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Editorial

The growth of Christian faith in the global south shows that secularization has not had the last word in modern times. Religion plays and will continue to play an important role in the lives of many, especially in Africa. While the African continent encompasses 54 countries and a marvelous cultural diversity, Africans share a common or similar conviction in the presence of the Supreme Being or Creator in their lives. This faith, expressed in many ways, has persisted through history. How much the religious voice of Africa will impact the world has yet to be observed. Yet looking at world geographical and religious trends, at Africa's population growth, and at the fervent religiosity, the high level of commitment to faith so closely connected with Africans (i.e. the belief in a Divinity, God or Allah), and the correspondence of religion with the people's well-being, it seems likely that Africa will play a major role in the future religious evolution of humanity.

Statistically, for the last century, the global south has been mounting steadily in population, while the western nations, including Japan, are relatively static (or have begun to shrink). Meanwhile, according to a report from CARA (based in Georgetown University) in 2015, the Catholic population in Africa has grown by 238 percent since 1980 and is approaching 200 million. 'If current trends in affiliation and differential fertility among religious groups continue, in 2040, 24 percent of Africans will be Catholic. This would result in a Catholic population of 460,350,000 in Africa.' Scholars project for the latter part of this century a huge impact of African believers and their descendants on world religions and cultures. (Philip Jenkins, *Fertility and Faith: The Demographic Revolution and the Transformation of World Religions*, Baylor University Press, 2020.)

Pope Francis once lost his patience with a lady in St Peter's Square who requested a baby blessing for a dog in a bag. On May 12 this year he warned against a culture that is 'unfriendly, if not hostile, to the family, centered as it is on the needs of the individual, where individual rights are continually claimed and the rights of the family are not discussed.' Raising a family has become 'a titanic effort, instead of being a shared value that all recognize and support.' Likewise, the Africa Synodal Continental Assembly states: 'Rooted in African anthropological principles and cultural values are community spirit, sense of family, teamwork, solidarity, inclusivity, hospitality and conviviality..., healthy seeds for the birth and growth of a truly synodal Church in Africa and in the world.' Incorporating those values, the Church, as family of God, may resist secularization and foster human development in Africa and throughout the world.

Constantin Konyi Kalamba

Meg Nakano

Richard Foster's Disciplines of Faith

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A friend in the process of rejecting Christianity gave me her copy of *The Celebration of Discipline,* by Richard J. Foster (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 2008 [1980]) which had been sent to her by her grandmother. The book proved transformative for me as for many of its millions of readers. The title did give me pause, as discipline is not exactly something to be celebrated when no difference is recognized between self-discipline and externally imposed discipline such as 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' military codes of conduct, or the mortification of the flesh in medieval monasteries. But even though this book mainly explores self-discipline, it is not a safe armchair voyage.

Foster is a Quaker clergyman, a graduate of George Fox College and Fuller Theological Seminary, and he shows the hallmark Quaker preference for the plain and functional in all aspects of life, including writing. Quakers traditionally have meetings instead of worship services, and have the historical reputation of being an assembly without clergy or ceremonies. They do, however, value education highly, and conduct discussions following the guideline, 'say nothing that does not further the discussion.'

The book was prompted by the superficiality that Foster found in his first congregation. Foster reflected that 'people are *trying* to be like Jesus, instead of *training* to be like Jesus' (italics mine). From the start he makes it clear that he intends the readers to put the disciplines he expounds into action in their personal lives. The 'discipline' in this book is similar to the Japanese idea of '*shitsuke*,' 躾, which in paper-folding is the setting of folds in a flat piece of paper so that when the paper is manipulated, it will fold easily, straight, and true to what has been pre-set. If we can pre-set the folds and creases of habit in our lives, so that the fabric of our life falls along the best lines at critical times, the result will bring simplicity and clarity. The aim of the book is the creation of patterns of thoughts and behavior, and the formation of those habits is indeed something to celebrate.

Negative reviews posted online object that Foster presents 'nothing but

Catholic mysticism.' Given that his champions of disciplined faith include Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), Francis de Sales (1565-1622), Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614-1691), Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751), Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), and Thomas Merton (1915-1968), it is easy to see how this misperception arose. But Foster's aim is not our knowledge of Roman Catholic spiritual practices. He works to establish the depth of their roots in our culture, and their value as actions in our daily lives. A second criticism is that there is 'no hermeneutics,' which overlooks the purpose of the book: forming the habits for a deeper practice of faith, not an armchair discussion of them.

Foster opens with a challenge: 'Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primarily spiritual problem.' He tells us that 'the Disciplines are classical because they are central to experiential Christianity.' 'The Bible called people to such Disciplines as fasting, prayer, worship, and celebration but gave almost no instruction about how to do them.' Yet at the same time, 'The life that is pleasing to God is not a series of religious duties.'

Foster warns against pitfalls that can arise in the practice of the disciplines. One is legalistic rigidity, which makes the disciplines regulations for control rather than the means to change our perceptions of life. Another is to see the disciplines as exercises for the pious, rather than calls to wage peace in a world troubled by war, or as a call to engage in work for social justice. A third pitfall is to see them as independent virtuous ends, a way to earn favor with God, instead of integrated means for placing ourselves before God as a living sacrifice to his aims for the world. We are not to center ourselves on the practices of discipline to the extent that we lose sight of our true focus, the greater good that is Christ himself.

Foster expounds twelve disciplines in three groups: inward, outward, and corporative. Individuals may find it easier to absorb or create change in their lives based on one group rather than another.

The Four Inward Disciplines

Meditation. When the book was written in 1978, meditation was either a biofeedback phenomenon or a transcendental Eastern religious practice that aimed to lower blood pressure, empty the mind, and free the practitioner from the burdens and pains of this world. With meditation, the individual could understand personal identity and reality to be illusions. At the time, it was radical for Foster to stress that meditation was not limited to exotic Eastern religions, but has historically also been Western, and that the Western (Christian) practice goes far beyond simple detachment from daily confusion in having attachment to God as its goal.

Prayer. Foster debunks the secular view of prayer as deluded and useless talking to oneself. He began his study of prayer by copying all references to prayer in the Gospels and pasting them onto a single sheet. Looking at the results, he concluded, 'Either the excuses and rationalizations for unanswered prayer I had been taught were wrong, or Jesus' words were wrong.' He draws an analogy to a TV set: if we turn it on and nothing happens, we do not decide that electronic media do not really exist; we assume the set may not be plugged in, the connection or channel settings may be faulty; something has gone wrong and we can discover and correct it. The same attitude, he says, should be taken toward prayer.

As Foster describes it, our first step into prayer must be to quiet our own activity and 'listen to the silent thunder of the Lord of hosts.' We should be moved by compassion in our prayers, and not make them too complicated or a rote recital. Foster advocates 'not prayer in addition to work, but prayer simultaneous with work.' The main function of prayer is listening, not asking things of God. Our universe is not closed; we are God's fellow workers, working with him in determining the outcomes of things.

Fasting. Fasting, like meditation, suffers misperception in popular culture. Foster notes that he could not find a single book on the subject of Christian fasting from 1861 to 1954. The general view when he wrote was that fasting injured health, that denying oneself anything desired was somehow wrong. This idea lingers even today, even though fasting is popular as a diet fad, practiced for semi-medical reasons, and as a way toward mental clarity. No consideration is given to taming the demands of appetite and food consumption to create personal freedoms. Yet freedom and growth are precisely the goals that Foster stresses.

Study. Foster writes, 'Many Christians remain in bondage to fears and anxieties simply because they do not avail themselves of the Discipline of study. They may be faithful in church attendance and earnest in fulfilling their religious duties and still are not changed.' Foster is not urging us to become academics, which he views as susceptible to problematic excesses. Foster has higher goals, and comments that 'Ecstatic experiences will not free us. Getting "high on Jesus" will not free us. Without a knowledge of the truth, we will not be free.' Study bears on both verbal and nonverbal books. The latter refers to intent reading of the goodness of nature and of one's own being.

Four steps in study are outlined: 1. Repetition, which affects the inner mind, deepening understanding, and changing behavior as it creates new habits. These are liberating habits, not the enslaving ones that fasting overcomes. 2. Concentration, a focus on the task at hand, which we see today being seriously eroded by modern media and the distractions in our lifestyles. 3. Comprehension. 'Jesus, as you remember, reminds us that it is not just the truth that sets us free, but the *knowledge* of the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). Comprehension focuses on the knowledge of the truth… insight and

discernment… provides the basis for true perception of reality.' 4. Reflection, which enables us to see things from a different viewpoint. Humility is a foremost requisite, for arrogance prevents learning. Pride in having advanced degrees has not only mistaken the accumulation of information for knowledge; it has failed in the spiritual practice of study.

The Four Outward Disciplines

Simplicity. The Outward Disciplines present a more direct challenge to the values in our secular lives. The discipline of simplicity is dangerous to all of our social pretensions. It is rooted in past ages, and skeptical of the new imperatives: to conserve electricity, eschew fossil fuels, shrink our 'carbon footprint.' 'Simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.' It is also incompatible with asceticism. 'Asceticism finds no place for a "land flowing with milk and honey." Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God.'

Foster gives homely advice: buy things for their usefulness, not their status; use them until they are worn out; give away unneeded possessions; ignore all sales pitches for the latest gadgets; avoid the bondage of 'buy now, pay later.' Thwart addiction to habits or substances, including alcohol, coffee, tea, reading, and online browsing. Learn to enjoy things without owning them, which includes an appreciation of all creation. Speak and write plainly. Aim at excellence in your work without regard for what others may say or think. Allow unfavorable comments about yourself to stand without correcting the narrative into something more flattering (compare St Thérèse de Lisieux). The list of suggestions for further reading includes Foster's book *Freedom of Simplicity* (HarperCollins, 2005).

Solitude. Foster opens with a quote from Teresa of Ávila: 'Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon Him in yourself,' and follows that with 'Jesus calls us from loneliness to solitude.' What I found most interesting was a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'Let him who cannot be alone beware of community…. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.' Social isolation and lack of face-to-face community is an unexpected problem in our media-connected world. Foster takes up 'the dark night of the soul' described by St John of the Cross. The dry, lost feeling may be a privileged opportunity to get past the superficial 'slush' that an over-dependence on living through our emotions can bring, and Foster likens it to the anesthesia that takes effect before surgery can be performed. It is God drawing us away from distractions, often so that we can face the deeper problems that we have avoided resolving in our lives.

Submission. Then Foster moves into a discipline that in secular society today is not understood and is at high risk of wrongful application:

submission. He describes what this Discipline will do for us, the tremendous freedom in 'the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.' Only by laying down that burden can we discern the difference between genuine issues and stubborn self-will, and gain the ability to value others, to have their dreams and plans become important to us. The real issue in submission is the attitude of consideration and respect for one another.

Foster goes on to describe the most radical social teaching of Jesus: Revolutionary Subordination. In servant leadership all claims to a privileged position are rejected. This 'cross-life' undermines social order based on power and self-interest. Ancient appeals to submission are based on how the gods had established things, other appeals are based on brute force, both of which are an affront to genuine biblical submission.

Revolutionary subordination to God will mean meekly refusing a destructive or illegal command and being willing to suffer the consequences of the refusal. Seven levels or 'acts' of submission are outlined, from submission to the Triune God through to the world, in our determination to live as a responsible member of an increasingly irresponsible world. In the study section, Foster mentions today's garbled concepts of submission: the doormat, the pleaser, the dependent, and the manipulator, all of which miss the power of authentic submission.

Service. The Discipline of Service is symbolized by the towel, while it is the cross that symbolizes submission. With the discipline of service, we are on ground that is less philosophically risky. Good deeds are widely appreciated. But as Foster points out, 'If true service is to be understood and practiced, it must be distinguished clearly from "self-righteous service."' 'Self-righteous service is impressed with the "big deal." It is concerned to make impressive gains on ecclesiastical scoreboards.' It 'banishes us to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial.... Service enables us to say "no!" to the world's games of promotion and authority. It abolishes our need (and desire) for a "pecking order."'

Service, for those following Christ's example, is not something that will earn us a medal. 'When we choose to be a servant, we surrender the right to decide who and when we will serve. We become available and vulnerable.' St Paul frequently boasted of his slavery to Christ, which challenges our modern efforts to soften that image, due to fear of a 'worm theology' that devalues human ability and potential. Foster explores the various types of service, from hidden service to the service of small things, guarding the reputation of others, hospitality, listening, as well as the service of being served, and finally the service of sharing the word of Life with one another. And we are reminded to stay aware that we are not omnipresent, and discern where balance in our lives means saying 'no.'

The Four Corporate Disciplines

Finally, we reach the disciplines that require a group environment before they can be practiced as intended within Christianity. The focus is on specific activities in which Christians should engage as part of their religion: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Refreshingly, no mention is made of the types of corporate governance and interpersonal management that maximizes the potential to 'grow the church' that are so popular in this age of mega-churches and online ministries.

Confession. The chapter opens with a quote from St Augustine: 'The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.' Unfortunately, as Foster notes, 'Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others.' This is where the general, public group confession enters the worship practices, with its stated general absolution. In some respects, the general confession serves as a gateway to personal, private confession, where a personal, physical demonstration of forgiveness becomes possible through the presence of the clergy. In another respect, the general confession is a declaration, heartfelt or not, and a reminder to the people gathered there, that they are not in a club for perfected saints, but a gathering of people in need of forgiveness and health, having 'left undone what they should have done, and done what they should not have done.' Through this Discipline, mutually engaged in by all members of the congregation, we are brought 'under the shadow of the Almighty.'

Worship. Worship of God has higher priority than service to society. The liturgy beloved of 'high church' believers is now being re-examined by the less formal 'low church' congregations. Worship should involve our emotions, and our whole body. Careful preparation creates a holy expectancy of meeting God in worship, like Brother Lawrence who met God in worship because he had been seeing God in his kitchen all week long.

Guidance. Foster places guidance in the section on corporate discipline because he is advocating a process closer to what others would call discernment: a group is called to examine, study, meditate, pray, and discuss what is to be done going forward. He recalls the discernment of the Quakers with regard to slavery. Although the Quakers started in England, they had been granted land in North America and encouraged to emigrate. As a unified body of believers they came to the decision in 1758 that slavery was an evil to be banned amongst all members. By 1776 when they joined the revolt against the crown, they had set free all the slaves that they had previously held, paying them wages for work done as much as they were able. They then

proceeded to aid escaping slaves traveling north. Today Foster advocates practicing discernment until all can reach agreement—in contrast to the common situation where disagreement prompts either the imposition of decisions or the breaking of church unity.

Celebration. When the poor receive good things, the blind see and the lame can walk, debts are forgiven, we experience a sense of elation that is largely missing in our modern world. Apathy and depression are rampant today, and part of the problem is how hard we have been pressed 'toward useful work and rational calculation.' Devout folk 'should be the most free, alive, and interesting. Celebration adds a note of gaiety, festivity, hilarity to our lives.'

There is something sad in people running from church to church trying to get an injection of 'the joy of the Lord.' Foster discourages celebrations that really don't celebrate anything and tells us not say Grace at the start of the meal and then complain about the food. Praising God when difficulty enters our lives, in its worst forms, denies the destruction and pain wrought by evil, and often ends up casting God as the author of that evil.

Foster advocates reclaiming the festivals of Christianity, going beyond pseudo gaiety and the 'froth' of 'Smile if you love Jesus.' The first question in the study section is, 'Do you enjoy God?' and the last is 'At the close of this study what covenant must you make with the Lord?'

Jean Greisch

Meister Eckhart's Faith

Jean Greisch born in Koerich (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg), 1942, was Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Institut Catholique de Paris. His books include *Le buisson ardent et les lumières de la raison: L'invention de la philosophie de la religion*, 3 vol. (Paris: Cerf, 2002-2004)

A particularly fearless champion of faith was Eckhart of Hochheim, better known as Meister Eckhart. The battle he fought took place primarily in the arena of his inner life, although he also faced external opponents who challenged his orthodoxy. Born around 1260 in Thuringia, he entered the Dominican convent of Erfurt in 1275, becoming its prior in 1294. His career can be summed up in the Dominican motto: *Contemplata aliis tradere*, Aquinas wrote: 'As it is greater to illuminate than only to shine, so it is greater to transmit to others what one has contemplated than only to contemplate' (*Sicut enim maius est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita maius est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari'; Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 188, a. 6). Metaphysician, theologian, preacher, spiritual master, mystic: each of these epithets fits Eckhart, and none of them can be separated from the others. He has left us no autobiography that would allow us to attribute to him a particular mystical experience, but dizzying passages in his works attest to his personal experience, often stated in terms of a 'breakthrough' (*Durchbruch*), making the soul 'equal to God and of the color of God as much as possible, and illuminating it inwardly by lifting it beyond itself into the divine light' (Pr. 31; 1:353).[1]

In his 'speculative mysticism' the boldness of metaphysical speculation and the intensity of mystical experience form an inseparable whole, as was also the case with the Neoplatonic philosophers. There have been many attempts to bring Eckhart's thought and spirituality closer to Buddhism or Vedānta, but he remains in the line of Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Pseudo-Denys, and Maximus the Confessor, all of whom see the soul becoming

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[1] *Pr.* = Meister Eckhart, *Predigten,* ed. Niklaus Largier (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), 2 voll.

by grace what God is by nature.

From 1325, Eckhart had to counter accusations from Henry of Virneburg, bishop of Cologne. He died on 28 January 1328, before being able to defend himself in Avignon against new accusations that found their expression in the bull *In Agro Dominico* (27 March 1329), signed by Pope John XXII. Written in large part by Cardinal Jacques Fournier, the future Pope Benedict XII, the indictment targeted 28 propositions extracted from the Latin works and German preaching of a 'certain Eckhart, from German countries, doctor of Holy Scripture, as they say, and professor of the order of Friars Preachers,' suspected of having 'wanted to know more than was appropriate,' and of not having 'wanted to do so with moderation and according to the measure of faith.' Eleven of his statements were judged to be false in form, and 17 others 'ill-sounding.'

In 1992, a request for rehabilitation, submitted by the Dominican General Chapter to Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, was rejected as irrelevant, since Eckhart had never been condemned in his own name.

Eckhart's Engagement with the 'Things Themselves' of Faith

Paradoxically, Eckhart rarely speaks of the act of believing. This is not because he is not interested in faith, but because all his thought is turned towards the very things of faith: God, the Trinity, the Word of God, grace, and eternal life. While drawing on numerous authorities, he never ceased to think in the first person. His speculative theology, inseparable from spiritual practice, was a high-risk investment of his entire existence. Planning to divide his works according to the three headings of the *Opus tripartitum*: the Book of general propositions, the Book of questions and problems, and finally the Book of his commentaries and interpretations of Sacred Scripture and the Latin Sermons—he advances a daring hermeneutical wager which was enough to alert his inquisitors: 'new and rare ideas exert a more agreeable attraction on the soul than usual ideas, even if these are better and more widespread.'

A subtle distinction, but one that is particularly close to his heart, is that between 'believing in God' and 'believing God' (*Pr.* 62; 1:655ff). To 'believe God' is to establish a relationship with God similar to that between a debtor and his creditor. Eckhart ruthlessly criticizes the mercantilist mindset underlying this. When Jesus drives the merchants from the temple forecourts, his purifying gesture has a radical spiritual meaning: to clear an empty space in the soul that only God can fill. 'This temple, in which God wants to rule powerfully according to his will, is the human soul, which he so well formed and created in his likeness.... God wants to have this temple empty, so that it contains nothing other than him alone' (*Pr.* 1; 1:10). Good Christians who perform virtuous deeds with an eye on reward from God or the salvation of their souls are merchants.

For Eckhart true experience is interior, and words and concepts have validity only to the degree that they refer back to it: 'What can truly be put in words, that must come out from within and move by the inner form, and not come in from outside.... It properly lives in the inmost part of the soul. This is where all things are present to you and inwardly alive and seeking and are best and are highest' (*Pr.* 4; 1:50). This level of experience, immediate and inward, is the criterion of all validity and truth for Eckhart.

But Eckhart does not clutch at any kind of experience. His thorough intellectualism makes him a critic of the raptures and trances on which some exalted souls pride themselves. The only experience that interests him and that he seeks to promote is Christian theological experience, brought to its highest degree of incandescence by the practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

St Augustine made possible a Christian baptism of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of conversion and Eckhart followed suit, to the point that he has sometimes been referred to as a 'second Augustine.' To be converted is to go back to the origin from which one went forth. This idea of conversion favors a convergence of metaphysics and mysticism. Believing consists in an intellectual and spiritual journey, a journey made by one who seeks God in all things and wants to find him at all times everywhere and in everyone in all modes. To discover that God is equally near to us in all things is the key to unceasing spiritual growth.

Desire to Be, Desire for God, Desire for Unity

There is a universal hunger and thirst for being, which determines the relationship of the creature to God: 'We are through being (*per esse*); therefore, insofar as we are, and as beings, we feed on and are nourished by being. And so all beings feed on God as being, and all beings thirst for being' (*LW* 2:276).[2]

No shadow of the negative and negativity slips into the fullness of divine being. Negation is an imperfection that must be kept away from the divine Being, because 'in God there is no place at all for negation'; for he is 'the one who is' and 'he is one' (*LW* 2:289). In contrast, the finitude of the creature is manifested in the fact that it has to beg of God, who is being itself, the being that it cannot give to itself. According to Eckhart, the essence of being cannot be understood in logical terms, it is grounded in the experience of finitude as failure.

'Know this: all creatures hunt and operate by nature for this purpose, that they become equal to God. The sky would never unfold if it did not hunt for and seek God or something resembling God. If God were not in all things nature would effect or desire nothing in any things; for, whether it please or

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[2] *LW* = Meister Eckhart, *Lateinische Werke* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956).

displease you, whether you know it or do not know it, yet secretly in its most inward, nature seeks or aims for God' (*Pr*. 69; 2:48).

The thesis that 'the union of the soul with God is a union in being' aroused theological unease. Eckhart denied that he saw the soul as so united to God that it would merge with him or become a portion of God himself. The fusional images which illustrate the renunciation of the individual ego so as to be 'enclosed in being,' as a drop of water melts into the sea or as the dawn is absorbed by the sun, do not sanction the erasure of all difference. Yet even if we reject the pantheistic misunderstanding, Eckhart's language about the ontological union of the soul with God remains rather dizzying: 'There, God is for the soul as if he were God only to be for the soul; for if God withheld from the soul aught of his being (*wesen*) or of his beingness (*istikait*), by which he is himself, were it only so much as a hair, then he could not be God; so totally is the soul one with God' (*Pr*. 64; 1:672).

Being, in virtue of its universality, delivers us from our conceptual idols which fixate us on the singularity of a *this* and a *that*. To unite with God, the soul that is aware that 'it is proper to God that nothing alien befalls him, nothing is imported, nothing added' (*Pr*. 44; 1:472), must waive any particularity. 'If you want God to be your own, make yourself his own and keep nothing but him in your sights; then, he is a beginning and an end of all your action, just as his deity lies in this, that he is God' (*Pr*. 14; 1:170).

Gelassenheit **and** ***Abgeschiedenheit***

In his treatise on *Abgeschiedenheit,* detachment, Eckhart makes it the greatest of virtues, still greater than humility, mercy, and even love, because, beyond all desire, it makes the soul receptive to God alone. The austere term *Abgeschiedenheit* expresses a demand for separation and a radical detachment which takes to heart the declaration of the Synoptic Christ that he came to bring the sword on earth (Lk 12:21), 'in order to cut off and separate all things.' The spiritual and intellectual challenge is not then to bring everything together in a botched synthesis, but first to detach and separate.

Eckhart makes this demand one of the fundamental themes of his preaching: 'When I preach, I usually speak of detachment and that one must be deprived of oneself and of all things. Second, that one must be inwardly formed into the simple good which is God. Third, that one think of the great nobility that God has placed in the soul, so that the human being may come to God in a wonderful way. Fourth, of the pure clarity of the divine nature; the brilliance that there is in the divine nature is inexpressible. God is a Word, an unexpressed Word' (*Pr*. 53; 1:564). In these four basic propositions, the preacher has his listeners pass from the evangelical requirement of poverty, to a fundamental law of the interior life, and to his idea of the nobility of the intellectual soul, and finally to his conception of the divinity of God.

Sermon 52 develops in all its intransigence a triple demand: *to want*

nothing, to know nothing, to have nothing.

To want nothing: this demand is directed against ascetic voluntarism. Eckhart treats the champions of asceticism and mortification as donkeys, because they fail to understand that, far from delivering them from their own self, asceticism only exalts it. As long as there is still a willing subject, mortifying himself, proud of his ascetic performances, true spiritual poverty remains at the door.

To know nothing: one must free oneself from all *libido sciendi*, which also remains, more or less, a desire for possession, mastery, and control.

To have nothing: we must strip ourselves of all forms of possession and property, not only of external material goods, but also of what, in a certain way, is identical with our own being: the self, and even God in it, as an intentional object of mystical desire.

The requirement of detachment implies the radical renunciation of everything that, near or far, clings to a singularity, including that which is expressed in a proper name. Not that Eckhart would advocate a general indifference that would prevent him from thinking of others. But for him, the best way to care for others is to practice forgetting oneself and all humans by pouring into Oneness for them (*Pr*. 64; 1: 672).

The term *Abgeschiedenheit* refers also to the radical separation from death. Eckhart does not shy away from the most drastic consequences of the exhortation to die to the world in order to be reborn in God.

Mortification is more than a mere ascetic exercise, for the soul must die a total death in the incomprehensible wonder of the Deity. The spiritual maxim 'Detach and separate' also has a metaphysical stake. It spells an exodus from the realm of the accidental, where 'this' and 'that' hold sway: 'turn away from all things and hold yourself nakedly in being; for what is exterior to being is accident, and all accidents create whys' (*Pr*. 39; 1:426).

Gelassenheit is the second pillar of Eckhart's spirituality. The numerous occurrences of the verb *lâzen* and of the participle *gelâzen* in his writing must be protected against voluntarist and quietist misreadings. *Gelassenheit* is not a passive 'letting be' or a vague 'serenity.' It 'leaves' everything to which the heart is attached: the goods of the world, property, success, fame, well-being, etc., all of which are obstacles to inner freedom. The renunciation is so arduous that it is doubtful if anyone apart from Christ has fully carried it out—all the more so in that it is not a way of doing but a way of being. It is not just a matter of detaching oneself from creatures in order to cling only to the Creator. *Gelassenheit* further implies a radical renunciation of any pictorial representation one has of God, by learning to 'abandon God through God himself' (2:346).

'Those who are not equal to anything—only they are equal to God. Divine being is not equal to anything; there is neither image nor form in it. To souls who are thus equal the Father gives equally and withholds nothing from them. Whatever the Father can accomplish, he gives to such a soul equally, yes, if it does not hold itself more equal to itself than to another, and it must

not be nearer to itself than to another' (*Pr*. 6; 1:82) This 'empty passage' has led some Japanese philosophers, such as Ueda Shizuteru, to try to bring the Rhenish Master closer to the Buddhist doctrine of *śūnyatā*.

To be detached and separate is to leave the register of 'why,' which not only determines a certain style of questioning, but which is linked with a number of behaviors and attitudes. For example, the attitude underlying the intentionality of the prayer of petition, which Eckhart suspects is concealing some kind of idolatry: 'When I ask for something, I ask [in fact] nothing; when I ask for nothing, I am praying properly. When I am gathered where all things are present, those that have passed and those that are now and those that are to come, they are all equally near and equally one; they are all in God and they are all in me. There, one cannot think of Konrad or Heinrich. If someone asks for something other than God alone, we can call that an idol or an injustice.... When I am praying for nobody asking for nothing, then I am praying in the most correct way, because in God there is neither Heinrich nor Konrad' (*Pr*. 65; 1:680). This criticism not only upsets the traditional hierarchy of forms of prayer, which subordinates the prayer of petition to the prayer of adoration; it also calls into question a certain representation of God.

Ultimately, the detached soul no longer even needs to pray to draw near to God, who is himself the supreme detachment, having neither accident nor alteration. It is in this context that we meet the statement that some have seen as expressing a masked atheism: 'we pray to God to be free of God and to take hold of the truth and to enjoy it eternally, where the highest angels and the fly and the soul are equal, there where I stood, and wanted what I was, and was what I wanted' (*Pr*. 52; 1:554).

Only a radical conversion makes it possible to rediscover the essential poverty in which, for Eckhart, human dignity consists: 'Humanity is as perfect in the poorest and most despised person as in the Pope or in the Emperor, because humanity in itself is dearer to me than the human I carry with me' (*Pr*. 25; 1:292).

Eckhart's sermons show that stressing the kenotic dimension of *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit*, does not imply neglecting the manifold dimensions of our worldly experience.

Basis, Metabasis, Anabasis

Negative or apophatic theology is often seen today as a lifeline for a theology that would like to extricate itself from the ruts of ontotheology. Eckhart, who exhorts us 'not to make noise about God' (*Pr*. 83; 2:190), cultivated a surprising combination of cataphatic and apophatic: throughout his work—and not in strict chronological succession—he resorts to three different registers, more complementary than alternative, in speaking of God.

Stanislas Breton speaks in this regard of a triple metamorphosis of religious language, from *basis* to *metabasis* to *anabasis*.[3]

The first, basic register, identifies God with being and vice versa. This entails a reflection on the ontological status of created being. The main characteristic of this basic language is its full positivity and the privilege granted to the attributive proposition. The privilege accorded to propositional over relational language has religious significance, in that it corresponds to an ascetic demand for purification. In subjecting affirmative discourse to the purifying double fire of the negation of the negation it reaches the 'marrow' of pure affirmation: '*Negatio negationis quae est medulla et apex purissimae affirmationis*' (*In Joh*. n. 207).

The second language, the register of *metabasis*, takes a distance from the ontological lexicon, by placing the divine Intellect above the being of God, in the first *Parisian Question* and also in the commentary on the Johannine Prologue, which bends the ontological discourse in an intellectualist direction: 'It no longer seems to me now that it is because he is, that God knows, but rather that it is because he knows, that he is, so that God is Intellect and intellective knowing, and that intellective knowing is the foundation of his being. For it is said: "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). The evangelist does not say: "in the beginning was being (*ens*) and being was God"' (*LW* 5:40).

The first *Parisian Question* also makes use of a third even more radical language, the *anabasis* of a negative theology which ventures into the wilderness of Deity itself, of which one can only speak in terms of nothingness.

These three languages involve fundamental operations of thought, and are correlated with three kinds of difference: the ontological difference of being and beings and the radical ontic difference which separates Creator from creature, for the first; the difference between the *Verbum* and the adverb, for the second; the 'meontological' difference of the Uncreated Nothingness of Deity and the created nothingness of the soul, for the third. Each language relates to a particular biblical locus: the revelation of the divine Name in Exodus 3:14, for the first; the Johannine Prologue for the second; Isaiah 45:15 ('Truly you are a hidden God') for the third.

***Basis*: Eckhart's Exodus Metaphysics**

The various forms of a 'metaphysics of the Exodus' (E. Gilson) are not perfectly alike—far from it!

'What is proper to God is to be.... This is why it is only in being that all that is anything resides. To be is a primary name. Everything that is defective is a

[3] Stanislas Breton, *Deux mystiques de l'excès: J. J. Surin et Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 89-191.

falling off of being. Our whole life should be one being. As far as our life is a being, so far is it in God. As much as our life is enclosed in being, so much is it related to God' (*Pr.* 8; 1:98). These formulas, revealing a unitive mysticism, are backed by an original interpretation of Exodus 3:14, which is one of the favorite targets of contemporary critiques of ontotheology.

The verb *sum*, taken in its function as the verb of existence, is not predicated of God *per inhaerentiam*, but *per identitatem*. God is not the subject of being, he is Being itself. Eckhart does not content himself with stating: '*Deus est esse*,' he reverses the proposition into: '*Esse est Deus*,' paving the way for the Rhenish-Flemish spirituality of '*being God in God*.'

The thesis '*Esse est Deus*' was suspect to the judges of Cologne, for it seemed to undermine the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as a divine production *ad extra*. 'We must not falsely imagine that God projected or created creatures outside of himself in a kind of infinity or void…. God created all things not so that they stand outside of him, next to him, or in addition to him, in the manner of other craftsmen, but he called them from nothingness, that is to say from non-being to the being that they would find, receive, and possess in him. For he is being' (*Prologus generalis* n. 17; *LW* 2:478).

Eckhart's account of creaturehood is an 'ontology of bondage,' one could almost say of beggary. As a mere creature, the human being must beg from God the being that he does not have and cannot give to himself. Like a burden, every creature, including humanity, carries change, which is always a source of suffering, on its back.

But Eckhart thinks beyond a summary identification of God and being, by contemplating the mystery of divine Ipseity, the very self of God. Indeed, only God has a real self: '"Ego," the word "I," is proper to no one but God alone in his unity' (*Pr.* 28; 1:322-4). The emphasis is clearly on the singularity of divine selfhood: '…that Scripture says "I" signifies first of all the being of God, that only God is; for all things are in God and of him; for apart from him and without him there is nothing in truth; for all creatures are a miserable thing and naked nothingness before God. This is why: what they are in truth they are in God, and that is why God alone in truth is. And so it is that the word "I" refers to the being of divine truth, for it is a testimony of a being. This is why this attests that he alone is' (*Pr.* 77; 2:140).

Mystical experience aims to become 'I' in Being-Subject: 'You must completely spoil yourself with your being-yours and must melt into his being-his, and what is yours and what is his must become mine, that you, eternally, understand with him his being not-become and its unnamed nothingness' (*Pr.* 83; 2:192).

Echoing a larger tradition, Eckhart sketches a Trinitarian interpretation of the Exodic formula which builds on the reduplicative expression *sum qui sum*, connoting 'the reflexive conversion of being itself into itself and onto itself and its dwelling (*mansio*) or standing fast in itself' (*In Exod.* n. 16; *LW* 2:21). The intra-trinitarian divine life is reflected in an ontological vocabulary which has often been criticized as incapable of thinking about becoming or relationship.

Nietzsche's suspicion that being is a bloodless abstraction, stifling life, is inapposite here, for nothing is more intensely alive than the 'bubbling' (*bullitio*) that constitutes the divine being. For the intense vibration that characterizes intra-divine life, Eckhart also refers to another Bible verse: 'In him was life' (Jn 1:4). It is only because at the highest level, in the divine Being-Subject itself, life consists of an internal *bullitio* that *ebullitio* can occur, the outpouring of this same life outside. Finally, Eckhart relates the *sum qui sum* to the divine Tetragrammaton which expresses the self-sufficiency of the divine essence, the naked and pure substance of God.

***Metabasis*: The Birth of God in the Soul**

According to Émilie zum Brunn and Alain de Libera, there are two metaphysics in Eckhart: on the one hand, a 'metaphysics of the Exodus,' centered on the revelation of God-being and expressed in the basic language of the ontological naming of God, which has as an anthropological correlate the emphasis placed on the nothingness of the creature; on the other hand, a 'metaphysics of the Word,' founded on the Johannine Prologue. In becoming incarnate, the Word espoused the common human nature and not any particular nature. Eckhart strongly emphasizes the connection between the idea of original nature and the generation of the Word. The anthropological counterpart of the metaphysics of the Word is the 'adverbial' condition of the spiritual person who 'must be like a morning star; always present to God and always near him, and must be exactly near and elevated above all earthly things and be an adverb close to the Word' (*Pr.* 9; 1:114).

Eckhart reads Jn 1:3-4 as follows: 'Without him nothing was made. What was made was life in him.' His commentary on the verse: *Quod factum est in ipso vita erat* intersects with the Christic ternary: 'the way, the truth, and the life' (Jn 14:6) and the ternary taken from the *Liber de Causis*: *esse, vivere, intelligere* which covers all that that we can say of being (*vivere, esse et intelligere evacuant sive implent totum ens*). In terms of conceptual abstraction, being occupies the top of the hierarchy of perfections. In the concrete perspective of participation, the Intellect occupies the top of the hierarchy, because it is more perfect than being since it includes it. Expressed more colorfully, being is but the forecourt of God, while the true temple is the divine Intellect (*Pr.* 9; 1:108).

A crude ontologism would threaten the primacy of the Word as well as the adverbial dignity of humanity, whose finitude, that is to say ontological beggary, is surpassed by an 'ontology of conversion to Christ the Word.' The divine Word makes possible a being-towards-God, just as being itself appears as 'the Word by which God utters all things and addresses them.' No one is excluded from this universal 'conversation.' Every being is called to participate in 'this locution and allocution... by which the essences of things are spoken, embrace each other, unite in the depths of their interiority, and

recount the glory of God' (*In Gen*. n. 148; *LW* 1:617).

Against this background, the theme of the birth of God in the soul of the faithful, found in the Greek Fathers, particularly Origen, takes on high relief, to such an extent that a 'Christmas mysticism' (F. Brunner) has been discerned in Eckhart. 'The Father has only one Son, and the less we intend or care for anything other than God, and the less we look outward, the more we find ourselves clothed in the image in the Son, and the more the Son is born in us and we are born in the Son and become a Son' (*Pr*. 41; 1:442-4). 'To live with the Son and in the Son and by the Son,' to the point of becoming the 'adverb of the Verbum': this demand only makes sense if one admits the possibility of God's birth in the depths of the human soul, in which 'the depth of God is my depth and my depth is the depth of God' (*Pr*. 5b; 1:71). This conviction, which is like the basso continuo of his preaching, is accompanied by an injunction: 'lay down everything that is yours and make yourself God's, so that God becomes your own as he is his own, and he is God for you as he is God for himself, and no less' (*Pr*. 30; 1:346).

The 'Christmas mysticism' manifests the ontological density of the process of conversion made possible by the Son whom God generates in the human soul: 'The Father begets his Son in eternity, equal to himself.... I say even more: He begot him in my soul. Not only is my soul… close to him and he close to it, [as] equal, but he is in the soul and the Father begets his Son in the soul according to the same mode in which he begets him in eternity, and not otherwise. He has to do it, whether it is pleasant or painful to him. The Father tirelessly begets his Son, and I say more: he begets me [as] his Son and the same Son. I say more: He begets me not only [as] his Son, rather: he begets me [as] himself, and himself [as] me, and I [as] his being and his nature' (*Pr*. 6; 1:82).

***Anabasis*: The Desert of Deity and the Unknown Depth of the Soul**

Words to talk about God and his works are relatively easy to find, but how speak of the transcendent One? Even if words are lacking to say this 'we don't know what' (*neizwas*) which allows the soul to come into contact with the 'naked God,' we must not give up speaking of it in a metaphorical language: this ineffable inner depth called the *scintilla animae*, the *Seelenfünklein,* is the 'interior desert' where 'God blossoms and grows green with all his deity' (*Pr*. 2; 1:4). Eckhart's favored image for the divine uncreated Nothingness is the Desert.

'[The final end] of being is the darkness or unknowing of the hidden deity from which this light shines, which the darkness has not grasped....' That is why the prophet said, 'Verily you are the hidden God' in the depths of the soul, where the depth of God and the depth of the soul are one depth' (*Pr*. 15; 1:180). This recalls what 'Dionysius the Luminous' affirmed: that God is above being, above life, above light (*Pr*. 71; 2:72). Eckhart adds a reference to the blindness

that struck St Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:8), when he no longer saw anything (*nihil videbat*). 'In that he saw nothing, he saw divine nothingness' (74-6).

The language of supereminence, which speaks of God only in the superlative, obscures the kenotic motif of the 'lowered God' (*enthöhter Gott*), 'stripped of his elevation, not absolutely, but inwardly' (*Pr.* 14; 1:168). Detachment and kenotic stripping come together not only in the human soul, but also in God.

However much Eckhart protests that when he affirms that God operates above being and prior to being he is not denying being to God, but raising being into him (*Pr.* 9; 1:106), his radical conception of divine transcendence, which places God above being and above all names, will make some theologians shudder. Quoting a pagan master, Eckhart says that 'the soul that loves God... apprehends him under the coat of goodness,' while the intellect 'apprehends him naked, stripped of goodness and being and of all names' (110).

The divine attributes themselves, which are only 'co-beings' (*mitewesen*) 'which constitute something foreign and distant' (*Pr.* 77; 2:142), are effaced before the requirement of purification which carries the mystic towards the pure essence of the Deity. The soul 'should not aim at anyone or anything but the deity in itself, neither bliss, neither this nor that, but only God as God and the deity in itself, for whatever else you are aiming for, all of this is a co-being of the deity. Therefore, detach yourself from all co-being of the deity and take it nakedly in itself' (144).

Theological difficulties begin when one asks whether the three persons of the Trinity are themselves only 'co-beings' of the deity, as some particularly radical formulations suggest, such as the assertion that God himself can only enter the soul if he renounces the 'property' of his three persons: 'should God ever take a look at the soul, it necessarily costs him all his divine names and his personal property; this he must leave totally outside if he is ever to look at it. But it is in so far as he is simply One, without any mode or property, there he is in this sense neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit, and yet is something which is neither this nor that' (*Pr.* 2; 1:56).

The deity that transcends the divine Intellect goes hand in hand with a particular conception of the human soul. The proper name of the soul is as unknown to us as the nature of God. The soul 'is ineffable and wordless; when perceived in its proper depth it corresponds to no word' (*Pr.* 77; 2:140). Its abysmal depth transcends the logos itself, for the same reason that Deity is higher than the divine Intellect: 'God, who is nameless—he has no name—is ineffable, and the soul at its core is also ineffable, just as he is ineffable' (*Pr.* 17; 1:200).

Only a radically separated soul can welcome everything into itself. This noetic theme, common to many medieval thinkers, is charged with strong mystical connotations in Eckhart: 'there is a power in the soul that neither time nor flesh touches; it flows out of the mind and abides in the mind and is

spiritual in every way. In this power, God tirelessly arises and burns with all his richness, with all his sweetness and with all his delights' (*Pr.* 2; 1:30).

Eckhart is fully aware that the words to say all this are lacking. 'He is free of all names, destitute of all forms, deprived and free just as God is deprived and free in himself. He is as fully one and simple as God is one and simple, so that in no way can we cast a glance at him' (34).

According to Ferdinand Brunner, the conception of the intellective soul as a bottomless abyss, like the abyss of Deity, is Eckhart's central teaching, even if it is also found elsewhere, as shown by Hadewijch of Antwerp (Letter 18): 'The soul is a bottomless abyss in which God is sufficient to himself, finding in it his fullness at all times, while likewise it is sufficient to itself in him. The soul is for God a free way where he may spring from his ultimate depths; and God for the soul in turn is the path of freedom to that depth of the divine being that nothing can touch except the depth of the soul. And if God did not belong to the soul entirely, he would not be enough for it.'

The naked soul meets the divine essence in its nakedness. The pure receptivity of *Gelassenheit* and *Abgeschiedenheit* involves a readiness 'to suffer God' (*Gotlîden*) which, very early on, was suspected of supporting a radical quietism, even a morbid dolorism. With Eckhart, it is rather a radical passivity which is at the same time the highest form of action. To act does not follow being, as the scholastic adage claims (*agere sequitur esse*), it is one with being. The dichotomy of action and contemplation symbolized by Martha and Mary must be overcome, since the intention of God is the fruitfulness of action in the unity of contemplation.

If absolute receptivity to God is the main characteristic of the unknown depth of the soul, escaping the grasp of the intellect, then feminine symbolism, rather than the masculine symbolism of the agent intellect, seems best to express this radical passivity. '"Woman" is the noblest name that can be attributed to the soul,' for unlike 'virgin' it signifies fertility (*Pr.* 2; 1:26). Eckhart boldly adds that what holds for the soul must hold also for the hidden abyss of the Deity. 'Where does fatherhood have a maternal name? Where it performs a maternal work, where the personal Intellect bends towards the unity of nature and unites with it. It is there that fatherhood has a maternal name and performs a maternal work, for it is a properly maternal work to receive where the Eternal Word springs forth. In essential memory, there maternity has a paternal name and carries out a paternal work' (*In Ecclesiasticum, LW* 2).

The Phenomenality of God

God is not an abstract concept for Eckhart, but a concrete presence. In what does this divine phenomenality consist? According to Eckhart God never withdraws from humans, but always remains close to us, even if we withdraw from him (*Tr.* 2; 2:384). 'God is a God of the present. He takes and receives you

as you are, not for what you have been, but for what you are now' (*Tr.* 2,2:373).

'Who are those who honor God?' This question admits of no other answer than: 'those who have fully gone out from themselves and are looking for absolutely nothing of what is theirs in anything, whether large or small, who do not consider anything below oneself nor above oneself nor beside oneself nor in oneself, who aim neither at property nor honor nor amenity nor pleasure nor utility nor interiority nor holiness nor reward nor celestial kingdom, and have come out of all this, of all that is theirs; it is from these people that God receives honor, and these honor God in the proper sense and give him what is his' (*Pr.* 6; 1:76).

It is not enough for this to constantly think of God; instead, we must constantly turn to him and aspire to him. A God who is merely thought of is only a conceptual idol, for thoughts are transitory. It is an essential God, a truly divine God, transcending human thought and every creature, that one must strive to encounter, so that he may shine in all things and all things may taste of God.

The phenomenality of God is mainly recognized by the fact that his essence is self-communicative: 'The sun gives its radiance and nevertheless remains in its place, the fire gives its ardor and nevertheless remains fire; but God communicates what is his, for he himself is what he is, and in all the gifts he gives he always gives himself in the first place' (*Pr.* 9; 1:108). For the soul that espouses this perspective, 'every work of God in the creature is grace, and the act or gift of God alone is grace,' grace that is freely given (*gratis data*) and that makes gracious (*gratum faciens*) (*Sermo* 25.1; *LW* 4:235), which, for the one who receives it, results in a transfiguration such that he participates in 'a certain boiling of the giving birth of the Son, having its root in the depth of the bosom of the Father' (239).

Living Without Why

Eckhart, successor to Thomas Aquinas's chair in Paris, was an outstanding theological 'master of reading' (*Lesemeister*). But he wanted to be more: a 'master of life' (*Lebemeister*) who put into practice the themes of 'living without why' and 'leaving God for God,' inherited from the courtly feminine mysticism of his time (Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthilde of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth). 'If someone asked life for a thousand years: "Why do you live?," if it had to answer, it would say nothing other than: "I live, because I live." This comes from this, that life lives from its own ground, and flows out from its own; the reason why it lives without why is that it lives for itself' (*Pr.* 5b; 1:70).

'*Deus et per consequens homo divinus, non agit propter cur aut quare*' (*Sermo* 4.1 *LW* 4:22): 'God, and consequently the divine man, does not act because of why or wherefore.' In his sermon on Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), Mary represents the fervent soul, inhabited by the infinite desire to

meet God, which allows itself to be enveloped by divine goodness and to be consoled and enthralled by his eternal Word, while Martha, the elder sister, represents greater spiritual maturity, rooted in a deeper experience of life: 'Martha knew Mary better than Mary Martha, because she had already lived long and well; for it is life that bestows the noblest knowledge. Life knows better than delight or light all that can be reached in this body below God, and in a certain way life knows more clearly than what the eternal light could give. The eternal light enables one to know oneself and God, but not oneself without God' (*Pr*. 86; 2:210).

Like everyone else, Eckhart knew his life was heading towards death. In the 'region of dissimilarity' where earthly life takes place, everything is equally perishable and subject to the law of aging, except the grace of God and eternal life, a gift from an ever-new God. In one of his German sermons, Eckhart confided that he felt younger every day, because, in faith, he lived from the eternal youth of God. It is in the same sense that he declares in one of the Latin sermons, echoing Romans 6:4 ('*in novitate vitae ambulemus*'): 'We walk in newness, and not in any newness whatever, but in newness of life and virtue given by grace, the grace of God which is eternal life.' For him, 'newness and life are proper to God.' 'By the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor 15:10). The twenty-fifth Parisian sermon reads like a little treatise on grace. Eckhart offers a triadic reading of it, successively reviewing the very idea of grace, its efficient cause which is God, and its finality: human being. For Eckhart, 'all is grace,' because 'every work of God in the creature is grace, and the act or gift of God alone is grace' (257). It is still necessary to distinguish a first grace which consists of 'a certain flow, an exit from God' and a second which consists of 'a certain reflux, a return to God himself.' This properly 'supernatural' grace makes us one with God, the beginning and end of all things, 'source of all grace, illuminating all human beings.'

Mark Patrick Hederman

Dostoevsky, Student of Humanity

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Dostoevsky has been an important companion on my spiritual journey. I discovered him in my twenties and have retained a hugely romantic vision of him, which can best be suggested in two vignettes which have stayed with me like a pair of highly colored stained-glass windows.

The first is of a delicate, high-minded young revolutionary condemned to death by firing squad in his late twenties, standing against a wall in the early morning awaiting execution. He describes his final moments as he faced the soldiers lined up in front of him. He was counting the buttons on one of their uniforms. Suddenly a horse gallops into the yard; the rider is carrying a last minute reprieve from the Tsar. The young man falls to his knees and vows to live every moment of the rest of his life with the fullness and intensity of those final seconds before he was about to die and the arrival of this miraculous reprieve. That, to me, was the beginning, and the meaning, of 'Existentialism' —to live every moment of your life as if it might be your last.

The second vignette occurs in Basel, Switzerland. On his way from Baden to Geneva, at the age of 46, in August, 1867, he stopped at Basel, where he viewed Hans Holbein's 1515 painting 'The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb.' Hans Holbein, the Younger (1497-1543) was one of the greatest and most accurate depicters of reality in the history of painting. There can be no doubt that, symbolically, as far as Holbein was concerned, Christ was definitively dead in Basel at this moment in history. His is a painting of unprecedented—and harrowing—realism. It applied the principles of the new anatomy to the techniques of artistic representation. Coffin-sized, it shows one panel removed to reveal an emaciated body on a white crumpled shroud. Although *rigor mortis* has set in, the hands and feet still claw in their death agony, the mouth and eyes remain open.

Unconfirmed stories circulated that Holbein painted this elongated corpse from the model of a Jewish man who had died by suicide, drowned in the river Rhine. Holbein's disciples are said to have eventually removed the corpse

from his studio because it was decomposing and nauseous from putrefaction. The picture itself almost corroborates the story. Muscle tone in the body has begun to collapse and the flesh has taken on the green hue of putrefaction. (Forensic examination has put the degree of corruption as being consistent with a three-day-old corpse.) The man is not handsome, his body is not beautiful: this is painting as *post mortem*.

We do not know who commissioned the portrait, or why; nor do we know where it was hung. The pierced hand, feet and flank identify the man as Jesus but oddly, for a work of such uncompromising realism, there are no punctures left by the crown of thorns nor marks from the scourging. The first time the painting is mentioned in an inventory it is listed as 'A dead man by Hans Holbein, oil on wood, with the title *Jesus Nazarenus Rex.*' But even here, the inscription is of a later date and is not by Holbein himself.

Dostoevsky, standing before this painting represents the second panel of my diptych. In her memoirs, Anna Grigorevna recounts leaving her husband alone and returning fifteen to twenty minutes later to find him 'riveted to the spot' before it: 'in his agitated face there was a kind of frightened expression, one which I had happened to notice more than once in the first minutes of an epileptic fit.' Afterwards Dostoevsky told his wife 'one could lose one's faith from that picture.' Besides this cryptic remark, repeated later by Myshkin in *The Idiot*. Dostoevsky's only commentary on the painting comes to us through Ippolit in the same novel:[1]

> The picture represented Christ just taken down from the cross.... In the painting his face is dreadfully disfigured by blows, swollen, covered with terrible swollen and bloody bruises, the eyes open, the pupils turned up, the large open whites of the eyes bright with a sort of deathly, glassy reflection.... As one looks at that painting, one conceives of nature in the form of some huge, implacable, dumb beast, or to be more exact, to be much more exact, though it may seem strange, in the form of some huge machine of the latest design which, deaf and unfeeling, has senselessly seized, crushed, and swallowed up a great and priceless being, a being worth all of nature and its laws, all the earth, which was perhaps created solely for the advent of that being!

'The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb' is painted by Holbein at similar representational limits to Dostoevsky's realism. Dostoevsky believed that any portrait of the complete and perfect man must somehow be a portrait of Christ, God become human. Many of his novels are an avowed attempt to achieve such a portrait. *The Idiot* grapples with the problem of Christ's character and career as possibly something harmful and even destructive because of his exorbitant compassion and reckless self-abandon. The first part of the novel was written in the space of twenty-three days between two bouts

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[1] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot,* trans. Henry and Olga Carlisle (New York: Signet), 447.

of epilepsy. Holbein's picture is found hanging in Rogozhin's rooms. The picture is the cataclysmic fuse for the novel.

Finding Humanity

It seems to me that the abiding theme of Dostoevsky's work is the human condition. For him we, as humans, are not simply a natural phenomenon, but rather the very center around which everything else moves and has its being. The riddle of the universe is enclosed in the mystery of humanity and we are microcosms of the macrocosm. To solve the problem: 'what is human being?' is to solve the ancillary question: 'who is God?' The two are intertwined. Does Dostoevsky believe in God? I agree with Rowan Williams that his concern as a writer was to show what belief and unbelief are like for human beings rather than to determine any such theological argument His search was not an abstract one. Human beings were incalculable, concrete realities, unavailable to abstract analysis. The novel was the only a forceps with which to prize out this wriggling impossibility, the only way of accompanying such unpredictability on its crazy journey through each singular identity, and its combined lunacy as a species in world history. The external architecture and interior design of his novels are ways of giving maximum free play to his mercurial cast of characters. Dostoevsky doesn't write about God, he himself replaces God as creator allowing free rein to whatever he creates. Rowan Williams puts this well:

> The endings of *The Idiot* and *Devils* can be read as at least leaving marked trails of unfinished business. What we are seeing in the novel, certainly, is not the outworking of a theological strategy but the effect that the writing itself has upon the original purposes of the writer. The theological interest of the novel is... in what precisely happens as Myshkin takes shape in the process of being written, and how the writing, not the planning, shapes what is possible for him as a character. The novel, in its narrative indeterminacy, is a statement of 'nonviolence,' of radical patience with the unplanned and undetermined decisions of agents.... Dostoevsky represents the first stirrings of a new and more challenging sense of what the novel is and achieves.[2]

Dostoevsky saw that instead of being part of some organic and totalitarian structure, subject to laws and hierarchies, whether natural or scientific, as were the backdrops of both Dante's and even Shakespeare's anthropologies, we, as human beings of the last two centuries, had been cut adrift of all

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[2] Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), 46-8. See J. S. O'Leary, 'Dostoevsky's Quest for Resurrection,' *JMJ* 63 (2009):132-44.

moorings, we were 'free.' And Dostoevsky saw this freedom as a terrible and demanding vocation. To attain to such heights, to maintain it, to live it, required 'greatness' and the stamina of a 'superman' (compare his younger contemporary Nietzsche's *Übermensch*). It is almost as if Dostoevsky's novels were attempts to discover whether there ever was, or ever would be, a human being who might live up to so demanding a vocation.

Dostoevsky is in search of convincing humanity: the optimum way to conduct our lives in the limited time each of us is allotted in the game of chance which is the universe. And he builds his weighing scales on a spectrum. We move from the incompleteness of humanity displayed in the diabolically selfish—the lonely hells created for and by *The Adolescent, Crime and Punishment, Devils,* to the swing of a pendulum in the opposite direction where we find the equally incomplete humanity of the 'angel' who loses himself in an inexhaustible compassion, a total surrender and gift of self to other people: Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot.* Between these two extremes, it is as if Dostoevsky sought to redress the balance and focus his search for a more complete humanity in a less extreme presentation of excess at either pole. Dostoevsky's ultimate suspicion was that Christ was too selfless to be human, that selflessness, as much as selfishness, if pushed to the extreme, might be just as distant from complete or perfect humanity as the most diabolical forms of selfishness.

Alyosha, in The *Brothers Karamazov*, seemed to offer such a median position. 'Now I am striking a balance' Dostoevsky said, 'of what I have been revolving in my mind for three years.' He began this novel in June 1878 and finished it three months before his death, in October 1880. It seems to me that Dostoevsky set out with the intention of describing his version of ideal humanity in the character of Alyosha, who would be the 'spiritual son' of the saintly monk Zosima, represented in the novel as the ideal spiritual father. (This character is based on a real staretz whom Dostoevsky knew and ¥admired.) However, as in most of his work, the version which emerges bears little resemblance to the original intention. As the novel unfolds, and as real life tragedies occurred in his own life, the author is forced to relinquish any preconceived ideas. The writing of *The Brothers Karamazov* was altered spectacularly by the death, in May 1878, of Dostoevsky's three-year-old son, also called Alyosha, who died of epilepsy, inherited from his father. The novelist's grief is apparent throughout the book. He named the potential hero of his novel Alyosha, as well as imbuing him with qualities that he sought and most admired. His loss is also reflected in the story of Captain Snegiryov and his young son Ilyusha. The death of his son also brought Dostoevsky to the Optina Monastery where he found inspiration for parts of the biographical section of Zosima's life, some of which are based on *The Life of the Elder Leonid*, a text he found there.

But the character of Alyosha is never fully developed; he becomes a somewhat shadowy figure when compared with the other brothers. In the unusual way in which he allowed his novels the very freedom he was anxious

for human beings to embrace, another character emerges from the household, the chaotic and indifferent world of Fyodor Pavlovich's two marriages and three children. From this unpromising incubator a more developed and far more interesting sibling, Ivan, the brilliant and intellectual atheist, steps into the limelight. The novel also incorporated elements and themes from an earlier unfinished project he had begun in 1869, *The Life of a Great Sinner*.

The novel counterposes the true spiritual meaning of the Orthodox Christian faith (seen as the heart of Russian national identity and history) to the new doctrines of atheism, rationalism, socialism, and nihilism. The Nietzschean theme of 'The Death of God' receives a more cultural and sociological treatment in Dostoevsky. The parricide in *The Brothers Karamazov*, based on the murder of Dostoevsky's own father by three serfs as well as on newspaper accounts of two contemporary murders. Such acts, including the attempted murder of the Tsar, reflect the 'death of God' ideology emerging at the time. Writing to his publisher Strakhov in 1869, he says: 'In any newspaper one takes up, one comes across reports of wholly authentic facts, which nevertheless strike one as extraordinary. Our writers regard them as fantastic and therefore take no account of them; and yet they are the truth, for they are facts. But who troubles to observe, record, describe them?' What appeared to his contemporaries as disconnected once-off occurrences were seen by him as connected to some unifying subterranean source which made them symptoms of a whole generation and its history. This heightened degree of perceptivity could be the secret of Dostoevsky's hypnotic potency as a writer. It might be traceable also to the heightened vision apparently afforded to those suffering from epilepsy.

In the Hebrew Bible epilepsy was regarded as a 'sacred' disease, the disease of the prophets. There is a link, especially in the instance of the viewing of Holbein's painting and the writing of his novel *The Idiot*, which connects Dostoevsk's epilepsy with clairvoyance. Writing in 1945, in his preface to an American edition of Dostoevsky's novels, Thomas Mann suggests:

> I don't know what neurologists think of the 'sacred' disease, but in my opinion it is definitely rooted in the realm of the sexual, it is a wild and explosive manifestation of sex dynamics, a transferred and transfigured sexual act, a mystic dissipation. I regard the subsequent state of contrition and misery, the mysterious feeling of guilt, as even more revealing than the preceding seconds of bliss for which 'one is ready to exchange his life.' No matter to what extent the malady menaced Dostoevsky's mental powers, it is certain that his psychological insight, his understanding of crime and of what the Apocalypse calls 'satanic depths,' and most of all his ability to suggest secret guilt and to weave it into the background of his frequently horrible creatures – all these are inseparably related to the disease.

In the way that Myshkin, in *The Idiot*, can foretell the death of Nastasia

Filippovna by his reading of characters and situations, which will inevitably lead to that result, thereby redoubling his compassionate protectiveness towards her, so too Dostoevsky, from his understanding of the century in which he lived, could foretell with compassionate foreboding the catastrophes which would come in the century that followed.

There are many traces of the original project, as it were, throughout *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the chapter entitled 'A Hymn and a Secret' (11.4), Mitya tells Alyosha:

> You, you will understand everything. That's why I have longed for you so much. Now the time has come at last for me to pour out my soul to you. During these last two months, Alyosha, I've felt the presence of a new man in me – a new man has risen in me! And what does it matter if I spend twenty years in the mines... one can find a human heart there also, in the mines, under the ground, next to you, in another convict and murderer, and make friends with him... one can breathe new life into the frozen heart of such a convict. One can wait on him for years and years, and at last bring up to the light of day a lofty soul, a soul that has suffered has become conscious of its humanity, to restore life to an angel, bring back a hero! And there are so many of them, hundreds of them, and we are all responsible for them!... For we are responsible for all.[3]

But, without a doubt, this project fades and Alyosha fades with it. The character of Ivan Fyodorovich becomes so much more central and elucidated. He is often perceived as the Nietzschean counterpart, and yet, though he outwardly plays the role of devil's advocate, he is inwardly far from being resolved in his atheism. A constantly reappearing motif in the novel is his proposition that without faith in immortality, there is no such thing as virtue, and that if there is no God, *everything* is permitted. When Zosima encounters these ideas during the meeting at the monastery, he doesn't dispute it, but suggests to Ivan that since in all probability he doesn't believe in the immortality of his own soul, his thoughts must be a source of torment to him: 'But the martyr likes sometimes to divert himself with his despair, as it were driven to it by despair itself. Meanwhile... you divert yourself with magazine articles, and discussions in society, though you don't believe your own arguments, and with an aching heart mock at them inwardly.'

Unbearable Freedom

Dostoevsky was aware that most of us cannot tolerate the burden which true freedom imposes. We prefer slavery in any form it cares to take, from nicotine to totalitarianism. Christ came to reveal to us the ultimate

[3] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (London: Penguin, 1969), 694.

possibilities inherent in our nature which, up to his arrival, had never been stretched to infinity. The temptations of Jesus in the desert represented three possibilities of escape from freedom. But Christ came to bring together in a free act of love the two infinite liberties of God and each human being, by an offering of terrifying friendship. 'God can only speak to gods but we were not ready or able for such vertiginous heights.' In the end it seems as though Dostoevsky realized that God was asking too much of us. In his final notebook, he would say: 'Christ was mistaken—it's been proved!... but I would rather stick with a mistake, together with Christ.'[4]

Dostoevsky offers a terrifying picture of the ultimate dictator in the person of the Grand Inquisitor, who is meant to depict the Catholic Church at its most totalitarian and ferocious. Christ returns to earth and is confronted by this authoritarian figure. The aim of the inquisitor is to send Christ back where he came from as speedily as possible. Why? Because he incarnated both in his person and his teaching dangerous revolutionary impulses which promised a freedom 'which human beings in their simplicity and innate lawlessness cannot even comprehend, which they fear and dread—for nothing has ever been more unendurable to human society than freedom!' The inquisitor taunts the powerless savior who has returned on a visit and has renounced his omnipotence: 'You wanted their free love so that they would follow you freely, fascinated and captivated by you. Instead of the strict ancient law, they had in future to decide for themselves with a free heart what was good and what was evil, having only your image before them for guidance.' So, the inquisitor continues, we have corrected your great work. They weren't up to that challenge. It was beyond them, too much for them. So, we felt sorry for them and took over. We, who have a much more realistic and compassionate understanding of humanity have taken that freedom away from them and replaced it with an authoritarian rule that governs their lives in every detail and removes the worry about how to achieve salvation, how to become free.

The people have become so obedient to the inquisitor that one command from him will turn the mob against this human person of Christ and all will see it as a religious act to have him burnt publicly.

> 'When the Inquisitor finished speaking, he waited for some time for the Prisoner's reply. His silence distressed him. He saw that the Prisoner had been listening intently to him all the time, looking gently into his face and evidently not wishing to say anything in reply. The old man would have liked him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But he suddenly approached the old man and kissed him gently on his bloodless, aged lips.
>
> That was all his answer. The old man gave a start. There was an imperceptible movement at the corners of his mouth; he went to the door,

[4] Quoted in Williams, *Dostoevsky*, 44.

> opened it and said to him: "Go, and come no more - don't come at all - never, never!" And he let him out into the dark streets and lanes of the city. The Prisoner went away.'
>
> 'And the old man?'
>
> 'The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man sticks to his idea.'
>
> (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 288-310 (bk 5, ch 5)

A kiss is a way of connecting people in the most intimate exchange, without their necessarily knowing and understanding one another. It is being in touch. It is the language of equals. It allows you to feel the confirmation, the energy, the approval of the person kissing. It is a specific and emotionally charged presence which does not require an overall grasp of the situation, nor does it involve great preparation or skill. In this context it describes a relationship which is neither following an idea nor adopting a technique, it is groping towards someone in the dark. It is heartwork.

Whether he believed in God, or Christ, or the possibility of monastic life, Dostoevsky wrote these words a hundred years ago, and they are consoling to me, who have been a monk in Ireland for the last sixty years:

> Fathers and teachers, what is a monk? Among the educated this word is nowadays uttered with derision by some people.... 'You are idlers and useless members of society,' they say, 'you live on the labour of others. You are shameless beggars.' And yet think of the many meek and humble monks there are, monks who long for solitude and fervent prayer in peace and quiet.... In their solitude they keep the image of Christ pure and undefiled for the time being, in the purity of God's truth, which they received from the fathers of old, the apostles and martyrs, and when the time comes they will reveal it to the wavering righteousness of the world. That is a great thought. The star will shine forth from the east.
>
> That is what I think of the monk, and is it false, is it arrogant? Look at the worldly and all those who set themselves up above God's people on earth, has not God's image and God's truth been distorted in them?... The world has proclaimed freedom, especially in recent times, but what do we see in this freedom of theirs? Nothing but slavery and self-destruction.
>
> The monastic way is different. People even laugh at obedience, fasting and prayer, and yet it is through them that the way lies to real, true freedom: I cut off all superfluous and unnecessary needs, I subdue my proud and ambitious will, and with God's help I attain freedom of the spirit...
>
> The salvation of Russia comes from the people... Therefore, take care of the people, and educate them quietly. That is your great task as monks, for this people is a Godbearer.
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> (368-70; bk 6, ch 3.)

Kogure Yusuke

Atheism and Suicide in *Devils*

Kogure Yusuke graduated in Religious Studies from Toyo University and worked as a librarian in Seijo Gakuen University.

To lose interest in life, to lose connection with one's God, one's faith, one's community, and to lose one's love for others, is a ruinous situation, which among other outcomes may lead to suicide. I shall study this connection between apathy and suicide by examining the activities and utterances of the characters in Dostoevsky's great novel, *Devils.*[1] I shall draw on other perspectives than those of the novel, referring especially to the contents of a program called the 12 Steps, which is widely used in self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. To apply this modern framework to a 19th-century novel may seem anachronistic, but Dostoevsky is a writer who homes in on matters of life and death, which are universal and perennial. His powerful stories leap beyond the context of their period and grip readers in every age. Atheism, indifference, *taedium vitae,* and suicide are themes that continue to be contemplated in the present day, although perhaps with less urgency.

One of the main characteristics of *Devils* is that so many of the characters die tragically. In no other of Dostoevsky's full-length works is the death toll so high. If we want to compare his four great tragic novels with Shakespeare's major tragedies (*Crime and Punishment* with *Macbeth, The Idiot* with *Othello*, *Devils* with *King Lear*, *The Brothers Karamazov* with *Hamlet*), the parallel with *Lear* holds in the precipitous course of the action towards social collapse and disappearance of meaning, with multiple scenes of horror. Just as *Lear* in its unrelieved darkness is the most purely tragic of Shakespeare's works, so *Devils* is among Dostoevsky's. *Lear* and *Devils* portray the desolation of a world without God, whereas *Hamlet* and *The Brothers Karamazov,* detective stories about the murder of a father, brood about God constantly, in doubt and revolt, but in final peaceful resignation.

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[1] In-text citations are from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Devils,* trans. Constance Garnett (Ware Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2005). (Some references have been added to this essay by its translator, J. S. O'Leary.)

Atheism and the 12 Steps

Today the loss of faith and the absence of God (or what Martin Buber dubbed the 'eclipse of God' in 1952) no longer constitutes a situation of dramatic shock and anxiety as it did in the late nineteenth century: think of Matthew Arnold's chilling awareness in 'Dover Beach' (1867) of the 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' of the Sea of Faith, or of Nietzsche's 'madman' in *The Gay Science* (1882) with his shock report that 'we have murdered God!' Writing in 1872, Dostoevsky has no intention of taking atheism lightly. His characters brood on it from various angles, and can be driven by it to suicide.[2]

Let me begin by quoting my favorite character, Shatov. Speaking as a Slavophile, he proclaims: 'He who has no people has no God. You may be sure that all who cease to understand their own people and lose their connection with them at once lose to the same extent the faith of their fathers and become atheistic or indifferent' (37; pt. 1, ch. 1.9). Shatov is one of the few characters in the story who struggles to find God. From his point of view, this is what people who are indifferent to God and faith look like. A sincere and good man, Shatov, given the theme of the novel, might be expected to have a happiness denied to the atheists. But as Stepan Trofimovich Verhovensky, the failed, ineffectual liberal, says in conversation with the fanatical nihilist Kirillov: 'I, who know my poor Russia like the fingers on my hand, and have devoted my whole life to the Russian people, I can assure you that he [Shatov] does not know the Russian people' (91; pt. 1, ch. 3.4). For in fact Shatov originally held a completely different ideology, under the influence of Nicholas Stavrogin, troubled son of Stepan's friend Varvara Petrovna, and particularly of Kirillov, with whom he spent much time during a trip to the United States. It is only recently that he has begun to 'seek God.' Shatov has not had a smooth relationship with Kirillov since his return to Russia. With only an imperfect faith, Shatov is as fragile as the rest of the characters, all ruined in various ways. He too has not escaped the menace of the 'devils' that hangs over the story. In the end he is murdered by Stepan's cold-hearted, efficient son Pyotr with his fellow-plotters. More tragic than this murder are the suicides that punctuate the novel, which I shall study in terms of lost connections with God and the human community. Reading the novel for the third time, I found that the psychology of the characters could be illuminated by reference to a well-known therapeutic program.

The 12 Steps are widely used in AA and other self-help groups to enable people to overcome addiction. They are a series of steps aiming to recover the 'spiritual' part of the person, where the cause of his or her shortcomings and

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[2] Nietzsche's reactions to the novel also reveal a grim and agonized attitude to atheism. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887-1889,* Kritische Studienausgabe 13 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 142, 144, 241, 409.

the struggle against them are located.

The steps are as follows: 1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Decided to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. 4. Made a searching moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our defects. 6. Trusted God to remove them. 7. Humbly asked Him to do so. 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed. 9. Made direct amends to them wherever possible. 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with the higher Power. 12. Tried to bring these principles to other addicts and to practice them in all our affairs.

In Steps 4 and 5 one writes down one's past mistakes on an 'inventory chart' and identifies their nature using four typologies. One of the typologies is 'lack of consideration,' which can be paraphrased as 'lack of concern.' When we lack concern for people and things, including ourselves, we are less likely to consider the opinions and positions of others and more likely to think selfishly. Selfish thinking and selfish behavior also destroy relationships with others. AA often uses the word 'insanity.' The onset of insanity is not in the body or the mind, but in the spiritual part of the person. Compare this with what Shatov says above about losing connection with people. When people leave the circle of self-help groups, they gradually lose the recovery they gained from the 12 Steps, and they also lose their willingness to believe in an existence beyond their own power. The recovery of the spiritual part gained through the Steps is nurtured in the community of the self-help group. The suicidal characters in *Devils* suffer these various forms of loss of connection, as I shall now attempt to show in detail.

Matryosha's Suicide

The first of the novel's three suicides is the most shocking in the novel. A ten-year-old girl, victimized by parental neglect and cruelty and by an adult who sexually seduces her, takes her own life by hanging herself in an out-of-the-way corner. The chapter in which her haunting story is told was suppressed until 1921, but is perhaps 'the most important in the novel' as A. D. P. Briggs says.[3]

This suicide appears to be a spontaneous action due to mental derangement. However, what lends it extra horror is that it is linked with the

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[3] Introduction, *Devils,* xvi. The chapter first appeared in English as F. M. Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession and the plan of The Life of a Great Sinner,* trans. S. S. Koteliansky and Virginia Woolf (Richmond: Hogarth, 1922). (It is translated by Michael Nicholson in the Wordsworth Classics edition.)

child's loss of her faith and of her God. Blaming herself for her sexual interaction with Stavrogin, Matryosha 'eventually decided that she had committed some unimaginable crime and that she was guilty beyond salvation—"she had killed God"' (429; pt. 2, ch. 9.2). 'Feverish and rambling,' her mother reports, she had said 'horrid things'; 'She says "I've killed God!"' (430). What does it mean to kill God? Here, we refer to the AA concept mentioned above, which uses the term 'Higher Power' as extensively as the word 'God.' This Higher Power, in the AA literature, is said to exist essentially within oneself. It is also described in terms of conscience. Conscience is what controls the ego, which tends to run amok, and guides it toward desirable behavior. As Stavrogin kisses her invasively, 'her entire face was ablaze with shame. And all the while I kept whispering to her. Suddenly something happened that was so bizarre I shall never forget it, something that quite bewildered me at the time: the girl put her arms around my neck and began all at once to kiss me herself with a terrible intensity, a look of utter rapture on her face' (428). The abused and love-starved child Matryosha is drawn into an adult game and is offered no reassurance by Stavrogin. Corrupt though he is, he is not a brutal sadistic rapist, but careless and callous in dealing with a vulnerable child. In the current jargon, he is guilty of 'soul-murder' causing the girl to imagine she has cut herself off from God.

Matryosha's despairing isolation is prepared at the level of her relationship with those around her, including her family. In her work environment she receives little attention as a human being, and her mother is insufficiently caring. This is a situation in which she lacks interest from her surroundings, and her own interest in her surroundings has not developed. Using the aforementioned identification: 'God ≒ Faith ≒ Connection with the community,' we can say that while let down by her community, or because they never took her seriously, she was also unable to fully develop faith and God within herself. Stavrogin was the person who decisively destroyed Matryosha's incomplete 'God ≒ conscience' and immature concern for her surroundings. The complete breakdown of these relationships, to God, to herself, to her surroundings, led her to choose the most abhorrent action against herself and those around her: suicide, and in its most hideous form, hanging.

The Case of Kirillov

Very different from this confused, impulsive suicide, is Kirillov's reflective and deliberate one. The loss of God causes Kirillov's ego to run amok due to his atheism, which was influenced by Stavrogin before the story began. As a result of his detachment from the aspects of conscience and love contained in the concepts of God and faith, and his attachment to and blind faith in the ego alone, he chooses to kill himself in order to demonstrate his complete freedom and thus become equal to God. Throughout the story, his Russian is described

as broken; his long stay in the USA and in other countries has estranged him from Russian thought and the Russian people. Language shapes human thought. His defective Russian shows the bankruptcy of his thinking and inner life.

Examining this breakdown, again with reference to the ideas of AA, we recall that it defines the 'Higher Power' as 'a greater power beyond oneself.' The 'self' here includes the 'ego' formed by our own thoughts and actions. This view may be summarized in the formula 'God ≒ Higher Power > Ego.' From this perspective, it is impossible for the ego to transcend or be equal to God. With this in mind, we can say that Kirillov's idea of man becoming God is bankrupt. By struggling to hold on to a bankrupt idea, Kirillov's inner conscience is also consumed. The exhaustion of his conscience causes his normal survival instincts as a living creature to cease to function. Compared to hanging, suicide by gunshot, Kirillov's chosen method, is a more modern means. In contrast to ancient beliefs and communal ties, the gun was a modern symbol at the time of the story. The atheism prevalent in Russia at the time of the story was a novel spiritual epidemic, and the destruction caused by the misuse of principles and ideas might similarly be seen as a new form of suicide.

Stavrogin

The protagonist of this story, bereft of care and love for all things, including himself, Stavrogin commits suicide by hanging at the end. The essence of his suicide is the destruction of God and the ego due to indifference to all things. A piece of paper with the inscription 'No one is to blame, I did it myself' (693) was placed beside his body. The silk cord used in the suicide was coated with soap: 'Everything proved that there had been premeditation and consciousness up to the last moment. At the inquest our doctors absolutely and emphatically rejected all idea of insanity.' (694; the closing words of the novel). Indeed, Stavrogin had a stable ego compared to Matryosha and Kirillov, even though he was prone to eccentricities and suffered from hallucinations.

Unlike Matryosha, Stavrogin had always received ample attention from his surroundings. Unlike Kirillov, Stavrogin's ego continued to operate without spiraling out of control, even though they share the common feature of a broken Russian language. Why, then, is Stavrogin ruined? We may assume that it is due to his loss of love for others and for himself. Toward the end of the story, Stavrogin's romance with Lizaveta falls apart. He had pinned his hopes on his love for her as a means of saving himself from suffering. However, he confesses to Lizaveta: 'I knew I did not love you and yet I ruined you' (545; pt. 3, ch. 3.1). Stavrogin's love for Lizaveta did not include concern for her well-being; self-interest was the main element, undermining his connection with others. No salvation can be found in a relationship that

cannot get beyond self.

But Stavrogin does not really love himself either. His indifference to everything is reflected in his letter to Darya: ‘I am still capable, as I always was, of desiring to do something good, and of feeling pleasure from it; at the same time I desire evil and feel pleasure from that too. But both feelings are always too petty, and are never very strong’ (pt. 3, ch. 8). Stavrogin’s spiritual condition is that loveless indifference described in Christ’s message to the Laodiceans: ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth’ (Rev 3:15-16). Stavrogin has bishop Tihon recite that passage to him before he reads his confession. He interrupts, saying, ‘it’s aimed at people who are indifferent, neither one thing nor another, isn’t it?’ (420; pt. 2, ch. 9*.1). Stavrogin’s failure to be very good or very bad concerns both his own conscience and the conscience that exists within the community. Even before writing to Darya, Stavrogin was aware of this biblical passage. We can infer that Stavrogin believes that his own attitude toward good and evil is to be vomited out of the mouth of God.

The only reason Stavrogin has left for living is fear of suicide. In the letter to Darya he writes: ‘I know I ought to kill myself, to brush myself off the earth like a nasty insect; but I am afraid of suicide, for I am afraid of showing greatness of soul’ (692). This fear may also bear on the fate of being vomited out of the mouth of God. Clearly, he has no genuine love for himself. The primal instinct of fear of death, or the faith problem of fear of not being saved, are what keeps Stavrogin alive. But never having been very good in anything, he does not even maintain an interest in these fears, and so heads for his doom in an entirely negative way.

Dostoevsky attributes to Stavrogin a number of characteristics of Christ: the way he receives the attention of others at once, and the way he instills diverse ideas (including both belief in God and atheism). The only difference is that these elements work in the opposite direction of Christ, as if they were a shadow of Christ’s love expressed both to others and to himself. Where Christ proves his love and his divine nature by his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, Stavrogin transcends death by hanging himself while sane and lucid, but there is no resurrection. His death is a stark sign of the loss of love and the doom that atheism entails. In light of the above, there appear to be two aspects to Stavrogin’s suicide: his ruin as an individual and his ruin in the context of his metaphoric inversion of Christ’s character, where it has a collective significance. In the novel’s epigraph, Luke 8:32-7, the devils possess a herd of swine and plunge them to their doom in the lake. Stavrogin is possessed by an evil spirit, by the madness or evil within himself, and is the chief of the eponymous devils. Most of the people who met tragic fates in the story were involved with Stavrogin.

Unnamed Suicides

However the story also mentions an unnamed suicide who never crossed paths with Stavrogin. This young man commits suicide alone, leaving a letter stating that he has 'drunk' all the money he had. There is no description of the young man's inner life, although there is an account of how he shot himself in the heart with a pistol. This is the first suicide in the story and is treated as an exciting distraction: 'Our ladies had never seen a suicide. I remember one of them said aloud on the occasion, "Everything's so boring. One can't be squeamish over one's amusements"' (317; pt. 2, ch. 5.2).

I shall speculate on the cause of the young man's suicide by reusing some of the points of view that I have discussed for each character above. Let me first refer to Liputin's mention of Kirillov's 'very interesting article dealing with the causes of the increase of suicide in Russia, and, generally speaking, the causes that lead to the increase or decrease of suicide in society' (91; pt. 1, ch. 3.4). Liputin has a personality that requires caution in trusting his statements, but despite Kirillov's anger at his indiscretion, he does not deny the account that Liputin insists on giving: 'He is only collecting observations, and the essence of the question, or, so to say, its moral aspect he is not touching at all. And, indeed, he rejects morality itself altogether, and holds with the last new principle of general destruction for the sake of ultimate good' (91-2).

Is the unnamed young man's suicide somehow connected with this revolutionary nihilism? One of the characteristics of the young man is the 'three mistakes in spelling' (317) found in the letter he left before his suicide. These errors are reminiscent of the linguistic breakdown shared by Kirillov and Stavrogin, reflecting a breakdown of thought. Do we find a comparable mental bankruptcy in this young man? He was traveling to a relative's house in town with a 'large sum of money' entrusted to him by his family to buy his sister a wedding present. During this journey he stops at the inn where he will commit suicide. He immediately goes out to a club and tries to play a betting game, but ends up losing. He returns to the inn and spends all his money on champagne, cigars, and a big dinner. Then he leaves for two days, and returns to the inn in a drunken state. He orders more drinks and food, and then commits suicide without being noticed.

To run out of money intended for another purpose due to gambling or drink is a form of 'insanity' frequently encountered in AA and other self-help groups. Dostoevsky himself was addicted to gambling at one time, and in *The Gambler*, based on his own experiences, he describes a similar kind of madness to that of this young man. Although it is not necessarily true that this young man had an addiction, the madness that can be read from his behavior in the days leading up to his suicide suggests that he may have had some sort of breakdown in his thinking. The essence of that breakdown is, again, a lack of concern. If he had shown proper concern and care for his relatives, he would not have touched the money in the first place. Also, even

after he 'drank' the money, if he had paid attention to the people around him, he would not have taken the step of committing suicide. It seems that the young man's inner conscience was so broken that he could not have such concern.

There is no description of the young man's family environment or his immediate surroundings. But other parts of the novel shed light on the Russian situation and the values surrounding the young man. Note again the reactions of the curious onlookers, and also their lack of any condemnation or questioning of his suicidal behavior. 'There was no trace of the anguish of death in the face; the expression was serene, almost happy, as though there were no cares in his life. All our party stared at him with greedy curiosity' (318-19). It is implied that this frivolous gawking is of a piece with a creeping nihilism in Russian society. 'Our ladies gazed in silence, their companions distinguished themselves by their wit and their superb equanimity. One observed that his was the best way out of it, and that the boy could not have hit upon anything more sensible' (319). Someone asks 'why people had begun hanging and shooting themselves among us of late, as though they had suddenly lost their roots, as though the ground were giving way under everyone's feet,' but the question meets a frosty reception. Dostoevsky, in the majesty of authorship, does not tip his hand with any overt expression of his view on the state of society, and the figure to whom he has entrusted the narrative is the least opinionated person in the novel, dropping from notice most of the time. Thus the incidents themselves must show the novel's message, that society has taken a suicidal turn due to the loss of individual connection to God, faith, and community. There is no direct relationship between the young man and Stavrogin. However, it can be said that the particular values of the time in which Stavrogin emerged constituted a diabolical miasma, and that the young man was one of many possessed by this evil spirit and sunk in it. All of this confirms that the essential cause of suicide in *Devils* is the loss of connection to God, faith, community, and love for others, and a general lack of concern for them.

Given the high suicide rate in Japan, and reports that half of Japanese youth have contemplated suicide, this novel should haves a particular resonance among Japanese readers. In fact, however, the popularity of the Russian novelist in Japan is concentrated on *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov,* and *Devils* is not so well known. Nevertheless, the situation addressed by *Devils* is not entirely remote form that underlying contemporary Japanese suicides. The loss of community ties and religious faith is also evident in contemporary Japan. Because of this, one gets the impression that the working of conscience, and the aim at moral self-development and at contributing to the welfare of others, based on a deep-rooted sense of love for oneself and others, are not strongly evident in Japanese people, who like the characters in *Devils* may appear to be morally underdeveloped. The lack of a firm conscience may underlie the recourse to suicide in some cases.

A Little Light

Stepan, the liberal from yesteryear condemned to irrelevance by the ruthless radicals of his son's generation, and unthanked for his devotion to the 'new ideas,' dies of illness at the end of the story. His death contains a hint of hope. In the inn where his wanderings have taken him, a gospel-woman has to look after him; she reads to him the passages about the lukewarm Laodiceans and the Gadarene swine (669-71; pt. 3, ch. 7.2) as if in review of the entire sorry events he has lived through. Rejoined by the imperious Varvara Petrovna, he receives the last sacraments and utters first a profession of faith not exempt from his usual comic bumbling: 'My immortality is necessary if only because God will not be guilty of injustice and extinguish altogether the flame of love for Him once kindled in my heart' (679), but his last words resonate prophetically as the answer to the agonies the novel has charted: 'The mere fact of the ever-present idea that there exists something more just and more happy than I am fills me through and through with tender ecstasy.... The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great' (680). These words are 'in flat contradiction with many of his former convictions' (679).

In AA and other self-help groups, the term 'bottoming out' refers to a sudden change in values and a longing for recovery that occurs at the end of a decline. Dostoevsky himself had a similar experience. At the height of his gambling addiction, he mistakenly entered a synagogue when he was about to enter a church to seek salvation, and from that moment on, his craving for gambling stopped. Stepan undergoes a similar bottoming out, after various hardships, regaining a genuine interest in God and others, and passing away near his loved companion and thinking of his son and Shatov (of whose murder he has not heard). His death seems to shine a little light at the end of the story, as if to counter the doom that Stavrogin sprinkles around him.

Dostoevsky's work contains an unusual number of characters, each representing the life lived by a real person, and each teaching us something and giving food for thought, so that the novel stimulates new insights on each rereading. When I read *Devils*, the two items that most caught my attention were the Laodicean apathy and the Gadarene suicides. Perhaps some element within myself contributed to my interest in these items. Dostoevsky's works can nourish a lifetime of reflection. The most rewarding way to read them is to continually face oneself as one does so.

David J. Taylor

Beckett's Faith

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In his obituary for Samuel Beckett (1906-89), the literary critic Eric Griffiths reminded *Independent* readers that 'Catholics pray for the dead that they be granted *refrigerii sedem*, *quietis beatitudinem*, *et luminis claritatem*—"a place of cool refreshment, the blessing of calm, and radiant light,"'[1] also observing within Beckett's later works 'places of calm, of cool or chill refreshment, lit with an inexplicably constant light, with a "light that makes all so white no visible source, all shines with the same white shine."' Griffiths kindly hoped that Beckett may have found such illumination and peace beyond his passing, as opposed to 'absolute cessation, the pulse dropped away to nought,' seeing in the above phrases he quotes from Beckett's prose fiction *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965)[2] a 'paradisiacal' situation.

It is a curious judgment, despite belonging to the critic's weariness of continually hearing about the infernal and the purgatorial in Beckett's imagery, and wanting to tread elsewhere in the spirit of Dante. More urgently, the remark belongs to the general will to wish Beckett well in the afterlife, or at least the condition after this life, which the great writer consistently documented as a more or less painful ordeal. But, indeed, and contrary to the above sentiments, alongside the beauty of its mysterious (inconstant) white light, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Beckett's single paragraph text of 1965 inflicts on its pair of male and female figures, cruelly compressed 'back to back'[3] in a rotunda, a great deal more than 'pauses of varying length' in

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[1] *The Independent* 27 December 1989.

[2] The dating of Beckett's texts throughout gives the year of first publication in English whether of the original work or of the translated version in English after the original French.

[3] Samuel Beckett, *The Collected Shorter Prose* (London: John Calder, 1984), 147.

pleasantly lit temperatures. 'Strong heat, surfaces hot but not burning to the touch' assail the body, as does a 'movement' which 'continues unbroken until, in the space of some twenty seconds, pitch black is reached and at the same instant say freezing-point.' Only 'the extremes' of light and heat 'are stable.' A sincere wish to recognize paradise in the 'great white calm,' which does not acknowledge the text's other emphases—that the light is 'agitated,' 'convulsive,' and capable of 'feverish greys'—seems a good intention too far (*CSP* 146-7). Perhaps uncharitably, we recall the much earlier protagonist Murphy in his wry retelling of the gag that without medical intervention the inmates of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat asylum 'would have been as happy as Larry, short for Lazarus, whose raising seemed to Murphy perhaps the one occasion on which the Messiah had overstepped the mark.'[4] Alongside the admittedly relieving beauty of Beckett's mathematically detailed visions, the reader is habitually beset by a countermanding, near permanent suffering in characters' bodies and minds. Dante's longing for the understanding at the climax of the *Paradiso* 'to see how human form could fit/The circle'[5] is reduced to a literal manifestation in the geometrical 'diameters at right angles AB CD' (*CSP*, 145) allotted the two bodies confined in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, which further recalls the fraught conjurings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in its anxiety about its own visionary potential:

> No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure. (CSP, 145)

The borrowed, disparate vocabulary of Shakespeare's quasi-paradisal island is to be erased as 'endlessly' as possible, and undergoes a relocation from the settings of romance to another of Beckett's (more accurately) purgatorial spaces. Prospero's celebration of his magical power over nature 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault' (V.1.43) is inverted, the freedom of the ether replaced by the confining space of the rotunda's prohibitive 'ground, wall, vault,' wherein the two tortured bodies are 'rediscovered miraculously' (*CSP*, 145-6), just as the young lovers Miranda and Ferdinand are also 'discovered' alone 'playing at chess' (V.1.171.1). More relevantly, *The Tempest* is also recalled in its conflicts, with Ferdinand 'austerely punish'd' (4.1.1) by Prospero, prior to the 'marriage-blessing' entertainment for his future son-in-law and daughter, after which he is 'vexed' and 'troubled' (IV.1.158-9), his transcendent account of how the magical spirits 'are melted into air, into

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Abbreviated as *CSP* in further citation.

[4] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: John Calder, 1993 [1938]), 102.

[5] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Kenneth Mackenzie (London: The Folio Society, 1979), 464.

thin air… like the baseless fabric of this vision' (IV.1.150-1) reenacted in Beckett as a momentary failing of the mind to sustain its imagery, 'the sighting of the little fabric quite as much a matter of chance, its whiteness merging in the surrounding whiteness' (*CSP*, 146).

Despite the fertile melancholy of his 'beating mind' (IV.1.163), and the final relinquishing of his supernatural powers, Prospero's artifice has determined a happy future for his young couple in the wake of the natural and human storms which have brought them together; the Beckettian inversion, meanwhile, persists in its negations, imperiously abandoning its hapless couple, and concluding with a throwaway, despairing ignorance of them and of any ability to proceed artistically:

> Leave them there, sweating and icy, there is better elsewhere. No, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere, and no question now of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness, to see if they still lie still in the stress of that storm, or of a worse storm, or in the black dark for good, or the great whiteness unchanging, and if not what they are doing. (*CSP*, 147)

Beckett is more usually to be witnessed reflecting on Shakespeare's darker acts, as, again, *Imagination Dead Imagine* insists on a tragic comparison with King Lear as he grieves for the dead Cordelia ('Lend me a looking glass;/If that her breath will mist or stain the stone/Why, then she lives' (V.3.261-3)), Beckett's narrator contrarily asserting that a voyeuristic proof of life may be achieved with the same action: 'Hold a mirror to their lips, it mists' (*CSP*, 147).

But above all influences, Beckett's oeuvre is emphatic in its self-plagiarism, its continuous, obsessive returns to itself and its concerns. Any sighting of a heavenly Christian light is tempered not only by the above text's alternative strictures but also by those of the much longer, precedent *All Strange Away* (1964) from which it derives its title, storm, and torturous rotunda (which appear after that text has experimented with a series of controlled spaces and arduous positions for a female protagonist, Emma). The word 'light' is omnipresent in *All Strange Away*, occurring, excluding variants, sixty times, and is clearly defined: 'Hell this light from nothing no reason any moment' (*CSP*, 117); the concomitant 'dark', appearing twenty five times, and enabling sleep 'with nightmares unimaginable,' adds to the 'unstillable turmoil' (126-7) and the 'mere cries' (127) and 'murmurs' (122) of ardent and anguished appeals: 'Mother mother, Mother in heaven and of God, God in heaven, Christ and Jesus all combinations, loved ones and places' (127). Such versions of prayer and the desire for 'sweet relief' (127) go unanswered, regretted instead as 'a mere torrent of hope and unhope mingled and submission amounting to nothing' (122). Emma's futile attempts at earthly rest—the bizarre narrative jolt in the incongruous appearance of a hammock—provide a further occasion for the narrator's vehement dissent in his creation: 'no more feeling apparently in hammock than in Jesus Christ

Almighty' (122). From the ridiculous to sublime blasphemy.

Such engagements cannot go unnoticed, and recognition of Christian language and experience in Beckett (as opposed to a yearning for the rewards of the afterlife) is an inevitability in an oeuvre of countless inclusions of God and biblical references. Charles Juliet in his conversations cum interviews was uniquely able to extract some of Beckett's most significant pauses from Beckett himself:

> Have you broken free of the influence of religion?
> Outwardly, doubtless … But otherwise … [6]

The strong sense here of needing to concede a prevailing internal watchfulness, and of reoccurring reactions, continuing in ways other than external reality, both in the remembered intensities of his biography and in his artistic application of religious expression, encourages discussion of what might be termed Beckett's faith.

Faith and Comic Reflections

An intriguing admission occurs to the eponymous narrator of Molloy (1955):

> in my own interest… I saw it only as the weakness of a solitary, a weakness admittedly to be deplored, but which had to be indulged if I wished to remain a solitary, and I did, I clung to that, with as little enthusiasm as to my hens or to my faith, but no less lucidly.[7]

Whether farming or worshipping, the paradoxical energy of negation driving Molloy in his dilapidated isolation reminds us that we do well to perceive the different forms light takes in Beckett. Dwindling as Molloy's enthusiasm may be, he acknowledges that his small but persisting adherence to his faith is not easily shaken off, concluding with the surprisingly positive twist towards clarity. And it is in this faith in the force of Christian terminology to lucidly convey diminished belief that one of Beckett's major creative paradoxes resides: that the inevitable expression of the discontents of an ingrained and reluctant religious upbringing involve a frequent return to the source.

James Knowlson carefully removes the possibilities of myth and inaccuracy regarding Beckett's birth at the very beginning of his authorized biography by establishing the fact that Beckett was born on Good Friday, 13

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[6] Charles Juliet, *Rencontre avec Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1986), 50.

[7] Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 114-15.

April 1906,[8] an extraordinary 'coincidence' in its relevance to the committed perceptions of general and personal suffering from birth and beyond (including Second World War trauma endured in France), which Beckett was to enunciate throughout his entire work. Decades after the celebrated trilogy of novels (*Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable*), the concise autobiographical recollections of *Company* (1979) develop from a vague cliche of physical and spiritual awareness ('You first saw the light on such and such a day'[9]) to historical marital and birth practice ('You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in' [*C*, 15]) to a final clear definition of an Easter birth, climaxing with the Calvary ('You first saw the light and cried at the close of the day when in darkness Christ at the ninth hour cried and died' [*C*, 77]), a genealogy bracketing the distinct instances of having 'cried' and the final rhyming blow of 'died' as of comparable and exceptional pain, whose purpose or not seems proffered for debate. Parental religious influence and childhood's ease of supplication ('Kneeling at your bedside you included it the hedgehog in your detailed prayer to God to bless all you loved' [*C*, 40]) are judged as naive, and implied to be a mystifying betrayal prior to a lifetime's disaffection:

> Days if not weeks passed before you could bring yourself to return to the hutch. You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench. (*C*, 41)

Yet the tones recorded here, both of the child's shock and later adult resentful anger ('God is love. Yes or no? No.' [*C*, 73]) are crucially held in the repeated 'never' (and its proximity to 'never forgiven'), tones which stand in contradiction to the measured, authoritative narrative voice in one of its numerous self-definitions:

> Another trait the flat tone. No life. Same flat tone at all times. For its affirmations. For its negations. For its interrogations. For its exclamations. For its imperations. Same flat tone. You were once. You were never. Were you ever? Oh never to have been! Be again. Same flat tone. (*C*, 26)

Taking the Lord's name in vain comes easily to Beckett's people, and in a wide variety of tones, as does the comic reframing of Biblical events traditionally owed the greatest respect. Molloy's tormented relationship with his mother and with humanity in general is calibrated in terms of Christ's

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[8] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Bloomsbury, (1996), 1-2.

[9] Samuel Beckett, *Company*, John Calder, (1980), 8. Abbreviated to *C* in further citation.

ultimate act of suffering:

> And God forgive me to tell you the horrible truth, my mother's image sometimes mingles with theirs, which is literally unendurable like being crucified.[10]

Yet, the comedian's archetypal exploitation of the troublesome female family member (wife, mother, mother-in-law) is itself brutalized at the punchline in the comparison with the extreme historical torture, let alone in the startling presence of the word 'crucified' itself and its inevitable religious connotations. The word was to permeate Beckett's drama, where actors—professional manipulators of tone, and dynamically employed—continue to deliver an oeuvre of resentment against the Almighty—God has presence in all of the spoken plays bar a few (intriguingly final) exceptions.

In *Waiting for Godot* (1956) with perverse irony, having condemned the hapless, servile Lucky for his verbal assault on the tyrannical Pozzo ('Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years!'[11](34)), Estragon's retorts rely on the comedian's quick fire timing to relay outrageous, knowing punchlines in repeated comparisons with Jesus:

> VLADIMIR: But you can't go barefoot!
> ESTRAGON: Christ did.
> VLADIMIR: Christ! What's Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!
> ESTRAGON: All my life I've compared myself to him.
> VLADIMIR: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!
> ESTRAGON: Yes. And they crucified quick. (*CDW*, 51)

Vladimir's shock at the ease of blasphemy spurs Estragon to imply a lifetime's reflection on his personal grief with the suffering bodily Christ as his forebear, as opposed to His miraculous or supernatural presence. The brevity and the rhythm necessary for the culminating gag are perfectly applied, but with resurrection denied and a further iconoclasm instituted, that Jesus had it easy, with the heat of the Holy Land accelerating life's demise.

A good comedian varies his jokes, but the great comedian also varies his tones; and it is in the shifting nuances of the lines where God is invoked that Beckett tests the experience of non-belief.

Hamm initiates a prayer session in *Endgame* (1958):

> CLOV: [*Resigned.*] Off we go.

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[10] Samuel Beckett, *Trilogy,* 63.

[11] Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, Faber, (1986), 34. Abbreviated as *CDW* in further citation.

HAMM: [*To* NAGG.] And you?
NAGG: [*Clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble.*] Our Father which art –
HAMM: Silence! In silence! Where are your manners? [*Pause.*] Off we go. [*Attitudes of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.*]
Well?
CLOV: [*Abandoning his attitude.*] What a hope! And you?
HAMM: Sweet damn all! [*To* NAGG.] And you?
NAGG: Wait! [*Pause. Abandoning his attitude.*] Nothing doing!
HAMM: The bastard! He doesn't exist!
CLOV: Not yet. (*CDW*, 119)

The brilliantly disquieting addition to the punchline ('not yet!') is hardly an occasion for optimism (He may still arrive to save us), and no doubt echoes Hamm's issues with God and his routine Beckettian ire, which both defines and countermands dissatisfaction with religious experience. But Clov's brief assertion implies an alternative tone—the fainter release of irony and its recognition of defeat while maintaining the possibility of alternative release. Any celebratory or anguished clarity of atheism, then, is abjured in Beckett for a more complex and enriching aesthetic compromise in outbursts poised between caustic fury and stoic understatement.

The strength of paradox prevails, with God's insertion guiding the audience, as if by way of clear and easy logic, towards its predicament in the midst of the serious business of comedy, as later in *Rough for Theatre I* (1976), where Hamm and Clov's attitudes have indeed been abandoned:

B: … Good God! Don't tell me you're going to pray?
A: No. (*CDW*, 232)

God is there to help the comedian alliterate:

B: … What befell you? Women? Gambling? God? (*CDW*, 228)

Jokes may be revised and improved, as in *Rough for Theatre II* (1976), where the above triplet extends into the details of a comic tirade on an everyman's downfall, which are universalized and made philosophically inescapable. Character B once again: 'finances, art and nature, heart and conscience, health, housing conditions, God and man, so many disasters.' (*CDW*, 238) The list rightly ends with its most troubling pairing, and like Clov's demanding punchline implies that the struggle is far from over: disasters are never ending.

Revolving It All: Christian Memory and Dramatic Ritual

Casual, even flippant humor is notably absent in works where, in particular, the traumatized female voice is granted a unique potency with which to reflect on the tribulations of faith.

The three women of *Come and Go* (1966) of 'Ages undeterminable' (*CDW*, 353), yet old in their constricting costumes, names, and memories of girlhood companionship in the playground at 'Miss Wade's' (354), are deprived of the supernatural power of the three witches in *Macbeth*, and lack, in another set of Shakespearean inversions, the forces with which their satanic forebears control men. Here God is not opposed in evil, but poignantly called on by each pairing as a means to prevent the secret knowledge of, presumably, a departed betrothed, which will complete the distress of the other unfortunate enduring absent love and marriage ('God grant not'… 'God forbid'… 'Please God not.' [354-5]). As the trio finally (re)unite in the exquisite onstage action binding all hands in which Flo claims she 'can feel the rings,' lifetimes spent remembering childhood, loss in youth, and the onset of age—the bodily rings of bone on elderly hands, replacing the wished for symbolic metal of wedding bands—also remember anachronistic expressions of politesse with which to gain holy blessings, and which went unreceived: the 121 spoken words of this 'dramaticule' (*CDW*, 351) contain an especially terse insight into God's distance from his supplicants: He did not grant marriage, but forbade it as it did not please Him in these three instances. Instead, Vi, Ru, and Flo are granted speech and motion of eternal theatrical beauty.

Though the women of *Come and Go* are denied the wild force of Shakespeare's witches, any theater or television audience confronted by the stunning outpouring of language from the single speaking character, Mouth, in *Not I* (1973) may well recall the female oracular gifts of myth. The abandoned, illegitimate soul who began life in a 'godforsaken hole' (*CDW*, 376) prior to a religious institution, and her final assumption of the third person 'coming up to seventy' (376) is still able to harness the unstoppable 'stream' of her speech as a private comedy of indictment:

> brought up as she had been to believe… with the other waifs… in a merciful… [*Brief Laugh.*] … God … [*Good laugh.*] (*CDW*, 377)

If the name of the Lord be not blessed in Beckett, God's continual presence nevertheless emerges as an offstage yet not so peripheral character to be variously railed against in despair or defiance, or—alternatively sided with in accusation and hostility. The Woman's Voice, rejected in romance but still malevolently inhabiting Joe's 'penny farthing hell' (*CDW*, 362) of a mind in *Eh Joe* (1967), consolidates her imagined assaults on his conscience in a startling turn to her ex-lover's faith:

> How's your Lord these days?… Still worth having?… Still lapping it up?… The

passion of our Joe…. Wait till He starts talking to you. (*CDW*, 364)

Joe extinguishes the voices of the past as a 'mental thuggee,' 'throttling the dead in his head' (*CDW*, 363). This self-serving version of Tenebrae inverts his faith, and precedes the anxious conjuring of the Almighty's voice and His (presumed) final judgment. Christian connotations, such as the misquotation of Luke 12:20 for more concise theatrical effect—'Till one night…. "Thou fool thy soul"…. Put your thugs on that' (*CDW*, 364)—may also include the more nuanced Beckettian ambiguities which often repay pause in a moment of apparently unrestrained vitriol: 'Yes, great love God knows why…. Even me….' (*CDW*, 364). Is God's knowledge and love inclusive enough to accommodate Joe and even include the woman in her vengeful gloating? Or is Christian doctrine sarcastically referred to in that it is *supposed* to embrace them both, and cannot, with the idiom 'God knows' reduced to the vernacular with its irreligious shrug of both ignorance and indifference. If Joe's post-coital habit of retreat from his partners is not conscience-inducing enough, the pointed recollection of a fragile innocent's suicide and the accompanying agonized publicity is intended to prevail:

> Ever know what happened?… She didn't say?… Just the announcement in the *Independent*…. 'On Mary's beads we plead her needs and in the Holy Mass'…. Will I tell you?… Not interested?… Well I will just the same…. (*CDW*, 365)

As it is in Joe's imagination we reside, the moral contradiction between his Catholic beliefs and his carnal affairs is no less dwelt on than his jilted acidic female interlocutor or an unforgiving God. The judgments, misquotations (of 'for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'), and snidely witty theology (when was God ever dubbed 'His Nibs'?)—are all his own:

> Then the silence…. A dollop of that…. To crown all…. Till His Nibs…. One dirty winter night…. 'Mud thou art.' (*CDW*, 365)

The young woman finally able to take her own life by pills and drowning ('What year of your Lord?…' [366]) is credited at the end with the greatest example of love, with God apparently categorized pejoratively along with the former arch lovers:

> *There's love for you*…. Isn't it, Joe?… Wasn't it, Joe?… *Eh, Joe*?… Compared to us…. Compared to Him…. *Eh Joe?*… (*CDW*, 367)

However, again—in another formulation—we recall the play's great artistic stress: that it is Joe himself who has replayed the girl's despairing sacrifice, and that his self-mortifying motions, while tragically understanding the extent of his lover's affection, also might encompass the *different form* of God's love (the ultimate comparison) and the meaning of his own inevitable

regret and pangs of conscience after a lifetime's neglected emotion and failure of sympathy.

Beckett's God is always closer than we imagine, as in *All That Fall* (1957), where the customary offhand desperation, such as Mr Rooney's ('Nothing Mrs Rooney, nothing, I was merely cursing under my breath, God and man' [*CDW*, 175]) is aligned with the strictures of life in traditional religious contexts. The difficulties of Mrs Rooney and Miss Fitt—aptly named in both her social and existential anxiety ('misfit')—are grounded in confrontation with the supposedly fulfilling actions of Christian ritual increasingly eroding the selves of their participants:

> MISS FITT: Mrs Rooney! I saw you, but I did not know you.
> MRS ROONEY: Last Sunday we worshipped together. We knelt side by side. No at the same altar. We drank from the same chalice. Have I so changed since then?
> MISS FITT: [*Shocked.*] Oh but in church, Mrs Rooney, in church I am alone with my Maker … Ah yes, I am distray, very distray, even on week-days. Ask Mother, if you do not believe me. Hetty, she says, when I start eating the doily instead of the thin bread and butter, Hetty how can you be so distray? [*Sighs.*] I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs Rooney, just not really there at all…. is there anything I can do, now that I am here?
> MRS ROONEY: If you would help me up the face of this cliff, Miss Fitt, I have little doubt your Maker would requite you, if no one else… I asked Mr Barrell to give me his arm, just give me his arm. [*Pause.*] He turned on his heel and strode away.
> MISS FITT: Is it my arm you want then? [*Pause. Impatiently.*] Is it my arm, you want, Mrs Rooney, or what is it?
> MRS ROONEY: [*Exploding.*] Your arm! Any arm! A helping hand! For five seconds! Christ! What a planet! (*CDW*, 182-3)

A dogged adherence to the promised consolation of well-worn words and deeds gives little comfort to characters bordering on madness. Yet both alienated women in various degrees of crisis maintain a strong awareness of the enduring bonds between Christian engagement and social nicety as Beckett, here, in an early phase of his dramaturgy, experiments with radio, routine comic puns, and the harsher reality of frustration with the limits of human interaction and the trials of friendship. Mrs Rooney's understanding of a personal 'Maker' unavailable to her, yet specific to Miss Fitt's mind charts a critical area of the characters' painful relation to faith: that the perception of belief in others is not merely a confirmation of a lack within itself, but a reinstitution of the mind's entire relation to its past and present conditions regarding spiritual belief and the need for their reassessment, as contained in the inversion of Christian patience in Mrs Rooney's 'explosion' of exclamation marks and angry appeal to God.

The Religious Sensibility in Beckett's Drama

Thirty years later, however, Beckett was to triumphantly reinstate and intensify the potential of the assisting arm of *All That Fall* in the late masterpiece *Footfalls* (1976), where the single onstage character May obsessively paces a palimpsestic strip of the stage, referred to by her offstage mother (electrically amplified and reminiscent of a radio voice) as the hallway of an old house shared by the women, while May herself recounts the same performance action as taking place in the transept of a nearby church, which she rightly recalls as symbolic of Christ's crucified body:

> M: A little later, when as though she had never been, it never been, she began to walk. [*Pause.*] At nightfall. [*Pause.*] Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north door, always locked at that hour, and walk, up and down, up and down, His poor arm. (*CDW*, 402)

Footfalls continues Beckett's career-long amalgamation of the registers of words ranging from the everyday and the Holy, 'poor' traversing colloquial (traditionally female) affection and sympathy, while also raising the comic accusation of May's continual nightly pressure on Jesus's outstretched limb, let alone evoking the literary presences of the sleepwalking, conscience-stricken Lady Macbeth, or the anguished perambulations of Racine's Bérénice. (As if He hasn't suffered enough.) The helping hand Mrs Rooney so craves is in this play dutifully offered by May as she administers medicine to her elderly bedridden mother ('Would you like me to inject you again?' [*CDW*, 400]), no doubt in her poor arm.) And it is in this poignant conjoining of the tragedy of May's endurance and mental illness with the image of Christ's suffering, verbally played with but now without the indignant or mocking humor of the other plays ('When other girls of her age were out at… lacrosse she was already here. [*Pause.*] At this.' [401]) that Beckett most finely articulates the demands the religious background makes on his art.

As in the fraught interrogations implied to be coursing within Joe's mind, May's rehearsed theatrical dialogues unite disparate contending identities into a coherent narrative, her tale of two further women encompassing the dramatic persona, Amy, whose suffering mind shares the epithet 'poor' with Christ's riven body. Despite its brevity, the nagging fretful repetition of the commonplace 'it all' acquires a vast semantic reach, from the social experience that has shunned May to the unfulfilling religious faith that has kept her bereft. Like the attenuated self of Miss Fitt, May and her voices have been hollowed out to a minimal existence of repetition and organized avoidance of the threat of self-knowledge; she also asserts—out of self-reliance and relief—that she 'was not there' at Evensong, despite her mother's reported protestations to the contrary:

> M: How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there?

> [*Pause.*] The love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen. [*Pause.*] I heard you distinctly. … Amy. [*Pause.*] Yes, Mother. [*Pause.*] Will you never have done? [*Pause.*] Will you never have done… revolving it all? [*Pause.*] It? [*Pause.*] It all. [*Pause.*] In your poor mind. [*Pause.*] It all. [*Pause.*] It all. (*CDW*, 403)

The grafting of the secular ritual of May's therapeutic transference of her mental distress onto the body of Christ secures a further perspective: that a suffering humanity does not supplant the need for religious involvement, but instead remains adrift and at odds in its context. It is as if Beckett's characters in their highly physical stage rituals enact a search for the spiritual meaning that evades them. T. S. Eliot astutely distinguished between loss of faith and loss of religious sensibility:

> The trouble of the modern age is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the inability to *feel* towards God and man as they did. A belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand; but when religious feeling disappears, the words in which men have struggled to express it become meaningless.[12]

For Beckett's voices, it is rather their *excess of feeling towards God and man* that is preventing any spiritual sustenance. Indeed, the characters are under pains to distance themselves from the thought 'even more awful if possible … that feeling was coming back … imagine!... feeling coming back!' (*CDW*, 379-80). The third person personae of Beckett's wretched women are feeling personified. Beckett's continual references to God bear the significant weight of the absence of belief, and bolster rather than erase faith's pressing residua. A terrible century's experience fractured the wholeness of 'the blessing of calm' for a writer who 'tarried in remains of light' (*C*, 29). Beckett's great tragicomic art does not conclude with but proceeds through inspired denial of spiritual balm. The 'blazing light' of *Happy Days* (1961) is the discomfort over-illuminating Winnie's 'heavenly day' and 'inaudible prayer' with its final horrified knowledge: 'World without end Amen' (*CDW*, 138). Yet though 'embedded up to neck' (*CDW*, 160) in Act 2, Winnie's heroic second speech salutes literary and religious interdependency by remembering another beginning—Book 3 of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: 'Hail, holy light' (*CDW*, 160).

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[12] T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, (1957), 25.

Frances Fister-Stoga

Bentham's Question and Montaigne's Cat: Animal Suffering and Spiritual Turning Points

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The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.—Proverbs 12:10

The very beginning of Genesis tells us that God created man in order to give him dominion over fish and fowl and all creatures. Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse.—Milan Kundera

Leaving aside debates on whether non-human animals have souls, a moral status, or are simply automatons with no rational capabilities, Jeremy Bentham offered a different perspective in 1780. In chapter XII of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* Bentham remarked: 'The question is not, can they *reason*? nor, can they *talk*? but, can they *suffer*?'

Non-human animal death has been portrayed in literature as part of an agenda for change. An example is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) which reformed the meat-packing industry with its descriptions not only of the industry's unsanitary conditions but also of the inherent cruelty of the slaughterhouse:

> Along one side of the room ran a narrow gallery... into which the cattle were driven by men with goads which gave them electric shocks. Once crowded in here, the creatures were prisoned, each in a separate pen, by gates that shut, leaving them no room to turn around; and while they stood bellowing and plunging over the top of the pen, there leaned one of the 'knockers' armed with a sledge-hammer, and watching for a chance to deal a blow. The room echoed with the thuds in quick succession, and the stamping and the kicking of the steers.... [After the 'killing-beds'] came the 'butcher' to bleed them and before you could realize it, the man had darted on to the next line, and a stream of bright red was pouring out upon the floor. This floor was half an inch deep with

> blood, in spite of the best efforts of men who kept shoveling it through holes. (43)

Beyond the pragmatic function of such depictions, several authors have described the cruel death of an animal as marking a turning point in their personal outlook. Here, an author, narrator, or character is affected with feelings either of sympathy or empathy towards a non-human animal subject. Sympathy 'is not an emotion that is congruent with the other's emotion or situation such as feeling the sadness of the other person's grieving for the death of his father' (Stueber). Rather, sympathy consists of 'feeling sorrow or concern for the distressed or needy other,' a feeling for the other out of a 'heightened awareness of the suffering of another person as something that needs to be alleviated' (Stueber). In The *Unbearable lightness of Being*, Kundera comments on 'compassion' as a similar response:

> In languages that derive from Latin, 'compassion' means: we cannot look on coolly as others suffer; or, we sympathize with those who suffer. Another word with approximately the same meaning, 'pity' (French, *pitié*; Italian, *pietà*; etc.), connotes a certain condescension towards the sufferer. 'To take pity on a woman' means that we are better off than she, that we stoop to her level, lower ourselves. That is why the word 'compassion' generally inspires suspicion; it designates what is considered an inferior second-rate sentiment that has little to do with love. (20)

As opposed to sympathy or compassion which involve pity, one may draw on the works of Edith Stein that define empathy. Empathy (*Einfühlung*) is the feeling 'into' another: it is 'the act of consciousness to know or become inwardly aware of foreign or other consciousnesses' (Calcagno, 37). *Einfühlung* does not 'necessarily imply knowing or understanding the consciousness of the other absolutely' (38). For Stein, 'in the empathic act, I feel myself in the alter ego's place. I know the experience of the other as my own because I have entered into or find myself "living" the other's experience of pain' (38), although the consciousness of the ego and the other are not identical. But whether sympathy, compassion, or empathy is involved, the image or the experience of seeing animal suffering has had the power to effect an inner spiritual transformation in many. In this essay I offer an overview of such presentations, inviting the readers to continue the exploration of such material and to meditate on its anthropological and ecological implications

Childhood Epiphanies

In his *Journals* (1774), one of the masterpieces of spiritual autobiography, John Woolman candidly recounts how the killing of an innocent creature leads him to feel empathy towards all creation:

> Another thing remarkable in my childhood was that once, going to a neighbour's house, I saw a robin sitting on her nest, and as I came near she went off, but having young ones, flew about and with many cries expressed her concern for them. I stood and threw stones at her, till one striking her, she fell down dead. At first I was pleased with the exploit, but after a minute was seized with horror, as having in a sportive way killed an innocent creature while she was careful for her young. I beheld her lying dead and thought those young ones for which she was so careful must now perish for want of their dam to nourish them; and after some painful considerations on the subject, I climbed up the tree and took all the young birds and killed them, supposing that better than to leave them to pine away and die miserably, and believed in this case that Scripture proverb was fulfilled. 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel' [Prov.12:10]. (24-5)

Being much troubled by his actions, Woolman then sees this event as having implications for human behavior: 'Thus he whose tender mercies are over all his works hath placed a principle in the human mind which incites to exercise goodness toward every living creature; and this being singly attended to, people become tender-hearted and sympathizing' (25). In part from this early pivotal event involving the death of the mother robin and her brood, Woolman would eventually become a chief advocate of inclusive justice and the end of slavery, later traveling to England to attend meetings with Quaker abolitionists and finally dying there.

More than a century later, Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) evokes a similar youthful turning point which made him afterwards hate the killing of animals for sport or as a pastime and become a famous advocate against animal cruelty such as cock fighting and vivisection. Shelley Fishkin quotes Twain's previously unpublished 'Family Sketch':

> When I was a boy my mother pleaded for fishes and birds and tried to persuade me to spare them, but I went on taking their lives unmoved, until at last I shot a bird that sat in a high tree, with its head tilted back, and pouring out a song from an innocent heart. It toppled from its perch and came floating down limp and forlorn and fell at my feet, its song quenched and its unoffending life extinguished. I had not needed that harmless creature. I had destroyed it wantonly, and I felt all an assassin feels, of grief and remorse when his deed comes home to him and he wishes he could undo it and have his hands and his soul clean again from accusing blood. (3)

This experience is reiterated in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* where Huck Finn recalls killing a bird and 'I hain't never murdered no creature since, that wasn't doing me no harm, and I ain't going to.'

One should also add that an early impetus against animal cruelty came from Twain's mother. In his *Autobiography* he recalls his mother preventing the brutal whipping of a work horse and:

> All the race of dumb animals had a friend in her. By some subtle sign, the homeless, hunted, bedraggled, and disreputable cat recognized her at a glance as the born refuge and champion of his sort—and followed her home. His instinct was right, he was as welcome as the prodigal son. We had nineteen cats at one time, in 1845. And there wasn't one in the lot that had any character, not one that had any merit, except the cheap and tawdry merit of being unfortunate. (36)

Twain's sudden personal understanding of creature suffering and his mother's actions may have been the catalyst for him to produce so many stories (whimsical or serious) that center on a wide range of non-human animals. One may also mention that Twain believed that animals could think and communicate although not speaking. He did not see humans as the center of creation and he thought that in many ways they were inferior to animals.

Part novel and part autobiography, Albert Camus' unfinished novel *The First Man* includes a traumatic childhood event where the main character, Jacques Comery, watches the death of a chicken killed by his grandmother:

> Jacques went to the designated place, across the kitchen, while the grandmother placed herself in the doorway, blocking the exit to the hen as well as the child…. With the razor-sharp knife she slowly cut its throat at the place where a man has his Adam's apple, opening the wound while twisting the head while the knife cut with a dreadful sound more deeply into the cartilage, holding still the animal that was shaking all over with terrible twitches while the blood ran bright red into the white dish; and Jacques watched, his legs trembling, as if it were his own blood he felt draining away. (233)

This incident showed Camus the preciousness of all life. The trauma remained with him into adulthood, and is not unrelated to his reflective essay on the guillotine (1957) which was influential in bringing about the abolition of the death penalty in France.

The well-known Brazilian author Clarice Lispector offers a different perspective on early spiritual turning points with her short story 'The Woman Who Killed the Fish.' In this autobiographical narrative written for a specific group of children and others through the National Children's Campaign, the author recounts retrospectively the treatment of various non-human animals in her life and confesses her 'crime.' Her son went away for a month, and the author agreed to manage his aquarium. Forgetting to feed the fish for three days while busy writing a story, Lispector admits: 'They must have starved, just like people. But we talk and complain, the dog barks, the cat meows, all animals speak through sounds. But the fish is as mute as a tree and didn't have a voice to complain and call out to me' and 'when I went to look, they were still, thin, little, red—and unfortunately already dead of hunger' (26-7).

The author asks for forgiveness from the young readers: 'I really would like you to pardon me. From this day forward I'll never get distracted again' (27).

Besides being a turning point for the adult author to be more attentive to all of creation and be less negligent, the death of the fish functions more as an indirect way to instill a turning point in the young readers to consider their own attitude towards non-human forms of life and display care and concern.

Later Turning Points

The great Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy, who became involved with animal welfare later in his life, presents yet another turning point in personal beliefs in the description of non-human animal death in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) Avoiding any anthropomorphic connections, the author equates the killing of a pig with Jude's adult *chute humaine* from intellectual and moral aspirations and his *mésalliance* with a brutish woman:

> By this time Arabella [Jude's wife] had joined her husband, and Jude, rope in hand, got into the sty, and noosed the affrighted animal, who, beginning with a squeak of surprise, rose to cries of rage. Arabella opened the sty door, and together they hoisted the victim on to the stool, legs upward, and while Jude held him Arabella bound him down, looping the cord over his legs to keep him from struggling…. The animal's note changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow, and hopeless.
> 'Upon my soul I would sooner have gone without the pig than have had this to do!' said Jude. 'A creature I have fed with my own hands.' (64)

Giving Jude the sticking-knife, Arabella mocks Jude's notion of killing the pig quickly to avoid prolonged suffering. 'The meat must be well-bled, and to do that he must die slow. We shall lose a shilling score if the meat is red and bloody…. Every good butcher keeps un bleeding long. He ought to be eight or ten minutes dying, at least' (64). Jude's participation in the butchering of the pig is a symbolic parallel to his own personal descent and brings about the realization of his fall. Jude's fall is further reinforced during the description of the town's official pig-killer's preparation of the meat:

> Challow [the pig-killer] made up for his neglect of the killing by the zeal in the scalding and scraping. Jude felt dissatisfied with himself as a man at what he had done, though aware of his lack of common sense, and that the deed would have amounted to the same thing if carried out by deputy. The white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow-mortal, wore an illogical look to him as a lover of justice, not to say a Christian. (66)

As Hardy was an active sponsor of animal protection, the Nobel prize laureate J. M. Coetzee has also championed animal rights and worked against their cruel treatment. These views are transposed in Coetzee's novel *Disgrace.* The novel is in part a critique of post-apartheid South Africa, but sections deal

explicitly with the main character David Lurie's involvement in a veterinarian clinic where he has to help euthanize stray dogs:

> Worse are those that sniff him and try to lick his hand. He has never liked being licked, and his first impulse is to pull away. Why pretend to be a chum when in fact one is a murderer? But then he relents. Why should a creature wit the shadow of death upon it feel him flinch away as if its touch were abhorrent? So he lets them lick him, if they want to, just as Bev Shaw [the vet] strokes them and kisses them if they will let her. (143)

It is partly through his empathy towards the strays that Lurie reaches a turning point in his attitude towards women—one that has led him to use and denigrate them.

In both *Jude the Obscure* and *Disgrace* the characters' exposure to creature suffering leads to new insights and action. In the case of Nietzsche, his famous and possibly apocryphal experience with the Turin horse in 1889 led to traumatic silence. Though not known as an animal rights advocate, and though not sharing Schopenhauer's notions of empathy and compassion (displayed, for example, in his concern for the lowly mole or his prized poodles), Nietzsche's behavior in this tragic scene has led some to hypothesize an epiphany that prompted a break with his own thinking. Milan Kundera imagines in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* that what Nietzsche murmured into the ear of the tortured horse was a plea for forgiveness of the cruelty human animals exact on other living beings:

> Another image comes to mind: Nietzsche leaving his hotel in Turin. Seeing a horse and a coachman beating it with a whip, Nietzsche went up to the horse and, before the coachman's very eyes, put his arms around the horse's neck and burst into tears. That took place in 1889, when Nietzsche, too, had removed himself from the world of people. In other words, it was at the time when his mental illness had just erupted. But for that very reason I feel his gesture has broad implications: Nietzsche was trying to apologize to the horse of Descartes. His lunacy (that is, his final break with mankind) began at the very moment he burst into tears over the horse. (Kundera, 189-90)

Imagined Suffering: Prevention and Prediction

Sarah Orne Jewett's story 'A White Heron' (1886) is one of the earliest feminist texts in the American literature canon. It depicts a young girl who lives in a completely natural environment connected to the creatures around her. In fact, the line between human and non-human animal is blurred, for as the girl's grandmother says, 'the wild creatures counts her one o' themselves' (533). She has a particular affinity to a nesting heron that a handsome male ornithologist is out to find. Asked if the ornithologist 'cages them up,' he

replies: 'Oh no, they're stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them… and I have shot or snared everyone myself' (534).

Attracted to the hunter, Sylvia (etymologically a 'forest'), 'would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much' (535). In the end, Sylvia declines remuneration if she shows the man the white heron because 'she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away' (537). By averting the bird's death, Sylvia maintains the natural ecology of her surroundings as much as possible—in contrast to the ornithologist and 'the sharp report of his gun and the sight of thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood' (537). Here, the spiritual turning point is the young girl's *imagined* cruel fate of the heron which leads her to reject the ornithologist and his money—and to preserve the heron's existence—thereby opting for life over death.

While 'A White Heron' looks at the impact of imagined suffering, the first dream sequence in *Crime and Punishment* shows Raskolnikov's dream of an actual trip he made with his father as a child for a church service. During the real trip (and in the dream), Raskolnikov met a group of drunk peasants who encouraged the owner, Mikolka, to whip and beat to death a mare too feeble to pull a cart of men. The suffering of the mare takes place before the child's (Raskolnikov's) eyes:

> 'Give her the final one!' shouts Mikolka, and he leaps from the cart as if beside himself. Several fellows, also red and drunk, seize whatever they can find—'whips, sticks, the shaft—and run to the dying mare. Mikolka plants himself at her side and starts beating her pointlessly on the back with the crowbar. The nag stretches out her muzzle, heaves a deep sigh, and dies…. 'It's my goods!' Mikolka cries, holding the crowbar in his hands, his eyes bloodshot. He stands there as if he regretted having nothing else to beat. (58)

In the real event and the dream sequence, Raskolnikov the child puts his arms around the dead, bleeding horse and kisses her eyes and mouth. Upon waking, Raskolnikov views the dream of the mare's death as connected to his moral dilemma and as a foreshadowing of the murder he will later commit—no longer the innocent youthful bystander.

Reversing the Anthropocentric Bias

Another Nobel prize winner, Isaac Bashevis Singer, was once asked if he was a vegetarian for health reasons. He replied in the affirmative: for the health of the chicken. The themes of non-human animal death and the morality of vegetarianism occur in many of Singer's works. In the short story 'The Slaughterer' (1967) the *shochet* cannot reconcile his compassion for animals with the ritual killing of them. In *The Penitent* (1983), Singer

portrays the main character's spiritual salvation by a return to Orthodox Judaism and to an ultra-religious community in Israel, partly influenced by an epiphany about eating meat:

> The waitress came and I ordered breakfast. I watched someone at the next table working away at his ham and eggs. I had long since come to the conclusion that man's treatment of God's creatures makes mockery of all his ideals and of the whole alleged humanism. In order for this overstuffed individual to enjoy his ham, a living creature had to be raised, dragged to its death, stabbed, tortured, scalded in hot water. The man didn't give a second's thought to the fact that the pig was made of the same stuff as he and that it had to pay with suffering and death so that he could taste its flesh. I've thought more than once that when it comes to animals, every man is a Nazi…. Yes, I had always felt these things, but that morning they literally hit me on the head like a hammer. (33-4)

Similarly, Marguerite Yourcenar's novel *The Abyss* briefly mentions the main character's aversion to meat as part of his personal system of belief: 'At this period of his [Zeno's] existence, meat and blood, entrails, and all that had ever lived and breathed disgusted him as food, for an animal dies in pain just as man does, and it repelled him to be digesting death's agony' (190). Zeno continues: 'From the days when he had himself slaughtered a pig at a butcher's in Montpellier… he had ceased to see any use in distinguishing between terms for a slaughtered beast and a slain or dying man' (190-1). Zeno's participation in killing offers a turning point which aids him in his spiritual alchemical journey to the Great Transformation.

An ancient Greek source provides one protagonist with a critical insight into non-human animal suffering. In another work by J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, the eponymous character sets off on a tour to give academic lectures on literary censorship and the lives of animals. As Costello grapples with the question of non-human animal death, she concedes that 'to equate a butcher who slaughters a chicken with an executioner who kills a human being is a grave mistake. The events are not comparable. They are not on the same scale' (109). Nevertheless, the question of cruelty (Bentham's question) remains. 'Therefore, it is quite appropriate that we should agitate for the humane treatment of animals, even and particularly in slaughterhouses' (109). One major turning point for Costello as she debates her position on certain issues such as the animal rights movement, however, is her espousal of vegetarianism. Her son remarks how Plutarch's moral essay 'On the Eating of Flesh,' which she knows by heart, had influenced her. He quotes the philosopher: 'You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death wounds.' 'Plutarch is a real conversation-stopper: it is the word *juices* that does it. Producing Plutarch is like throwing down a gauntlet' (83).

Deep Ecology and Montaigne's Cat

In his essay 'How to Speak of Animals,' Umberto Eco illustrates how humans often cover up their cruelty to animals by envisioning them as cute, kind, wise, and with other lovable attributes. In the texts discussed above, the respective authors bring to the fore the suffering of animals to show how it can occasion a spiritual turning point. Such turning points can affect personal beliefs or lead to social changes. They involve sympathy or empathy which usually brings about an awareness of the interconnectedness of the human and non-human animal. This awareness parallels in many ways the philosophy of Deep Ecology which dislodges the traditional anthropomorphic viewpoint and sees the human animal as acting as an interdependent part of a whole.

In the paradigm elaborated by Arne Næss, influenced in part by Spinoza's ideas of the unity and divinity of Nature, there are both a 'shallow' and a 'deep' ecology. Shallow Ecology—such as fighting pollution—doesn't really solve an issue, but rather maintains the status quo of affluent countries. Deep Ecology, according to Næss, does away with the traditional hierarchical scheme with *homo sapiens* at the top; nor does it place the non-human animal as somewhat superior, as Plutarch among others did (in his essay, 'That Brute Beasts Make Use of Reason'; see also Whitman's lines, 'I think I could turn and live with animals' in *Song of Myself,* and Kafka's story of human degradation, 'A Report to an Academy'). In Deep Ecology, 'the natural world is seen as a highly complex and tangled network of interdependent relations and beings, (for example, plants, animals, mountains, and rivers), of which humans are only one part' (Blackburn, 285).

Besides 'equalizing' all of creation, the specific Deep Ecology connection between the human and non-human animal in regards to suffering was a major catalyst in developing the movement. Harding recounts the story of Aldo Leopold, a wildlife manager in the United States, who in 1920 was put in charge of eradicating the wolf population in the United States:

> Eventually an old wolf was down by the side of the river, and Leopold rushed down to gloat at her death. What met him was a fierce green fire dying in the wolf's eyes. He writes in a chapter entitled 'Thinking like a Mountain' that: 'there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain. I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.' (Harding)

In this pivotal moment of seeing the wolf's suffering, Leopold had an insight into the whole ecosystem freed from the manipulation of *homo sapiens*: 'For the first time in his life he felt completely at one with this wide, ecological reality. He felt that it had a power to communicate its magnificence. He felt

that it had its own life, its own history, and its own trajectory into the future. He experienced the ecosystem as a great being, dignified and valuable in itself' (Harding).

For the animal rights activist and the environmentalist of Deep Ecology, as well as those authors presented above, one has already rethought Montaigne's comment: 'When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not playing with me rather than I with her?' Rather, there could be simply unity—both the human and non-human animal playing together. For those depicting non-human animal suffering, the unity through sympathy, compassion, or empathy is not one of mere amusement as Montaigne envisioned, but rather of life-changing spiritual epiphanies.

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Book Reviews

Richard Kearney, *Salvage: A Novel.* Boston: Arrowsmith, 2023.

This novel is a 'Salvage' operation, a book that was not merely written, but was wrought over more than a decade; dredged up from the depths of the ocean. It seems to be a simple story about a girl living on an island off the coast of Ireland, but beneath the apparent simplicity there are underground passages, psychological insights, symbolic sustenance.

Fanny Howe, writing in *The Harvard Review,* describes 'a kind of reverse DNA, whereby [the author] grew into the body of land and sky, and describes in his own flesh what he knows and is, creating a chemical confluence between the landscape and a growing child.' 'Anacarnation'[1] is accomplished in his own flesh carved into words, each one tried and tested for timbre and tone. The difference here is that the author is a man whereas his counterpart in the novel is a woman. Eve on this occasion opens the rib-cage of Adam to open the book of Genesis. Somehow or other, the two are one. The somersault involved is the attempt to turn himself inside out and collect the totality of his being, through what T. S. Eliot has called 'an objective correlative,' at the other side of several divides. 'Anacarnation' is an act whereby you re-inhabit the body and stretch your limbs through every muscle and pore until it feels like a true fit and you become the reality of who you are. It is not enough to bleed yourself onto the page, every word has to be 'packed in ice and stitched with salt' as W. B. Yeats describes the exigence of any art work. There can be no generalities, no 'one-size-fits-all.' Anacarnation is deep-sea diving in the very diving bell that is your own peculiar and idiosyncratic embodiment. It is autobiographical or it is not at all.

Salvage tells the story of a young woman growing up on an off-shore Gaelic-speaking island in the 1940s. It forms a compendium of many of the women in Kearney's life, including Ireland, as a predominantly feminine archetype. His mother, who encrypts the 'Anne' of 'anacarnation' was, by all accounts, an exceptional person and an all-embracing mother. She had seven children but, it was said, each one seemed to be an 'only child.'

More technically, 'ana' is a Greek-derived prefix, which in modern usage means 'Back, up, again in time and space' (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Applied to narrative, it is about telling the present backwards and forwards, turning melancholy into mourning, transforming acting-out into working-through, as psychoanalysts might say. For Kearney, names and

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[1] For this concept, see Richard Kearney, 'Anacarnation: Recovering Embodied Life,' in *Anacarnation: Returning to the Lived body with Richard Kearney*, ed. Brian Treanor and James Taylor (London and New York: Routledge, 2023). See also Kearney. 'Recovering Embodied Life,' *JMJ* 75 (2021):219-25.

prefixes work at multiple levels, from the personal to the mythological and metaphysical. In this novel the sea is symbolic of 'the universal mother' that Jung describes: 'The sound resemblance of *mar*, *mère* with *Meer* = sea and Latin *mare* = sea is remarkable, although etymologically accidental. Might it refer back to "the great primitive idea of the mother who, in the first place, meant to us our individual world and afterwards became the symbol of all worlds?"'[2]

Kearney reminds us that 'Anna'—Sanskrit for healing nourishment or food—is one of the earliest known words for God; just as in Celtic mythology the most ancient name for mother earth is 'Ana,' worshipped by Hindus as Ama and Danu. If Christ comes in the form of bread and fish (Pisces was one of the earliest signs for the risen Christ), why cannot Brigid, a Christian saint based on the ancient Celtic Goddess of the same name, come in the form of fish, herbs, fungi, and sea wracks to nourish and heal her people? Kearney finds a version of his 'anatheism'[3] in the panentheistic dimensions of Celtic and Eastern wisdom traditions: God *in* all things but not God *as* all things (pantheism). Kearney builds on the panentheism of John Scotus Eriugena, who wrote that God is present in all living creatures, meaning not just fellow humans but other-than-human life forms that surround us. Kearney is particularly taken by Eriugena's notion of a 'running God' (*deus currens*) who courses like a river in spate or electrical charge between infinite creator and finite creatures alike—the divine running after the living as the living run after the divine. This chimes with the eschatological notion of the Kingdom as a redemptive 'recapitulation' *(anacephalaiōsis*) of history. For Maeve Sullivan, this occurs in multiple anacarnations within her life-world of humans, animals, and plants, in sacred moments of epiphany where the past folds back into the present and opens onto future possibilities. Kearney writes of a similar scenario regarding his own mother's posthumous return as a dolphin:

> My mother taught our family to love dolphins at an early age, during regular boat trips to the islands of West Cork—Brigid's Island and Chapel Island *(Staic Séipéil*) in particular. She often spoke of the legendary hospitality of dolphins, how they were said to reach out to us as we reached out to them, teaching us to connect in new ways and saving souls at sea, guiding them back to life and land. When she died in 2004 she told all her children gathered at her bedside, how grateful she was to have lived on this earth and she promised—with a characteristic smile—to come back and visit us each time we saw a dolphin at sea. Mirabile dictu, when we made annual trips to the islands around her anniversary we would invariably meet dolphins, and return a

[2] C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York: Dover, 2003), 283.

[3] Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York Columbia University Press, 2011).

> knowing glance.... A particular sentient being (here the dolphin) was momentarily 'maternalized' by my intention to resonate with my mother's memory.... The dolphin 'anacarnated' my mother without ceasing to be a dolphin and vice versa.[4]

'When our love is directed towards an animal or even a tree,' wrote Pelagius (c. 354-418), another of Kearney's Celtic panentheists, 'we are participating in the fullness of God's love.'[5] These Celtic nature mystics were in tune with the Pauline claim that in Christ 'all things hold together... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Col 1:17, 19). In *Salvage,* the Celtic-Christian notion of anacarnation is embodied in the healing shape-shifting powers of Maeve Sullivan, for whom 'all things' comprise both human and non-human life, between which she moves with grace and ease.

It is possible that the author was from conception the beneficiary of amniotic fluid disorder. This concept derives from the Ancient Greek ἀμνίον (*amnion*, which referred to the 'bowl in which the blood of victims was caught'); or, more originally still, to a 'vase in which the blood of a sacrifice was caught,' sometimes said to be from *amē* meaning bucket, or a diminutive of *amnos* meaning a lamb. Kearney became a sacrificial lamb in the womb of femininity.[6] 'Beautiful Girl' (the name of his favorite mare) has been a melody as well as an emblem from day one. It is, therefore, all the more appropriate that the novel's cover is designed by his eldest daughter, Simone—an artist, poet, and potter—, who comes at the other end of the tunnel to emerge as his own feminine offspring. Along with her and her sister Sarah's ink drawings interspersed throughout the text these visual traces are creative and affirming fingerprints from the other side of the palimpsest, poised to shape the clay before it could be sufficiently rounded for firing.

In *Salvage,* Maeve Sullivan 'saw and heard things differently, learned quickly, could smell rain on the wind and was left-handed.... With her curly black hair and wild blue eyes, she was curious and daring since the day she

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[4] Kearney, 'Anacarnation,' 247-8.

[5] *The Letters of Pelagius: Celtic Soul Friend*, ed. Robert Van de Weyer (Evesham: Arthur James, 1995), 72.

[6] Richard Kearney's mother, Anne was diagnosed as terminally ill from tuberculosis, while pregnant with Richard, but was saved at the last moment by a new medication. Almost drowned in the amniotic fluid of his mother's womb, he was 'salvaged' in time to be born in Cork on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1954. He was Christened Richard Marius, after Mary, 1954 being declared a Marian Year to mark the centenary of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. There is a Marian dimension to his novel, insofar as St Brigid was known traditionally in Ireland as 'Mary of the Gaels.'

was born. [Her father] sensed it from the start. He had no doubt his daughter was chosen, called, rare.' When Maeve experiences tragedy she becomes mute, a 'quiet girl' moving with observant savvy like her eponymous filmic double in *An Cailín Ciúin* (dir. Colm Bairéad, 2022). She has both innocence from birth and wisdom beyond her age. *Salvage* calls out for the screen, the various gaps between scenes unfolding like blanks between still images, as they slowly unspool into a cinematic montage of powerful vision and feeling.

'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asks Jesus. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' (Jn 3:4). Anacarnation means exploring and reinhabiting your bodily self in a more spiritual, imaginative, and creative way. The task of the second half of our lives is to reinhabit the scarecrow of ourselves in a more deliberate and knowing way, to establish a more accurate and real identity among the labels foisted upon us by the many voices that took it upon themselves to tell us who we were, and who we are.

In his search for further 'Ana' possibilities after ana-theism and ana-carnation, Kearney might be interested to know that the word 'anamniotic' was invented in 1880, to describe the phenomenon of being 'without an amnion' (a condition which applies to those who have become sea creatures so comprehensively that they re-emerge as amphibians and/or fish). People preparing to become astronauts—including some preparing to land on Mars for our next anacarnation—are put through grueling tests and reconstructions of their bodies because in such alien circumstances, experts tell us, human beings become halfway between a fish and a bird. *Salvage* takes us deep into uncharted realms of the human relationship to nature and the magical possibilities of metamorphosis it releases.

Mark Patrick Hederman

Catherine Cornille, ed. *Atonement and Comparative Theology: The Cross in Dialogue with Other Religions*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021.

This book brings a wholesome enlargement of perspective on discussion of the Atonement, engaging with Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Judaism, and African religions. The questions the Atonement raises seem to drop into this dialogue as if from outer space: 'Why did Jesus have to die? What is the evil that is conquered by his death? How does his death and resurrection effect the salvation of all?' (Cornille, 1). The answers even within Christian tradition imply different conceptions of 'God, evil, salvation, human agency, and the relative importance of the divine and human natures in Christ' (1). Formal theological objections to certain versions of the Atonement today also imply a variety of presuppositions: 'The penal substitution theories of atonement have been generally rejected in contemporary theology as based on an outdated feudal understanding of retribution. Feminist and other liberation theologians

have taken theories of vicarious suffering to task for their tendency to glorify suffering and surrogacy' (1).

The first four essays address the question 'Why Atonement?' Islam, as Daniel Madigan, SJ, relates, gives no saving role to the Cross, and indeed denies the need of salvation altogether. '*Falāḥ,* or the positive achievement in space and time of the divine will, is the Islamic counterpart of Christian "deliverance" and "redemption"' (Isma'il Raji al-Furuki, quoted, 12). Al-Faruki urges that Christian 'peccatism' and 'saviorism' undercut human autonomy and dignity (as God's *khalīfa* or vice-gerent on earth). Fr Madigan pleads for a more sympathetic interpretation of the Christian discourse of sin and Original Sin, and draws heavily on Karl Rahner to provide this. But could a Muslim be expected to know Rahner's rather counter-intuitive claim that 'original sin in the Christian sense in no way implies that the original, personal act of freedom of the first person or persons is transmitted to us as our moral quality' (quoted, 20). Surely that is what St Augustine claimed and what Catholic parents, quite recently, used to think when having their children baptized. It looks as if Islam corrected Augustine long before modern Jesuits got around to it: 'no soul will bear another's burden' (Q 17:15, quoted, 21). Yet 'the Qur'ãn unmistakably depicts the origins of human history as marked by disobedience to God' (23), and teaches that 'the driving, the urging of the soul or self (*nafs*) toward evil' (24).

Even so, since the Merciful one forgives freely and immediately, why is atonement, especially at the cost of an innocent life, required? Fr Madigan responds with standard critiques of Anselm, and of 'understandings of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* that lead to what has been called "grace-ism"' (33), thanking Muslims for identifying weak points in Christian theology. I was unable to see how this alleged grace-ism differs from the teaching of St Paul and Martin Luther, or indeed from the immediate forgiveness Islam celebrates. Bonhoeffer's unwise and nauseatingly repeated phrase 'cheap grace' is invoked to prove that 'Christians do have a case to answer when it comes to taking seriously the moral task of the believer and the relationship of ethical action to salvation' (34). But the case is mostly represented by what Fr Madigan agrees are caricatures, and his recourse to a synergism of ethics and grace as the basis of salvation is quite vulnerable to the powerful critique from the Augustinian tradition, which he himself caricatures as involving 'facile notions' of original sin and 'salvation as a *fait accompli* that absolves humanity from any further ethical struggle' (34-5). Interreligious dialogue should present the deepest theology on both sides; shadow-boxing between caricatures is counter-productive, as Fr Madigan himself insists. It would have been better to proceed in that key from the start.

Thierry-Marie Courau, OP, turns to Buddhist accounts of craving (*tṛṣṇā*), which leads us to build 'a fantasy world based on our longing for and grasping of seductive objects' (49). These objects are fetishized or reified as existing in and of themselves rather than in their interdependency with subjective factors in the web of dependent origination. The trio of craving, grasping (*upādāna*),

existence (*bhava*) within the twelvefold chain of dependent origination 'are engines (actualizers) for creating new existences (actualized), which all are *duhkha*' (51). Taking pity on those enchained in this cycle, the bodhisattvas 'show that there is nothing to grasp or obtain, that the thirst to "take, keep, or reject" must dry up in order to stop chasing after what does not exist' (52). Shining this Buddhist lamp on Genesis 2-3 'we see more clearly in Genesis that which has always been there.' Misperception of the forbidden fruit as 'an object in and of itself' aroused 'the craving to appropriate it.' As a result of this mental confusion and illusion, 'the human is self-reduced: He was the receiver-of-the-whole-garden; he is now only a prehensile eye and hand, a grasper-after-objects, implicating the second individual in the same confusion' (53). Christ's non-grasping at equality with God (cf. Phil 2:5-9) reverses Adam's confusion and greed, and 'reveals the non-existence-in-itself of evil, the illusory existence that evil can possess for a time' (55). If one replaces the 'garden' with our threatened planet in this meditation, the shared wisdom of the Buddhist and Christian sources emerges luminously.

Klaus von Stosch looks to a Qu'rān verse: 'Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger.... His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food' (Q 5:75, quoted, 71). This is directed at mainstream 'Byzantine theologians who claimed that Jesus did not need to eat' (72). 'In the logic of this theory of atonement, it is very important that Jesus Christ shares our human condition in all its ambiguity and that he also shares our libertarian free will' (74). I am not sure what this adds to the best Patristic Christology or why it is necessary to learn it from Islam.

Bede Benjamin Bidlack seeks light in Daoism on the meaning and practice of penance. He takes up Elizabeth Johnson's suggestion that 'Jesus's passion and death were never for the sake of satisfaction' but rather enact 'divine accompaniment with a suffering world' (79). This scarcely matches Jesus's self-description as 'a ransom (*lutron*) for many' (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28), or his identification as a means by which sins are forgiven in Rom 3:25 (*hilastērion*), Heb 2:17 (*hilaskesthai)*; 1 Jn 2:2 (*hilasmos*). Daoism can 'fill the void left by Johnson's accompaniment interpretation of the cross' (79). In syncretistic 'Numinous Treasure Daoism' 'universal salvation is the notion that ritual behavior can relieve the suffering of other beings, and bodhisattvas are agents devoted to this end,' with salvation meaning 'to ferry across illusions, changes, and the distresses of this world and the next' (83). In one ritual, 'the so-called penitents... are taking upon themselves the suffering of those in hell' (87) in a communal intercession. 'Atonement means bringing the cosmos, oneself, and the society into harmony with the Dao' (92). This chimes with an integral Christian notion of penance as what 'leads to atonement, which is a reconciliation, a healing, a re-conformity with the divine will' (97).

The second batch of essays examines interreligious perspectives on the Cross. Indian resistance to the doctrine of the atonement would previously have been dismissed as just 'the heathen in his blindness.' But as revisited by Francis X. Clooney, SJ, it turns out that the critiques of Ram Mohun Roy

(1772-1833) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) chime with current intra-Christian objections. A Hindu convert to Catholicism, Brahmobandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907), argued that Hindu reformers were 'infatuated with the notion of self-salvation and self-divinization' (110) and noted that 'other religions too, and particularly in India, knew the fact and value of vicarious suffering' (111). The Hindu world was unpersuaded, an impasse that shows us 'the limits of moral exemplarity (Christ's selflessness) and even loving intervention (his suffering all for the sake of humans), if such are perceived also as rebukes' to their traditions (111). Clooney seeks another route, in 'the aesthetic, contemplative power of gazing upon the crucified' (105).

The Mughal emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) was impressed by Jesuit adoration of the suffering Christ. Vedānta Deśika (1267-1369) offered a traditional Indian basis for this in his account of how Vishnu 'experienced suffering, grief, and fear during his divine descents' (116). According to Vīrarāghavācārya (1897-1983), the divine sufferings of Rāma are 'as real as the most effective performances on stage,' and affected pious audiences for centuries 'as God most compellingly demonstrates his commitment to his people' (117). Hindu spiritual leaders such as Keshab Chunder Sen (1838-1884)—who cried: 'Jesus, thou art atonement incarnate' (118)—and Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) reached an affective locus where 'Hindu and Christian insights can begin to cohere in contemplation of the holy person who suffers' (118).

Michelle Voss Roberts complains about (mostly African American) students who sing hymns on the Blood of Christ: 'I *know* the students are aware of how the logic of "blood shed for me" can reinforce unhealthy ideals of sacrifice and suffering for women and racialized persons' (130). It 'feels like a rebuke, a rude gesture, directed at faculty like me' (131). But for many Christians it is deeply liberating to sing, '*Me immundum, munda tua sanguine'* (Aquinas); 'Blood of my Savior, bathe me in Thy tide' (Ignatius Loyola/Frederick Faber), 'Just as I am, without one plea/ Save that Thy Blood was shed for me' (Charlotte Elliott), or Archbishop Welby's favorite: 'And can it be that I should gain/ An int'rest in the Savior's blood?' (Charles Wesley). Should these be canceled? Should we balk at the New Testament glorification of the Blood (Mk 14: 23; Mt 26:27-8; Lk 22:20; Jn 6:53-56; 19:34-7; Acts 20:28; Rom 3:25; 5:9; 1 Cor 10:16; Col 1:20; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:12-26; 10:19; 1 Pt 1:19; 1 Jn 1:7; Rev 1;5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11)?

When she turns to contemplating a *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* maṇḍala of the eight phases of love however, Roberts embraces visceral Indian imagery, such as a hymn involving 'a "rosary of hands and heads," entrails, and a blood-stained elephant hide' (137). She favors Julian of Norwich, whose visions are at the bloodier end of the spectrum of representations of the Passion: 'the bleeding head of Christ... the flowing blood of Christ,' though they present atonement 'not as punishment for sin, but as union with God in love' (140). The caricature of atonement as God's cruel punishment for sin has too much purchase in current theology; in standard Christian piety it signifies precisely the loving

union enabled by forgiveness of sin.

In the last quartet of essays, on 'rethinking redemption,' Marianne Moyaert, in dialogue with Jews, notes that 'since the Shoah, the idea that *suffering may somehow be redemptive* has come under tremendous pressure' (190). But might one not say that the Shoah puts *every* article of faith under tremendous pressure? Joshua Ralston engages in dialogue with Muslims who 'have challenged the historicity of Jesus's death, rejected its salvific meaning, mocked its metaphysical implications, and questioned the propriety of its ubiquitous presence in churches, liturgy, and ritual' (214). Again, such a critique seems too all-enveloping to be illuminating on the precise topic of atonement. A reply to it would involve revival of the anti-docetic polemic of early theologians such as Tertullian, reinforced by modern scriptural scholarship.

Leo D. Lefebure reads 'atonement' as 'being at one' and sees notions of atoning sacrifice as secondary. Like other contributors he talks of the biblical doctrine as if it were merely an interpreted choice: 'Often Christian theologians have interpreted the death of Jesus on the cross as an atoning sacrifice that was in some way necessary for salvation' (240). He quotes D. T. Suzuki's *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist* (London: Unwin, 1988): 'The crucified Christ is a terrible sight and I cannot help associating it with the sadistic impulse of a physically affected brain'; 'What is needed in Buddhism is enlightenment, neither crucifixion nor resurrection' (240). This is matched with some feminist theologians who 'accuse traditional theologies of atonement of holding up child abuse as an ideal' (242). Surely we have had enough hand-wringing over such sweeping critiques?

Shinran radicalized the Buddhist teaching of the Three Poisons: 'we are full of ignorance and blind passion. Our desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause' (quoted, 243). Our egocentric calculative thinking (*hakarai*) poisons even religious acts. Lefebure asks: 'To what degree do Christian actions and reflections in relation to atonement move within the orbit of what Shinran calls *hakarai*?' (244). St Anselm corrected cruder calculations about the atonement in terms of buying off the devil but introduced a subtler *hakarai* by his focus on the debt we owe to divine honor. 'Only humans owe the debt, but only God can pay it; thus a God-human is necessary' (245).

Shinran preached a turn-around by which one abandons calculation and the very idea of a substantial ego to entrust oneself totally to the compassion of Amida Buddha. Such a dynamic of love and grace is also the very heart of the Atonement as understood by Paul and John, and modern critics of the doctrine generally give it insufficient attention. Shinran's own tradition fell into the deviations of *hakarai* in its 'turmoil over religious acts' at the end of the 18th century. 'One prominent leader, Chido (1736-1805), was arrested, carried to trial in a cage, condemned as a heterodox' (251). These feuds demand to be overcome in 'mature, integrated practice' in which 'both the teleological dichotomy between this world and the Pure Land and the

interpersonal dichotomy between self and Amida Buddha are "in some sense overcome, though not eliminated"' (251, citing Dennis Hirota). Shinran teaches: 'Other Power is the Buddha's power that has become one's own as shinjin. It is the power of the heart and mind of the person in whom self-power falls away and disappears as oneness with the Buddha's mind is realized' (251-2). Christian union with Christ may be ontologically different from the kind of fusion this suggests, but it lies in a similar realm of mystical insight. Devotion to the cross of Christ massively stresses the believer's trusting identification with Christ, or Christ's gracious identification with the believer. Criticism of the atonement that misses this fundamental tone of mystical identification is misguided. Buddhism challenges Christians to retrieve and deepen their traditions in the key of enlightenment, in a way that goes deeper into the power of Christ's adoption of the role of sacrificial Lamb rather than distorting or diluting it.

S. Mark Heim discusses 'generous Buddhist readings of the cross and their emphasis on a dimension of nondual realization in it' (259). He resists a common Buddhist perception that 'Jesus's life and, above all, his death, plainly lacks the marks of the highest levels of spiritual attainment,' because of 'Christ's disjunctive relationship with God' (260). Heim believes that 'we can be instructed by Buddhist teaching to formulate the realization dimension in the cross,' with special reference to 'the three Christian "registers" of non-duality: apophaticism, immanence, and communion' (263). The first of these he associates with emptiness and no-self, the second with buddha nature. The cross is 'emptiness embodied' (263), and is seen less as a historical event than as 'a meditative achievement' (261). It symbolizes something perennially true, and is critiqued in terms of its adequacy to that function. 'Suffer with Jesus Christ' is a mantra for dealing with physical pain; in taking the focus away from self it generates many of the effects of Buddhist meditation. Heim links the more positive teaching of an immanence of buddha nature in all sentient beings with the Eastern Orthodox language of divinization, and with 'a mode of God's presence in and to the world' with which one can commune 'as a form of "bare awareness," which is always available underneath the business of communicative consciousness' (268). This is 'an at-one-ment, a human identification with a divine presence that is always the case' (270). When Heim turns to the third aspect of 'Christian nonduality,' namely 'communion,' he says, 'Jesus's death is about change in what Buddhism regards as a world of convention and projection, but what Christians regard as part and parcel of the kingdom of God' (274). Jesus is unique 'in his eschatological role as creating saving communion among humans and with God.... This is not an ontological condition, but a relational achievement' (276).

Perhaps the lesson of all these interreligious encounters is that Christian theologians need first to sort out what they mean by Atonement before a firm platform of dialogue can be constructed.