection of his message that God is love, and Christ’s death on a cross is the ultimate revelation of God’s love for humankind. The image of Christ, the Word of God, giving the very last drop of his blood from his pierced side, is the expression of our God who is love. This wounded one, dying for love of us, is God. And we are to look to him.

Mystics have interpreted this gospel text to also mean that we are invited into the heart of Christ, which means the love of God. They look to Jeremiah: “Leave the towns, make the rocks your home… Learn from the dove that makes its nest in the walls of the gaping gorge” (Jer 48:28). Holes amongst rocks are Christ’s wounds and the gaping gorge is his heart, as well as the abyss of God. The dove is a symbol of the soul and of faithful marriage. In the *Song of Songs*, the Lover calls to his Beloved: “My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock, in the coverts of the cliff, show me your face” (Song 2:14). Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) loved to pray amongst the crevasses of La Verna because for him they were like the wounds of Christ. Gertrud of Helfta (1256-1302) wrote: “Pray for me, that with chaste love, I may deserve to build a nest like a turtledove in the wound of love of Jesus, my spouse” (Gertrud, 1989). The *Anima Christi* prayer of the early fourteenth century has the line: “Within thy wounds hide me.”

Julian’s vision (or “showings”) of Christ’s Passion embodies this Johannine passage, which shapes Julian’s whole life because, through life-long *lectio divina* of her vision, Julian herself comes to live and embody it. Julian explains this by structuring her text around her vision of Christ’s Passion and the three wounds she asks from God: the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion and the wound of willful longing to God. She uses a hermeneutic of “ beholding” to move from the kataphatic vision of Christ’s Passion, which she sees visually, to the apophatic understanding of being one with God. This may be clearly observed in the tenth showing of Christ’s Passion when Julian sees that:

with a good cheer our good Lord looked into his side, and beheld with joy, and with his sweet looking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side within (P.xxiv.235).
It is through Christ’s wound in his side that Julian’s understanding is led to be enclosed within him in mystical knowing. In the previous showing, Julian was overwhelmed to hear Christ say: “It is a joy, a bliss, an endless liking to me, that ever I suffered Passion for you” (P.xxii.227). She devotes two chapters of the long text to savoring this delightful knowledge (P.xxii, xxiii). Now, as Christ invites her into his side, he declares: “Lo, how I love you” (P.xxviii.237). This looking at how Christ loves her is the looking “to the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37), and is a transforming meeting with God in contemplation. Julian learns that she is always to behold God’s love, and to come to God through Christ’s wounded side. In her writings, as Julian embraces the three wounds she has prayed for, she shows us how to enter Christ’s wound and be one with him, by which she also means being one with the Trinity for “where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity, to my sight, is understood” (P.iv.156). She does not give great explanations or detailed directions about how we may do this, but she shares her experience of God with us, as one would in spiritual direction, and expects us to understand.

John of the Cross, too, is centred on the pierced Christ of John’s gospel. In the first stanza of the Canticle, John (describing his own experience) sings of the Bride, wounded with love for her Bridegroom, calling for him who, “like a stag” (SCB 1), has flown (Song 2:8-9). Searching, she eventually catches sight of “the wounded stag” (SCB 13) on the hill above. The stag (Bridegroom), like the Bride, is wounded with love. The Bride is overwhelmed by this and the Bridegroom coaxes her: “Return, small dove, alight!” (SCB 13) John is using symbolic language to explain the Bride’s God-given longing for God which leads in contemplation (the hill above) to her knowing that, if God, like the stag, “hears the cry of his mate and senses that she is wounded, he immediately runs to her to comfort and caress her” (SCB 13.9.523). This being wounded and being caressed is contemplation and the Bride is gradually led deeper, until in the twenty-second stanza of the Canticle, she enters the “garden of her heart’s desire, a place wherein to rest all centred on love” (SCB 22). It is “beneath the apple tree” (SCB 23) in the garden that the Bride and Bridegroom pronounce their marriage vows. In the deep cellar of contemplation, the Bridegroom gives her his heart, revealing “sweet and secret knowledge” (SCB 27), and she surrenders herself. The knowledge revealed is contemplation. It is “very delightful because it is a knowledge through love” (SCB 27.5.582).

Beyond John of the Cross’s rich symbolism is an apophatic mysticism which sees the Bride’s search as a journey into rest, or silence, where she is centred in God, and this meeting with God takes place beneath the cross (the new apple tree in the new garden) in a meeting of woundedness. John has a Trinitarian understanding of God but his use of the terms Bridegroom and Beloved relate particularly to Christ, risen and with us (SCB 14&15.2.525). While delighting in the beauty of nature, and poetry, John downplays visions and emphasizes the apophatic as mature contemplation. Christ, “the wounded stag” on Golgotha, is, for John, as also for Julian, our way to the God we meet in silence. In his commentaries, as a spiritual director, John explains how this way of knowing matures as we are wounded in love, and our intellect, memory and will are emptied. According to Edith Stein (2002), John’s purpose is not theoretical: he wants to “lead people by the hand”.

Julian sees Christ’s wounded side as the Wound of Love, into which we are invited to bring our wounds. For John, wounds of love are “touches of love” (SCB 1.17.484), delighting and tormenting us, as we are consumed by the Flame of Love, within our daily woundedness. In their texts, both mystics take us into our own hearts and wounds, to encounter the living
knowledge of love. If we do not engage with our own experience as we read their texts, we are observers and not fully engaged in receiving this living knowledge that imparts transforming union. Our wounds are the place of transformation. When we pray in pain that is beyond human help or reason, when we cling in naked faith, trust and love, and own our helplessness, there our wounds and Christ’s wounds are one, and we meet God’s love. It was when suffering unto death that Julian was led to the joy of knowing God’s compassionate love for her. Likewise, in John’s experience of abandonment in his Toledo prison, he was overwhelmed by God’s love.

Julian’s and John’s experience is repeated in the stories of our directees. An example, used with permission, is a person feeling totally bereft and despairing after being suddenly abandoned by a loved life-partner. When praying in unspeakable agony of soul, this person experienced Christ’s wounded hands holding his so that their hands became one. He felt exquisitely loved: “I didn’t know I could be loved like that”, and commented that “that was when I knew that I would get well again one day”. It is the spiritual director’s role to assist directees to enter their wounds, which are the place of God’s transforming love.

Some implications

For us, as for Julian and John, the mystical journey includes transforming conversion and a whole-of-life trust-commitment to wandering, “drunk with desire”. God seduces, overpowers, and leads into solitude. Prayer is integral. As our ego is emptied, we are filled with God. Our wounds are the place of transformation. We are to keep our eyes on Christ crucified and God’s love, and not our failings. We are to make our nest in the wound of love, which for Julian and John is the heart of God.

References

Spirituality for Generation Y Australians and the implications for spiritual direction

Susan Campbell*

Understanding the cultural, social and spiritual context of Generation Y is critical for those who seek to guide them effectively in life-changing spiritual direction ministry.

Keywords: Generation Y, spirituality, spiritual direction

Australia is home to more than four million ‘Generation Y’ (Y-ers), those born between 1980 and 1995. The most defining attribute of Generation Y is optimism, as they anticipate a future brimming with financial, social and vocational success (Huntley, 2006). This optimism is experienced in a realistic context of life that includes uncertainty and insecurity; however, Y-ers have integrated these concepts into a positive notion of freedom (Mackay, 1998). Optimism and freedom, along with consumerism, choice, belonging and whole-of-life integration of technology are significant markers in understanding Generation Y.

The dominant motif of spirituality among Y-ers is the search for meaning. However, parents and teachers have largely failed to provide a framework or tools to pay attention to the inner life, to engage in spiritual practices or to make sense of how everyday events interact with the spiritual realm. Soaked in a consumer culture, they look to celebrities, musicians, the internet and reality TV for guidance (Carrigan, 2001). They view spirituality as a consumer product, shopping around for the most interesting, exciting and fulfilling experience.

Y-ers face a dilemma of wanting to hold on to something, yet simultaneously not wanting to grip too tightly. In the post-modern era where truth is relative and tolerance is the norm, “any form of exclusive truth claim will seem alien” (Savage et. al., 2006). Some are paralysed by the saturation of so many messages while others prefer to relax and leave their options open in case something better comes along.

For Christians, the influences of Generation Y culture and worldview are easily recognisable and indeed powerful in their attitude towards spirituality. Opportunities arise for those interacting with this generation to harness their openness, provide scaffolding, challenge attitudes that do not align with scripture and provide resources to nurture and support their spiritual life.

The ministry of spiritual direction can be a vital and life-giving resource for this generation. It can fill the void created by parents and leaders; support the articulation of spiritual questions; enable the discovery of identity; embrace issues regarding all areas of life and provide a safe space to work with pain.

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There are some characteristics of Generation Y that may create challenges for those who seek spiritual direction and the guides who accompany them. Potential issues and attitudes that guides would benefit from being aware of are: spiritual direction being a consumer item; the challenge of contemplation; expectation of spiritual experiences; spiritual direction providing an alternative to Christian community and managing the relationship that lacks reciprocity.

Generation Y are “wired differently” (Savage et. al., 2006) to those before them, therefore thoughtful reflection about how to best serve them is required. The investment of careful consideration is vital, not only for the future of spiritual direction ministry, but it has the potential to significantly impact the lives of many in future generations.

References


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Towards a critique of spiritual direction as field of practice

Di Shearer*

Spiritual directors engage regularly in supervision as a form of personal critique of practice. However, the field of practice as a whole appears to lack a strong theoretical research base. This lack weakens the contribution of the field not only within academic circles but more importantly within the day to day listening ministry to which we aspire.

A theoretical field that has potential for a holistic critique of the practice of spiritual direction is that of Integral Theory based in the writings of Ken Wilber. Evolutionary Spirituality (Craig Hamilton) and Integral Life Practice (Ken Wilber, et al) are emerging as communities in search of a world spirituality. The practices associated with them engage similar methodologies and parameters to those of spiritual direction, albeit mostly with an alternate rhetoric to that of a mainstream Christian tradition.

This paper reviews experiences of the author within these two sets of spiritualities and uses them to suggest criteria for critique of spiritual direction (and formation) as a field of practice. While essentially theoretical, this paper illustrates the points being made with discourse derived from one to one conversations, small group and large forum contexts. These are set within the framework of the author’s personal formation as spiritual director and make reference to the AECSD Standards for Formation document.

The aim of the paper is to suggest the value of critique to a field of practice and to lay the foundation for the development of such a critique at subsequent Symposia.

Keywords: field of practice, critique, Integral Theory

Spiritual direction as field of practice

This inaugural Symposium of the AECSD arises in a field of practice that is centuries old. From earliest times, the practice of listening to another with a view to bringing to articulation the life giving presence of God has been reflexive in its practice without being regulated in any particular way as a field of expertise. To gather the wisdom of practitioners in this field and to seek a theoretical underpinning for further research is a step forward in establishing what is becoming an increasingly sought after ministry, both within the church and more broadly. A worldwide surge in attention to spirituality demands careful analysis and rigorous implementation of professional standards, such as those contained in the documents of this Council, namely the Code of Ethics and Standards for Formation. The aim of this paper is to sketch a map of this field of practice and to lay the foundation for development of a critique at subsequent symposia.

* Dr Di Shearer retired as lecturer in Intercultural Communication from the University of South Australia in 1998 and practises as spiritual director in the Adelaide Hills as a member of ANSD. Following the visit of Br David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine, to Adelaide in 2009, her interest in interfaith spirituality spawned an interest in evolutionary and integral approaches. Over new year, she attended an Integral Spiritual Experience in California of 700 participants from all spiritual lineages and all major continents and has taken intensive internet courses involving application of these spiritualities before and after this event.
The field is often mapped from the perspective of the individual director who learns of spiritual direction, engages in it, senses a call to this work and moves on through discernment processes and retreats to formation as spiritual director. In doing so, the individual appreciates the value of supervision and links with a spiritual direction community, engaging regularly in supervision as a form of personal critique of practice. Supervision remains key to the ongoing development of individual practitioners. In these contexts, for a spiritual director to understand academic terms like transference and counter-transference is not as important as being able to track these processes and one’s felt or ignored responses within a conversation. Looseness of definition, even around the nature of the practice of spiritual direction itself allows flexibility and personalization of one’s charism. The uniqueness of individuals and of each spiritual direction relationship ought never to be undermined by dominant theoretical stances that remove the freedom which the field seeks to engender through conversational relationship.

However, for the field of practice as a whole to lack a strong theoretical research base does not assist us in moving forward as demand for our ministry grows. Implicit in every practice is an underlying theory of which the practitioner may only rarely be conscious. To practice professionally is to make this theory more explicit, whether as individuals or as a community.

Consider the way in which definitions of spiritual direction are frequently introduced by a process of elimination highlighting differences with fields like counselling, mentoring and therapy. The vision statement of AECSD embraces our common understandings in these words:

to listen the life giving presence of God into articulation in the individual and the community.

Further, each formation program is free to state its own philosophy of practice and usually provides a definition within various recognizable parameters key to which is the word ‘listening’. The multiple meanings of director and direction further complicate the transparency of the field to newcomers. This fuzziness affects adversely the relationship of the field of practice to related disciplines and weakens its contribution to them. By refining the various approaches used within spiritual direction and their inter-relationship, we might better fulfil the final phrase in our vision statement which reads ‘to listen the life giving presence of God into articulation … in the community’. It is important within the day to day listening ministry to pay full attention to the individual, but to fail to be transparent in what we are offering through this work is to fail the community of faith and society at large whose development is also part of our vision.

Using these guidelines as a basis for consideration of spiritual direction as a field of practice, I will proceed to develop the context of my journey, introduce a theoretical foundation that shows promise in critiquing the field and demonstrate the ways this has worked out in practice circles associated with contemporary world spirituality movements.

**Personal context:**

Through my formation which took place formally over six years in three different programs, I laid aside the decades of experience I brought as an educator of adult educators. This was a necessary discipline and one which yielded a harvest in terms of my development as a woman of spirit. However, constantly on my mind was the question of where critique of the field lay.
No-one seemed to be concerned with an alternative view to the one being presented. As an academic, this challenged me to finish the course, develop my practice and then take a rigorous look at psychological and sociological theory in related fields. With graduation and a further two years of practice I recognized that my personal and academic background as well as global developments called forth an interfaith orientation. I put my quest before Br David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine monk, and found myself in contact with ‘Integral Theory’ based in the work of Ken Wilber (Wilber: 1999-2000). A world wide spirituality movement has been nurtured by this Integral approach which has also found application in many other disciplines. Over a year I have become convinced of the value of this theoretical orientation and its potential for holistic critique of the practice of spiritual direction. This paper proceeds therefore to overview the basic tenets of this theory and to demonstrate the ways in which it is being applied in practice in developing spirituality circles.

**Integral theory**

The comprehensiveness of the theory is seen in this way:

> The word integral means comprehensive, inclusive, non-marginalizing, embracing. … In a certain sense, integral approaches are “meta-paradigms,” or ways to draw together an already existing number of separate paradigms into an interrelated network of approaches that are mutually enriching.

Wilber in Visser (2003:xii-xiii)

Wilber achieves this meta-paradigm approach by combining wisdom of the ancients with the wisdom of modern disciplines. With its theoretical basis in Integral Spirituality (Wilber, 2006), he draws on East and West and masters both science and spirituality (Wilber, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004) in a fresh and invigorating way. In application the theory allows individuals to develop systematically multiple aspects of themselves including their physical body, emotional intelligence, cognitive awareness, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual wisdom in addition to taking perspectives on ethics and morality (Wilber et al, 2008).

**Integral theory: framework and elements**

In its most basic form, Integral Theory is a quadrant analysis of human experience from four combined perspectives. These are derived from making distinctions between an internal/external and individual/collective resulting in four irreducible perspectives: subjective, inter-subjective, objective and inter-objective (Figure 1). As all languages have three sets of pronouns, so the quadrants arising from these distinctions can be described by these pronouns; first person, ‘I’, second person, ‘you’ giving rise to ‘we’, and third person, ‘it’ and ‘its’ in a plural sense to complete the four perspectives. This analysis can be developed in an applied sense in different ways; for example, intentions, culture, behaviour and systems. A key concept in the theory is the way in which the four aspects are correlated or tetra-arise in any given human experience.

Four elements in addition to quadrants are lines and levels of development, states of consciousness and types. Together they form the AQAL trademark, AQAL being an acronym for all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states and all types. It combines theory, application and awareness within each of these elements and integrates them through practical application to every day events, both private and public.
Integral theory and spirituality

From this basis, Wilber identifies four ways in which the term ‘spiritual’ is used in contemporary literature (2006:100ff). It may be used in a sense of the highest level of development. Spiritual can be used as a separate line of development in and of itself (for example, compare emotional and spiritual intelligence). The term ‘spiritual’ is also used to describe a peak or mystical experience, implying a high state of awareness. The word in some contexts refers to a particular attitude present at any stage of development such as compassion or wisdom.

In this way, the framework allows spirituality to be seen as a state, level of development, line of development or type with the upper left quadrant amenable to spirituality as quadrant. A further perspective on the concept ‘Spirit’ is its use interchangeably with words like ‘God’ as ‘Is-ness’ or to the conscious energy of life as in, divine energy, or ‘Holy Spirit’. An all pervading caring presence including qualities like kindness, generosity, joyfulness is a further use of the term (Wilber, 2008:201).

In both source literature (e.g. Teresa of Avila, 1976) and contemporary literature (e.g. Barry, 2004), Wilber concurs with Evelyn Underhill (1911) on four major states of mystical experience. He summarizes these as gross level, purification; subtle level, illumination; causal level, dark night or formlessness; and non-dual level, unification (Wilber, 2006:95-98).

Integral theory and human development

In the upper left quadrant, the individual interior, Wilber draws on many lines of development from major research domains, frequently named multiple intelligences (Gardner: 1999, 1993; Smith, 2008). These include cognitive (Piaget 1977, Kegan, 1982), self (Loevinger, 1976), interpersonal (Selman, 2004), values (Graves, 1970), emotional (Goleman, 1998), kinesthetic (Gardner, 1999), psychosexual (Freud, 1999), moral (Kohlberg, 1983), needs (Maslow, 1954), aesthetic (Housen, 2002) and faith/spiritual (Fowler). Development in these lines is independent though inter-related, the cognitive line being necessary but not sufficient for each of the others.
Within this quadrant are also states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, sleeping) and energetic states (gross/physical, subtle and causal). A third area of investigation is around types (e.g. masculine/feminine), and personality factors as measured in Myers Briggs (1995) or Enneagram research (e.g. Rohr, 2001). An emergent typology is one of quadrivia, the quadrant from which one most naturally steps out and the supporting or secondary quadrant of preference, being developed through Integral Coaching (Hunt, 2009).

Combining the four states of spiritual experience with development over time, Wilber proposes ‘altitude’ as a metaphor for considering different levels of development within any line, constructing a matrix of perspectives in the Wilber-Combs Lattice (Wilber, 2008:88-93) which allows consideration of both state of consciousness and level of experience. This integrates states and stages with in depth consideration of the difference between an enduring structure within one’s spiritual development, a ‘structure-stage,’ and a stabilized experience or ‘state-stage’ allowing that we are never outside of a state, and always within a stage.

![Wilber-Combs Lattice](image)

It is the integration of these as both spiritual experience and developmental psychology that offers so much to this field. Wilber claims that ‘if both are not included it is unlikely that a true understanding of human beings and their relation to Reality, divine or otherwise, will be reached’ (Wilber, 2006:38).
However, it is not only in the individual quadrants that Integral theory makes a contribution. By taking the perspectives of the collective rather than merely the individual and considering these through an interior or exterior lens, a field of practice can be mapped more comprehensively.

**Integral theory and research domains**

That each of the quadrants has a different ‘type of truth’ or validity claim suggests that different approaches to research need to be argued from different philosophical bases. Working with truth, truthfulness, justness and functional fit, the validity claims of the four quadrants, allows four perspectives from which judgments (or discernment) can be made. Take, for example, a basic stance regarding meditation and viewing it both from inside and outside the individual.

> Meditative understanding involves a methodology of looking at the “I” from inside (using phenomenology). Spiral Dynamics involves studying it from the outside (using structuralism). Both study a person’s consciousness but see very different things because they are inhabiting a different stance or perspective. (Wilber 2006:38)

Such examples could be worked for all four quadrants which gives rise to eight zones of enquiry as shown in Figure 3. Understanding how the two perspectives in each quadrant are related adds a further dimension.

![Figure 3: Research Domains (Wilber, 2006:37)](image)

Phenomenology, structuralism, hermeneutics, ethno-methodology, cognitive science, statistical studies, sociology and systems theory are each well established methodologies. Wilber’s claim that all eight rudimentary zones and their interrelationships tetra-arise in any interaction or conversation provides breadth and depth to a field of application.
To this point I have introduced briefly the theoretical framework which I am challenged to pursue further as spiritual director. A visual representation (Self 2008) is provided as Appendix A to enable further clarification. I move now to my experience of a spiritual community in which I have been engaged in recent months.

**Evolutionary spirituality**

Over the past year, Craig Hamilton has grown Integral Enlightenment, a world-wide spiritual practice business (www.integralenlightenment.com). His Academy for Evolutionaries poses the following curriculum:

- How do we actualize ourselves as mature human beings for optimal living in today’s world?
- How do we access our inner qualities of spaciousness, wisdom, courage and compassion to address today’s challenges?
- How do we build self awareness and presence for the purpose of transformation?
- How do we bring the value of the wisdom traditions into our contemporary practice of leadership?

(Hamilton 2010)

Each of these are recognizably spiritual and have spiritual transformation in view.

For short courses in this field, he offers a set of Principles of Evolutionary Culture. These are:

- A wholehearted intention to transform
- A commitment to engage
- A beginner’s mind
- Speaking from the deepest, most authentic parts of the self
- Deeper listening
- Risk taking
- We all have evolving edges
- If we’re not uncomfortable, we’re probably not evolving
- A life of constant resolution
- Always on stage: being an example for everyone we meet

(Hamilton, 2009)

In addition to individual transformations, these are principles for collective engagement and conversational intervention.

With basic assumptions that are not incompatible with Wilber’s, evolutionary spirituality, as defined by Hamilton, agrees that at the heart of religion has always been the mystical quest. He argues that:

humans, as the conscious, aware part of the creation, have a potential for holiness, an immense transformative potential to become something extraordinary. At the same time, we have an innate lower nature, call it original sin in Christianity or the five poisons in the East …

(Hamilton, 2007)

The goal of the spiritual path, in his terms, is ‘to transcend our smallness, our lower nature, and become a pure reflection of the perfection of the Creator or the source of all that is’ (Hamilton, 2007). He compares what he sees as the highest calling in religious traditions,
‘radical self-transcendence and purification so that we could know God directly’ with a threefold mystical task as human beings in the new evolutionary spirituality:

- to face the reality of how primitive our current evolutionary stage is compared to where we can go
- to give our hearts and souls to the deep spiritual work of rising above our lower nature
- to stretch to think and feel, and most importantly act as global citizens…. to realize that evolution is seeking unification, and it is our job as conscious agents of evolution to help to bring that into being.’

(Hamilton, 2007)

He also claims that ‘despite our resistance to change, we nonetheless long for it’. This is the spark at the heart of every human being which is implanted in us by:

that initial impulse that has been driving the whole event. And, if we can align ourselves with it, ground ourselves in it, it will give us all the inspiration, strength and perspective we need to do its bidding.

(Hamilton 2007)

In applying these premises within the course, there was an invitation over an extended period to recognize when one is acting from ‘ego’, when from the ‘ground of being’, and when by the active divine principle within each of us, the ‘Evolutionary Impulse’, (Cohen 2002, Teilhard de Chardin, 1959). Hamilton proposes that

the creative evolutionary dynamics that have given birth to this entire universe in all its glory and diversity are now alive in us. And, in a very real sense, they are only now attaining the peak of their power. Because, in us, these powers now have attained consciousness, they can be directed.

(Hamilton, 2007)

**Integral spirituality soundings**

In enquiring how course content of this nature impacts individuals I offer two soundings from my own experience of the groups.

One participant in the course who has engaged in formation as a spiritual director expressed the view that her experience within contemplative movements had certainly changed her relationship to God, herself and others as she moved from an exoteric (mythical/dogmatic) to an esoteric (meditative/contemplative) stance. However, she has identified some gaps in the experience of this movement which evolutionary spirituality has helped her address. Among the list of gaps she includes:

- So much emphasis on resting in God and then the natural flow of action will follow…that the false self had a hay-day in stopping me from acting because I was waiting for the “natural flow”…when in reality it was all the fears of the ego/false self that has often stopped me from acting.
- The need to clarify … ideas of choice versus having no choice in regards to aligning with the presence and action of God in our lives. Sometimes there is confusion as to where grace belongs in regards to choice and the ego. It seems easy for the ego/false self to use the idea of grace and waiting on God…for an excuse for inaction and having no choice.  
  
  (Personal Communication)
The second sounding is from a European woman who identifies her spiritual formation as taking place in India where she studied Eastern teaching of traditional enlightenment under a spiritual master. She brought the following sense to the concepts ego, evolutionary impulse and ground of being. In response to the question regarding which of these one finds it most easy to align with, she writes:

I find this inquiry … most challenging, as it puts me in the position of having to re-define my whole approach to the self and therefore to the Self … I have so far followed and adhered to the traditional approach to "Enlightenment", and to Advaita Vedanta. It is a challenge which I am SO grateful to take. … I have to admit my resistance, because there seems to be so much work still AGAIN to DO …, and because I feel shaky, feeling as if I'd have to abandon an old Beloved … for a younger one!!!

(Group Forum Discussion)

This participant found the ground of being most familiar, a ‘friend, a comfortable duvet to sink into’ and ego most foreign ‘strangely’. The approach of Evolutionary Impulse she expressed as:

I love EI! It is my life, I could not have lived without being close to this Aliveness, I have been hand in hand with it always.

(Group Forum Discussion)

Her reflection on the exercise undertaken over a number of weeks concludes this way:

To let my consciousness be rooted in Ground of Being I would have to let go of wanting. Let go of ALL wanting. … I would need to embrace it. I would need to relax so profoundly.....the absolute opposite of ego contraction.... To align and embody consistently with Evolutionary Impulse I would need to let go completely, I mean really and truly completely for my need for approval by society at large.

(Group Forum Discussion)

These soundings convey the essence from which this contemporary world spirituality movement springs.

The practices associated with this community and application of Integral theory considered together engage similar methodologies and parameters to those of spiritual direction; for example, meditation, deeping experience, finding responsible inner and outer freedom, articulating desires, working with shadow, and recognizing resistance to name a few. In an alternate rhetoric to that of a mainstream Christian tradition, what Hamilton calls the ‘Evolutionary Impulse’ (Hamilton, 2009) is often referred to as ‘God’ with the proviso that a mythic God in the skies is not intended. Wilber speaks of the ‘Three Faces of Spirit’ recognizable in nature (nature mysticism), in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship (deity mysticism) and in the ‘I am’-ness of personal experience (causal or non-dual mysticism) (Wilber, 2008:211-212).

In reviewing my experiences within these two sets of spiritualities, I have often felt I am back in a formation experience. I have been openly Christian in stance. I have been accepted by and accepting of those whose spiritual formation has come about through Buddhist, Hindu,
Sufi or other mystic influence. I have learned to deepen my spiritual experience through silent meditation, chanting, yoga and other practices from across a range of wisdom traditions.

From this dual vantage point of theory and practice, I address in closing the value of these explorations for critique of spiritual direction as field of practice and offer an example from my own experience of this twinning of theory and practice.

Towards critique of spiritual direction as field of practice

Integral theory can be described as a map of the territory of human experience. The field of spiritual direction with its focus on the human experience of God could benefit from its clarity and comprehensiveness. The map is not the territory, but using a map that draws so widely and so deeply on human experience through the ages and across traditions will facilitate our journey.

Integral theory is also matrix of components that make up that experience. By moving beyond the individual interior experience and recognizing the evolution of human development and social systems, integral theory opens a space for questions regarding the spiritual development of communities. The theory invites us to a future which ‘transcends and includes’ (Wilber, 2010a) as we move through the magic, mythic, rational developments of centuries and beyond modern and post-modern developments. Yet these stages of development in the world at large are shown to be mirrored in individual lives. The approaches taken here include somatic and behavioural experiences, cultural emphases and social systems in addition to individual interior experiences.

Further, Integral Theory is a set of person perspectives, that enables finer definition of terms such as ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirit’ not only in refining the concepts, but also assisting in bringing different spiritual experiences to articulation through awareness and application. Since first, second and third person perspectives are available in all languages, they are universal starting points for analysis of spiritual experience.

As a catalyst for psycho-active integration of body, mind, spirit and shadow, an Integral approach holds potential to correct the tendency of a field of practice to define itself against or outside of contemporary scholarship in related fields. For spiritual transformation to be truly meaningful, it must be ‘integral’ in its impact, meaning that it must transform every aspect of our humanity—including our relationship with the world around us. While internal shifts in consciousness and felt experience of God can continue to be valued, an Integral approach to the field of spiritual direction offers a new set of practices and teachings designed to catalyze a revolution at the deepest levels of our being, leaving no stone unturned in its life-changing impact on our soul, our psyche, and the outward expression of our humanity.

(Hamilton, 2009)

Finally, Integral theory engenders practices in each of these aspects of being. The recent publication of Integral Life Practice (Wilber, et al 2008) sets the theory in the context of daily experience for every seeker. In both complement and contrast, Evolutionary Spirituality (Hamilton) is an emerging community in search of a world spirituality based on principles which mirror to a large degree the kinds of qualities being sought both within directees and those in formation as spiritual directors.
When mapped through these multiple lenses, the field of spiritual direction in preliminary draft and rough hewn may be represented in this way:

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<tr>
<th>INTERIOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contemplative prayer</td>
<td>Action oriented praying of life</td>
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<td>Lines of Development</td>
<td>Somatic experiences</td>
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<td>Levels of Development</td>
<td>Behaviours</td>
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<td>States of Consciousness</td>
<td>Brain waves, neurology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person Types</td>
<td>Relics, Icons, Vestments</td>
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<td>Individual Psychograph</td>
<td>Creation: deserts/islands/gardens/place</td>
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<td>Shadow Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose, Values, Vocation</td>
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<th>COLLECTIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cultures, worldviews</td>
<td>Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning, art, music</td>
<td>Scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morality, values</td>
<td>Source literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>By type (eg Ignatian, Protestant)</td>
<td>Contemporary literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>By geography, (eg Iona, Lindisfarne, Latin America)</td>
<td>Theological and Inter-spiritual Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By associations and councils (ANSD, CSD, AECSD, SDI)</td>
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<th>THEOLOGY</th>
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<td>Theological and Inter-spiritual Systems</td>
<td>Social systems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Insurance &amp; economics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marketing / Promotion</td>
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<td>Globalisation</td>
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Figure 3: An Integral approach to spiritual direction as field of practice

**Integral, evolutionary and holistic**

The conceptual tools provided by Integral theory and the reflective practice illustrated through soundings in Evolutionary Spirituality offered here suggest initial criteria for critique of spiritual direction as a field of practice as integral and evolutionary. Spirituality, and in particular, spiritual direction as a field of practice needs to concern itself with each of these perspectives if it is to achieve a mature contemporary stance among other disciplines and approaches. To complement these, I turn attention in closing to the holism inherent in bringing them together.

In the context of these experiences, I met a theologian whose words touched me deeply and translated the theoretical concepts into somatic and experiential terms. Consider the concept of true self and unique self as described in an address to the first Integral Spiritual Experience (ISE1, 2009) which included participants from all major religious traditions and every major continent.

The overall number of True Selves is but one. The same True Self in you is the True Self present in all sentient beings. But notice something. Let's say five of us are sitting around a table …Each of us has transcended the ego--the small self, the finite self, the self-contraction--and is alive as the One True Infinite Spirit Self. But even though we are all equally the One Self, there is at least one thing that is very different for each of us:
namely, the angle we are looking at the table from. Each of us has a unique perspective on the table—indeed, on the world itself. So the One True Self is actually taking on a different perspective in each of us. Each of us has a different view of the world, even though each of us is the One True Self. And that means each of us actually has not merely a One True Self, but an infinitely unique self.

Paradoxically, we each experience not only a singular True Self, the same in all, but a radically unique manifestation of that Self—special and unique to each of us. Each of us has different talents, different gifts, and different unique views, and enlightenment involves discovering and honoring our differences just as much as our sameness.

(Wilber, 2010b)

Compare this view with that of St Symeon, the New Theologian of the 10th CE:

We awaken in Christ’s body as Christ awakens our bodies, and my poor hand is Christ. He enters my foot, and is infinitely me.

I move my hand, and wonderfully my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him (for God is indivisibly whole, seamless in His Godhood).

I move my foot, and at once he appears in a flash of lightning. Do my words seem blasphemous? —Then open your heart to Him.

And let yourself receive the one who is opening to you so deeply. For if we genuinely love him, we wake up inside Christ’s body

where all our body, all over, every most hidden part of it, is realized in joy as Him, and He makes us utterly real

and everything that is hurt, everything that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognized as whole, as lovely, and radiant in his light. We awaken as the Beloved in every last part of our body.

(St Symeon (949-1022) in Mitchell, 1989:38)

It is the holistic twinning of both the theoretical and the experiential, Integral and evolutionary, on which I rest my case that critique of spiritual direction as a field of practice will stand us in good stead to move forward as a field of practice. Through both contemporary theoretical underpinning and ancient wisdom traditions we are poised for transformation in a global context that calls forth from us both integrity and imagination.

Only this kind of whole-being transformation will be sufficient to meet both the needs and demands of contemporary life, and the deepest longing of the human heart—the longing to be a vessel for the infinite in this world.

(Hamilton, 2007)

Our common search across the globe had been expressed this way,
If, as historian Arnold Toynbee put it, the introduction of Buddhism into the West may well prove to be the most important event of the 20th century, we might also argue that the re-discovery of the contemplative roots of Christianity will be equally important. And as we enter the 21st century, it stands to reason that the recognition of a common mystical ground between Buddhism, Christianity, and the other World Religions will be the most important event of all.

(Teasdale & Wilber)

I look forward to furthering my understanding of these approaches and to the development of rigorous critique as we take the courage to stand shoulder to shoulder with others who search for fulfilment in God and the evolution of our species.

Appendix A: (overleaf)

Appendix A: AQAL Integral Map © Steve Self, www.formlessmountain.com (used with permission)
References:


Wilber, K (2010b) Video Address to the Integral Spiritual Experience 1, Asilomar, California, January 2010


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Br David Steindl-Rast, a Catholic monk of the Benedictine Order, is known for pioneering work in interfaith dialogue and for his promotion of the spiritual practice of gratefulness. He was born, in Vienna, Austria, in 1926 where he studied art, anthropology, and psychology, receiving an MA from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and a PhD from the University of Vienna. In 1952 he followed his family who had emigrated to the United States. In 1953 he joined a newly founded Benedictine community in Elmira, NY, Mount Saviour Monastery, of which he is now a senior member. Brother David was sent by his abbot to participate in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, for which he received Vatican approval in 1967. His Zen teachers were Hakkuun Yasutani Roshi, Soen Nakagawa Roshi, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, and Eido Shimano Roshi. He co-founded the Center for Spiritual Studies in 1968 and received the 1975 Martin Buber Award for his achievements in building bridges between religious traditions. He is the author of a range of books on spirituality, the most recent being ‘Deeper than Words: Living the Apostles’ Creed’ a contemporary view, which he discusses with Ken Wilber on http://integrallife.com/node/81648. Brother David serves a worldwide Network for Grateful Living, through www.gratefulness.org, an interactive website with several thousand participants daily from more than 243 countries.

Craig Hamilton is an independent researcher, writer, broadcaster, and lecturer with a passion for the evolution of consciousness. Founder of Integral Enlightenment, he is best known for his work as Senior Editor of the award-winning What Is Enlightenment? magazine. His articles have examined the landscape of an emerging evolutionary spirituality and have contributed significantly to the forging of a new, scientifically informed spiritual worldview bridging the great wisdom traditions of both the East and the West. Craig is a founding member of Ken Wilber’s Integral Institute, and a participant in the Synthesis Dialogues, an interdisciplinary think tank presided over by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. www.integralenlightenment.com

Ken Wilber is the first philosopher-psychologist to have his Collected Works published while still alive. Wilber is an internationally acknowledged leader and the preeminent scholar of the Integral stage of human development, which continues to gather momentum around the world. Some of his more popular books include Integral Spirituality; No Boundary; Grace and Grit; Sex, Ecology, Spirituality; and the "everything” books: A Brief History of Everything (one of his largest selling books) and A Theory of Everything (probably the shortest introduction to his work). Ken Wilber is the founder of Integral Institute, Inc., the co-founder of Integral Life, Inc., and the Senior Fellow of Integral Life Spiritual Center. www.integrallife.com, www.corintegral.com, www.integralinstitute.com

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The question of Grace in a face of human disorientation: the contribution of a spiritual director to the journey of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder

Kaye Twining*

The paper demonstrates the significance and boundaries of one model of Christian spiritual direction in the spiritual journey of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder, whose horizon of meaning making is shaped by the Christian religious tradition. Bipolar disorder belongs to the family of mental disorders. The nature of bipolar disorder is that it affects a person’s moods, thoughts and behaviour (Kelly, 2000). Consequently, the experience of bipolar disorder is such that it can disorientate a person’s sense of self, thus triggering existential questions around identity, meaning, belonging and religious expression. These are significant spiritual questions. However, due to the complex nature of bipolar disorder these spiritual questions often go unheeded. Through the methodology of praxis, the paper describes the complex nature of bipolar disorder. Such an understanding provides a foundation for the centrepiece of the paper which comprises a theological reflection on the human experience of Grace in relation to the question, “can bipolar disorder be a true spiritual dryness through which a person may take steps towards God?” (adapted from Kelly, 2000). The paper concludes by outlining one model of spiritual direction which draws upon the central theological reflection on Grace and is flexible enough to respond to the needs of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder as they engage in their spiritual journey.

Keywords: Grace, bipolar disorder, spirituality

Introduction

Foundational to the topic of this paper is the question, “can bipolar disorder be a true spiritual dryness through which a person may take steps towards God?” (adapted from Kelly, 2000, p.191). The question is a complex one due to its multifaceted context. Firstly, a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder undeniably requires professional therapeutic interventions to stabilize the symptoms. Secondly, the significance of spirituality in the life of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder is well recognized within the western mental healthcare field. Even so, Koenig argues the term spirituality has become so “diluted” (2007, p.39) it has lost its depth of meaning. Therefore, even though the value of spirituality is well recognized, there is a lack of professional and communal clarity about what constitutes spirituality.

Thirdly, the question is posed within the general context of the western Christian religious tradition. However as Koenig (2007) states, one of the symptoms of bipolar disorder can be distorted religious beliefs. As such, the religious beliefs and expression of a person diagnosed

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with bipolar disorder may be a manifestation of the disorder itself which necessitates medical treatment. Consequently, the exploration of spirituality within a religious framework can be a contentious issue. The question is further contextualized by Kelly’s assertion, “when we are unwell messages of “Turn to Christ” should be replaced by messages of “Await [God’s] Grace” (2000, p.192). Such a context raises two further questions, “what is Grace?” and “how does a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder await Grace?”

In light of the above multifaceted context, the question of Grace in a face of human disorientation is broached. A face here symbolizes a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder. By way of response, this paper comprises one western Christian spiritual director’s understanding of the terms spirituality and Christian spirituality, the impact of bipolar disorder on a person’s spirituality and a Christian theological reflection on Grace. Finally, the significance and boundaries of one model of Christian spiritual direction will be outlined. Such a model encompasses the theological reflection on Grace and is flexible enough to meet the needs of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

**Spirituality defined**

The definition of the term spirituality, as it pertains to this paper, is derived from the research of Swinton (2001) and Lonergan (1971). Swinton commences his treatise by differentiating between the human spirit and spirituality. He maintains the human spirit is like an “integrative presence” (2001, p.16) within each human being, which both enables and drives them to “respond to” (2001, p.16) their lived experience in a meaningful way. Meaningful in the context of this paper incorporates three dimensions. The first is identity formation, that is, the unified way a person perceives their sense of self in response to their relationships and lived experience of their world at a given time. As such, a person’s identity is not static. The second is the way a person constructs the purpose of their existence (Fowler & Keen, 1978). The third dimension is that of belonging. Belonging refers to a person’s experience of connection within their own person, their local community and their wider world.

Swinton (2001) then analyzes the term spirituality into three particular experiences. First is the intrapersonal, concerning personal meaning making. Second is the interpersonal, concerning communal belonging. Third is the transpersonal experience whereby a person is drawn towards transcendent mystery. With this model as a foundation, Swinton argues spirituality at its most universal “is the outward expression of the inner workings of the human spirit . . . [and] strives to answer deep existential questions pertaining to the meaning of life, suffering, illness and so forth, as well as recognizing the need for human interconnectivity and the desire to transcend the self in meaningful ways.” (pp.20-21)

In light of Swinton’s analysis, spirituality is understood to be a common human experience rooted in the desire for authentic selfhood which is expressed in the ongoing journey of self-discovery and self-realization within community. While spirituality is a common human experience, it is shaped by the lived experience of the individual person, the communities in which they live and the religious or secular nature of such communities.

Lonergan’s (1971) transcendent method of conscious intentionality both agrees with and extends Swinton’s analysis. There are two key principles within Lonergan’s method. The first is the dynamic pattern of human consciousness within the light of the revelation of God’s love. Such a dynamic pattern incorporates the four precepts of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility. As a result, when a person consciously attends to their
lived experience with rational curiosity, they are able to be reasonable in making rational judgments and be responsible in coming to decisions and carrying them out.

The second principle is the human capacity to be curious, to question and to uncover responses. Inherent to human questioning, Lonergan claims, is the question of God. Such an ability and desire to question allows a person to break through and transcend their current horizon of meaning making. Lonergan names this process as conversion. Conversion in this manner may take form in the realm of the moral, the intellectual and the religious. Other terms synonymous with conversion are transformation and self-transcendence (Haughton, 1980). While most people experience pivotal movements of conversion in their life, conversion is the ongoing dynamic within the human consciousness which allows a person to be both a transcended and a self-transcending being. Lonergan’s transcendental method of conscious intentionality therefore extends the analysis of Swinton by taking God’s revelation seriously, while recognizing God’s revealed love is mediated through human knowing and experiencing.

In view of the above analysis, spirituality is understood to be the ongoing process of self-discovery and self-realization whereby a person, in response to the drive of their human spirit, intentions to explore, name and claim their authentic selfhood in community. Christian spirituality encompasses the same process within the additional dimension of the experience of the drawing of God’s all embracing love, as revealed through the Christ of the Gospel Story and interpreted by the historical Christian religious tradition, as such tradition resonates with personal experience.

In summary, Christian spirituality is defined as the way a person names and claims authentic selfhood in community in response to the drawing of God’s love as framed through the horizon of the Christian religious tradition.

At this juncture it is also worth noting the human spirit, or integrative presence, is known to be resilient. Resilience here means instinctively self-righting (Deveson, 2003). Therefore, when a person’s human spirit has become disoriented; it has the capacity to reorient itself. Such a self-righting mechanism can be supported by an enriching environment, namely, one in which a person can safely attend to their felt experience within their story of disorientation (Deveson, 2003; the Barkers, 2008). Story as applied in this paper means a person’s reflection on and articulated interpretation of their lived experience through their particular horizon of meaning making. As such, story is central to identity formation (Coles, 1989; Shea, 1996). Nueger (2001) also confirms the significance of story. Her research finds the telling of story is particularly empowering for a person whose lived experience sits outside the dominant cultural stream. Thus as the research demonstrates, a person’s human spirit regains its unique equilibrium through attending to the felt experience within personal story.

The impact of the diagnosis of bipolar disorder on a person’s spirituality

To understand how bipolar disorder impacts a person’s spirituality, it is imperative to gain some insight into the complex nature of the disorder. The symptoms of bipolar disorder are comprehensively listed in the Mood Disorders section of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV, 1994. Due to the brevity of this paper and the focus of the topic, they will not be listed here. However, what is pertinent to the topic is that bipolar disorder is a mental disorder which affects a person’s mood state, shifting between the poles of depression and mania. Intrinsic to each mood state is a corresponding affect to the person’s
thinking and resultant actions. A person may experience the disorder in a mild to severe form. For example, the symptoms of a depressive episode may range from “decreased energy” to “feelings of worthlessness or guilt” to “a loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities” to “recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation, plans or attempts” (DSM-IV, 1994, p.320). The symptoms of a manic episode may range from an “inflated self-esteem or grandiosity” to “decreased need for sleep” to “excessive involvement in pleasurable activities with high potential for painful consequences” to psychotic features in which a person may become “physically assaultive or suicidal” or “identify with a deity or famous person” (DSM-IV, 1994, p.330). Because the mood affects a person’s reasoning, they might engage in activities which leave them in trouble with the law or in financial difficulty (DSM-IV, 1994). Therefore, during the depressive and manic episode a person may feel, think and act in ways which are uncharacteristic for them.

The symptoms of bipolar disorder require and often respond well to professional therapeutic interventions. However, the symptoms constitute simply one component of the disorder. Added to the symptoms are the ongoing consequences arising from the uncharacteristic behaviours. While recognizing the lived experience of each person diagnosed with bipolar disorder will be unique to them, such consequences can include numerous losses within a person’s outer world and inner being with the attendant and often unacknowledged grief (Lafond 1994). The losses listed below are drawn from autobiographical accounts recalled in Jamison (1997), McManamy (2006) and Solomon (2001).

Pre-diagnosis
The losses may include: loss of family, secure accommodation and employment. Also the loss of love; hope; meaning; belonging in self; belonging through: family, friends and jobs; control in one’s life. Added to the losses can be the experience of loneliness; despair; confusion; chaos; exhaustion; shame.

Post-diagnosis
The disempowering nature of the internalized and external stigma of living with a socially unacceptable label (Fawcett, Golden & Rosenfeld, 2000). Additional to the stigma can be the effects of medications. Hornbacher lists hers as “double vision until 2pm, dizziness, headaches, nausea, digestive problems, low blood sugar, anxiety, shaking hands” (2008, p.284). Furthermore, there is the often multifaceted process of recovery which involves a person’s reclamation of their physical, mental and emotional stability and spiritual wellbeing. Lafond (1994) asserts that within the recovery process grieving is often denied, even though grief is a natural and healthy response to loss.

The above is simply a brief synopsis of the complex nature of bipolar disorder. However, it portrays how both the symptoms of the disorder and the ongoing consequences of the lived experience can impact a person’s spirituality. The losses suffered may break open the person’s sense of self, like scattered jigsaw pieces. Such a breaking open may trigger existential questions around identity, purpose, belonging and religious expression. For a person so affected, the experience of bipolar disorder equates with true spiritual dryness.

As alluded to earlier, the Barkers’ (2008) research in narrative therapy indicates that recovery of spiritual wellbeing commences with the telling of the story of disorientation, attending particularly to the felt experience. In this way, resilience is cultivated through conscious grieving. From there, a person can begin to reflect upon their story and reframe the disorientating experiences into ones of meaning. Meaning here refers to the self-knowledge a
person gains by reflecting on lived experience. For example, reflecting on his experience of depression, Solomon now recognizes in himself “a heightened awareness of the joyfulness of everyday existence;” “the value of intimacy;” “to seek vitality in life rather than happiness;” “a deeper experience of love” (2001, pp.434-443). As a result, Solomon did not piece together his former sense of self, he transcended it. Furthermore, in Frank’s case, once the symptoms of mania were stabilized, reflection on his manic experience of identifying with Jesus Christ, led him to believe in a “higher source” (cited in Kelly, 2000, pp.186-87). These two examples illustrate the experience of bipolar disorder is not necessarily one exclusively of illness. The research of Lukoff (1985) also corroborates this line of argument.

Solomon’s experience as recorded above demonstrates that while a person’s past experience cannot be changed, it can however be reframed in such a way as the person experiences an interior shift from suffering with a mental disorder to living fully with it. To live fully means embracing the “unique, awesome, never to be repeated human being that [they] are called to be” (Deegan, 1996, p.92). Thus the experience of bipolar disorder can become the catalyst through which a person breaks through and transcends their former horizon of meaning making, thereby fostering spiritual development. However, for the Christian person so diagnosed, can the experience be one through which they may take steps towards God? The following theological reflection addresses this question.

The human experience of Grace – a theological reflection

Theological reflection on Grace within the Christian religious tradition is often shaped by the horizon of the afterlife (Haughton, 1980). However, afterlife is not the only horizon. This present life also offers ground for theological reflection. Such is the horizon of the following theological reflection.

The central character of the Christian Gospel Story is Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, born of Mary and Joseph and the one who came to be known as the Christ. Freeman claims the Gospel Story reveals Jesus the Christ “lived his humanity to its fullest” (2000, p.43). At the same time he bore witness to the good news that “God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them” (John 4:16 NRSV). In essence this is the story of Incarnation. Thus, the Christ of the Gospel Story awakens humanity to the new consciousness that all people are called to live from and into their authentic selfhood in the light of God’s all embracing love. The contemporary term applied to such an experienced reality is transforming union. Lynch asserts transforming union “does not annihilate [a person’s] resources and their identity by entering so deeply into them” (1974, p.112). Rather, the basis of transforming union is God’s all embracing love meeting with a person where they are at in their daily life, calling forth authentic selfhood. In this way, transforming union both befriends the actual self while at the same time generates self-transcendence. (See also Conn, 1998; Haughton, 1980; Keating, 1998). Within the Christian religious tradition such a process is named as the human experience of Grace.

While the ongoing experience of Grace is unique to each person, the intention of transforming union is not a privatized religious experience. Rather transforming union leads an individual towards authentic selfhood in community. Such an understanding is exemplified in the Gospel Story, where the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ reveal the qualities within love, qualities such as wisdom, forgiveness, mercy and compassion, allow a person to “see beyond image” (O’Donohue, 1997, p.92) and therefore “affect the deepest change” (O’Donohue, 1997, p.92). Examples of such transforming union in the Gospels are: the story of the
Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-6 NRSV). The story of Zaccheus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10) and the story of the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:30-39 NRSV). Each of these characters was an outsider in their own community. Each lived with their own stigma. However, in love Jesus the Christ met with each one as they were and transformation emerged. Such transformation comprised personal inner healing and restoration of communal belonging. These three stories reveal transforming union does not take form in a separate realm beyond ordinary life and personal development. Rather, they reveal that transforming union leads an individual towards authentic selfhood in community.

**Grace in response to bipolar disorder and spiritual dryness.**

The theological reflection reveals Grace as God’s initiative. Therefore at this juncture, it would be more applicable to turn the question around and ask: “can bipolar disorder be a true spiritual dryness through which God may make steps towards the person?” The response would have to be yes, if as argued above, Grace encompasses God’s all embracing love meeting with a person where they are in their daily life, befriending the actual self and generating self transcendence. A person diagnosed with bipolar disorder is not excluded. However, especially in the early stages of recovery, the experience of bipolar disorder might leave the person unable to receive God’s love, let alone respond. Barriers may have been erected through feelings such as worthlessness, guilt, anger or shame. The question for a spiritual director might be, “Does this render Grace impotent?” And if not, how might a person so affected experience the gift? In the early stages of the recovery process, it may well be through a human response that the person might again begin to experience their own self as lovable. As a result, they may once again become receptive and responsive to experience God’s all embracing love.

How may this actually take place? One way is to create a safe environment for the person to express their story to a person or persons who are willing to bear witness to it. To bear witness, according to Copeland, involves listening compassionately “before uttering a word” (2004, p.80). To bear witness to a story in this way is not a passive stance, for a “witness is never a spectator” (2004, p.80). As a result, those who choose to truly witness a story of human disorientation may well be called to their own place of “lament” (2004, p.81), which in turn may call into question their own understanding of Grace. It is for this reason that a person’s story of disorientation is often silenced. It is too painful and confusing for the one listening. Nevertheless as Ackermann (2004) challenges, if the suffering is repressed or denied, inner healing and transformation cannot take place. Such a line of argument concurs with the research of the Barkers and Lafond as cited earlier. However, where may a Christian person diagnosed with bipolar disorder find someone who is willing to bear witness to their story in the manner described above? A spiritual director is one person who is qualified to bear witness to a person’s story of disorientation within the dynamic awareness of Grace.

**One model of Christian spiritual direction**

The model of spiritual direction proposed is reflective in nature and conversational in style. The principal dynamic of the model is the human experience of Grace, as Grace is proposed within this paper. Consequently, the intention of this model of spiritual direction is for one person (directee), in the company of a qualified other (director), to intentionally engage in their ongoing life process of transforming union. For this reason, the content of the spiritual direction session is a directee’s story of faith. Faith here finds its expression in the three
interconnecting dimensions of general meaning making, being drawn to ask questions with regard to transcendent mystery and discovering belonging within a religious tradition (Fowler, 1995). Accordingly, a person’s story of faith as expressed and reflected upon within spiritual direction includes three interrelated dimensions. The first is the directee’s everyday lived experience. The second is the directee’s experience of God’s love or, perhaps perceived absence of God’s love in their everyday life. The third is the experience of belonging, or apparent lack of belonging within their religious tradition. For this reason, ongoing Christian spiritual direction is an invaluable spiritual resource for the Christian person.

The flow of story is distinct within spiritual direction. Rather than a formal autobiographical narrative statement, the story expressed within spiritual direction may be more like disarranged jigsaw pieces, which as Ruffing maintains, are not “selectively organized” (1989, p.118) and have not yet been “fully assimilated into the life story” (1989, p.118). Thus in each session the directee sets the agenda by sharing from whatever is uppermost in their awareness at that particular moment. As such, the story shared by the directee within each spiritual direction session is often messy and seemingly disconnected to the previous session (Ruffing, 1989). However, over time a directee begins to see the connections within their story of faith. In so doing, they begin to experience their self as a unified being.

Foundational to the model of spiritual direction is Lonergan's method of intentional consciousness, which commences with attending to lived experience. Lonergan claims that while a person needs to be attentive to their whole experience, it is their joys and sorrows, fears and desires which are of particular importance (1971, p.9). Even when a person’s feelings might seem shocking to them, Lonergan states it is important not to “brush them aside, overrule them, or ignore them” (1971, p.33). However, the felt experience is not an end-in-itself. Rather, it provides authentic self-knowledge which gives intentional consciousness its “drive and power” (1971, p.30). For when a person recognizes and befriends their actual self in this way, transformation may emerge. On the other hand as Lonergan attests, if a person does not attend to their felt experience they become alienated from their authentic self (1971, p.34). Thus it is through exploration of the felt experience within their faith story that a person comes to truly discern their inner movements towards, or away from authentic self and therefore God (Conroy, 1993; Ruffing, 1989).

The function of the spiritual director
The spiritual director is a person who is specifically trained in the method of listening to and assisting a directee to express, reflect upon and deepen their story of faith. The director approaches each session with an attitude of openness to bear witness to the directee’s story of faith, while also listening for the invitational presence of God’s love. As a result the director does not offer prescriptive answers for the directee’s questions. Rather, a director generates an environment of nonjudgmental compassion within which the directee feels safe enough to express whichever felt experience is most affective in them in the present moment. The director then assists the directee to attend to their felt experience in such a way as to generate authentic self knowledge within the light of God’s love. Such attending to, may initially take a number of creative forms beyond simply verbal communication. For example: art journaling (Hieb, 1996), clay modelling, poetry writing. Also, Liebert (2008) endorses the practices of exploring bodily felt awareness, imaginative image exploration and allowing nature to give rise to insight. Such creative responses enable a person to attend to their felt experience, even when verbalization may be difficult.
The significance of the model of spiritual direction for a Christian person diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

The model of spiritual direction is flexible enough to meet the needs of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder for a number of reasons. Firstly, the director is one who is trained to assist the directee to attend to their story of disorientation in a number of creative ways, while at the same time bearing witness to God’s love. Consequently, the process of conscious grieving can take place within the dynamic awareness of Grace. Also, through the nonjudgmental, compassionate human response to their story of disorientation, the directee may then begin to experience God’s love as present with them in their suffering. Therefore, the model offers an environment in which a directee may await their experiential reality of God’s Grace.

Secondly, due to the ongoing nature of spiritual direction, the model offers an environment in which a directee may continue to explore their spiritual questions within their horizon of meaning making, that is, their daily lived experience, their experience of God and their Christian values. Additionally, due to the conversational style and emphasis on the directee’s story of faith, an unspoken awareness occurs whereby the directee assumes responsibility for their own spiritual journey. As a consequence, the directee may rediscover their personal authority and authentic selfhood in the light of God’s love.

When would spiritual direction be appropriate?
The Barkers' research found the telling of story is valuable even when the person is at their “lowest ebb” (http://tidal-model.com/What is the Tidal Model.htm, 2008). While such research takes place in the context of narrative therapy, the theory could be extended to this model of spiritual direction. For in this model, a directee’s faith story is central. However, the Barkers’ research applies particularly to group narrative therapy. What does this mean for the model of spiritual direction, which is ordinarily experienced on an individual basis? Perhaps a form of group spiritual accompaniment may prove more beneficial in the earlier stages of the recovery process. Such a suggestion draws together the Barkers’ research with that of Dougherty (2003) on group spiritual direction. Perhaps through group spiritual accompaniment the participants may experience companionship and mutual support within Christian community as they await their experiential reality of God’s Grace. For this reason, in the early stages of recovery a form of group spiritual accompaniment which draws on the flexibility of the model as proposed, may well be even more significant than individual spiritual direction.

The boundaries of this model of spiritual direction
While it is claimed that a spiritual director has a significant contribution to make in the spiritual journey of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder, there is a number of boundaries to be recognized. Firstly, Christian spiritual direction is not to be undertaken in preference to therapeutic treatments. Spiritual direction would ordinarily be recognized and offered as ancillary to the overall clinical treatment program. Secondly, there needs to be agreement by both the clinician and the spiritual director if a person is going to engage in both disciplines at the same time. Thirdly, spiritual direction is not to be viewed as mandatory. It must be the choice of the person so diagnosed. However, how can a person choose if they do not even know it exists?
Conclusion

In light of the definition of Christian spirituality as applied in this paper, it was demonstrated that a person may incur a number of losses due to the experience of bipolar disorder. Such losses may impact a person’s spirituality by breaking open their meaning making processes, thus disorientating their sense of identity, purpose and experience of belonging in their world. For a person so affected, the experience of bipolar disorder equates to true spiritual dryness.

In terms of a theological reflection on Grace in response to the question “can bipolar disorder be a true spiritual dryness through which a person may take steps towards God?” it was demonstrated that Grace is God’s initiative of lovingly meeting with a person where they are in their daily life, calling forth transforming union. Transforming union was shown to be an ongoing process of befriending the actual self while generating self transcendence in the light of God’s love. As such, a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder is not excluded from Grace. Therefore, in light of the nature of Grace and the experience of bipolar disorder, it could be stated that bipolar disorder can be a true spiritual dryness through which God may take steps towards the person and the person may take steps towards God.

However, it was also demonstrated that especially in the early stages of recovery a person may not be able to receive and respond to God’s loving invitation. For the person so affected, the presence of another who is trained and willing to bear witness to the story of disorientation within the dynamic awareness of Grace is significant.

The model of spiritual direction as proposed was demonstrated to be flexible enough to meet the needs of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The model provides a safe individual or group environment for a person to creatively express and reflect upon their story of disorientation within the dynamic awareness of Grace. Also, when appropriate, the spiritual director can assist the directee to reflect on their experiences of depression and/or mania and reframe them into experiences with meaning. Furthermore, given that spiritual direction is an ongoing spiritual practice, a directee is able to continue to engage with their spiritual questions within their horizon of meaning making, including their experience of God and their Christian values. For these reasons, the model of spiritual direction as proposed has a significant contribution to make to the spiritual journey of a person diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

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Poetry

Anne Powell*

Going deeper

Go down
down
down
to the place in you
where fire and silence dwell ~
the place of power.

Go down
down
down
to that pool in you
of weedless water ~
the place of knowing.

Go down
down
down
down
the moss bright path
to your Grandmother’s house ~
the place of song.

Go down
down
down
to the last strawberry ~
freshness of God.

* Anne Powell was born in Taranaki. She is a Cenacle Sister living in a community in Wellington (NZ) whose area of mission is fostering spirituality particularly through retreats and spiritual direction. She has two collections of poems published (Firesong, Enough clear water) and appears in several NZ anthologies and journals. Her third book, Tree of a thousand voices, is being published in 2010.
Moments

In moments of loss and pain
sit quietly among green of fern
and remember
all is cyclical.

Inside the bells

The trees are in stillness
In stillness are the trees.

The feathers are in lightness
In lightness are the feathers.

The pain is in emptiness
In emptiness is the pain.

The depth is in going
In going is the depth.

The serenity is in presence
In presence is the serenity.

The listening is in quiet
In quiet is the listening

for sounding of bells over water.

Inside who you are

Inside who you are
is a tree in its rightful season.
if only you’d stop
turn and
sit down
against the trunk
spread out your picnic
of egg and bacon pie,
and wine and dine
your companionable past and present.
Inside your guests
fortune’s sweet future awaits you.
Inside the quiet

You could learn a lot
just sitting watching God
take tea with Buddha
in the tent at the top of the world.
They keep the flap open
so you can walk
inside the quiet and cool
and see the small cups that you thought
too tiny for the hand of God
who after all holds the whole world.
That’s why God needs to rest
on a cloud of cushions
and contemplate with Buddha
the art of letting go.

Visit us

Visit us
in breath of wind
in endurance of cliffs
in glow of kowhai
in silence of stars
in solitude of moon
in eyes of the poor
in embrace of a mother
in pleasure of friends
in faith that does justice.
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