Refresh

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Spirituality

a special edition celebrating the work of David Crawley

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SGM Contacts www.sgm.org.nz

Admin:
The Rev Adrienne Bruce, PO Box 33, Dannevirke 4942, Cell 021 432 768; admin@sgm.org.nz

Workgroup Convenor:
Jane Wilkinson, janeinwelly@gmail.com

Spiritual Directors Formation Programme Coordinator:
Fran Francis, 14 Oruamo Place, Beach Haven, Auckland 0626; 09 4191152; fran.francis@sgm.org.nz

Desktop Publishing and Printing:
Advocate Print, Rotorua

Refresh Editor:
Diane Gilliam-Weeks, 32 Kauri Street, Eastbourne, Hutt City, 5013; 0274978374;
dianegw@outlook.com

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Spirituality Celebrating the Work of David Crawley

Guest Editorial by Tim Meadowcroft

Theoretically, nobody is indispensable, but in an environment where we depend on each other to do our work, there have been seasons where I have trembled at the thought of what life might be like at Laidlaw College without David Crawley. Now, on his retirement, in this volume of *Refresh,* we pay tribute.

Since 2004, David Crawley has maintained a dual role teaching Spiritual Formation at Laidlaw and as an active Spiritual Director and trustee of Spiritual Growth Ministries which publishes *Refresh*. Laidlaw is grateful to editor, Diane Gilliam-Weeks, for allowing this edition to be used as a joint tribute to David from his colleagues and friends in both the Laidlaw College and Spiritual Growth Ministries communities.

A bit of history

Since the turn of the century 'Spirituality' and David Crawley have been inseparably linked

At the end of 2020, David Crawley 'retires' after over thirty years of service with Laidlaw College (until 2008, Bible College of New Zealand). After completing a first class honours degree in mathematics at Auckland University, a year as a junior lecturer at AU, and a period of secondary school teaching at Tamaki College, in the early 1980s, David went with his family to Bible College of New Zealand as a student. While there he completed the Australian College of Theology BTh and then the MTh in biblical studies.

While still working on his Masters degree in 1986, David was catapulted into teaching Old Testament as a result of a serious accident to a faculty member. From there, he never really left College, teaching on a casual basis before taking up a full-time permanent faculty role at the start of 1988.

Very soon after, in 1989, Sheila Pritchard established Spiritual Formation as a separate discipline on the College books. Increasingly David found himself attracted to the field.

And as it grew in range and popularity, he transitioned to teaching it. In the mid-90s as Sheila began to reduce her hours, David gradually took up more responsibility. He was eventually handed the baton of leadership for this new and growing discipline at the start of 2000. Since that time, Spiritual Formation and David Crawley have been inseparably linked concepts at BCNZ/Laidlaw College.

During those years, as research support for his growing involvement in spiritual direction and spiritual formation education, David undertook and completed a postgraduate diploma in counselling and then a PhD from Waikato University.

While all this was happening, the spiritual growth movement in New Zealand was gathering pace. Beyond his College employment, at the establishment of Spiritual

Growth Ministries in 1997, David became a Trustee. From then on, for more than twenty years, David has been involved in SGM Workgroup and part of the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme (SDFP) where he models competent and compassionate spiritual direction practice for Year 1 students alongside National Co-ordinator, Fran Francis. During the formative residential experience, he leads the work of Year 2 participants, encourages delayed finishers (known as 'the beyonds'), conducts workshops, marks assignments, and writes and updates resources. Through the Advisory Group, David provides a vital reference point for excellence in programme delivery, content, and direction.

Sue Pickering – a colleague of David's in this enterprise throughout – reflects further on this in her essay later in this issue.

On a personal note

I was blessed to have David as a colleague for my entire twenty-five years at BCNZ/ Laidlaw College. Like most of us who have been alive for a while, David experienced personal joy as well as tragedy and sadness during those years. This is quite a challenge when you're also known as 'the spiritual formation guy'. People are watching you.

Without ever setting out to promote himself as an example to anybody (the idea would be anathema to him), David encouraged and challenged me and many others by the way in which he so evidently integrated the conduct of his personal life with his expertise in Spiritual Formation. There's always been a sense the spiritual disciplines David teaches are lived by him as well.

At work, David is a superb teacher, constantly improving his courses and his teaching – never content simply to pull last year's course off the shelf. The material remains alive in his hands. He's never hankered after administrative leadership, but does it well when it falls to him and he has – on many an occasion – rescued situations (including mine).

David has a special ability to take a large idea and figure out how to make it work at a practical level, hence his expertise in curriculum design and delivery. College life has its ups and downs and many times I've seen David calm volatile meetings and people with a word in season, a timely expression of a different perspective, or a reminder of how the other person must be feeling about all this.

Although I'm sure it doesn't always feel calm, there is a sense of stillness to David as institutional tumults rage around him. How often my impetuous soul has envied him in this and been calmed by his presence. He has a happy knack of being thoroughly committed to his work without giving the impression he needs it.

This tribute edition of Refresh

And so we offer this set of essays in appreciation of the contribution David made and the person he's been among us.

Sheila Pritchard, who paved the way for spiritual formation at BNCZ and David's involvement in the subject, reflects on her lifetime of devotional journey.

Sue Pickering, David's long time SGM colleague, thinks about connection and friendship with a poignant example from David's own ancestry.

Chris Marshall, another colleague for a number of years at BCNZ, considers the place of joy in the Christian life.

Geoff New, an early student of David's and then a beneficiary of his spiritual direction, encounters suffering on a visit to Auschwitz.

David experienced personal joy as well as tragedy and sadness during those years.

In a timely piece, **Laura Béres**, who has found much in common with David in the context of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality (in which David has been a regular participant), brings the Covid experience into conversation with ideas of space and place.

Ryan Lang, a postgraduate student – both mentored by David in teaching and a beneficiary of his spiritual direction – reads Athanasius on the place of song in the spiritual life.

In companion pieces, two members of the so-called 'Columbus Three', **Lex McMillan** and **Donald McMenamin**, describe the breakfast community they formed with David in quest of their PhDs. They speak respectively of the joyful participation and the love that emerged for the Three as travelling companions.

And finally, **Sarah Penwarden's** evocative poem captures David at one of his favourite places.

This set of essays is occasioned by David's retirement from the institutional life of Laidlaw College. But of course, David is not retiring from life nor from spiritual direction. Those of us who know him look forward to what the next stage of life will bring for him, for those he loves best, and for those of us who have been privileged to know and work with him.

Thank you, David, for so much.

Painter Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret

Spirituality

Celebrating the work of David Crawley by Sue Pickering

For more than twenty years I had the privilege of working with David Crawley on the Spiritual Growth Ministries (SGM) Trust Workgroup and as part of the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme. As a former SDFP Coordinator, I've personally appreciated David for his presence, wisdom, and kindness in Workgroup as well as for his many roles within the formation programme over decades.

What would SGM do or be without you, David? You've been and remain a blessing to so many. Thank you.

For this article, it's my privilege to explore the link between spirituality and friendship, using the SGM Workgroup experience, Scripture, images, and stories. Most writers about spirituality begin with a definition. I'll begin with three!

Friendship is the antidote to pretence and the cradle of spirituality.

The first is a comprehensive description of the 'what' of spirituality devised by an international group of cross-discipline specialists in 2014: 'Spirituality is a dynamic and intrinsic aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose and transcendence, and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions and practices.'

Two shorter definitions use less academic language to speak of the 'how' of spirituality. For Gerald May, spirituality is 'the dynamic process of love in one's life'; for Franciscan priest and teacher Richard Rohr, 'the supreme work of spirituality is about keeping our heart space open.' These two outstanding teachers in the Christian contemplative tradition warm the term 'spirituality' and anchor it firmly in our God-given need to seek and form loving connections, long-term mature friendships—with ourselves, with others, with the natural world, and with the divine.

As we live in a world linked digitally – and virally – as never before, a world where institutional religion is seen by too many as irrelevant, where levels of anxiety and loneliness are growing, trust in public leaders waning and deception commonplace, is it any wonder people are searching for that 'something more' which will offer hope, wisdom and enduring truth?

We're born for loving connection but sadly, too often, this holy vocation is compromised as we contend with the realities of human limitations. A snippet from a children's story illustrates:

> A little boy is taken by this father to 'see the universe' at the edge of his town. The night is dark and, while the father is longing to show his son the starry sky, the child is enraptured with the universe at his feet: the snail crawling over a stone, a leaf

blowing in the wind, and a wonderful flower. The father scoffs at his son's delight, instead lifting him up and pointing out distant dead stars whose light is still somehow visible. 'Can you see them?' and the little boy, unwilling to be mocked again for his 'silliness', wanting to please, says 'Yes'.

How subtly the journey of disconnection from our own truth and from other people begins. As we grow up, in order to be accepted, have our needs met, and satisfy the expectations of powerful 'others,' we start to modify our behaviour, discount our feelings, and build defences. We start to pretend things are 'fine' when they're not. We pretend at home, with our colleagues, with ourselves, and with God. We censor our prayers. We hide what God already knows but longs to hear us acknowledge so the Spirit of Truth can bring peace, healing and comfort.

This practice of pretence can continue and intensify as we navigate the unpredictability of the first half of life, as we 'build our container', establish our ego identity, acquire vocational skills, and grow a family. As a consequence, we can lose touch with the blessed uniqueness which was God's gift to us at our conception. And sadly, if we believe what we've constructed for the first few decades is all there is to us, if the pretence persists life-long, then we'll come to our death as strangers to ourselves and those closest to us.

But there is hope.

Friendship is the antidote to pretence and the cradle of spirituality. It provides a universally accessible context and process by which we begin to get closer to others, face some of our shadow, and begin to trust. In the safety net of committed friendship, as our friends accept and care for us, we come to see ourselves as God has always seen us: precious and beloved (Isa 43:1-4).

We no longer have to pretend.

Jesus took his disciples on an intense, experiential, friendship 'bootcamp'. Near the end he had this to say to them:

> 'I've never called you 'servants' because a master doesn't confide in his servants, and servants don't always understand what the master is doing. But I call you my most intimate friends, for I reveal to you everything I've heard from my Father.' (John 15:15, The Passion Translation).

Jesus' disciples had lived and worked together, argued and jostled among themselves, on the road with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry. They'd grown in their relationships with him and with each other – but with this pronouncement Jesus offered them an intimate relationship of spiritual friendship in which nothing would be hidden from them, including Jesus' glory and each other's vulnerability.

We're invited to that same intimacy, to become like Christ, to experience union with God, so we may be transformed and in turn work to transform unjust structures in society and support those on the margins. But transformative spiritual growth rarely happens in isolation. It's more likely to flourish wherever there are small groups of people who meet in Christ – for a Kingdom purpose – and are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit. SGM Workgroup is such a small group when twice-yearly meetings provide a context to develop and deepen our friendships and learn 'to keep our heart-space open'.

In my memory and today, unlike most governance meetings – before the formal agenda unfolds – we began our work with contemplative prayer and a couple of hours listening to each other share significant moments or movements in the preceding six months. By making this a priority, we develop deepening respect and regard for each other, and are bound together in spiritual friendship across the years, in spite of distance, and even beyond death itself.

Not only did we conduct the business of SGM with all its usual components of planning, finance, admin, and reports – by being receptive to each other, respectful and hopeful – we accompanied each other as vocational choices were discerned.

We anointed and prayed for each other prior to pilgrimage or to surgery, and we blessed pounamu in farewell. We celebrated progress in hard situations. We managed to disagree without resorting to unkindness and form ways to respond to the contemporary reality of profound spiritual poverty and the search for 'more' of life.

The fruit of the Spirit became evident among us as we took the risk of being honest with ourselves and let others see deeper inside our souls. We became vulnerable to each other. We became real – a process not without cost as the children's classic, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, describes:

> 'It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse. 'You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.'

And when we faced the unexpected and unwanted trials of life, we supported each other. Major health issues, profound disappointments and betrayals, worries about the directions our children were taking, and challenges to our theological understanding – all brought into the light of Christ's love made visible in our circle of friendship.

Saddest of all was the shocking and untimely death of our vibrant Workgroup Convenor, Mike Wright, chaplain at the University of Otago, and the painful loss of our mighty totara, Andrew Pritchard, who died before he and wife Lynn could enjoy their retirement.

As we grieved, we wept – unashamed of open emotion; we shared stories about our dear friends and wrote poetry; we trusted each other with our memories and gave thanks for those precious lives lost. Throughout this, we were held by our friendships and, in spite of the unanswerable 'why?', we were able to grasp glimpses of God's grace.

In that context we were like Jesus' disciples after his crucifixion, holding on to each other until resurrection dawned. An unlikely bunch of diverse people – brought together by our shared love of Jesus and our need to listen to the still small voice in the midst of the vagaries of life.

We got to practise what we preached. Profound spiritual friendship always comes at a cost: the cost of self-giving.

In the 1970s, Carole King wrote a song she said, 'was as close to pure inspiration as I've ever experienced. The song wrote itself. It was written by something outside of myself, through me.' That song was *You've got a friend.* Such was its sustained appeal, the title alone is enough to bring the lyrics to mind for most of us.

But we may not know what Carole King did with the song was an extraordinary example of the self-giving nature of mature friendship. As her good friend, James Taylor, commented decades later, 'In an amazing act of generosity…amazing kindness…she let me cut this first, release it first. I was amazed she would let go what I thought was maybe the best pop tune ever written.'

Taylor's rendition was released in 1971 and rose to number 1 in the US and number 4 in the UK. He and Carole King maintain their friendship to this day.

Just before Jesus called his disciples 'friends', he made a statement about self-giving love – so familiar even to the biblically illiterate – that I've chosen a new translation for its freshness of perspective. 'For the greatest love of all is a love that sacrifices all. And this great love is demonstrated when a person sacrifices his life for his friends.' (John 15:13, *The Passion Translation*)

This leads us into the last 'chapter' of this exploration of spirituality and friendship as we turn to a story of astonishing synchronicity which reveals God's loving desire to broaden the circles of friendship beyond cultures and expectations.

Peter Mihaere writes of an incident at Messines in France during WWI:

> Over the 2016 ANZAC weekend, my whanau learned about an amazing event that happened to my great-grandfather, Private Piwa Mihaere, 7th June, 1917. Just before dawn, headquarters of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion at Red Lodge was heavily shelled. Piwa was buried under the wreckage, pinned down by some fallen iron. Sergeant David Crawley, putting his own life at risk, with shells bursting around him, pulled Piwa to safety. Deep in my heart I knew one day I would visit the very spot of this rescue. This became a pilgrimage, for myself, for my deceased father who was a favoured grandson, and for my whanau. I got that chance last December, with Crawley's grandson, also known as David Crawley, to travel, explore and relive the events of a century ago… we found the Red Lodge, or at least its probable location. Close by was a military cemetery where David and I held a little service of remembrance to our tipuna (ancestors) and to those who had fallen.'

David, you and Peter are forever linked by this story of comradely courage; by the pilgrimage the pair of you took to see the site of the conflict; by your reflection on the outworking of John 15.13 as your grandfather saved Piwa Mihaere's life.

Having been welcomed onto Piwi Mihaere's marae on Anzac Day, 2016, David, you are linked not only to Peter but to the whole whanau.

© Peter Mihaere

In this photo, you stand at Piwa's grave at Te Rauhina marae urupa in Wairoa with Piwa's great-great-grandson, Paul Macdonald by your side, and your respective ancestors' photographs. This place is now your place David – these people your people – as the life-saving friendship begun a century ago continues.

And so the circle of friendship expands like a ripple across the ocean.

David, as we journey on as friends of Jesus, thank you for the friendship years that have been, blessings on the friendships you currently enjoy, faith and trust for the friendship years to come.

Ko te Karaiti te Kingi o nga kingi,
e whakaora nei i ana pononga
he hoa pumau mona.
Ko ia tonu te Ariki.

Saint Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre (c1530s) by Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo.

Joy is the Energy of God's Kingdom

by Chris Marshall

It's a pleasure to offer this brief reflection in recognition of David Crawley's life and work, at the time of his retirement from Laidlaw College. In his more than forty years of association with the College, David has made an immense contribution to the theological, pastoral, and spiritual formation of generations of students, as well as to nurturing the spiritual life of the wider church. In his characteristically gentle and thoughtful way, he has beckoned people into a deeper experience of God's love and grace, as the essential key to lifelong perseverance in the journey of faith.

To speak of perseverance may evoke the idea of an arduous and somewhat dismal doggedness. But, in the well-known passage at the beginning of Hebrews 12 where readers are urged to 'run with perseverance the race set before you, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,' there's a curious somewhat elusive reference: to joy.

Curious because at first glance, joy seems oddly out of place in a passage dominated by sin, shame, and suffering. Locked in a desperate 'struggle against sin' – most likely the temptation to abandon their Christian faith in the face of opposition – the Hebrews are encouraged to 'consider' the hostility Jesus endured from sinners, and view him as the paradigm and enabler of faithful discipleship: the one who, 'for the sake of ['*anti*'] the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God' (Heb 12:1-4).

The reference to joy is elusive because the force of the Greek prepositional construction anti, translated 'for the sake of' in the NRSV, is ambiguous. The statement could either mean Jesus endured the cross 'so as to obtain' the joy of heavenly glory, or he embraced the cross 'in place of' or 'instead of' the joy he currently experienced in his earthly life.

It was a matter of tangible experience, an experience, it seems, of being immersed in liquid love.

In the former case, the author is suggesting that what gave Jesus the strength to withstand abuse and torment was the anticipation of future joy in heaven. In the latter case, the implication is that Jesus willingly gave up the joy he presently knew in his relationship with God and with others in order to plumb the joylessness of grief and abandonment in the events of crucifixion and death.

The Greek text may be legitimately construed either way, though the second option is perhaps most likely. But the grammatical point is entirely academic because both meanings were true of Jesus' actual experience. It's clear Jesus knew deep joy in his day-to-day relationship with God as his Father (Matt 11:25-30, cf. Heb 1:5-6), a joy he freely exchanged for the desolation of the cross, with its climactic cry of dereliction, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34, cf., Heb 5:7-10).

This joy, however, was later restored to him on the far side of the valley of suffering and death, flowing both from the renewed intimacy of 'sitting forever at God's right hand'

(Heb 1:13; 12:1) and from seeing 'many children brought to glory' (Heb 2:10) as a result of his saving work.

The passion event, in other words, was flanked by Jesus' experience of joy – his prior experience of relational joy and his subsequent experience of victorious joy – while the deepest suffering of the event itself wasn't the 'hostility he endured from sinners,' but the complete deprivation of the divine joy he'd hitherto known.

Originality of Christian Joy

A few years ago, I was invited to speak on the theme of finding joy in difficult circumstances at a conference of the Christian Medical Fellowship. When I began preparing my talks, my mind went back to something I'd recently read in a book picked up in a secondhand bookshop.

The book, entitled *The Originality of the Christian Message* (London: Duckworth, 1920), was by the Scottish theologian H.R. Mackintosh. It was based on a series of lectures Mackintosh delivered in America just after World War I on how Christianity was unique or distinctive or 'original' among the religions of the world. It's not the kind of book modern scholars of religion would dare write – with its bold assertions of the uniqueness and superiority of Christian truth – but that's what made it such an interesting read.

The book focuses primarily on what set earliest Christianity apart from other religious and philosophical movements in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Mackintosh proposes one of the most distinctive features of the early Christian movement was its message of 'redemption as a present experience'. It wasn't just the assertion of bodily life beyond the grave that made Christianity different; it was also its emphasis on salvation as a presently available experience of moral, spiritual and emotional transformation – an experience of what Mackintosh calls 'present blessedness', the blessedness of union with God in Christ, even here and now.

In accounting for this experience, it's well known that New Testament writers place an overriding emphasis on the role of faith. It is by faith that believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, find deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and are empowered to 'walk in newness of life' (Rom 6:4). Faith is the key. But Mackintosh draws attention, almost in passing, to something else in the New Testament's descriptions of present redemption, namely the role of joy.

The first-century Roman world, he explains, was marked by a pervading sense of darkness, pessimism, superstition, and fear. Cruelty and bloodshed were everywhere. By contrast, the New Testament is 'the most obviously exultant book that has ever been written' (116). The mood of this literature is encapsulated in Paul's thrice-repeated injunction to the Philippians, 'Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord… Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice! (Phil 3:1; 4:4).

Such an emphasis on joy and rejoicing in the Christian community was, Mackintosh explains, highly unusual in the religious environment of the time. He's worth quoting in full:

'Students of first-century literature need not be told that this distinctively Christian gladness, or glad fearlessness, which breaks across life like a flushing dawn, was a strange new thing. Such joy unspeakable and full of glory is not found in other faiths. Jesus somehow was able to give men the courage to believe themselves redeemed …not merely by speaking to them about the Father but by revealing in his own life the security and gladness which flow from trustful obedience to the Father's love. As Matthew Arnold said, 'It is the gladness of Christianity which has made its fortune, and not its sorrow'…Alone in the religions of the world, it dared to say, 'Rejoice evermore'. This is a fact so distinctive that some thinkers have actually defined the method of Christianity as 'salvation by joy'…[T]he joy in God generated by the fact of Christ was a new phenomenon in religious history, and one charged with boundless significance for the creation of living and victorious morality. (116)

Reasons for Joy

If we were to ask whence came this early Christian experience of irrepressible joy, the answer, it seems to me, lies in four interrelated phenomena.

The first source of joy was the unshakeable belief the first believers had in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, an event that proved beyond all question he had secured a definitive victory over the powers of death and evil. This belief generated immense hope for the future and an intrepid fearlessness in the present. 'Death has been swallowed up in victory,' Paul exults, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 15:53-56).

A second source of Christian joy was the awareness of having received a radical forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the compulsions or power of sin (Rom 3:9). This is what enabled them to walk in a 'newness of life,' a newness characterised by a profound sense of liberty and lightness. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death…To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace' (Rom 8:1-4).

The third reason for joy was the experience of belonging to a new social community, a new kind of society in which 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Membership of this community brought a feeling of mutual solidarity and support (Gal 6:2), as well as a newfound sense of dignity and equality that cut across all the deepest social divisions of the day.

The fourth and most important source of early Christian joy was the indwelling and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst. This was not a matter of abstract doctrine. It was a matter of tangible experience, an experience, it seems, of being immersed in liquid love. That's why Paul can say 'God's love has been poured into our hearts – like molten fire – through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). Over and over in the New Testament, the experience of joy is attributed to the Holy Spirit, sent like a surging flood upon the young community (e.g., Rom 14:17; 15:13; Gal 5:22).

It was these four interconnected realities, then, that generated this effervescent, contagious joy that distinguished the early Christian movement. That doesn't mean Christians exercised a monopoly on joy. All people have the capacity to know profound joy, irrespective of religious or philosophical commitment, in virtue of being made in God's image. Joy is a manifestation of God's common grace.

But while joy is not unique to Christians, there's still something unique about Christian joy. You might say Christian joy is human joy on steroids, the steroidal injection comprising the four realities just described: a confidence in Christ's triumph over death and the forces of evil, the knowledge of personal forgiveness of sins and freedom from moral defeat, membership in a loving community of worship, equality and support – and, most importantly, immersion in the pulsating life and power of God's Spirit

But Wait! There's More

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of this steroidal Christian joy was its capacity to co-exist with suffering and distress. This is truly remarkable. The New Testament writers repeatedly speak of joy and suffering as simultaneous experiences. They are not mutually exclusive. They don't cancel each other out. Instead they run on a kind of dual carriageway, existing side by side at the same time.

This coexistence is attested everywhere in the New Testament. 'We want you to know, brothers and sisters,' Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy…overflowed in a wealth of generosity' (2 Cor 8:1-2).

He reminds the Thessalonians how 'in spite of persecution, you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit' (1 Thess 1:6). The writer of James goes so far as to suggest, 'whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy (1:1-3).

These texts all speak of joy in the time of trial, joy in the midst of sorrow. The sorrow is still sorrow. The pain is real; it still hurts and is never denied or repressed or trivialised. And yet paradoxically – even miraculously – suffering is accompanied by a tenacious, inextinguishable joy. This distinctively Christian blend of severe suffering and joyful buoyancy is most eloquently described in 2 Corinthians 4: 'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies (2 Cor 4:6-11, cf. Rom 8:36-39).'

No wonder, then, that just as the New Testament speaks of the Christian experience of peace as something that 'surpasses understanding' (Phil 4:7), so it speaks of the Christian experience of joy as 'beyond description and full of glory' (1 Pet 1:18).

Jesus on Joy

When we turn to the Gospel accounts, we find joy was a recurring theme in the teaching, activity, and experience of Jesus as well. He was frequently found at the table of tax collectors and sinners, celebrating with them their inclusion in God's renewing and restoring work (Mark 2:15-17; Matt 11:18-19; Luke 7:31-33; 19:5-10).

The disciples were beneficiaries of this reality too. Luke reports that when the seventy came back from their preaching mission, they 'returned with joy saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" Jesus responds by explaining how they'd been given access to his own unique authority over spiritual evil but insists they shouldn't rejoice in their power but rather 'that your names are written in heaven.' Then, addressing God in prayer, Jesus himself 'rejoiced in the Holy Spirit', marveling at how the Father had drawn such marginal and insignificant people into the orbit of his saving revelation. And turning once again to the disciples, he pronounced the beatitude, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see…and hear what you hear' (Luke 10:17-25).

In the earlier list of beatitudes in Luke addressed to the disciples, there's a further reference to joy – in this case the paradoxical joy while suffering just described. 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets' (6:22-23; cf. Matt 5:12-13).

In both cases, the disciples' joy comes from being caught up in the 'present blessedness' of God's saving rule, a joy that persists in the face of pain, persecution and social exclusion. It's the same joy that fuels the social radicalism of God's rule.

In the Parable of the Buried Treasure, Jesus likens encountering the kingdom of God to discovering 'a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field' (Matt 13:44). Discovering God's saving activity in Jesus elicits great joy, and this joy impels a radical change of lifestyle. The man sold all he possessed and bought the pearl of great price. He disinvested in the world as he knew it and reinvested his entire life in the agenda of God's new order.

Energy of God's Kingdom

In his proclamation and instruction on the kingdom of God, Jesus consistently called for a radical response from his hearers. In a word, he called for repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15). Repentance in the biblical tradition entails a conscious refocusing of one's values, priorities, allegiances, and patterns of conduct.

The repentance Jesus demanded was far-reaching in nature. In his ethical teaching, he targeted four fundamental areas of human existence: wealth and possessions (the realm of economic power); status, privilege, and prejudice (the sphere of social power); violence and attitudes towards enemies (the arena of coercive power); and religious and ritual performance (the domain of spiritual power). For Jesus, responding to God's kingdom required major transformations in each of these areas.

But the personal and political transformation Jesus called for wasn't the product of heroic self-discipline, cold moralism, doctrinaire legalism, or ideological purism – all of which are common in society and equally prevalent in the church – it was the product of joy. The joy of discovery, the joy of grace, the joy of finding something extraordinary and receiving it as pure gift.

Joy is the energy of God's kingdom. The motivation for commitment to the transformational agenda of God's kingdom is the joy of being connected to Jesus and filled with his Spirit.

Of course, joy doesn't do the whole job. It must be complemented by self-discipline, courage, and perseverance. Discipleship is difficult. Jesus constantly warned his hearers that following him would involve hardship, persecution, and rejection. There's a cost to discipleship, just as there was a cost to messiahship for Jesus, a cost we must freely and repeatedly choose to embrace.

But when we do – when we 'sell' our investment in the world as it is and 'buy' property in God's new order – we get a free promotional gift along with our purchase. We get joy! The joy of being joined with Jesus and his people and filled with his Spirit, a joy capable of sustaining us through the darkest of times because it is constantly replenished by 'the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Rom 5:5).

Evolutionary Spirituality

'We Shall Not Cease from Exploration' by Sheila Pritchard

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

Life was very simple at the beginning. Love and awe, the intimate and the transcendent were core experiences – without those lofty words, of course. I was privileged to grow up in a family where my very earliest memories are of being deeply loved – not only by my parents but also by God. Like most things in early childhood, this was absorbed by a kind of emotional osmosis.

From the age of six, summer holidays on Ponui Island gave me freedom to roam the beaches and the bush without fear of 'stranger danger'. Somehow, the boundary between creation, God and me, felt very permeable. I can still vividly recall moments of wonder-filled awe. Ponui was for me what Celtic Christians have called 'a thin place.'

These are the roots from which everything else has evolved in my spiritual journey: knowing a loving God and experiencing that vast, exciting Mystery beyond me. I am profoundly grateful for such a beginning.

Somehow the boundary between creation, God, and me, felt very permeable.

Concentric Circles

I can't remember when this image occurred to me, but for many years it has been the most helpful way to express my continual exploration of life with Love/God at its core. Just as the rings of a tree grow with the oldest cells at the centre, so the central core of love and awe has been sustained through all my expanding circles.

Like most children, I began by assuming the circle of God's love and acceptance was wrapped around 'us' – in my case good Baptist Christians. Maybe the Anglicans and Methodists and Presbyterians were sort of included provided they'd asked Jesus to be 'their personal saviour.' Catholics weren't even on my radar!

It's inevitable all of us draw a circle with our own familiar group at the centre.

Yet, we're all born into this vast cosmic universe as a tiny baby on a very small planet. We each grow up in a particular culture and religious heritage and specific family. Initially, there's no other way to view life than with 'myself' and 'my group' at the centre. And if that perspective doesn't change and evolve – a world of division, conflict and egocentricity is the result. A tribal 'God' is worshipped who loves and protects 'us' above all others. Sadly, this is all too evident today – culturally, spiritually, and politically.

The evolution of the cosmos has been continuing for 13.8 billion years, so scientists tell us. On planet earth, change can be a slow and gradual process – often subtle and barely noticed. And yet, there are cataclysmic events that can't be missed.

Within the short span of a human life, our spiritual evolution may also be slow and subtle, yet marked by defining experiences. The journey for each of us will be uniquely designed – as God patiently draws us to grasp more fully 'how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ'. (Eph 3:18).

I'm grateful to whoever originally said: 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere.' And as thirteenth century mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg said, 'The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw, and knew I saw, all things in God and God in all things.'

Our own scriptures proclaim: In God 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28); astoundingly it's also true that in us God lives and moves and has God's being (Gen 1:27; John 17:20-23 and elsewhere). What's more, the whole of creation is the expression of God's being (Gen 1; Rom 1:20).

As Judy Cannato puts it, 'We all flow from one source. There is a single Creator who remains present to every person and every part of the cosmos, sustaining and empowering their on-going development. Some will call that process evolution; others the work of the Spirit.'

I call our willing participation in that process 'evolutionary spirituality'. At the deepest level of reality there is no boundary. All is enveloped in Divine Love. God's grace is a circle without circumference. But what does that really mean in the living out of life? Seeing God in all things? Really? What about pandemics and global warming and refugee camps?

If we see God as a separate being above and beyond the tumult of this world, it's natural to ask: 'If I'm supposed to "see God in all things" why doesn't God become a bit more visible in sorting out the mess and brokenness?'

But if the Mystery we call God is intricately and inextricably woven into all things, then God is participating in the anguish, the grief, and the brokenness. God is also the source of creative wisdom in new discoveries in science, technology, and ecology. God is expressed through the hearts and hands, skills and sacrifices of millions of human beings like you and me.

I remember many years ago realising with a jolt: 'The whole world is the body of God and I am a cell in God's body'. Each of us is a cell in the body of God. Every single cell is crucial to the wellbeing of the whole. Our conscious participation in that holistic wellbeing is what evolutionary spirituality is about.

I want to unfold.
Let no place in me hold itself closed,
for where I am closed I am false.
I want to stay clear in your sight.
I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.

I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.
I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
and I still don't know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?

Rainer Maria Rilke

I've been 'living my life in widening circles' for more than seven decades now and I'm nowhere near 'the end of all my exploring'. I look back in gratitude to the ways God continues to nudge, call and challenge my evolving participation in 'the circle with no circumference'. When I was a child, no one asked me to explain or put words on my experience. So too in these widening circles – words become more and more inadequate.

However, I've been grateful for the words of others. So – rather hesitantly – I offer a few glimpses into some of the factors that have supported my evolving spiritual journey.

The integration of science and theology

Science and theology are both searches for truth. Sir John Templeton of the Templeton Foundation 'is interested in "humility theology" which emphasises the need for both scientists and religious believers to recognise the limits of their way of knowing and leave room for the other.' When this happens a deeply enriching integration is possible.

In 2005, I attended an international conference for spiritual directors. Mathematical cosmologist, Brian Swimme, was the speaker. His presentation took me to places of awe and wonder on a scale vastly greater than my childhood experiences, though the central 'knowing' was the same. I'll never forget his passion and joy as he moved seamlessly from the infinite expanse of the cosmos to the delicacy of a fern frond.

Those who bring cosmology 'down to earth' and quantum physics close enough to excite me, have made a significant impact in the evolution of my faith. If this interests you, a great place to start might be with *The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion* by Barbara Brown Taylor. Or you could dive in the deep end with Ilia Delio's, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love.*

Knowing and Unknowing

The Cloud of Unknowing, by an anonymous 14th Century author, is a book I've read many times and a book that means more on each reading. It's liberating to 'know that not knowing' is actually the place of humility and surrender to the Mystery we call God.

In the deep challenges and unanswerable questions of life, 'unknowing' can be a bedrock of trust. I remember one period of many months when the only prayer I could pray was 'I don't understand, but I trust you.'

Paradoxically, alongside this 'unknowing' there can be an inner 'knowing': an impulse of the Spirit hard to ignore.

As a young adult I 'just knew' I had to respond to the inner conviction to leave my secure circle of comfort and career to go to Nigeria as a missionary. Later, after returning to New Zealand and nine years teaching at the Bible College of New Zealand (now Laidlaw), I 'just knew' I had to spend my sabbatical in a Jesuit retreat centre training to be a spiritual director. These two decisions were among the most challenging of my life. Responding required the boundaries of my circle to evolve in life-changing ways.

Spiritual Practice

In his book *The Contemplative Heart*, James Finley has a section headed: 'Find your Contemplative Practice and Practice It'. Spiritual practice, like most other things can evolve over time. From early childhood I was taught to have a 'quiet time' each morning. That meant reading the bible with the help of age-related Scripture Union notes and talking to God. I'm grateful for that well-ingrained habit.

Over the years that prayerful beginning to each day has been maintained. Now though, it's more about silence and less about words. Centering Prayer is a daily rhythm, but solitary walking or simply sitting and gazing are spiritual practices too. Photography, painting, singing, gardening, knitting, dancing… and other forms of art and creativity can be deeply contemplative practices.

The heart of any spiritual practice is that it ushers us into a deeper place of 'hard to explain' connection with the Mystery beyond us. I'm sad when people feel there's 'one right way' and lack the freedom to discover, in a myriad of ways, what Brother Lawrence called 'practicing the presence of God.'

However, lest we think that spiritual practice is all about achieving silent serenity, let's not forget this story from the Desert Fathers: Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, 'Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office. I fast a little. I pray. I meditate. I live in peace and as far as I can I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?' Then the old man stood up, stretched his hands towards heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and he said to him, 'if you will, you can become all flame.'

This story came to mind one day in 2002 as I was reading Revelation 8:1-5. In my journal I wrote:

If you wish you can become all flame!
Silence in heaven for half an hour
Then censers of prayer and incense causing
earthquakes and thunderclaps.
Who is this God we so casually talk about?
How dare we play with fire as if it were an interesting toy?
How dare we speak so flippantly about our 'images of God'
as if we decided which one suits our fancy today.
Rain fire from heaven to consume our paltry wonderings
into the deafeningly silent wonder and awe of a nameless God
who destroys in order to create!
Destroys words, defies images in the silent flame of terrifying love.
Do I wish to be all flame?
Yes – and no.
Candlelight is more comforting.

Spiritual Companions, Dead or Alive!

Many of my spiritual companions are the authors of books. You may have gathered this already! My reading has evolved as my spirituality has evolved. Or perhaps it's the other way round! Unless I know a person well, I hesitate when asked to recommend books. It's usually about the right book 'finding you' at the right time. And there definitely is a right time. I can't begin to list the hundreds of spiritual companions who 'found me' between the covers of books – spanning the centuries and across many spiritual traditions.

Of course, real live spiritual directors over the years have been supremely important. They prayerfully listened, encouraged, and acted as midwives to each emerging circle of my spiritual journey. Several special people have filled that role over the years. Without them, I'd have hesitated or turned back from some of the Spirit's invitations to evolve.

One of my current spiritual companions is my Syrian friend, Abir. She and her family arrived in New Zealand three years ago. Abir and I have become close friends. We often have lunch together and usually end up in very satisfying discussions about spiritual things. They're satisfying conversations because 'iron sharpens iron'. We're open to learn from each other and challenged to articulate our own faith. She's a committed Muslim. Neither of us is trying to 'convert' the other. I feel free to be passionate about the good news as I experience it from my life-long Christian journey. I'm enriched by Abir's deeply lived faith. We delight in many similarities and respect and explore our differences.

An Inclusive Spiritual Community

After all these years I'm still a Baptist! I'm privileged to belong to a Baptist church where deeply thoughtful theology and genuinely inclusive spirituality are practised. We're a wonderfully mixed bag of people with varied backgrounds and life experience. I learn from scientists and university lecturers in our midst. I'm enriched and challenged by people whose sexual orientation is different from mine. I'm humbled by how I once would have judged them. I deeply appreciate people who live with mental health challenges. We'd be impoverished without their insights and contributions.

Children and young people contribute to our gatherings and are consulted about issues that affect them. Each person is respected and welcomed for their unique contribution to the fabric of our community. I often sit in church and think, 'I'm sure Jesus feels right at home here.'

'Chop wood, carry water'

There is a Zen saying: 'Before enlightenment I chop wood and carry water. After enlightenment I chop wood and carry water.' Exactly! It doesn't matter how far the evolutionary journey has taken us – life continues with laundry and dishes, work and money worries, sickness and health, aging and loss, winter and spring. We don't evolve to float on some exotic plane. Jesus, the supremely evolved person, participated fully in the mess and brokenness of the world. He sought out the marginalised and made sure no one was excluded. He knew how to celebrate life. He didn't hide his agony over what his commitment required of him. His constant communion with God was his source of power, wisdom and love.

I hope 'I shall not cease from exploring' that same path until the day I die. That will be the day I 'arrive where I started and know the place for the first time.'

© Ian Thompson

Autumn in Auschwitz

by Geoff New

I first met David nearly thirty years ago as one of his students at Laidlaw College (formerly Bible College of NZ). After that, we really came to know each other in the fifteen years David was my spiritual director. During that time, I was the minister of a Presbyterian church. We spent hour–upon–hour exploring ministry context and pastoral presence through spiritual conversation.

During those deep times, and as we traversed some dark valleys, David became many things to me. Is it allowable to assign descriptors of the Spirit to describe David's ministry in such seasons? Comforter. Counsellor. Guide. Advocate. Someone who reminded you that you were no longer orphaned but had received the Spirit of Adoption (Rom 8:14–17). Someone who took from Jesus and made it known (John 14:14, 26). Someone who revealed the veracity of Jesus' promise that he and the Father would come and make their home with those who loved him (John 14:23).

David is someone who has that all too rare quality of being able to speak through their silence, bring stillness through their words, and sustenance through their listening. His qualities as a spiritual director, lecturer, disciple of Jesus, and brother in Christ have the combined effect – to draw on Spirit ministry again – of breathing new life into dry bones.

Arising from this combined effect on me of David's ministry, I want to reflect on a pilgrimage I undertook in 2018. This journey was the fulfilment of a lifetime desire to pay respect, to actively remember, and to honour the suffering and death of millions. That pilgrimage was to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The ministry, friendship, and example of David in the preceding fifteen years had prepared my heart and mind to take this journey. David had facilitated a work of the Spirit that challenged me to keep my heart, eyes, and ears open in the presence of the temptation to shut them in the name of self-preservation.

Once during spiritual direction, while orientating me to the Servant Songs (Isa 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12), David said 'Suffering isn't the result of the call, it is the call.' That striking statement profoundly changed my understanding of ministry.

It took my academic assent about suffering for Christ from something I could pontificate about – to something I needed to participate in (Phil 3:10–11).

So I approached my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in a quieter spirit than might have otherwise been the case. In a lecture in 2007, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate, Elie Wiesel, made a startling observation which has currency and causes me to reflect on the Servant Songs in a different light. Wiesel said, 'You must admit, all of you, had [Jesus] lived in my time he would have ended up in Auschwitz.'

However, I'm not for a moment suggesting or inferring this hell–on–earth in any way represented the call of God for people as expressed through their suffering. But I am taken with Wiesel's comment which allows for the likelihood the Incarnation would have taken place there.

For that reason, on an aptly brooding, cold, heavy fog–laden autumn day in October 2018, I anxiously travelled to this emblematic Holocaust camp.

With the Old Testament prophets' ministry in mind, the great rabbi of the twentieth century, Abraham Heschel, laid down a relevant warning:

> There is nothing we forget as eagerly, as quickly, as the wickedness of man. The earth holds such a terrifying secret. Ruins are removed, the dead are buried, and the crimes are forgotten. Bland complacency, splendid mansions, fortresses of cruel oblivion top the graves. The dead have no voice, but God will disclose the secret of the earth.

Heschel lost his mother and three of his sisters in the Holocaust. He was writing at a time when countries were obstructing attempts to bring Nazi war-criminals to justice. But here at least in Oswiecim (Poland) the ruins remain, the crimes are remembered, and in the act of walking on the earth of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the attempt is made to give the dead voice – to listen to their prophetic utterance and exorcise oneself from bland complacency.

As my wife Ruth and I waited for our group to begin the journey through the buildings, pathways, bunkers, and barracks of this place – there a short distance away stood the gates of hell.

The gates with the infamous iron archway, proclaimed its lie: Arbeit macht frei. Yet embedded in the characters of those words, one letter speaks as an act of defiance. The letter 'B' was crafted upside down by prisoners charged with making the sign. That upside down 'B' was their subtle and significant exposé of that lie. All sense of human worth and dignity is turned upside down on the other side of those gates.

Later Ruth told me, as she waited to enter through that evil entrance – it was all she could do not to lose control as she experienced feelings of being utterly overwhelmed. For in her mind's eye she envisaged all those who'd passed through those gates into unspeakable sub-existence.

And so, as I reflect on that day when we walked in respect and reverence of this place, there's another gate which must be entered. This gate appears in the astonishing writing of Auschwitz's survivor, Primo Levi – an Italian Jew, a chemist, and member of the Italian resistance. He was captured and sent to Auschwitz–Birkenau in 1944. At the beginning of his book *If This Is a Man*, about his experience in the camp, Levi records a poem. It's the true headline and subtext of Arbeit macht frei – and acts as the welcome and warning for all who now enter to remember. Here we take on a burden of responsibility – to listen to the secrets of the earth God discloses. Levi wrote:

If This is a Man
You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, on returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who does not know peace
Who fights for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman,
Without hair and without name
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.
Meditate that this came about:
I commend these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts
At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising;
Repeat them to your children,
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.

Levi wrote this poem–prayer in January 1946, a year after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He wrote his book in reverse order. Each chapter was written according to the urgency of his memory rather than in logical order. And so this poem – while alive in his mind in Auschwitz – was the last piece he wrote in his book and he positioned it as an epigraph: a gate.

While his poem is entitled 'If This is a Man', it is also known as Shemà. It's modelled on the great Jewish prayer which has its grounding and genesis in Deuteronomy 6. Levi's particular prophetic edge is to heed the Hebrew command in Deuteronomy 6:4 'to hear' (shemà). Yet his tone of voice in telling his story is the feature. It's as if he reverently whispers his account.

Such is the gentle tone in how he writes, one of the questions he most frequently fields is: 'In these books there are no expressions of hate for the Germans, no desire for revenge. Have you forgiven them?' His answer reveals that while he does not raise his voice – his words are loud enough for any conscience to hear:

> I have not forgiven any of the culprits, nor am I willing to forgive a single one of them, unless he has shown (with deeds, not words, and not too long afterward) that he has become conscious of the crimes and errors of Italian and foreign Fascism and is determined to condemn them, uproot them, from his conscience and from that of others. Only in this case am I, a non-Christian, prepared to follow the Jewish and Christian precept of forgiving my enemy because an enemy who sees the error his ways ceases to be an enemy.

That's why one enters Auschwitz-Birkenau in quietness to heed those who still speak their prophetic message. And while this place was not solely populated by Jews, it's become synonymous with their suffering during the Holocaust. So it's right and proper to step foot there with quietness of spirit, mindful of the spirit of the Hebrew prophet, and Elie Wiesel's summation of a Jewish distinctive: a Jew 'defines himself more by what troubles him than by what assures him… to me the Jew and his questioning are one.'

Part of paying respect in such a place is to allow questions of faith and life to emerge from the undergrowth – for them to have voice and take up residence in your heart. It is to submit to the hard work of allowing the heart to expand.

Elie Wiesel waited years before penning his memoirs of his Holocaust experience. He waited so enough time had lapsed to be better able to see clearly, to listen to the voices crying within his own, to regain possession of his memory, and so he could unite the language of humanity with the silence of the dead. These four elements rely on silence and listening.

Whenever Elie Wiesel visited Auschwitz–Birkenau after the Holocaust, he wouldn't speak for two or three days. He needed that time to listen. There is something in this practice for Christian disciples to absorb – in our service and advocacy in this world.

Such silence marked the day that Ruth and I were guided through this Holocaust memorial.

As we began to be guided through the manicured and sterile setting of Auschwitz I–Main Camp, two images immediately caught our attention. The first, the presence of birds whose marked absence were a feature during the years Auschwitz–Birkenau was in operation. Yet the birds were silent. They did not sing – but they had at least returned.

The second image was the trees. It was a still autumn day without any wind whatsoever. Yet the trees wept leaves constantly. Even though the season of the year determined the shedding of such tears, it was as if the trees needed no annual reminder. The leaves falling punctuated the day—all day.

And so we were led from one building and barrack to another. Behind glass panes were the spoils of genocide: prayer shawls; shoes with those of a child prominently apart from the rest, hair, clothing – life once lived. Words were few and the spoils of a demonic war were plentiful.

At various times, our guide prepared us for the next place we'd enter. 'When we enter here, this is a silent place. Please. Do not speak. Do not take photos. Remain silent.' Such places included Block 11: the punishment block. Such places included the adjacent courtyard where executions took place. Yet even there – a few, very few, talked. Later at

the end of the day some were laughing. My sense was the quietness became too loud – so they needed to silence it with noise. To cope.

Towards the end of the part of our journey through Auschwitz I–Main Camp, before we went to Auschwitz II–Birkenau, I'd fallen behind our group.

The last place to visit in this first camp was a partly concealed bunker. As I approached it several teenagers emerged. The boys' faces were etched with a grim, blank, and distant look. The girls were weeping.

When I entered I found myself alone in an empty concrete room. In an adjacent space were furnaces for the cremation of the bodies. It struck me I was standing at the scene of the first image of the Holocaust I'd seen as a young boy. I walked out of the bunker but immediately felt compelled by God to return. To prayerfully pay respect and remember. I re-entered the bunker to pray there alone.

This was extraordinary as there were about three thousand people being guided through the memorial that day. I stood there and found I couldn't do anything. I was utterly incapable of forming a thought, saying a prayer, or feeling any emotion. I felt nothing and was encompassed by Nothingness. I literally could not function or draw on any human faculty.

Yet - mysteriously - I did sense I was held by God and contained by him. And at some level, I sensed the intercessory nature of Christ.

After this, we travelled the short distance to Auschwitz II–Birkenau. If the entrance of Auschwitz I–Main Camp is known for its iron–clad deceitful text, Auschwitz II–Birkenau's entrance is known for its devouring open-jaw like gateway. If Auschwitz I–Main Camp is now known for the preservation of its buildings and displays to sustain memory, Auschwitz II–Birkenau is now known for a collection of ruins and empty barracks.

Just inside the entrance, I was overwhelmed by the sheer vastness of the space. I literally stood stock-still for a full five minutes trying to comprehend what my eyes were trying to absorb. Finally, I realized I wasn't with Ruth. I looked back to find she was looking in the opposite direction.

Auschwitz II–Birkenau spread out in that direction too. I hadn't grasped its totality. I couldn't take it in much less take it at all. Somehow the emptiness of the ruins and those buildings still standing had more impact that any of the carefully preserved displays of Auschwitz I–Main Camp. The silent emptiness of Auschwitz II–Birkenau was even more confronting.

As we walked, our guide seemed to say less. He became – not only our guide – but our guardian. I'm told their philosophy in guiding people is 'safely in and safely out.' He achieved that. Even so I think something of the spirit of the Incarnation takes place: you are emptied of your sense of sovereignty and invited in a spirit of servanthood to take on solidarity with those who were herded here.

Our guide's final words did just that. He gathered us as a group. He sincerely thanked us for coming. He said, 'I don't expect you to remember everything I said today. Or everything you saw. But I ask one thing of you. Please remember something of the story. Even one little part; and bear witness. Remember. And bear witness.'

I've chosen this occasion of writing for David to honour our guide's request to bear witness. And these words are inadequate. So, yet again I find myself entrusting my story to David's expression and experience of Christ to contain all this.

Allow me to offer a final reflection. My witness from that day was framed by an encouragement at the beginning and a promise at the end.

On the morning we travelled to the death camp, I sat on my hotel bed genuinely afraid of the day ahead. I feared the spirit and spirituality which might be waiting at that hellish place. Then, somehow unexpectedly, I found in my possession the words of Elie Wiesel concerning the *Akeda* (the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22). Wiesel had written about this foundational biblical story through the eyes of someone who'd survived Auschwitz–Birkenau:

> Let us return to the question we asked at the beginning: Why was the most tragic of our ancestors named Isaac, a name which evokes and signifies laughter? Here is why. As the first survivor, he had to teach us, the future survivors of Jewish history, that it is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter. Isaac, of course, never freed himself from the traumatizing scenes that violated his youth; the holocaust had marked him and continued to haunt him forever. Yet he remained capable of laughter. And in spite of everything, he did laugh.

Reading these words my fear was replaced with a calm. Wiesel's biblical reflection engendered faith. His words inspired me to expect to encounter God, and the voice and Spirit of Christ. Marilynne Robinson said, 'When people are in the presence of great evil or terrible rejection and still speak of the goodness of God—that is true theology. The rest is just embroidery.' Wiesel modelled true theology in his reflection of the Binding of Isaac.

That is how the day began.
This is how it ended.

As our guide led us towards the end of our time together, I looked upon a scene in which the autumn leaves rained down against the backdrop of a guard tower and barbed wire fences disappearing from view into the fog. Immediately, the leaves spoke of death and resurrection; the guard tower and barbed wire – of evil.

And just as immediately the words from Revelation crashed defiantly into my soul:

'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.' (Rev 11:15)

'The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.'
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen' (Rev 22:20–21)

The Columbus Three

by Lex McMillan

I'm grateful to have grown and been shaped through relating as the Columbus Three—David, Donald, and I—for six years between 2009 and 2015. I wish now we'd gifted the staff at Columbus Glen Eden with a small photo of our PhD certificates in recognition for their generous hospitality.

I was first drawn to meet by a sense I wouldn't be able to tackle such an immense task alone, and by hunch that I'd benefit from conversations with David and Donald about God, people, and wellbeing.

My purpose in writing here is to reflect on our experience in light of a notion I gratefully attribute to David: 'relational participation'.

While I can only speculate about what specifically drew David and Donald, the seeds of my attraction lie in having grown up on a family farm. For me, this was a place that melded me with a sense of myself as a person in relationship: relationship with the land, family, and God. In a similar way the Kenyan concept of *ubuntu* suggests, my sense of myself grew out of first knowing who we were in community.

In consequence, if you were to have met me as a young person, yes, you'd have met me as Lex – and you had the eyes to see – you'd have also recognised my mother's and father's voices, my uncle's and aunt's influence, the smile of the sunrise over the sea, the chill of southern winters, and the impression of God's presence on my heart.

In the face of challenges associated with academic research and writing, we were guided by this background awareness of the value of sharing life. And so we began to meet as the Columbus Three each second week for breakfast.

Amongst the array of gifts on the table, David brought a tenacious commitment to the idea that God is personally present to us in the ordinariness of everyday life. Further, he offered the insight that as we engage in practices of love—things like risking mutual vulnerability, offering forgiveness, working for justice, and adopting a stance of humility—we are also participating in the shared life of God.

As a relationship therapist, one of the things that draws me to the Christian faith is what I want to refer to as its 'incarnational centre', the coming together of heaven and earth in human life. This appeals to me because to be relevant, faith needs to find its feet in the ordinariness of my clients' joys and struggles.

As we worked together discussing one another's writing – sharing coffee, bacon, and eggs – I was changed in ways that please me. These changes came about through being with David in two ways. First in conversation as he drew on his sophisticated grasp of Scripture, social psychology, and spiritual formation, and second through enjoying his presence as a man available to be encountered. My point is that as well as my ideas being informed through rich conversation, I was personally formed as we shared a style of relating I can best describe as participation in love. Now bear with me for a moment while I reflect on this experience theologically. To me it illustrates the style of loving participation the Christian faith invites us to go after.

Cunningham said 'participation suggests human beings are called to understand themselves, not as "individuals" who may (or may not) choose to enter into relationships, but rather as mutually indwelling and indwelt.'

However, this suggests the invitation to participate in ways that foster mutual indwelling requires we risk going outside our comfort zones. In my experience, it's not usual to meet other men who are also open to the risk that always accompanies participating in love. This is where my earlier point about the contours of participation lands; while participating in love involves reciprocity with one another, it also involves a simultaneous relating to God.

In other words, as relational beings we're not meant to practise love alone. Instead, we're invited to allow our personalities to be permeable, and open to the 'interpenetration' of God's empowering presence. This is the kind of participation in God that forms in us the capacity to respond, and subsequently be available to be encountered and experience ourselves as indwelt by God and human others.

And so, in the light of these reflections, I can say one very satisfying outcome of meeting as the Columbus Three is that I've been further developed as a person-in-relation. If you were to meet me, and you had the eyes to see, you will also meet aspects of David and Donald's indwelling.

as we engage in practices of love - things like risking mutual vulnerability, offering forgiveness, working for justice, and adopting a stance of humility - we are also participating in the shared life of God.

Breakfast with David

by Donald McMenamin

It's 7 am (maybe sunshine, maybe rain) and for six years I've been meeting here for breakfast at Columbus Coffee in Auckland's Glen Eden, often weekly, with David and Lex.

We three friends share training and interest in relationships which support wellness – and these breakfasts are themselves a site of wellness-producing relationship (which is just to say we enjoy breakfast and each other!). I am here because writing a PhD turns out to be more of a social project than an individual one, and we need all the help we can get.

As I think about what stands out for me in these years of conversation, I recall the taste and aroma of good food and coffee, the warmth of conversation and care, the excitement of fresh ideas with friends who study similar but different texts. But most of all I call to mind a joy in the rich exploration of the power of language which David and Lex make possible.

When I was 21, in recognition of a love of words even then, my mum and dad gave me a huge dictionary – I have it still. And breakfast with David and Lex is like that dictionary – a site of delight in the beauty, the variety, and the accuracy of language. Yet more importantly, these breakfasts are about the ethics and power of language to create new and healthful ways of thinking and being for ourselves and for the people alongside whom we work.

Let me offer an example of such language David brings to breakfast, this time following his reading of Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin, et al. 1993). Speaking of how we might be with the people we work alongside – David introduces three words which can shape our practice: Presence, Ownership, and Play. In a way which can be described as internally persuaded (Bakhtin, 1981), I take up the ideas that:

1. People 'should have unhindered access [presence] to an acknowledged speaking position in the conversation' (answering yes to the question 'will I be listened to?').

2. People should have 'ownership of the meanings of one's experience' (answering yes to the question 'will you hear me in my preferred meaning-making?').

3. Conversations should be characterised by 'room for movement, a playfulness which subverts rigid forms of authority,' and which includes 'a playing with various ways of telling one's story in search of that which seems most resonant' (answering yes to the questions: 'can we explore a variety of ways of thinking about this?' and 'will this be a playfully creative conversation?'). (See Crawley, 2016, p. 7).

In our breakfast conversations I'm drawn to a practice where people, together with those they care about, can playfully find their own preferred meanings and expressions of self.

It's a pleasure to be a part of these conversations over breakfast and coffee. It's as if each time we meet I'm gifted new colours to paint with – new ideas, new words, new possibilities. And now I can ask, what effects do these breakfast conversations have in my practice as a counsellor and as a teacher?

In part answer, a short story.

Sometime later, a woman I'm speaking with describes drinking alcohol as casting a shadow of depression across her days. She and I wonder, is that at all like trees casting shadows and limiting the sunshine? We play with an image of trees casting shadows, and of clearings where sunshine can fall on her and her children.

What difference might it make if, rather than a person with a drinking problem, she knew herself as a person who tends to clearings and manages sunshine for herself and her children? We tell stories of sun and shadow, looking for their various effects, and for her preferred histories of stepping into sun where she can. She wants to be on the lookout for chances to prune trees, so they cast less shadow, and she warms to stepping into the sunshine with her children.

The three words which David made available – Presence, Ownership, and Play – offer me a lens through which I can reflect on, and develop such therapeutic conversations. In this example and others, I can ask myself, to what extent have the people I work alongside had a position to speak their own versions of life, their own metaphors?

I know I come into conversation with ideas about what wellness looks like – to what extent are the hopes and ideas of the people I meet with explored and developed? To what extent does this person's own experience-near vocabulary shape what we can and do discuss?

As I write this I recall my teacher, Wendy Drewery, using the word 'reify' to speak of the ways my interpretations of others' experience can lose their metaphorical, as-if status and take up a kind of rigid truth-status – as if my professional descriptions are somehow more correct than people's local tellings. In that light, and encouraged by David's breakfast vocabulary I can ask: to what extent is my practice characterised by people's own presence and play? To what extent is it both appropriately light-hearted, and making room for local creative alternatives?

Now back to Glen Eden and three friends at the breakfast table: one preparing a conference paper, one bringing years of research and writing together in a thesis, one writing a short book (McMenamin, 2017). Into each project, across the months and years, is woven the perspectives, the wonderings, the vocabularies of the others. And within that woven support, each author explores the ethics and power of language to create new and healthful ways of thinking and being – that people might enjoy presence, ownership and play within their preferred life stories.

On Meeting a Stranger

With respect
And reverence
That the unknown
Between us
Might flower
Into discovery
And lead us
Beyond
The familiar field
Blind with the weed
Of weariness
And the old walls
Of habit

John O'Donohue

Considering welcoming spaces

for dialogic encounters during the Covid-19 pandemic by Laura Béres

This blessing, in John O'Donohue's collection, *To Bless the Space Between Us*,[1] reminds me of much of David Crawley's work on the importance of, and possibilities associated with, dialogic encounters in therapy and spiritual direction. It also creates an image of how, with reverence, a space can develop between two people for new insights that can flourish and refresh us. Nonetheless, this can, at times, involve a sense of vulnerability as we give up the comfort and safety of old habits.

I have only met David a few times in person – each time at the British Association for the Study of Spirituality (BASS) biannual conference in England. However, his interest in Bakhtin's work on the dialogic imagination, and his ability to make Bakhtin's work clear and relevant for therapists and spiritual directors, has had an influence on how I also theorize aspects of the conversational process in professional practice.

David has written: So rather than standing back from our own contributions, which will have effects whether we like it or not, I suggest that dialogic engagement and the agency of the other are better served when our part in the collaborative construction of meaning is apparent…Furthermore…for me to withhold my dialogized contribution to the other is, in Bakhtin's view, an ethical failure – a failure to love.[2]

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1 John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
2 David Crawley, "Otherness in Relation: A Dialogic Perspective," in *Stories of Therapy, Stories of Faith*, ed. L. McMillan, S. Penwarden, and S. Hunt (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 31.

This was probably not quite what David had in mind when he wrote those lines, yet I was pleased to be invited to reflect upon how his contributions have, indeed, had an effect, and so also celebrate those contributions.

To be transparent about my own part in the dialogic encounter with David's work, perhaps I should explain I'm a clinical social worker and university professor, who primarily practices with a narrative therapy focus. I'm engaged in the study and practice of spirituality and am interested in how the areas of spirituality, spiritual direction, and narrative therapy can all inform and support one another. David also works across these various domains which is reassuring when I might at times wonder if anyone else sees these possibilities. Indeed, I'd argue that his writing on concepts of space, hospitality, dialogic encounters, and 'play' provide bridges across, and are crucial in the practice of, both spiritual direction and narrative therapy.

Space and place are two concepts that are often used synonymously in common usage, yet as signifiers they each contain interesting complexities. For instance, Massey suggests 'place' often evokes a sense of 'local place': 'For some it is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical space of meaning…For others, a 'retreat to place' represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and building walls.'.[3] She warns this can result in intense feelings of nationalism and territorial parochialism, of which I worry we have seen much in the past several years in the United States and England.

On the other hand, Massey suggests 'conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite too, for the possibility of politics.'[4] She argues that both place and space continue to change over time even if we think of them as never changing. She gives two examples: The first involves going home to visit her mum, expecting the same well-loved traditional cake to be served as usual, to find her mum has used a newly found recipe, resulting in cries of, 'Oh mum, we love the old cake!'; and the second is of a mountain which seems solid and immovable gradually eroding and shifting over time due to the elements, or dramatically changing with an earthquake or volcanic eruption. I find these examples evocative, and then wonder what they mean for the place in which we engage in therapeutic encounters and the hospitable space we attempt to co-create with clients. I think the point may be to embrace that even physical places and the comfort of old traditions change, and rather than struggling to keep things the same, to welcome new opportunities.

I'm writing this after four months working from home due to Covid-19. I'm feeling nostalgic for my counselling office, university office, and classroom setting, while finding it continues to be important to create a hospitable space for dialogic interaction even within online meetings. There are certainly challenges – how to offer a welcoming and hospitable online sense of space for the development of community, or the impact on therapists and clients of plexiglass walls and face shields in large counselling rooms. Physical distancing doesn't mean social distancing, so the enactment of hospitality and dialogic conversations continue to be important even as our physical place adjusts our conceptions and use of space. This requires flexibility and a willingness to 'play.'

Discussing the role of '*authority*' in spiritual direction conversations, David has *played* with the narrative therapy idea that clients can be supported in re-authoring the stories they tell themselves and others about who they are - stories which impact their identity. David plays with this idea of *authority*, over against traditional forms that reside in therapist or spiritual director, while drawing upon Bakhtin's work, and a framework which includes 'play.'

David says, I choose the word *play* for its range of connotations. Primarily, the kind of play I have in mind is room for movement, as opposed to rigidity. Play in this sense is having the freedom to name experiences, interior shifts, intuitions, or imagined possibilities in ways which may depart for externally prescribed interpretations and storylines. This kind of play may be assisted by play in other senses of the word, including the *playfulness* which subverts rigid forms of authority, and *playing with* various ways of telling one's story in search of that which seems most resonant with the movement of God in one's life.[5]

This description of play illustrates how space is required to give 'room for movement,' while highlighting the benefit of not taking ourselves and our traditions too seriously. Playfulness helps to create space for new ideas and ways of thinking about ourselves and others. Playfulness opens space for new ways of being as we engage in dialogic rather than monologic, or authoritarian, conversations.

Bakhtin, just as narrative therapists also acknowledge, suggests a truly useful and engaging conversation which is dialogic in nature is, by definition, a two-way interaction where both people in the conversation are affected to a certain degree. As David, and others (for example, Guilfoyle[6]) point out, a dialogic conversation doesn't automatically come about because the therapist or spiritual director has committed to sounding tentative rather than authoritative.

Dialogic conversations take place when a therapist explains where their thinking has gone and what's come to mind as they listened to their client. The therapist can ask if these ideas are useful or not, opening the space again for the client to be the primary author of re-storying their experiences. This will necessarily also involve the therapist or spiritual director being willing to experience a degree of vulnerability.

3 D. Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2009), 5.
4 Massey, *For Space*, 59.
5 David Crawley, "*Authority* in Spiritual Direction Conversations: Dialogic Perspectives," *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 6 (2016): 7-8.
6 M. Guilfoyle, "Dialogue and Power: A Critical Analysis of Power in Dialogical Therapy," *Family Process* 42 (2003): 331-43.

I've written elsewhere about the importance of vulnerability as a stance for engaging in transformative pedagogical practices with students,[7] and I believe these practices share much in common with therapeutic encounters since both have the potential to result in learning and flourishing.

As I ask students to discuss critical incidents from their experiences so they can learn how to develop practice-based-theory through the critical reflection process, many suggest they feel a heightened sense of vulnerability with me and their peers. This requires me also to be willing to be vulnerable, which I enact by sharing my own critical incidents, engaging in demonstrations of critical reflection questioning, and deconstructing classroom encounters.

My willingness to experience vulnerability is an important element of moving away from traditional forms of authority and can include taking on a playfulness and openness to other ways of interacting in counselling, and spiritual direction, as well as teaching. However, it also requires the development of what Fook calls a space of *critical acceptance*[8] – not just a sense of safety or comfort – but a space which allows for taking chances with critical analysis.

The subtleties involved with the formation of a space which is comfortable enough for engaging in unsettling work, but not so comfortable that no new learning can occur, share much in common with the nuances contained within the concept of hospitality.

The Rule of St. Benedict, written for monastic settings in the sixth century, offers ideas about hospitality oddly helpful in the twenty-first century to those considering how hospitality can be part of the therapeutic encounter.[9] One element of Benedict's practice of hospitality which is not usually part of the mainstream discourse about hospitality, is that of hosts needing to step back from their hosting interactions to look after themselves and their own spiritual needs. Although the 'other' is to be welcomed as if welcoming Christ, it's also wise to take time for discernment, then to withdraw to maintain the type of space and lifestyle that would have initially attracted the guest to that place.

As de Waal points out, Benedict's directions about boundary setting sound like advice 'any good psychologist would tell us [are] essential lessons that we all need to learn.'[10] These ideas also are linked to an acknowledgement of the two-way nature of relationship and the need to examine effects on both ourselves and those to whom we offer services.

7 L. Béres, "Reflections on Learning as a Teacher: Sharing Vulnerability," in *Learning Critical Reflection: Experiences of the Transformative Learning Process*, ed. L. Béres and J. Fook (London: Routledge, 2020), 123-38.

8 See our use of this phrase in L.Béres and J. Fook, eds., *Learning Critical Reflection: Experiences of the Transformative Learning Process* (London: Routledge, 2020).

9 L. Béres, "*The Rule of Saint Benedic*t: Considering Hospitality, and Welcoming Spaces in Contemporary Therapeutic Practice," in ed. L. Béres, *Practising Spirituality: Reflections on Meaning Making in Personal and Professional Contexts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 131-44.

10 E. de Waal, *A Life-Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995).

I don't mean the effects we experience from our work are necessarily going to be negative and draining, since I believe we are just as able to experience vicarious resilience as vicarious trauma,[11] but it can be far too easy to slip into the mode of constantly doing more without truly discerning whether this is what we're called to do – even as we've had to shift to working from home as a result of Covid-19.

There's much written about 'Zoom fatigue' being more draining than in-person interactions – eye strain staring at a screen, the image of yourself staring back, and a greater intensity of focus on others' faces than were everyone sitting around a table. There's the risk of back to back meetings, since transition times for transport are no longer required. Certainly, neo-liberal individualism and competition, don't foster the critical reflection required to examine the pressures and invitations to keep taking on more.[12]

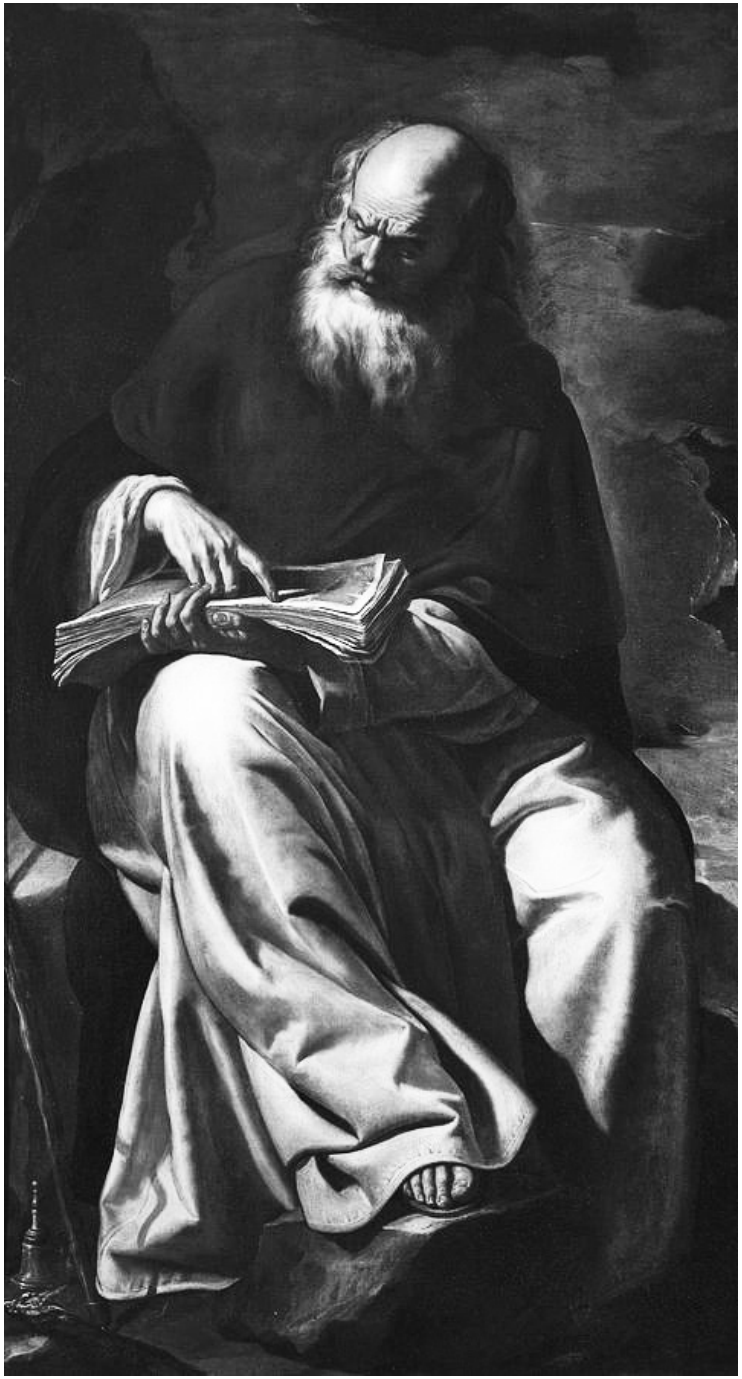
Nonetheless, it continues to be important to step-back now and again, and to consider how these changing circumstances may require adjustments to how we offer the space, and the hospitality for truly meaningful dialogic encounters. As Rowan Williams recently remarked in a podcast about being human in a time of pandemic,[13] we need to offer a sense of presence to anyone with whom we engage, and we are tasked with finding ways to ensure this presence online. Taking time to consider what we value and how to balance these, and being willing to approach these challenges with an attitude of play, or flexibility, might just help.

As David steps back from his time at Laidlaw College, I hope this will bring about a time of refreshment for him and ongoing excitement for dialogic encounters with people in a variety of contexts. Hopefully, he will have time and space to play, to rest, and to be creative.

11 L. Béres, "Notes on Self-Care and the Ongoing Effects of Working as a Narrative Practitioner," in *The Narrative Practitioner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 136-56; P. Hernández, D. Gansei, and D. Engstrom, "Vicarious Resilience: A New Concept in Work with Those Who Survive Trauma," *Family Process* 26 (2007): 229-41.

12 H. Brabazon, "The Academy's Neoliberal Response to COVID-19: Why Faculty Should Be Wary and How We Can Push Back, *Academic Matters* (2020). Online: https://academicmatters. ca/neoliberal-response-to-covid-19.

13 P. Plyming (host), "Rowan Williams – What Does Being Human Look Like in a Time of Pandemic?" *Talking Theology Podcast* (8 June 2020). Online: http://podcast.cranmerhall.com/ 231001/ 4071230 -rowan-williams-what-does-being-human-look-like-in-a-time-of-pandemic.



How Goodly Are Your Dwellings:

Song in Athanasius and the Vita Antonii by Ryan Lang

It is a joy to be able to honour David for his beloved presence in the Laidlaw community. In 2019, he signed up to be 'alongside' me in my junior role at the college. I am so grateful for his willingness to mentor me in teaching and for the deep well of Christ's life I got to draw from in his classrooms. He also offered a voice of encouragement in my doctoral work. Most of all, though, I will never forget how in a time of crisis he sat with me and helped me to hear the still small voice of the Spirit.

A spiritual director in India once invited me to move from 'theme' to 'truth,' that is, from a beautiful story about Jesus toward encountering Jesus *himself*, in the flesh—in real faces and situations. David embodies this for me, living what he teaches in real encounters. I want to be like him when I grow up! For now, it is a privilege to offer a short reflection from my thesis, on the song of the desert fathers, who came alive for me in one of David's classes.

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Early in the fourth century, a figure emerged in the Egyptian desert – and in the collective Christian imagination. His name was Antony. Athanasius' account of the hermit's life in the *Vita Antonii (Life of Antony) (Vita)*, written shortly after Antony's death in 356 CE, left a defining imprint on Christian spirituality.[1] In fact, it has been hailed as 'next to the Gospel of St. Mark the most important biography of early Christianity.'[2] The *Vita* has been studied from countless perspectives. However, one aspect of it has remained hidden – its vision of Christian *song*. Before we reflect on the role of song in the story, let us say something about its author.

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was a pivotal figure in the church at a formative time for Christian identity, as the faith spread through the empire after Constantine's conversion. It is believed he wrote the *Vita* while living with desert monks, in exile from Alexandria under an Arian emperor (356 - 62).[3] He had close ties with the monks. He was drawn to their ascetic life as a way of discipleship—understood as *theosis*, a process of coming into union with God. In his battle against the Arian heresy, he sought to infuse the monks' vibrant spirituality into the life of a unified, orthodox church.[4] For the

1 A debate persists as to the authorship of the *Vita*, but we will accept the traditional view that it is the work of Athanasius of Alexandria. For David M. Gwynn, Athanasius' theological and stylistic imprint is too clear to be disregarded without conclusive evidence. See David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15; see also on the debates regarding Athanasius' authorship John Behr, *Formation of Christian Theology, Volume 2: The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 253-54.

2 Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 126.

3 Brian Brennan, "Athanasius' Vita Antonii: A Sociological Interpretation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985): 209.

4 Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 105-30

bishop, true belief and practice were a matter not just of personal salvation, but of the renewal of creation. Antony was already a well-known figure and known personally to Athanasius. In the Vita, the bishop embodied his theological vision of the Christian life in his portrait of the monk.[5] That vision included a theology of song.

Song in the Vita Antonii

Antony's story is a journey in movements from the city into the desert—or from worldliness into spiritual perfection.[6] Singing is heard in three phases of the journey. The songs are always the psalms. The first phase is presented as an initial stage of conflict with the devil. When Antony enters the ascetic life, the devil tries to distract him from his pursuit of holiness. At the peak of the struggle, he appears to the monk face-to-face. Antony, who has earlier cited other Scripture, now responds with a *psalm*: 'the Lord is my helper, and I shall look down on mine enemies.' The devil flees, 'shuddering at the words.' The author calls this 'the Saviour's work in Antony' (*Vita*, chs. 6 - 7). Importantly, though Antony cites a psalm, there is no mention here of singing.

The first singing we hear is in the night. Antony enters a tomb at the edge of the city to continue his struggle, and, fearing his discipline will 'fill the desert,' the devil attacks him with a host of demons. After midnight, the monk lies on the ground, wounded.

[H]e could not stand up on account of the blows, but he prayed as he lay. And after he had prayed, he said with a shout, 'Here am I, Antony; I flee not from your stripes, for even if you inflict more nothing shall separate me (Rom 8:35) from the love of Christ.' *And then he sang*, 'though a camp be set against me, my heart shall not be afraid.' (*Vita*, ch. 9, my emphasis)

In one of the most vivid scenes in Christian literature, the devil sets on Antony with a multitude of demonic beasts—but Antony perceives that it is trickery, and that the Lord has made the devil weak. Christ appears in a ray of light, and the demons vanish. The Lord assures Antony he was always with him, but waited to see his 'fight.' The Lord affirms his enduring presence.

In a second phase, Antony moves into the desert, enters a ruined fort, and lives there alone for twenty years, drinking from an internal spring and eating a store of bread replenished by friends twice per year. The Vita calls this his 'training' (Vita, ch. 14). Psalm-singing is his key activity.

[T]hose . . . who came [to the fort] heard as it were crowds within clamouring . . . 'Go from what is ours . . . You cannot abide our attack.' . . . [But] there came to his aid visions from above, and the weakness of the foe . . . armed him with greater zeal. For his acquaintances . . . would hear him singing, 'Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered, let them also that hate Him flee before His face. As smoke vanishes, let them vanish . . . in the name of the Lord I requited them.' (*Vita*, ch. 13)

At the end of this season Antony re-emerges from the fort transformed, in a state of complete 'equanimity' (or 'harmony'), 'initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God' (*Vita*, ch. 14).

A third phase in the story involves a wider transformation. Antony's visible change, and the miracles Christ now works through him, draw to him others who '[enrol] themselves for the citizenship in the heavens' (*Vita*, ch. 14). In a long address on spiritual warfare, Antony teaches the new monks how he will sing the psalms when demons try to deceive or intimidate him.

Then, in one of the most beautiful passages in the *Vita*, we see the new community fill the mountains. The author notes seven traits of their life together: 'holy bands of men who *sang psalms*, loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, laboured in almsgiving, and preserved love and harmony one with another' (Vita, ch. 44, my emphasis).

In time, Antony withdraws to an 'inner mountain.' The devil continues his attacks in the night, and Antony continues to repel him with psalms. The author emphasises Antony's appearance in his last years. In a key text, the monk is described as having 'a wonderful grace,' a gift 'from the Saviour' (*Vita*, ch. 67). 'Thus Samuel recognised David . . . Thus Antony was recognised . . . for his soul was at peace; he was never downcast, for his mind was joyous' (*Vita*, ch. 67). Antony's face has become like David's. The same joyful countenance is his as he lies on his deathbed.

Athanasius' theology and Antony's song

For Khaled Anatolios, understanding 'the implied systematic framework that underlies all of Athanasius' work is . . . essential to a proper understanding of anything he says.'[7] In that spirit, we will now explore how song fits within Athanasius' wider theological vision. This can help us to understand what is actually happening when the Antony of the Vita sings.

Athanasius' vision begins with God's *gracious intervention*. All of creation subsists in God, who lovingly preserves it by allowing it to participate in his Word. God gave humanity a distinct level of participation in the Word—in whose image we are created—in order for us to know God and 'live a divine life' in union with him.[8] We sinned and lost this knowledge. So the Word took our human condition and made it possible for us to participate in his divine life. This is our redemption. Through the Son, we are given access again to the Father, as the Son and the Spirit 'bind us to the Godhead.'

5 Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 249

6 The version I have consulted in summarising Antony's story is *The Life of St Anthony*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. Ellershaw, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892).

7 Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2-3.

8 Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 2-3

What is the proper human response to such grace? The first aspect of it is *thankfulness*, as Athanasius stresses throughout his work, nowhere more strongly than in his *Festal Letters*. The second is to 'match' God's grace in the pursuit of holiness, or *virtue*. In Christ, by the Spirit, human beings offer back to God the life we have received. For Anatolios, Antony's story in the Vita is a picture, from the human point of view, of this 'life of grace.'[9] The monk models a faithful human response to God, in Christ, in the context of a cosmic spiritual battle.

1. Praise

Singing functions in Antony's life of grace in at least three ways. The first is in *praise*. In what seems like a passing comment in his *Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasius explains that the first reason the psalms are *sung*, rather than spoken, is because it was proper for Divine Scripture to hymn God not only with continuity but with *expanse of voice*. Recited with continuity, then, are such words as those of the Law . . . while recited with expanse are those of psalms, odes and songs. And thus it is assured that men love God with their entire strength and capability.[10]

Readers of Antony's story often see his most significant weapon to be prayer. Yet, there is a clue, in Antony's address to the monks on spiritual warfare, that prayer is not his only—or even his primary—mode of engagement. His primary weapon is *praise*. Listen to these words:

> For if [demons] find us faint-hearted [they] mightily increase our terror . . . But if they see us *rejoicing in the Lord*, contemplating the bliss of the future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in His hand, and that no evil spirit has any strength against the Christian . . . when they behold the soul fortified with these thoughts—they are discomfited and turned backwards. Thus the enemy, seeing Job fenced round with them, withdrew . . . Thus if we are wishful to despise the enemy, *let us ever ponder over the things of the Lord, and let the soul ever rejoice in hope.* And we shall see the snares of the demon are like smoke, and the evil ones themselves flee rather than pursue. For they are . . . fearful, ever looking forward to the fire prepared for them. (*Vita*, ch. 42, my emphasis)

The psalms are not mentioned explicitly here, but they are heard in the context of the passage.[11] These are Antony's concluding remarks on spiritual warfare. He is not preoccupied with the enemy's attack, but instead faces and rejoices in Christ and his victory. In Athanasius' vision, song's 'expanse of voice' involves Antony's 'entire strength' in this joyful, loving beholding of God.[12] In praise, he is strengthened in truth, and the demons' power dissipates like 'smoke.'

2. Prayer

The second part of the life of grace in which we hear singing *is prayer.* The ground of Antony's 'success,' for Athanasius, is that he is a 'co - worker' with Christ. Athanasius' sense of 'co-working' fits within his understanding of the incarnation. In the incarnation, Christ 'destroyed our death and granted us a renewal of life.' But the incarnation also has a second, pedagogical purpose. Christ's bodily works on earth revealed his Father to creation. And Antony's works, which derive from Christ, continue to point creation to the Son—and through him to the Father.

In Athanasius' account, it is always Christ's power at work in Antony. Yet, the monk has one properly *human* activity. It is prayer, a 'spiritual receptivity, invocation of and openness to the power of the Lord.' We usually see Antony singing the psalms as prayer. He invokes Christ in the psalm, and the demons flee.[13] It is significant he does not sing the psalm in his first encounter with the devil; he speaks it. This tells us it is the words of the psalm, not the singing per se, that invoke Christ.

The psalms, for Athanasius, are words of Christ.[14] The risen Lord is present where they are voiced, manifesting his victory over death. When *does* Antony sing to invoke Christ? It is when he is isolated, in the heat of battle - at night, in the tombs, in the fort - when the devil's weapons of deception and fear are strongest. He prays with his expanded, singing voice - with his 'entire strength' - when all other lights go out.

3. *Theosis*

Song has a third role in the life of grace—in the process of *theosis*. Here, it touches the deepest aspect of God's reconciling work. For Athanasius, the soul is created with a 'native dynamism' that leads it to the knowledge of God. In the incarnation, Christ's presence becomes 'internal' to humanity in a new way, enabling us, by grace, to return to our soul in its natural state and, through it, to come home—to again know God. In other words, the incarnation brings about a new *intersubjectivity* between God and humanity, in Christ, that leads us into union with God.[15]

9 The quotes in this paragraph and immediately preceding may be found variously in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 165-75.

10 Athanasius, Epistula ad Marcellinum de interpretation psalmorum 27, in James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 53.

11 The preceding chapters involve singing psalms in the context of spiritual attack, and singing psalms in the same context is the major theme in Antony's twenty-year period of training, immediately prior to this address in the narrative.

12 This is similar to the description of his battle in the fort, where "there came to his aid visions from above, and the weakness of the foe . . . armed him with greater zeal."

13 The quotes in this paragraph and immediately preceding are found variously in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 178-88. Athanasius sees prayer in a large sense, as including all aspects of ascetic discipline, insofar as they derive from the invocation of divine assistance. This life of prayer includes the singing of psalms.

14 This understanding of the psalms is pervasive in the fathers by this time. See John J. O'Keefe and R.R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

15 Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 188, 194.

This aligning of divine and human subjectivities is at the heart of Athanasius' teaching on the psalms. All of Scripture is Spirit-breathed, he says, but the psalms have a 'special grace,' in that they contain the 'emotions of the soul' and its 'rectifications'—that is, they provide a divine pattern for *how* to feel, speak, and act.[16] We experience the psalms as though we were singing; they move us as if they were our *own songs*.[17] What is happening here? In the psalms, we encounter *Christ*, who sings in the words, and perceive in him, as if in a mirror, the perfected image of our own soul.[18] His words and emotions become ours as we pray them over time.[19] We come under his leadership and appropriate his image. His presence in these sacred words transforms us. This is why Athanasius insists that we sing the words of the psalms unaltered.[20]

What role does *singing* have in this 'alignment of subjectivities'? For Athanasius, one reason the psalms are effective is that they are sung with a melody. He hastens to add that their 'sweetness of sound' is not for 'the ear's delight.' It benefits the soul.[21] Singing with a melody figures, outwardly, the inner harmony of a soul that possesses the mind of Christ. In the same way that we can appropriate Christ's image by voicing his words, *singing can effect harmony in the soul*, 'just as harmony unites flutes to effect a single sound.' 'By acquiring the mind of Christ,' John Behr notes, 'through a harmonious reading of the Psalms, enabling a true and virtuous life, the human being becomes the instrument of the Spirit, obedient to the Word.'[22]

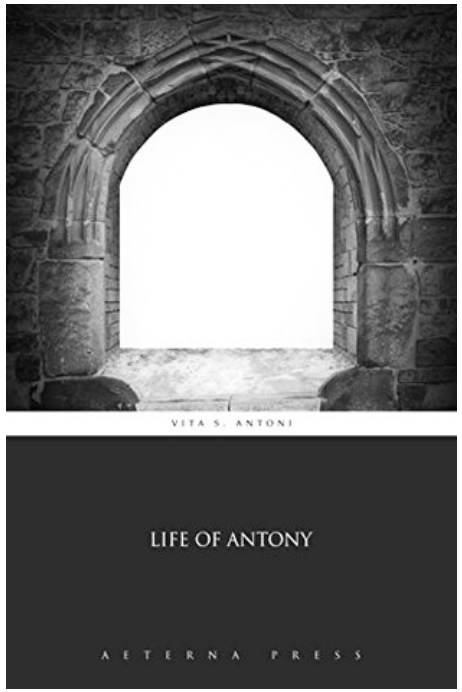
We can return, at last, to the *Vita*. Athanasius' theology of the incarnation saturates this story. Antony's *theosis* is its narrative centre. The key phase is his twenty-year training in the fort, when he sings the psalms in his contest with the enemy. He re-emerges as a 'paradigmatic human . . . vessel of divine grace,' with a harmony that signifies 'divine-human co-subjectivity insofar as it represents the co-working and co-leadership of Christ and the human soul over the passions and emotions.' In the darkness of the fort, Antony invoked Christ's saving power against his enemy through song. In doing so, he was also *mastered* by the Lord. For Anatolios 'the ordering, harmonizing, and life-giving power which the Word exercises in the universe becomes immanent to Antony's own constitution.' No one element in this process is given more attention than the 'effect of the singing of the Psalms on [Antony's] soul.'[23] Singing has aided the monk's union with God.

16 Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 250-51.
17 Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 150.
18 Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 198.
19 Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 251.
20 Paul R. Kolbet, "Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self," *Harvard Theological Review* 99 (2006): 93, 98.
21 Kolbet, "Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self," 99-100.
22 Athanasius of Alexandria, Letter to Marcellinus, in Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 252, 253.
23 Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 200, 201.

The transformation extends beyond the individual. The image of a community filling the desert extends the *Vita's* vision of *theosis* to the body of Christ and, through it, to all creation. Psalm-singing is first among the seven traits that characterise the monks' life together. This is how the author describes the community: 'any one beholding the cells . . . would lift up his voice and say, 'How goodly are your dwellings, O Jacob, and your tents, O Israel; as shady glens and as a garden by a river; as tents which the Lord has pitched, and like cedars near waters" (*Vita*, ch. 44). The desert, traditionally seen as the abode of devils, has become a 'garden' brimming with life, the very dwelling place of God, through the presence of the body of Christ. God enfolds the earth in a loving embrace of his Son, 'making all things to be at peace.'[24] The song of the church has participated in the redemption of the world.

***

David, your life encourages me to move on from the story to the face-to-face encounter with Jesus, from reading the *Vita* to becoming someone who sings in the 'night.' Thank you for your gift to us, and bless you as you enter this new season of life with Christ.



24 Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 210.

Calling

by Sarah Penwarden

Find a city on the slopes
of Mt Subasio, walk
the streets past pink
stone walls treading in his footsteps.

Below terracotta roofs, on lawns
where even the weeds are herbs,
stop to eat bread with oil,
descending to his church -

San Damiano, where Francis
prayed and heard Christ on the cross
call him to rebuild
the crumbling church.

See him again lying prostrate,
in bronze, up at the caves to which
you climb the next morning through ilex woods
where he preached to birds.

Later, heat shimmers in the piazza,
tourists in Sophia Loren shades watch
a nun hurry past, while children run through
a fountain's spray.

Enter the hush of the crypt, carved from rock,
dim and candle lit, and among the
singing frescoes - Cimabue, Giotto -
pray at his tomb.

The sun is setting at Santa Chiara,
the sky turns another pink as
evening fades; look past the bell tower
calling you to where the Umbrian hills unfold.

SGM News

Tēnā koutou.

Welcome to this special edition between Laidlaw College and Refresh/SGM to honour David Crawley's teaching career. I was a student at BCNZ (Laidlaw) in the late '80's when David was a rising star lecturer. As well as developing his academic career, David also embraced an interior journey which saw contemplative spirituality at the heart of who he is. So many of us have benefited from his rich learning and practice. We wish David God's generous blessing in his retirement from Laidlaw, and we are also extremely glad he continues with Workgroup and as Assistant Co-Ordinator for the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme.

Miraculously, Workgroup (all 10 of us), managed to meet face to face in March and September. We continue in good heart and health as an organisation which holds responsibility and future dreaming faithfully together. With sadness we accepted Diane's decision to step down from editing *Refresh* after 10 years and 20 wonderful, creative, beautiful editions. Diane's editorial flair has been amazing and we can't thank her enough. And now we hope and pray there might be another special person feeling drawn to consider becoming our new *Refresh* editor – please talk to us! Do also take some time to check out the programme and what is on offer around the country for 2021 - thank you to everyone who creates and runs these events.

Kia tau te aroha noa ki a koutou me te rangimarie he mea nā te Atua nā tō mātou Matua

Ngā mihi, *Jane Wilkinson, SGM Workgroup Convenor*

Looking for a new Editor for Refresh

After ten years editing *Refresh*, Diane Gilliam-Weeks is stepping down. We're now looking for that special someone with a passion for communicating contemplative spirituality.

Key attributes and skills

A Christian contemplative with

- passion to edit *Refresh* and familiarity with publishing
- flair working with images, poetry, story
- initiative in seeking contributions
- a network of contacts and connections around New Zealand
- an intuitive sense about whose writing will connect with Refresh readers
- good editing skills
- willingness to work for love and the SGM annual 7-day silent retreat as koha for editing [or equivalent!]

The successful applicant may call anywhere in Aotearoa home.

Expressions of interest close 12 February 2021. Email SGM Workgroup Convener, Jane Wilkinson janeinwelly@gmail.com. Interviews will be completed by 26 February 2021.

Formation Programme

It feels like we've experienced much more than a single season since I last wrote a Spiritual Directors Formation Programme update. We have experienced seasons of the spirit, haven't we? We have lived several lifetimes in one year – or so it feels to me. These are times which call for soul-searching and deep listening to God, creation, and one another.

Cracks in an externalised faith or shaky theological framework widen in times like this which highlights the need for spiritual listeners; soul friends who, unlike Job's companions, are not defensive of God or accusatory of the one suffering. Spiritual direction is a listening ministry and one needed in such a time as this.

If the number of applications for next year is anything to go by it seems others agree! The ecumenical strength of our programme is seen in Catholic, Baptist, Open Brethren, Salvation Army, Anglican and non-denominational contemplative Christians entering the course. Each person represents a unique Whānau Karakia; all will embody spiritual direction in their own way and, through their listening, will see people transformed before their eyes.

Steve Tollestrup, speaking to directors recently, said spiritual directors are activists. I believe it! When we recover God's vision of us, when we develop a capacity for seeing the holy in the ordinary, when we grasp there was never a time we were not loved and there is a sacred and unwounded centre to our being where God is – we live differently. If that's an activism that excites you, join us.

Fran Francis SDFP Coordinator

Formation Programme Special Interest Projects now available on the SGM website
https://www.sgm.org.nz/spiritual-direction-special-interest-projects.html

Camino Conversations - Pilgrimage as a Spiritual Practice - Kathryn Overall

Charismatic Gifts and Speaking in Tongues - Christeen Mackay

Contemplative Prayer, Enneagram and Spiritual Growth - Renate Frei

From Head to Hands - Creative Processes in Spiritual Direction - Alice Wood

Holy Borders & Sacred Threads - Spiritual Direction Across Faith Traditions - Judith Wigglesworth

Images of God and Believers from a Muslim Background - Jan Balzer

Into Silence - The Sound of a Gentle Whisper (A prayer resource with separate Cover Sheet) - Holly Walton

Music and Spiritual Direction - Philippa Brocklehurst

Music as a Sacred Experience - Kaye McGregor (with accompanying song brochure)

Orientation, Disorientation, New Orientation (Brueggemann) - Don Scott

Sabbath Rest as a Contemplative Practice - Petra Corbett

Spiritual Direction and the Highly Sensitive Person - Judith Lorimer

The Last Word

My thanks to Tim Meadowcroft for working with us on this special tribute edition of Refresh for our colleague, David Crawley – and to those who wrote from the heart to honour his retirement. With this edition, I retire from my labour of love as *Refresh* editor. To all our wonderful readers and contributors – my heartfelt thanks for your loving attention over the past ten years. And a special thanks to our wonderful proofreaders, Anna and Kerry Johnstone. Arohanui! I wrote this poem as a thank you gift to SGM for allowing me the privilege.

To edit Refresh
Is to place your fingers in a stream
Flowing with God's love
Into and through the heart of God's children
To watch it sparkle in the sunlight
Swirl around mossy rocks
And through green tendrils.
You get to touch it! Feel it! Splash it!
And every drop and trickle
Pours into your own God river
Forever flowing.

With deepest wells of love from Diane Gilliam-Weeks

Winter 2021 Refresh
Theme 'Practice'
Deadline was Sept 28, 2020 now March 28, 2021

Our decision to produce this tribute edition was made after the last *Refresh* was published. Our intention is to save the many fine contributions which already been submitted for the new editor. There's still time to write!

What's the contemplative practice you practise? What's your rule of life, what does your contemplative practice look like, and where do you find it easiest? Who were your spiritual mentors? How has your life in God become deeper and more intimate with practice over time? How has your contemplative practice informed your life in action? How best do you 'hear' God? The new editor will have the opportunity to use these contributions in their first edition.

Guidelines for writers – please, please, please!
keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
use single quotation marks
be conversational in style
use conjunctions wherever possible
use endnotes instead of footnotes
use inclusive language wherever possible
ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB.

. © Bill Cheyrou / Alamy Stock Photo

Contributors

Tim Meadowcroft is a senior research fellow at Laidlaw College, Auckland, after previously being on the full-time staff for twenty-five years. He's also a priest assistant in the local Anglican parish of Henderson.

Sue Pickering is a Taranaki-based priest, spiritual director and writer, and has enjoyed a long association with Spiritual Growth Ministries. Seeing God in the everyday informs Sue's life as she follows the Way of Jesus into the unknowns of ageing.

Chris Marshall taught at Laidlaw for 20 years, before joining the Religious Studies Department at VUW for ten. He has now retired from the inaugural Diana Unwin Chair of Restorative Justice. His focused is to bring biblical insights on spirituality, peace and justice into dialogue with modern justice theory and practice, to the mutual enrichment of both.

Sheila Pritchard is enjoying settling into a sunny apartment at Evelyn Page Retirement Village. She is very grateful to have an office space near the beach where she continues to offer spiritual direction and supervision two days a week. Walking along Orewa beach to one of the many excellent cafes for a coffee or lunch is a bonus!

Geoff New is a contemplative and Dean of Studies at Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership in Dunedin. He was awarded a Doctor of Ministry degree in 2011 through the Australian College of Theology for his Back to the Future: *The impact of the ancient disciplines of Lectio Divina and Ignatian Gospel Contemplation on contemporary preaching.*

Lex McMillan has worked as a practice manager for a child and family support agency, taught in, and led, the counselling programme at Laidlaw College, provided relationship counselling and mediation for the family court, and counselled in private practice now for twenty five years.

Donald McMenamin is a counsellor and counsellor educator with 30 years' experience in high schools and private practice. He has particular interest in how new stories of identity support the reintegration of people at risk of exclusion from their school, family and community.

Laura Béres, MSW, MA, PhD, is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at King's University College at Western University in Canada. She also is a narrative therapist, and writes in the areas of Narrative Therapy, Spirituality, and Critical Reflection on Practice.

Ryan Lang is a PhD candidate at the University of Otago. His research explores the song of the Church in times of darkness. He contributes to teaching on spirituality, worship, and mission at Laidlaw College and Venn Foundation.

Sarah Penwarden is a lecturer in the School of Social Practice (Counselling) at Laidlaw College, and a therapist in private practice. She's married to David Crawley and lives in leafy Titirangi. Poetry is her quirky hobby.

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A Contemplative Farewell

As a final farewell to our readers I offer one of my favourite cover images from the past 10 years along with the wonderful passage below which summarises my understanding of divine presence and love. It refers to the theology of 13th Century Franciscan friar Duns Scotus. Ngā manaakitanga, Diane.

'Scotus is struck by the beauty of the created order and understands its existence as gift from a loving God. The beauty of creation manifests itself both visually and through the song or canticle of the universe. This beauty sets the stage for an encounter: an encounter with this gracious God, so personally attentive and intimately present to all that is, yet so hidden and discrete. It is this God who gently calls each person to respond to goodness in love, who invites and supports each one to imitate that love in self-gift, and who ultimately graces each with eternal life in the fullness of relational communion.'

Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ,
author of *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor*