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THEOLOGY, NEWS AND NOTES



Spirituality

FULLER
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

JUNE 1993

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

PAUL F. FORD • Page 3

The Sense and Sense-ibility of Spirituality

PAUL F. FORD • Page 4

To Grace a Debtor

ROBERT P. MEYE • Page 8

Slouching Towards Bethlehem: An Experience of Psychology and Spirituality

QUINN R. CONNERS • Page 12

Do As I Say, Not As I Do or

How to Develop the Spiritual Aspect in Your Marriage Relationship

RICK and SHERI BLACKMON

• Page 15

Broken and Shared: Discovering and Claiming My Own Holy History

NORVENE VEST • Page 18

Norvene Vest's "Top Ten" Spiritual Books: An Annotated Bibliography

• Page 21

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INTRODUCTION

BY PAUL F. FORD

This is the third *Theology, News and Notes* issue devoted to the theme of spirituality: It is the second if you count only the October 1982 issue integrated by Robert P. Meye, but the third if you count (as I do) the October 1988 issue on "Character" (also produced under Bob's guidance); the first was the "Spiritual Formation" issue of March 1979. In another sense, there has never been a *Theology, News and Notes* not devoted to the theme of spirituality, because all have attempted to describe what holiness looks like.

But this issue is different in approach. We, the contributors, make more personal statements by welcoming you, our fellow pilgrim, to walk beside us and view our individual quests to respond with God's help to God's call to each of us to be holy. We take this tack partly because human beings have a nearly infinite interest in the stories of their fellow human beings, and partly because spirituality is the least abstract of subjects when it is the most personal. Ultimately, like prayer, which is its chief activity, spirituality ought not to be talked about; it must be tasted. If Henri Nouwen has defined spirituality as "what we know by heart," then what we attempt here is heart speaking to heart.

The contributors to this issue are all closely associated with Fuller, to put the quest for holiness within our midst rather than to defer to the "stars" on the current Christian stage. Finally, each of us

has assembled an essential bibliography which will help you dig deeper into the subject of spirituality.

What you hold in your hands would not exist without Bob Meye's prompting. As an editorial board member of *Theology, News and Notes*, as a professor of the subject from the biblical point of view, as a dean who sought both to call to the faculty women and men who could be exemplary Christians as well as scholars, and

*"Walk beside us
and view our
individual quests
to respond
with God's help to
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each of us to be
holy."*

also to help create an atmosphere emphasizing spirituality, he has kept this theme front and center. Perhaps when you read his autobiographical essay, you will get a sense of how we, the students in his New Testament Spirituality classes, felt when we heard him tell his story. We were in the presence of someone who was attempting to live what he was in quest of defining and describing session after session, year after year, for the twelve years he taught NT 582. We thank the editors of the forthcoming *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*

(InterVarsity Press) for their permission to quote from Bob's article on Spirituality in Paul. ■

PAUL FORD came to Fuller as a Benedictine monk in 1975, earned the Ph.D. in Theology in 1987, assisted Robert Meye in the teaching of New Testament Spirituality from 1978 to 1987, and is now an associate professor of theology and liturgy at St. John's (Roman Catholic) Seminary in Camarillo, California. There Paul, and his wife, Janice Daurio, make their home. He hopes to have a publisher soon for a book based on his dissertation on C. S. Lewis's theology of prayer and discernment.



The Sense and Sense-ibility of Spirituality

BY PAUL F. FORD

Something enormous happened to me during my twelve years at Fuller Theological Seminary. No, I am not talking about how the monastic Brother Peter Ford became the married professor Paul Ford — at least not directly. And I am not telling the full story of how I finally decided to write my dissertation on C. S. Lewis as a spiritual mentor. What really happened was that I discovered I actually could live on every word that came from the mouth of God — every word: Verbs, nouns, and even adjectives (to be explained below).

This is not to say that my practice of the monastic way of prayer, the four-stage contemplative reading of Scripture called *lectio divina* (also to be explained), had left me starving. But I hadn't ever had to depend on God as much as I did during the time of my transition from monastic life; until you have to depend on God alone, you don't really believe that God can be so trustworthy. And I didn't know how much nourishment was available in God's Word and, really, nowhere else.

This realization began to dawn during the very wet winter of 1978 when I was working with Dr. Robert Meyers in the design and teaching of the course, *New Testament Spirituality*. You have to picture me getting up at four in the morning to put the final touches on my lectures to be given four hours later, fighting fear of short-term failure (what shall I say about this in class?) and anxiety over long-term aimlessness (what shall I do with my life?) with the very words and ideas of the New Testament that I was trying to bring to life for my students.

During this difficult but precious time, *lectio* was incredibly

nutritious. Every biblical text I picked up to study on behalf of my students, or pray on my own behalf, became grist for *lectio*. I would read just a few words and the text would stop me (stage one, called *lectio* or "reading" by the ancients). I would ruminate on the text (often throughout the day), chewing it over and over again (stage two, called *meditatio*); I was amazed at how filling and energizing the Word is. Almost effortlessly I would move on to

"I discovered I actually could live on every word that came from the mouth of God—every word: Verbs, nouns, and even adjectives."

adore or thank or beseech or ask God for forgiveness (stage three: *oratio*). Then, in my hunger I would be tempted to go on to gobble up more of the text but I usually remembered to leave time for God to console me if he desired or just to waste time in his presence (stage four: *contemplatio*).¹

Throughout this season of my life I was learning what Christians down the centuries already knew:

The Bible is not a text you read; it reads you. The Bible is not something you read to have read ("Did you see the article in *Time*?" — "Yeah, I read that.") but something you read in order to continue to read. I learned that Christians are ruminating animals, so to speak, who need to chew the cud of the Word in order to receive its nourishment. During these months all sorts of texts took on deeper meaning for me and, I hope, my students.

One particular text, Romans 12:1-2, the "epicenter of New Testament spirituality from a Pauline perspective" as we nicknamed it in our course, became the key to unlock spirituality for me. I already knew from Louis Bouyer, the great historian of Christian spirituality, that the schema of the old and new humanity is the matrix of Pauline spirituality.² I likewise knew that C. S. Lewis would describe the same distinction as between "nice people or new men."³ What I learned from Romans 12:1-2 was that the basic components of this new humanity are our true selves, our bodies and minds, offered up totally in prayer to please God and transformed by God to resonate in perfect harmony with God's pleasure in discernment.

These two verses provided me with the sustaining insight that prayer and discernment are the being and doing dimensions, the vertical and horizontal, of the spiritual life. Sandra Marie Schneiders and H. H. Farmer are just two theologians who have commented on this diadic structure of the Christian life. Schneiders says:

"What do people mean when they talk about seeking 'spiritual direction'? If we listen attentively to these seekers we hear two recurring themes: Prayer and discernment . . . that is, for organization and structure in the *being* and *action* dimensions of the spiritual life."⁴

Farmer writes of it thus:

"The new life of cooperation with God is manifested in prayer, and in a daily activity increasingly informed and guided by the divine Spirit."⁵

And the Biblical scholar Oscar Cullmann has called discernment the "key to New Testament morality."⁶ Discernment is that essential gift of the Holy Spirit which enables the Christian to discover and do in the present moment that activity which pleases God.⁷

I have discovered that these insights can even be sung about, as in the hymn by John Keble, a hymn I often use in my morning prayer as the "grace before the meal" of the day:

"New every morning is the
love our waking and
uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness
safely brought,
restored to life and power and
thought.

New mercies, each returning
day,
around us hover while we
pray;
new perils past, new sins
forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new
hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our
mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless
price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes will
lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we
see;
some softening gleam of love
and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and
care.

The trivial round, the com-
mon task,

will furnish all we ought to
ask:
room to deny ourselves; a
road
to bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in thy dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every
day,
to live more nearly as we
pray."⁸

In the spirit of Romans 12:1, the quest to "hallow all we find" provides plenty to offer as a living sacrifice; the "trivial" and "common" give more "room to deny ourselves" than we usually wish

"The quest to hallow all we find provides plenty to offer as a living sacrifice."

but also, thankfully, "a road to bring us daily nearer God." Romans 12:2 draws our attention to the seven new things Keble says God is always trying to get us to see and to act upon: Love, mercies, perils past, sins forgiven, thoughts of God, hopes of heaven, and treasures; this verse also directs our contemplative gazing and active doing to the old, common, and trivial things: Friends, scenes, crosses, and cares. Finally, the interplay between being and doing is revealed in the two prayers of the last stanza: "Fit us for perfect rest" and "help us to live more nearly as we pray."

Because of this transformation, my perception of C. S. Lewis was also changed: Lewis the apologist gave way to Lewis the spiritual director. I changed the direction of my dissertation and studied Lewis for what he said and

experienced about prayer and discernment as the foundation of the new self God was building in him and wants to build in each of us.

To his fictional friend Malcolm and to me, reading Lewis's side of their fictional correspondence, Lewis disclosed a method for the prayer of adoration, a method which also becomes a way to understand the meaning of spirituality:

" . . . mental images play an important part in my prayers: I doubt if any act of will or thought or emotion occurs in me without them. But they seem to help me most when they are most fugitive and fragmentary — rising and bursting like bubbles in champagne or wheeling like rocks in a windy sky: contradicting one another (in logic) as the crowded metaphors of a swift poet may do. Fix on any one, and it goes dead. You must do as Blake would do with a joy; kiss it as it flies. And then, in their total effect, they do mediate to me something qualitative — more like an adjective than a noun. That, for me, gives it the impact of reality. For I think we respect nouns (and what we think they stand for) too much. All my deepest, and certainly all my earliest, experiences seem to be of sheer quality. The terrible and the lovely are older and solider than terrible and lovely things . . .

The wave of images, thrown off like a spray from the prayer, all momentary, all correcting, refining, 'interanimating' one another, and giving a kind of spiritual body to the unimaginable, occurs more, I find, in acts of worship than in petitionary prayer." (*Letters to Malcolm*, p. 86).

Perhaps, I thought, Lewis would caution us that we respect the noun "spirituality" too much. My study of the history of the noun in Greek, Latin, English, French, and German bore out that the adjective "spiritual" is far older than the noun "spirituality." Following Lewis, let us look at the adjective "spiritual," well aware that in all talk about supersensibles we must use sensibles, that is, metaphors.

At first blush there seems no better example of supersensible than the adjective "spiritual." Almost by denotation "spiritual" is not-sensible; it connotes the not-bodily and denotes the not-fleshly (we have to be careful to avoid reading the ancient dualism of body-soul into the Pauline distinction between flesh and spirit). And yet to speak about this supersensible, we must use metaphors derived from the five senses — sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. To help us experience what is the reality behind the adjective "spiritual," biblical images, especially from the New Testament, can be grouped around each of the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. They can be further delineated into the being and acting dimensions, the prayer and discernment dimensions, of spiritual reality.

The following collection provides just a sketch of Christian spirituality in hopes of provoking you to pursue a more detailed picture on your own. As Lewis says, these images "help [us] most" even "when they are most fugitive and fragmentary . . . : contradicting one another (in logic) as the crowded metaphors of a swift poet may do." But since the Poet of the Bible is God the Holy Spirit, the contradictions are only apparent; they spur us to look deeper for their hidden unity. For each, we

will have to "kiss [them] as [they] fl[y]," especially because of limitations on the length of this article. But, "in their total effect, they [will] mediate to [us] something very important" — the sense and sense-ibility of spirituality.

■ **SEEING** In his book *Ways of Imperfection*, Simon Tugwell, the British Dominican theologian who was a member of the International

"Spirituality is a way of hearing, a way of hearing like God, a way of hearing God."

Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, defines spirituality as "people's ways of viewing things, the ways in which they try to make sense of the practicalities of Christian living and to illuminate Christian hopes and Christian muddles." What and how do they view; what and how do they see?

With eyes of faith, they see the will and pleasure of God in the great design of history-come-to-a-focus in Jesus. They abandon their worldly point of view and see only Jesus. Especially when they behold the least appealing person, the least one, the little one, they see God. Even when they stumble and fall, even when they choose the dark, they have only to come to their senses, raise their eyes, and see the welcoming sight of their Father and his household ready to party at their return. In turn, each becomes a welcoming sight to one another. Spirituality is a way of seeing, a way of seeing like God (doing) and a way of seeing God (being).

■ **HEARING** In the world of physiology, seeing is the most developed sense; in the world of faith, where we do not walk by sight, hearing is the most developed. What and how do the spiritual hear? What sounds do they make and what sounds do they register?

Christians don't make the sounds of noisy gongs or clanging cymbals or of trumpet blast at street corners; they don't chatter or gossip. They do say "Abba, Abba" a lot and they do say "Jesus is Lord" and they are wont to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs full of thankfulness. There is also enough silence in their lives for them to hear God's still, small voice in the least one, the one left naked and half dead at the side of the road. And their ears are ever tuned for what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Spirituality is a way of hearing, a way of hearing like God, a way of hearing God.

■ **TOUCHING** Physiologists and philosophers tell us that touch is the most complex of the senses:

For all practical purposes, distinctions can be made among (1) tactile or cutaneous sensitivity that selectively perceives pressure, pain, warmth, and cold; (2) deep organic sensitivity, viz., kinesthesia or proprioception for muscular sensation, and deep touch for the viscera and internal organs; and (3) vestibular function . . . for the positioning and movement of the body in equilibrium, a function that works in harmony with kinesthesia and deep touch.⁹

Because we are members of one another, body parts of the Bride of Christ, our sense of touch moves us to comfort one another

with the comfort with which we have been comforted. We clothe our naked members and give food and drink to our hungry and thirsty members and, touched and moved to our own depths by human misery of every kind, we reach out with healing to those whom the world regards as untouchable. Spirituality is a way of touching like God, a way of touching God.

■ **TASTING** Tasting is almost another word for discernment, according to New Testament scholar Pierre Sandevor. "To taste . . . is above all to appreciate the flavor of our experiences on all levels . . . The Bible applies it to the discerning of moral values and to the savoring knowledge of God and of Christ, the delights of our life here below and in heaven."¹⁰

So what do Christians "taste" like, so to speak? How do they use the ability to savor? They taste "salty," that is, they add flavor to all those human activities which tend to go flat and insipid; you know they are present by their zest for life — lukewarm is something they are not. Their conversation is well-seasoned with graciousness and wisdom. Because their Lord drank death to the dregs, they can live life to the full. But, paradoxically, they also have a hungry look because they are "accepting no substitutes," nothing artificial. Their Bridegroom is absent and so they hunger and thirst for his righteousness and both taste and see that he alone is good, that his Word is sweet; they long to dine with him in the kingdom. Spirituality is a way of tasting, a way of tasting like God, a way of tasting God.

■ **SMELLING** The way Christians smell pleases God and attracts or repels their fellow human beings. All the while the incense of their living sacrifice reaches heaven, God rejoices because God recognizes the sweet smell of Jesus who

gave in his own death the pattern of our dying. Those destined for life detect this same fragrance in their Christian brothers and sisters while those who refuse to be saved hold their noses. All those washed in the Lamb's blood follow the Anointed One to the mountain of spices and to the enclosed garden from which there wafts already the marriage perfumes and the banquet aromas. Spirituality, then, is even a way of smelling, a way of smelling like God, a way of smelling God.

These images — fugitive, fragmentary, rising, bursting, wheeling, contradicting, correcting, refining — should suggest the sense and sensibility of spirituality as the total consecration to a transformation of the self by God the Holy Spirit which is the exhortation of Paul in Romans 12:1-2. Without the graces I received in 1978, the year of severe mercy, I would not be the man and teacher I am today. I treasure the insights I have just attempted to offer to you. This attempt invites me to take them seriously again for myself. ■

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In addition to my C. S. Lewis favorites, *The Great Divorce*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, I would recommend a prayerful reading of the following titles by other authors:

1. *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness* by David Steindl-Rast (Paulist, 1984).
2. *Holiness* by Donald Nicoll (Paulist, 1989).
3. *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* by Ann and Barry Ulanov (John Knox, 1982).
4. *Poverty of Spirit* by Johannes B. Metz (Paulist, 1984).
5. *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God* by Andre Louf (new edition available from Crowley Publications).
6. *Introduction to Spirituality* by Louis Bouyer (Liturgical Press, 1961).

ENDNOTES

- 1 For more on the process of *lectio* for individuals or groups, please see *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth* by Norvene Vest (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).
- 2 Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality* (New York: Seabury, 1977), vol. 1: *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, p. 63.
- 3 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1960), p. 175; this is the title for Book Four, Chapter Ten; Chapter Eleven is titled "The New Men."
- 4 "The 'Return' to Spiritual Direction," *Spiritual Life*, 18 (Winter, 1972), pp. 272, 274, emphasis added.
- 5 *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience*, 2nd. ed. (Nisbet, 1936), p. 261.
- 6 *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Floyd V. Filson, tr. (Westminster, 1950), p. 228. Cullmann's assertion serves as the foundation for Gerard Therrien's masterful study, *La discernment dans les écrits pauliniens* (Etudes Bibliques, Paris: Librairie Lecoffre/J. Gabalda et cie, 1973).
- 7 Cullmann has a more complicated definition: "The capacity of forming the correct ethical judgment at each given moment, and specifically of forming it in connection with the knowledge of the redemptive process, in which, indeed, the Holy Spirit is a decisive figure" (p. 228). Therrien follows Cullmann here, and adds the definition of Ceslas Spicq: "The Christian's prudential and autonomous judgment exercised in the present time and the most concrete circumstances whereby he/she discovers and carries out that which pleases God" (p. 1, my translation and emphasis). See also Romans 14:18, Ephesians 5:10, and Colossians 3:20; see Werner Foerster's article "aresko . . . euarestos . . ." in *TDNT*, I, p. 457; see also Hans Bietenhard's article, "Please," in *DNTT*, III, pp. 816-817. For insight into the meaning of the will of God as the joy or pleasure of God, see Andre Louf, *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God* (Darton, Longmans, Todd, 1974; Franciscan Herald, 1975), pp. 27-33.
- 8 As found in *Hymnbook 1982* (Church Pension Fund, 1985), Number 10.
- 9 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII, p. 91b.
- 10 "Taste," *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Xavier Leon-Dufour, ed. (Crossroads, 1973), p. 590.

To Grace a Debtor

BY ROBERT P. MEYE

Whether autobiographical or spiritual, your past is, in many ways, what you make of it. We humans are all selective — and often, to our own harm, dishonest — in our approach to the past. Even our best efforts toward honesty are no guarantee that we can retrieve those critical elements which really matter in the present. So, there remains much about the human person which is a mystery; our self remains impervious even to highly credentialed practitioners of the art of human understanding.

With that caveat, I will engage in some autobiographical reflections which will be followed by observations regarding my understanding and definition of Christian spirituality. I will not seek to connect these observations with a solid line; rather, I will let the two stand side-by-side.

So, to understand my personal spiritual commitments and practice, we need to begin with my family heritage. My paternal grandfather was a drunkard who beat his family and ultimately caused my father to run away from home during his teen years, never to see his parents again. By the providence of God, Dad became part of a wonderful Christian household, whose lives were governed by a quasi-Wesleyan spirituality. My father was converted, and became committed to the way of holiness, in an *absolute* sense. Thanks be to God, Dad came closer to embodying absolute integrity than anyone I have ever known.

My father's unhappy beginnings robbed him of much that would have served him — and me — well by way of closeness and mutual understanding. He gave much of himself to me, but often at a distance. Dad's scars inevitably entered into my experience of

God as mediated to me through my father. This experience was exacerbated by others to follow.

My mother was one of thirteen children of very devout Eastern European Roman Catholic immigrants; for them and my mother, God, the faith and the Church were everything. However, during my mother's younger years, my grandparents felt something missing in their inherited religious commitment and, along with a considerable extended family, became Protes-

"A significant slice of my childhood was a disquieting mixture of heaven and hell."

tants. Following their conversion, their lives were influenced and shaped by early Pentecostalism, first in the setting of a rural house church, and later in a local church. In retrospect, I see their lives, in many ways, as an amalgam of their early quasi-mystical Roman Catholic influences and subsequent Pentecostal experience. Today, they might be characterized as unusually quiet charismatics or perhaps charismatic Catholics.

Revivalistic influences were prominent in our home church as well as the essentially fundamentalist movements to which we were

exposed. The combined results of my Pentecostal and revivalist exposure resulted in a roller coaster experience of salvation — better, of my relationship to God. To this very hour, I find myself warning those newly enamored of the word "experience" in spirituality that experience is a many splendored and sometimes very negative thing! Speaking in tongues, in spite of the warning of wise pastors, appeared to be the *sine qua non* of Christian experience. It was *the* thing people sought most earnestly. Because I never had the experience (although I sought it) I did not know myself to be an enduring object of grace. And in my sensitive young life, I knew full well that I was a sinner, needing the grace of God. The unrewarded quest for this gift of the Spirit placed me in jeopardy every time a revival meeting was held; the call to repent of sin seemed to be just the thing I needed! I can sum it up by saying that a significant slice of my childhood was a disquieting mixture of heaven and hell.

I joined the Navy at the tender age of seventeen, leaving home shortly thereafter, never to live there again. But I also maintained strong ties to my father and especially my mother. I seized every opportunity possible to be with them, or to encourage their presence with me and my family, and to help them in every way I could (letters, work, telephone calls, etc.). It was always clear to me that my parents cared very much about my faith and conduct; and it was my blessed experience that they never sought to control me. Here, they incarnated grace; only later did I truly realize this fact. In consequence, throughout my life, through their example, concern, and their complete trust and support, I felt myself to be on a long, helpful and comfortable tether.

Early on at Stanford University, which I attended as a midshipman under the Navy ROTC

program, I fell in with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and became deeply involved in its ministry for the next four years. I found in IVCF a comfortable home, and made an easy transition from my significant and emotionally charged Pentecostal beginnings to a joyful, but also a consciously intellectual, expression of the faith. The transition was eased by the fact that my father, who was not a tongues-speaking Pentecostal, embodied the glorious integrity of true holiness. The integrity of my colleagues in the Fellowship, and the wise pastoral leadership there, allowed me to blossom as a Christian, serving in various facets of its mission on and off campus. Still, there were issues from the past unresolved, in particular, a nagging lack of certainty regarding my relationship to God.

Two things happened after graduation in 1951. I married Mary, the wonderful woman whom I had met at an IVCF weekend conference some seven months before. Without question, we met at a time when we both needed each other very much — and we still do. Sadly, because of the Korean conflict, my NROTC commitment meant that I had to leave for Korea right after our marriage, and I served for three very long years in the Korean theater. Fortunately, my role as acting chaplain of my ship and task unit, and the presence in our port of wonderful American and Japanese Christian friends went far towards helping me endure a very painful separation.

During the final months of military service, I heard God's call to turn aside from my developing plan to go to law school and instead go to seminary to prepare for some form of Christian ministry. I assumed pastoring would be the outcome, but this was not firm. In my fourth year of two degree programs, I felt a deep commitment to prepare for the ministry of theological education

— and have deeply felt that commitment every day for almost four decades. However, I entered into seminary with a certain sense still of not being an object of God's grace.

It was because of the career and teaching of the great Karl Barth at the University of Basel in Switzerland — the location of my doctoral program — that a decisive breakthrough occurred.

"I began to know myself as an object of grace."

This happened despite all the worries Barth's teachings generated among my theologically conservative friends. I still can't mark the day or the hour; but rather, the blessed impulses of that experience, combined with those of a Christian lifetime, gradually worked their way in my life. Finally, in and through Barth's instruction, an instruction which, above all else, sought to be faithful to Scripture, I began to know myself as an object of grace. Indeed, in the providence of God, it is to Karl Barth that I owe the confirmation of things long before taught to me but not always experienced, including a deepened understanding of God's decisive self-revelation and saving work in Jesus Christ for me; grace as the decisive mark of the way in which God views us in Jesus Christ and works in human life; and gratitude and thanksgiving as the hallmark of our experience of God in Christ.

As I moved away from my graduate experience, I resolved on the decks of the German passenger liner, the *Bremen*, to communicate the gospel to real people in plain English. I was certain of one pragmatic requirement: It required

a commitment to authentic, lived faith on my part. Doesn't the gospel claim the heart? How could I communicate the gospel truly without a deepening experience of it?

The 1975-76 academic year was momentous. I lost my father to a massive heart attack and also experienced a once-in-a-lifetime sabbatical. For six months, Mary and I, supported by a sabbatical fellowship grant, participated in community life in a series of centers of spirituality ranging from a lay academy in western Crete to the ancient abbey of Iona off the coast of western Scotland. Ours was a thoroughly ecumenical experience. It was a life changing, virtual conversion experience. Among other things, I emerged from it finally knowing myself to be an object of grace. I felt myself newly empowered for service to God. This was one of the first "markers" I had of God's grace in my life.

One of the most important things I experienced was the wholeness of an authentically spiritual life. I cannot develop this here, I can only say that my teaching regarding spirituality has again and again returned to lift up the breadth and depth and wholeness of authentic spirituality. Walking and talking and living with people who had given themselves to God was a wonderful revelation of God's grace.

I was also impressed in that same sabbatical experience by the historic emphasis upon prayer in the spiritual life — often in a way that virtually equated spirituality and prayer. This ancient perspective was newly impressed upon me, along with the long-standing emphasis upon the Word, the Christian community of faith, and worship as being essential in any expression of spirituality. But I was also impressed with a rich and lively general expression of spirituality, above all spirituality as formed by the blessed fruit of the Spirit, beginning with, and

emphasizing, love, joy and peace. To those who feel that such emphases lack substance, I can only say that love, joy and peace are, for most of the world, life itself — though often a life yet to be realized.

Over the years I have found myself turning to Romans as a treasury for teaching and preaching, and an abundant resource for my own thinking and ministry. I experienced Romans not only as Paul's theological legacy, but also as his spiritual legacy to the church. One of my great experiences of God was mediated through Romans 5:5b: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given unto us." That awesome and joyful declaration, as much as any, has been the banner over my pilgrimage. A second marker: About 1970, I joined a community of seminary faculty and administrators from across the land in a covenant of prayer for deepened spirituality in ourselves, each other, our colleagues, students and respective schools. (Only recently have I come to wonder about any possible connection between the intercessory ministry of that small nationally situated band and the subsequent revolution in respect to the place of spirituality in seminaries generally.) Then, a third: I found myself turning to a new focus in my New Testament Spirituality class. This course was especially enriched and supported by a Roman Catholic teaching assistant, Paul Ford, now a professor at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California, and integrator of this issue of *T,N&N*. Then a fourth: As dean of Fuller's School of Theology, I attached a very high priority to my role as a minister to faculty colleagues, and then students and staff. I felt that my spiritual, emotional, and physical health were as important as my theological instincts and academic integrity in meeting the challenge of serving as dean.

Then a fifth: At the Seminary, within the locus of theological schools generally, and in my writing, I was increasingly involved in addressing spirituality. Several years ago, I committed myself to writing what seemed to be a major dictionary article on Paul's spirituality. I had long since, echoing Barth who echoed Paul, affirmed that "Yes to God" is the essential definition of Christian spirituality. I still affirm the

"Love, joy and peace are, for most of the world, life itself—though often a life yet to be realized."

goodness of that definition, although both then and now I find it necessary to flesh out that "Yes." To wit, I understand this to be a "Yes" in act and attitude. It is a "Yes" which is dependent upon the divine "Yes" spoken and offered to us in Jesus Christ, the divine Son. It is an enabled "Yes," in which the Holy Spirit works especially through communion and conversation which is prayer, the Word of God, and the community of faith — all rising to the worship of God in the name of Jesus. This "Yes" is at once the deepest expression of our informed love of God and of our ready obedience to him. It is a "Yes" which issues in the great fruit of the Spirit, preeminently love, joy and peace.

In writing the article, I felt a new pressure to define spirituality, which has moved from an inactive sidetrack into the mainline of commitment in our theological schools and in the mass of literature written out of and for that locus. I noted that almost

everyone seeking to define spirituality began their essay with a lament on the unresolved condition definition of spirituality within the community of faith: What is spirituality?! Even more, it seemed to me that the defining process suffered from many deficiencies. These included: (1) a failure to be faithful to the canon; (2) a failure to feature the "specifically Christian" element in the spirituality espoused by the Church; and (3) a tendency — in keeping with the times — to define spirituality from below (anthropocentric) rather than from above (theocentric, Christocentric authentic Spirituality, in other words, a fully Trinitarian pattern). I also found unresolved tensions in the essays on spirituality, including tensions between faith and freedom, freedom and obligation, obedience and love, heart and mind, body and spirit, and so on.

All this played an important role in my effort to define Christian spirituality, but for a long time, it also complicated things. I found myself emphasizing now one, now the other direction as being primary. As a result, I was hindered in completing my article as I spun out a seemingly unending series of useful but partial definitions. It was only when most of this essay was in place that I realized the answer was already there in front of me. The answer was to be found — not in picking and choosing — but recognizing the importance of both particular and general trends in defining spirituality. There, well past the deadline, I found myself writing such things as the following:

The affirmations of Pauline spirituality may be pictured as an ellipse representing the believer's life. The Holy Spirit as the effective power at work in the believer elicits the believer's "Yes" to God that is expressed in the interactive poles of the ellipse — (1) the privileged responsibilities of the child of God, especially the triad of prayer, Word and community, culminating in

worship; and (2) the comprehensive obedience represented by the fruit of the Spirit . . .

Although in Pauline spirituality the pattern of life called forth by the sovereign creator God effectively touches the whole of human existence, the Spirit of God has entrusted the believer with special means of grace which nurture a disciplined relationship to the Trinitarian community — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through the use of these gracious means, the believer is enabled to live out the whole of life in the world in faithfulness to God. Thus, the spirituality of the believer may be pictured as an ellipse with the two interactive poles representing: (1) the exercise of the privileged responsibilities of the child of God; and (2) a comprehensive pattern of obedience leading to a growing harvest of the fruit of the Spirit.

A FEW OTHER THOUGHTS

■ Spirituality must not be disconnected from faith. If our spirituality is not our lived faith, it is nothing.

■ A new name does not make something better — as when spirituality replaces piety — but it does have a certain power to encourage new reflection and open up new vistas.

■ One virtue of the word "spirituality" is its potential to underline itself as the practice of the Spirit.

■ In respect to spirituality, we are profoundly in debt, positively and negatively speaking, to persons and movements which have gone before us, surround us and will often live beyond us.

■ Although experience is a very important teacher, Christians of all people should not underestimate the power of the Word, inspired by the Spirit of God, to effect change, including spiritual change.

■ Spirituality, as life in general, is intricately interwoven; it begins at the heart of things and works out into all things.

■ We best understand and define spirituality in terms of inclusion, not exclusion of alternatives — so long as these

alternatives have claim to be Christian.

■ The best beginning point for developing a spirituality from below is to recognize that it finds its foundation and validity in a spirituality from above.

■ Above all else, grace — God's grace — and gratitude — our response to the grace of God — are the two most essential components of an authentic Christian spirituality, a spirituality which, patterned in the imitation of Christ, and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, will ever bear fruit in love, joy and peace. All of this will happen only within the framework of our privileged response of

"Spirituality, as life in general, is intricately interwoven; it begins at the heart of things and works out into all things."

faith in God in Christ and in the power of the Spirit, especially expressed in our life in prayer, in the Word, and in the community of faith. Such life ever rises to the true worship of God and flows out into witness and service to the world.

Perhaps I should mention that twice in the last three years I have been bitten, once sharply, by that old enemy, cancer. The result is that last August, I retired because of disability. But it has been my experience that God is greater than cancer. The abiding assurance of God's outpoured love

(Romans 5:5b!) has lightened and warmed my pilgrim way. God's great "Yes" has been spoken in Jesus Christ, and "I know whom I have believed." This, I take, to be the continuing testimony of the Spirit of Christ to me and in me. Here I stand. I can do nothing else. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! ■

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Slouching Towards Bethlehem: An Experience of Psychology and Spirituality

BY QUINN R. CONNERS

THE SECOND COMING

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand . . .*

*The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?* W.B. YEATS

WB. Yeats's dramatic words remind me of that hunger in all of us for some way to bring together the fragments of our lives in a shattered world. The coming of Christ at Bethlehem was such a moment of integration where the human and divine met and a healed humanity became possible. Yeats reminds us that each must be involved in that same movement — that same healing — as we move towards the incarnation of God's love in our lives.

Fuller Theological Seminary has long been interested in that healing process under the rubric of the integration of psychology and

theology. I very much benefited from my experience at Fuller which has developed a fine research and training center where a theoretical and practical understanding of the relationship between these two disciplines could be studied. While the theoretical exploration is very important, ultimately the integration of the two is done on the practical level within the individual in cooperation with God's grace. Another word for it is

spirituality. These reflections will describe my experience of that ongoing movement of integration.

First, I will state the beliefs which serve as the theological context of my spirituality. Second, I will discuss the processes/methods — psychological and otherwise — which have helped me to try living out those beliefs and to develop a spirituality.

THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS

In order for the integration of psychology and spirituality to take place, there are certain core beliefs or assumptions that have grounded me.

The first assumption is the event at Bethlehem — the Incarnation. The birth of Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of God's love for us. What this event means is that the human experience has been graced. In other words, the whole range of human experiences has the potential for being a vehicle of God's grace for us. Of course, it does not mean that every human experience is an experience of grace, but the potential is there. This foundational event of the Incarnation makes the experience of God directly accessible to us.

The second assumption is that we as human beings need to be healed. Though the Incarnation is the expression of God's incredible love for us, the reality of the human condition is that we are not self-sufficient. We are made in the likeness of God, but we are flawed. Hence the saving act of Jesus Christ is essential to all.

The third assumption is that we live the Christian life in the context of a community of believers. Growth in the spiritual life necessitates that we do so in the context of support from and accountability to believers. The sense of companionship and accompaniment sustains us while at the same time we provide that same experience for others. Part of that includes an implicit (and sometimes explicit) accountability to the larger group that we are

being true to the faith journey that we share.

This community of believers can find expression in a number of different ways. It can be: (1) in a local church; (2) in an approach to biblical and theological beliefs (as at Fuller); (3) in more traditional communities such as religious orders (e.g., the Carmelites, Dominicans, Jesuits, etc.) in the Roman Catholic tradition; or (4) in some variation or combination of these communities. These ecclesial "clustering" provide a more or less systematic tradition for understanding and interpreting the Gospel. This tradition is rooted in the Gospel but with a particular emphasis. For me that community has been the Roman Catholic church and the Carmelite Order, which emphasizes contemplative prayer, community, and a life of prophetic ministry (in the spirit of Elijah, the fiery Old Testament prophet of Mt. Carmel). However, it also meant being involved for shorter periods of time with communities like Fuller who have supported and challenged my faith-life in valuable ways.

All of the above beliefs/assumptions operate as the context within which I live the Christian life: Belief in Jesus Christ who as incarnate God saves me, a person who needs healing and a community of believers that is there for support and accountability. There are other theological beliefs that serve as guideposts for me, but these have been most fundamental to my spiritual development. I believe they are a fundamental bedrock for people who are serious about growing in their relationship with God.

PROCESS

Growth in one's spiritual life is where one experiences the integration of psychology and spirituality. To grow in one's spiritual life, one has to enter into

a process. Developmental theory in psychology provides one way of imaging what that is like. The research offers two helpful insights: We are changing all the time, and we are never a finished product. Furthermore, the Scriptures are filled with examples of individuals like Job who have taken that relationship with God so seriously that their lives are dramatically changed over a period of time. Not only are their lives changed, but their under-

"An ongoing prayer life is crucial to spiritual growth. Here we are talking about a 'day-in, day-out' relationship with God."

standing and experience of God changes as well.

What are some of the components which help that process of growth?

First, an ongoing prayer life is crucial to spiritual growth. Here we are talking about a "day-in, day-out" relationship with God. Periods of time set aside on a regular basis to enter into the mystery of God's love and our need for healing are vital. Whether we use Scripture, read other people's prayers, use meditation techniques, or try various prayer forms like centering prayer, regular praying is needed to develop a relationship with God. Prayer is the only way to do that.

Second, a major component for growth in spiritual life is ongoing self-reflection. Self-reflection can lead to deeper self-

knowledge which is a key to growth in the experience of God. Contemporary psychology offers vital assistance for growth in self-knowledge. For example, psychotherapy has been enormously helpful for me in stirring up material that enables me to know myself better and thus to be more real with God. As we confront the darkness within each of us — whether that darkness comes in the form of depression, addictions, problems with authority, etc. — psychotherapy helps us to confront the reality of these disorders within us. As we confront these, cognitively and affectively, this becomes material that we bring to prayer. Bringing this to our prayer enables us to be our real selves before God and to experience the ongoing struggle not to try to be perfect before God — the Christian's great illusion.

This growing self-knowledge keeps us rooted in the reality of our need for healing. That reality never ends. We struggle with the Scripture that reminds us to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." The reality is that we will only be perfect when we move from death to new life. Nevertheless, that does not mean that we do not struggle towards the healing that God offers to us in Christ.

The kinds of prayer forms I find most helpful at this point in my life are what is known as either centering prayer or Zen sitting. Both use the same methodology. That methodology includes attention to either a name that is repeated like Jesus or Abba or attention to one's breathing. In this prayer form, begun with an act of faith in the presence of God, one uses non-verbal prayer in God's presence. What surfaces in this kind of prayer are both cognitive and affective awareness of myself — most often feelings of anger, sadness, fear, joy, about various events present and past in

my life. This prayer form enables me to continue to "hold my feet to the fire" when it comes to trying to be my true self before God; that is, trying to be the self that is broken but loved.

No therapy is ever going to heal us completely. Therapy and psychology cannot replace prayer and growth in our relationship with God. However, this ongoing knowledge of our own psychological dynamics keeps us rooted in that hunger for God which is never satisfied. This hunger for God is another way of talking about original sin which was an attempt to deny our need for God. This ongoing self-knowledge keeps us rooted in the reality that we cannot be truly human without searching for God.

Occasionally, there are more intense experiences along these lines that are helpful. Periodic retreats have helped me move away from the usual, necessary distractions of my life to help me confront my own darkness and need for God's healing.

A variation on the retreat experience which was particularly related to the integration of psychology and spirituality was the "intensive experience" of John Finch. It was a unique opportunity in my own spiritual development to enter more deeply into the mystery of myself and of God. The intensive lasts three weeks. You live alone in an isolated cabin without television, radio, books, or other such distractions except a daily hour of therapy. It is a twentieth century desert experience. As designed, the experience allows us to enter into ourselves and into the dynamic of our own emotional and cognitive life to enable us to experience the damaged and blessed persons we are. My experience of the intensive also led to the most profound, contemplative experiences of God in my life, convincing me that

psychology can indeed lead us to God. It may not be everybody's choice, but such experiences can be instruments of grace.

In this time of increasing reports of sexual abuse by clergy and other trusted professionals, like John Finch, it has been very painful to see such individuals who do so much good with programs like the intensive also inflict so much harm on parishioners and patients. Each of us must be accountable to someone so that the evil we all are capable of does not overwhelm the good. Thus, in

"If we stay open to God and to all that is in us that wants to close God out, then we will experience God most profoundly."

retrospect, these experiences also help me to more fully realize that God can use even the most compromised individuals and situations in our lives to lead us to a deeper experience of the reality of his love for us. If we stay open to God and to all that is in us that wants to close God out, then we will experience God most profoundly.

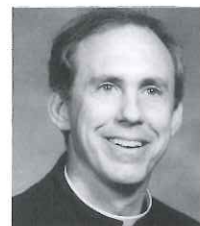
Another help in the process of integrating psychology and spirituality has been the usefulness of a spiritual guide at different times. A spiritual director or guide is one who accompanies the individual in his/her quest for God and is part of that faith community one belongs to. This person serves as a mirror and objectifier of one's experience in light of the

scriptural and theological tradition of one's community. The temptation to live with our illusions and projections is great because they keep us from the intimacy with God that can at times be so terrifying. Perhaps even more importantly these days, the spiritual director helps us be accountable to ourselves, to the damaged parts of ourselves, and to that deeply rooted hunger for union with God that we resist in so many ways.

Finally, various other pilgrims on this faith journey serve to help us through their writings. Many have influenced me, but I mention here only a few. Dag Hammarskjöld's *Markings* (Knopf, 1964) encouraged me to discover the possibility of union with God even in the most secular surroundings. Barry and Ann Ulanov's *Primary Speech* (John Knox, 1982) and William Johnston's *The Inner Eye of Love* (Harper San Francisco, 1978) gave me a theoretical and practical framework for the integration of psychology and spirituality. Finally, the poetry of people like Michael Blumenthal in his *Days We Would Rather Know* (Viking, 1984) encourages me to continue

—please turn to page 22

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Do As I Say, Not As I Do or How To Develop The Spiritual Aspect In Your Marriage Relationship

BY RICK AND SHERI BLACKMON

We attended a Christian college together, went to Fuller with team ministry intentions, and even interned together in a church. We conduct seminars and retreats on marriage and family issues, share similar values and beliefs, and enjoy a solid marriage. But, until recently, one crucial element was missing — a joint spiritual relationship.

The friction and frustration over this lack came to a head one morning several years ago. Rick's twenty-year affair with the morning newspaper let nothing stand in the way of a thirty-minute morning perusal of the pages. He would squeeze in a quick devotional reading or prayer afterwards — if time allowed.

Groggily, Sheri stumbled into the kitchen with a caustic remark: "I can see you're having your regular devotions with the sports page!"

Instantly, intense anger coursed through Rick and he readied himself for the defensive attack: "I am sick and tired of you telling me how to conduct my spiritual life. You're driving me away from God with your continual critique of my spirituality. You don't know what's in my heart, so lay off!" (Pretty good response for a marriage counselor, isn't it?!)

SHERI That morning, I experienced the loss of a dream to which I had tenaciously clung, that of spiritual intimacy with my husband, marked by regular prayer and devotions together. I

figured I could make it happen, but I realized at that moment my attempts were only worsening the situation. I also recognized I was trying to make Rick into my own image of what a spiritual person

"I experienced the loss of a dream to which I had tenaciously clung, that of spiritual intimacy with my husband, marked by regular prayer and devotions together."

is. In that moment, I gave up and let the dream die, not realizing that a seed must sometimes die before new life can take form.

RICK I felt ashamed that we were having this conversation again. I felt the tension between the truth of her allegation that my spirituality was lacking, and an unwillingness to be controlled and molded into her image. On one level, I rejected her accusations because I

had a very strong Christian foundation and background. I knew Scripture, had completed an M.Div., and even specialized in working with Christian pastors in my psychotherapy practice.

But as I sat in therapy with these ministers, I increasingly recognized a missing dimension: An affective personal interaction with God in daily life. When I teach a class on personal growth and development at Fuller, the project most frequently chosen by students is one designed to increase the quality and frequency of their prayer and devotional life. As I reflected on the lives of my students and my clients, I began to see myself in them. My faith was primarily based in cognitive and rational precepts but lacking experiential depth for a dynamic walk with Christ.

At that time, a close friend asked me to form an accountability relationship where we would challenge each other to grow spiritually. By then, the issue of my personal spirituality had become one of integrity. If my own walk with Christ wasn't having a noticeable impact on my ministry and marriage (except in a belief sense), then wasn't I missing out on an essential part of the Christian life? And how could I, in good conscience, work with Christian leaders who were struggling with the very same issues? My long-term interest in integrating psychology and theology now became very personal: How could my own walk with Christ impact the depth and nature of my work and ministry?

SHERI I was caught by surprise one day when Rick mentioned in an off-hand manner that he had been fasting regularly for several months. He did it to learn how to deal with deprivation and to build self-control. I was impressed and encouraged by this move. I had been meeting with a friend from church in a one-on-one discipling relationship. We explored spiritual growth together and began to practice different spiritual disci-

plines. Through Rick's encouragement, my friend and I fasted several times, as well.

I began to see that the seed I had allowed to die was sprouting and growing up into new life, all without any effort on my part. I was reminded of Paul's advice to wives of unbelieving husbands to win them over in a quiet manner with their lives. While Rick was not an unbeliever, the same principle applied to him: The male psyche resists being controlled; men dislike feeling like they must measure up to standards imposed by their wives. Allowing my dream of what I thought our spiritual relationship should look like die, created a greater tolerance within me. Because I no longer expected much, there was room for God to create something new and unexpected. During the coming months, I experienced a renewed freedom to devote time to prayer and other spiritual disciplines. I no longer felt alone in that search, but was encouraged by Rick's continual growth.

Much of this growth continued to be individual or with other friends, not together as a couple. We still didn't make time to pray and pull together as a family for devotions, except irregularly. This continued to bother me; I had been raised in a home where my mother initiated spirituality and my father "went along" with her. I did not want my boys to associate spirituality with the feminine realm. Consequently, I embraced an extreme of not initiating at all, because I had grown tired of being the only one to motivate our family to pursue spiritual growth. I continued my regular times of prayer and Bible reading with the children (which Rick did as well), but Rick and I shared little spiritual intimacy together.

The trend began to reverse itself gradually when, while teaching a class on family finances, I learned practical ways to overcome the obstacles of not spending enough time together seeking God. I developed a simple system of money management for

the children which would teach them to divide up their allowance into three categories: that which belonged to God, that which went into savings, and that which went toward buying a planned item once enough was saved. We implemented this little discipline with a family meeting where we decided to discuss interpersonal concerns and conclude with a devotional and prayer time. As we began to implement the plan, we

"My mother initiated spirituality and my father 'went along' with her. I did not want my boys to associate spirituality with the feminine realm."

were struck with how easy it was and yet how much benefit we all received from the brief time spent together. That success brought great encouragement and hope. The biggest challenge continues to be in keeping with a regular meeting. We have found that if we get to the bank before the weekend to get enough change for the kids' allowance, we're much more likely to implement the plan. In a strange way, our joint devotional life has been given new focus and direction through — of all things! — money management.

Concurrent with the successes we began experiencing jointly, Rick entered a relationship with a spiritual director through which he

gained greater insight into his resistance to and struggles with prayer.

RICK One of the fruits of my reflections was a decision to find a pastor for myself. I frequently ask pastors in therapy or in seminars if *they* have a pastor. You can guess that the answer is usually "no." And by "pastor," I simply mean someone who is intimately acquainted with your personal spirituality and who has the skill and courage to help you grow. I recognized that I have lacked such a figure for all of my professional life. The pastor in my church is a wonderful person but he is also my wife's boss. Understandably, I have some hesitation approaching him. So, I began to look around for someone with whom I would feel comfortable sharing my spiritual journey. I found a spiritual director who lived fairly close who agreed to meet with me.

In our first meeting together, he asked me about my experience with God's love. My jaw dropped as I sat there and realized I had virtually no experience. I could preach on it, teach on it, even reflect God's love to others in my ministry, but outside of feeling loved by those in my life, I could not connect to personally experiencing God's love. This conversation took place almost a year ago and has resulted in a daily attempt to discipline myself to ask God to show me how he was going to love me that day.

During our second visit we discussed the old-fashioned concept of vainglory. I recognized that many of my real agendas in life had to do with self-advancement and personal ambition rather than a carefully contemplated understanding of God's will and calling for me. I had been through this kind of self-examination before with friends and in therapy, but now attaching some motives with my spirituality made it take on a whole new meaning. While trying very carefully not to throw the baby out with the bath water, I began to bring God into

the core of everything I was doing. This was (and is) both painful and freeing! It is quite common for a Christian psychologist to say one's worth should be connected to Christ rather than one's work, but I now began to experience that reality as well.

When I think of these pastoral visits, I am struck that most of them are not spectacular in nature. But the cumulative impact of having someone ask me very directly and specifically about my spiritual experience has affected me deeply. I feel accountable in the very best sense to the discipline of listening to what God is doing with me, because someone regularly asks me about that. I now wonder if clergy shouldn't be in this type of relationship for the entirety of their careers. In that sense, we are talking about something very different from psychotherapy for pastors, which may help address a particular difficulty or explore dynamic issues from a minister's past.

SHERI As a pastor, I am usually in a giving mode which requires that I keep my spiritual tank filled. Rick has always been a great help and sounding board when I have brought home ministry issues and struggles. Since he started seeing his spiritual director, however, the effects of that relationship have begun to spill over into our relationship in a rather intangible way. We have felt a greater freedom to share spiritually and to pray together.

In my own reading, study and ministry, there has been a renewed and growing interest in the area of spiritual direction and formation. In recent months, my commitment to making time for God through solitude, prayer, meditation, etc., has increased, and I have seen positive results as a pastor, a wife and a mother. I am greatly encouraged that through our individual growth, our family is benefiting as well.

We have experienced some success in sticking with our weekly family meeting, and we continue

to take advantage of those "teachable moments" that arise spontaneously to impart Christ's gospel and God's great love to our children. We pray together most nights or whenever an appropriate occasion arises. We're learning not to underestimate the importance of those informal times of spiritual growth.

I'm beginning to feel more freedom to initiate prayer, provided that activity does not fall only to me. Our struggle is not over, but we are making steady progress. We have seen many changes in each other. I am learning to let go of my control of Rick and to see that spirituality is

"We are learning that spirituality encompasses all of life, from how we deal with finances to how we talk to our children."

tailor-made to each individual. I have seen Rick change from a reluctant giver of our finances to an enthusiastic and generous steward. Our children see that their dad spends time each morning in prayer and devotional reading, and that makes a powerful impression. And I have watched Rick's strong competitive instinct moderate through his spiritual direction and personal prayer times. We are learning that spirituality encompasses all of life, from how we deal with finances to how we talk to our children. We

anticipate that with these attitudes, God will show us great insights and surprise us with other gifts in the years to come.

We have learned some things about the complicated phenomenon of resistance and how it specifically applies to our walk with God. At our core is the healthy desire to grow and develop as a Christian person. There is also another desire that moderates and often binds this healthy drive. It has been called by many names by people ranging from St. Paul to modern psychologists. It is that part of us which seeks homeostasis or sameness, even if that sameness is bad. Within each of us is an ambivalence about doing God's will which pervades our emotions, will and intellect.

Resistance is the manifestation of that inner ambivalence which varies depending on certain —please turn to page 23

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BROKEN AND SHARED: Discovering and Claiming My Own Holy History

BY NORVENE VEST

Once there was a religious scholar, zealous for God and eager to eliminate all false doctrine. One day, a certain young heretic was to be killed — stoned to death — and our scholar found himself at the edge of the crowd, holding the coats of those violently ending the life of that young man. The scholar watched, his adrenaline running high, when suddenly the eyes of the young man caught his, and they were full of love and beauty. There was no fear in those eyes, no resentment, just glory pouring through from another dimension. In that brief contact, our scholar woke up. He did not yet know he was awake, but he would. The scholar's name then was Saul, and even that would change. (Acts 7:54-8:1.)

The Bible is full of vignettes, of moments of holiness penetrating through everyday experiences, of gentle and searing darts of grace which intersect with normal events. And although at the time the dart of grace may seem like nothing, it has the power to transform our lives if we will allow it.

When we look back over our own lives to notice God's gently urgent touch, are we able to recover and claim such moments? Do we — each of us — know how God usually deals with us, and how we typically respond? It is not easy to develop these skills, because they combine two radically different attitudes. First, we must acknowledge our own limitations: Like Saul, perhaps our zeal for God has been totally

misdirected. Second, we must acknowledge our own infinitely precious value: If God did not really desire our companionship, there would be no need for any touch at all. We can weep because of our sinfulness, and we can rejoice because we are loved, but can we do both at once? What happens for us, inside and outside, as we begin to notice and claim the holy history of our own lives?

THE INVITATION

What does it feel like to be one with a holy history? A holy history

“What is the quality of life for one who is called forth out of nothingness to be a beloved person living in this world?”

is personal, nonetheless filled with the presence of God, full of pattern and meaning, just like the Hebrews, indeed, very like our Lord Jesus. What is the quality of life for one who is called forth out of nothingness to be a beloved person living in this world? What

are holy people like? If each of us is called to be holy, should we not be absorbed in such questions?

Several years ago, I was sharing coffee with a colleague at one of the outdoor tables at the Catalyst, the coffee and sandwich shop in the middle of Fuller Seminary's campus. He turned to me and asked, “What does it feel like to be a holy person?” I was amused and taken aback, thinking that he was gently kidding me. Perhaps he was, but I saw he was also serious, and it made me think.

What does it feel like to be a holy person?! Perhaps the first response is simply that I *desire* to be holy. There are many dangers connected with such a desire, not the least of which is that I might concentrate only on God's will for me, repressing or pretending that my creatureliness is unimportant and I have transcended it. I would then be in good company with Saul, whose zeal for God took the form of following all the rules and making sure everyone else did, too. (No swearing, no anger, no inappropriate sexual desires, no raucous laughter, no fun . . . And soon, God would be the only one desiring my company!)

But there are greater dangers in refusing the desire to be holy, and are we not all called to such a desire? God invites us each day to accept anew the fact that we are beloved, and to live accordingly. And we *do* respond, one way or the other, whether we realize it or not. Do we say, “Not today, Lord, I'm too busy” (or “. . . too depressed” or “. . . too angry.”)? No, the response is much more difficult: “I *will* today, Lord; teach me to be yours in whatever state I am.”

When something is holy, it is near to God. Therefore, our lives are holy whether or not we acknowledge it, because God is always there. That is a statement of faith. As for experience, the balance of this article will address my personal experience of this faith in God's constant presence.

MY (HOLY) HISTORY

To be human is to be located, situated, hemmed in by specific forces which give content to our range of choice. My holy history has its roots in my family history which includes a loving step-grandmother, a feminist mother who encouraged me to be all I could, a tradition of Sunday church attendance, and a multitude of other forces too numerous to mention. But for me, the center of gravity hinges on the moment of baptism, receiving my father's name and being marked by the Holy Spirit as God's forever.

I was baptized at six weeks of age. I am named after my father, Norvin, and was baptized on his birthday. For all of my childhood and early adulthood, I was so glad for that. I felt I was my father's sidekick, his special pal, the one who anticipated his needs and calmed his troubled spirit. When he died twenty years ago after committing suicide, I grieved that he had never let my love be enough for him. All my life I told his sad story: That his mother died of smallpox when he was two years old, that he was shipped around to various remote relatives until he was five, when his father grudgingly took him back after remarriage; how in those three critical years, my grandfather blamed Dad for his mother's death. Somehow my father found the only way to get attention was by acting out, and he became a hellion. Dad was always in trouble; Grandpa was always bailing him out and covering up for him. I don't think he ever grew beyond those early wounds to his spirit. But that is my father's holy history, sacred to him, and in God's hands.

For forty-eight years I grew from that moment of baptism toward the person God knows me yet to be. Early years of my

adulthood were invested outwards, in the social outreach and service of community development and care for the poor. Yet the last ten years brought significant change. There has been a tremendous homecoming for me, as I graduated from Fuller with a vocation to spiritual direction, and married a priest in the Episcopal Church. These recent ten years seemed somehow to be a turning inward, checking and securing the foundations, finding safety and strength

“Yet even as I blossomed in the favorable soil of love and ministry and prayer, something dark began to enfold me.”

in the things which really matter. Yet even as I blossomed in the favorable soil of love and ministry and prayer, something dark began to enfold me and I felt myself being pulled deeper and deeper into terror and self-loathing. Somehow the inward turning seemed to make me safe enough, grounded in faith and supported by love, to let the unthinkable emerge. Somehow, the blessing of love seemed to emerge side-by-side with the growing knowledge of a terrible truth that would break me. Could the two occur at once? Could both be the gift of God, grace touching me in the present moment? It certainly did not feel so. Yet my community of faith assured me that I was attuned to God and was called to be as obedient (*ob-oedire*: listening) to the suffering as to the joy.

Two years ago, my world split open no less profoundly than did

St. Paul's on the Damascus Road. Two years ago, I woke up one early morning in a mental hospital and let myself remember what somehow I was already knowing: That my father had sexually abused me from the very earliest moments of my conscious awareness until I was about twelve years old. He invaded and possessed my body in every way imaginable, alternating between seduction and brutality. He tore me apart mentally, physically and emotionally as he followed his own tortured demons of despair and need to pay back the wounds he had suffered. But “pay back” whom? Why should his docile girl-child be the victim of his stored-up, anguish-motivated rage? He never gave a thought to the injuries he was inflicting on my soul; he never sought help; he never repented nor asked for forgiveness.

How do I discover my holy history amidst these broken shards? Lost dreams and illusions . . . A new perspective on all the history my childish pain taught me to pretend was true about my own life . . . A deep suicidal sense of my own filthiness . . . Newly awakened fears of loud noises and dark places, revealing a conviction that life itself is unsafe . . . Horrified recognition of a deep-seated mistrust of love and tenderness which holds everyone at a distance . . . A passionate and irrational need to be in absolute control of environment (combined with a despairing sense that I have no power at all) . . .

The effects of the abuse are profound, complex and very deeply rooted in my life. Now my task is to look all these factors in the face, feel them in my body,

accept them as my own authentic history. It takes so much — time, courage, love, help. Meanwhile, I ask myself: "Can such a blighted history possibly be holy?"

The last two years have been a time of the greatest suffering I have ever known. I have had to remember and release all the stored-up memories and pain which the abused child could not afford to release. Most of the time, my faith has been blind. That is, I know God is near me because of the community I belong to, because of the history I share, because of prayers offered on my behalf, because of excellent therapeutic care. But in my feelings and in my thoughts, often there is only numbness and darkness. I sometimes stare for hours at the cross wondering, and I marvel at the wisdom of a God who anticipated these moments when the only thing which can reach my battered spirit is his own willingness to suffer. I once asked my spiritual director, "Where was God then?" and she gently said, "Beside you, weeping."

Once, I had a memory of a particularly horrible rape, and as I recalled that scene, my father forcing me to engage in that horrible act, I felt another presence in the room. I "saw" Gabriel standing in the corner with drawn sword, a blazing whirlwind of fire. Sometimes I rage, asking why the sword was not used to stop what was happening, why God only wept. And other times, the fact of God's tears touches me so profoundly that I myself weep for love.

THE GOOD NEWS

Nothing can change this past of mine. Yet now that it is no longer secret, it no longer has the power to corrode me from the inside. Now I begin to sense the butterfly wings of God's grace upon me and my history with those gentle, transforming touches that promise something even better than the

"I used to think that holiness meant purity, set-apartness, holy innocence."

unblemished history I believed I had. Before I was broken open, I was cut off from others by fear and self-hatred; I was isolated by unknown secrets and set apart by a sense of my terrible difference. I used to think that holiness meant purity, set-apartness, holy innocence. Accordingly, I tried very hard to mimic what I felt had forever been lost to me. But in this breaking, God has been teaching me the inadequacy of such a notion.

Now I can be shared. Can words tell how much joy there is in my life today to know that I can belong, that I truly am one of many, that I am free now to be at unity through God with people, with nature, with life itself? The invisible chains that kept me always separate are broken at last. The interior wall not of my own choosing (nor even of my awareness) has collapsed. In the depths of my being, I previously felt somehow apart, isolated, alone, unacceptable. I was a "No" to myself. The release of the truth about my life has enabled me to

be a participant in life. Now I am a part, sharing with others in the great "Yes" that is God's life uniting us. Today I value myself enough to nurture myself and receive nurture, and my friends sense in me an openness and lack of restraint which is joyously inclusive. What a gift!

In my own holy history, Jesus Christ's cross and resurrection (the Paschal mystery) are central; they provide a foundational parallel and healing sacrament to my life experience. I have always felt so, but until recently have not known why. My life has been an experience of dying only to find rebirth on the other side. I have come to see that my own baptism, while it did mark me with my father's name, was also a deeper naming as God's very child. I am baptized into Christ, sharing his brokenness and new life. I am broken, in order that I am more fully myself and more fully in communion.

Within the painful unfolding of the past two years, I have discovered and claimed a powerful major death and rebirth in my own life. But this central dramatic theme has brought with it an unexpected and quite surprising additional discovery. I find that I live my spirituality of the Cross best in a routine dailiness, attentive to the small motions of the Spirit as they appear in the here-and-now. I am grounded and gently embraced through attentiveness to the present moment. I am discovering that God is by my side everywhere, when I am silent and open. The great crucifixion is gradually eased into the wonder and delight that is new birth, through the simplicity of the ordinary. My soul is healed, my resurrection unfolds, as I find

myself enjoying hot soapy dishwasher, watching kittens playing, holding hands with my husband, hearing morning bird song.

I'm not finished by any means. My holy history happens in slow, gradual steps, hardly perceptible until I reflect back later. In some ways, I will always be broken with the "No" that my early life taught me. And somehow, even that "No" is but a means to bring me deeper into the "Yes" that is God's life in me, now and forever. ■

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Norvene Vest's "Top Ten" Spiritual Books— An Annotated Bibliography

CLASSICS

Conferences by John Cassian, especially the first and second conferences of Abba Isaac on Prayer (which are the ninth and tenth conferences reported by Cassian). In remarkably simple language, Cassian reports on his "interviews" with the Desert Fathers as a young man seeking guidance for a closer walk with God. Especially these two conferences help us understand the approach to "prayer without ceasing" so important in the third and fourth centuries. Eerdmans has a very fine translation in its series on the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume XI* (1986), and Paulist has an abbreviated collection in its *Classics of Western Spirituality* series.

Showings by Julian of Norwich, is a record of the visions and their theological interpretation by a remarkable fourteenth century English woman and anchorite. At a time of serious illness, she had a series of visions, or showings, which she spent the rest of her life pondering, seeking answers to questions of human sin and suffering at a time when many of her contemporaries were dying of plague. She is one of the first mystics to explore the feminine aspects of God, even calling Jesus "our Mother." (Paulist Classics of Western Spirituality, 1978.)

The Sacrament of the Present Moment by Jean-Pierre de Caussade, is a series of spiritual talks given by a Jesuit priest in the eighteenth century. Caussade's basic premise is that God is present in every moment and every situation for those who

passionately love and seek him. He urges his sisters to seek and surrender to this presence in all things, and discusses the effect of such surrender in a life of boundless joy. A fine edition is translated by Kitty Muggeridge with an introduction by Richard Foster, and published by Harper in 1989.

CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEWS

Soul Friend by Kenneth Leech, relates a history of spirituality (with special emphasis on spiritual direction) to its place in the present social climate and its relation to therapy. There are particularly excellent chapters on prayer (four and five) and on reconciliation (that is, on sin and forgiveness, Appendix.) (Harper, 1980.)

Mysticism by Evelyn Underhill, especially Part Two, gives an overview of the basic pattern of spiritual evolution in the soul, as well as introducing a number of the great spiritual personalities in Christian history. (E. P. Dutton, 1961.)

CONTEMPORARY DEVOTIONALS

Testament of Devotion by Thomas Kelly, is wonderfully prayerful reflections of a Quaker about living in tune with the Divine Center within each one of us. Even to read the book is prayer. (Harper, 1941.)

Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God by Andre Louf, is intended "to do just a little to

appease the hunger for prayer." It is the author's testimony to prayer, relating to the role of Scripture and the Holy Spirit, the example of Jesus, and prayer with our bodies, in our hearts, and from the contexts of our lives. (Franciscan Herald Press, 1975.)

Holiness by Donald Nicoll, begins with the assumption that all of us are called to holiness, but that holiness requires a different form of knowledge than we usually exercise. It involves a terrible intimacy with the One who is holy, and thus involves the way we live and seek to bring life into all our doings. The book is both practical and mystical. (Paulist, 1989.)

Journey Inward, Journey Outward by Elizabeth O'Connor, reflects the lived experiences of the extraordinary congregation of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., which has a remarkable history of combining social action and prayerful communion. O'Connor, the gifted reporter of this experience, invites every Christian to share this united journey. (Harper, 1968.)

CONTEMPORARY LIFE PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUALITY

The Courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, is a guide for survivors of child sexual abuse.

They draw from considerable experience with survivors, and emphasize the healing process. There is a helpful section for supporters of survivors, and a powerful section of stories from "courageous women." I, and countless other women, have found reading it an enormously healing experience. (Harper, 1988.)

The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker, is sometimes regarded as being more about psychology than about spirituality, but it is clear that Becker intends to write about foundational aspects of being in the truest sense of the word. His basic hypothesis is that the reason we are unable to live the abundant life is because we deny ourselves our creatureliness; that is, we deny that we die. It is a provocative and helpful way of thinking about the context of our faith lives. (Macmillan, 1973.)

The Passionate God by Rosemary Haughton, is a book of theology, but above all, it is an earnest exploration of how transformation/conversion can actually happen in human life. She explores a new way of thinking about our life with God, similar to Charles Williams's idea of coinherence, which she calls Romantic Breakthrough, or exchange. It is not easy to follow her closely reasoned argument, for it represents a radically different way of thinking. It is a feminist and communal position, but far more. (Paulist, 1981.)

Slouching Towards Bethlehem: An Experience of Psychology and Spirituality

—from page 14

to trust my experiences as a man who looks for the fullness of life in the most ordinary of circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the integration of psychology and spirituality ultimately is the experience of the birthing of Christ's life in us. It is the experience of slouching, lurching, running towards Bethlehem. However, that movement towards Bethlehem is usually done through Calvary. It is experienced through the darkness and sinfulness which are a part of all of our lives. This darkness and sinfulness do not make us evil, but simply broken people in need of God's healing grace. When we are faithful to that inner journey, then we will move towards Bethlehem where we experience the enfleshment of God's love in the unique experiences of our own lives. Thus, we help to discover the special cognitive and affective map that is our personal journey to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. ■

Do As I Say, Not As I Do

—from page 17

factors. Some manifestations of resistance are discouragement, boredom or depression. Avoidance of prayer, as well as a constantly cheery, emotionally charged prayer experience, may also be signs. A persistent repetition of a fallacious belief about oneself or God or the world may also be a sign of resistance, for example, when one fails to improve a low view of oneself. "Strategic forgetting" may be a sign that something about God is being resisted. Intellectualization is another prevalent form: Instead of focusing on one's own experience, the focus is on a viewpoint, issue or another's problem. Then there's the Too Busy Syndrome, or its relative, the I'm Not in the Mood Response. These are unconscious resolves to give over one's spiritual growth to another, to let one's time schedule and mood determine one's commitment to growth. Overall, this type of resistance is an abdication of personal responsibility for spiritual formation.

As a couple, we employed a few forms of resistance, particularly the I'm Not in the Mood version. Once one recognizes the presence of resistance, one realizes that the other person is resisting because it is very painful to be open to change in a particular area. To apply force is thus counterproductive. It is much more helpful to discuss what might be going on and what information the resistance provides. This has proved to be a more effective strategy for both of us, because it pinpoints the real issue: Resistance to God's movement in our lives. It also reduces

the defensiveness which used to accompany this kind of discussion.

A few weeks ago, Rick presented an idea he had pondered for some weeks. He wanted to discontinue our long-time subscription to the morning paper, because he felt it got in the way of taking time for the Lord. We would, however, continue our evening paper subscription. Guess who resisted him on this point for some time, until we finally decided to cancel? Yes, the one who so caustically commented on her husband's devotion to the sports page just a few short years before. Sheri came around, however, and thinks it was a wise decision. And we haven't noticed any less awareness of the news. ■

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