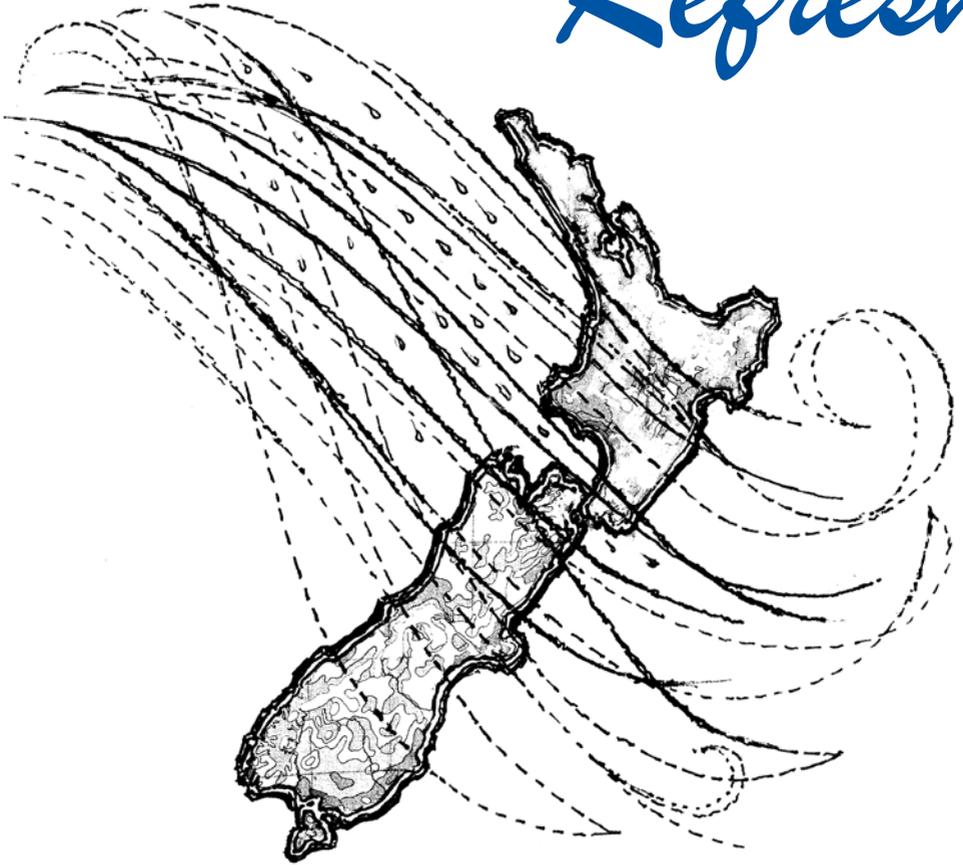


Refresh



Faith

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COVER DESIGN AND DRAWINGS

by Jo O'Hara

COMMENT

Andrew Dunn

I've been thinking that it's not often we talk about faith in contemplative spirituality! In a sense we don't need to because the focus is largely on the experience of God's loving, the interaction with Jesus as friend upon the way, his dying for and with us, and with his risen life in us, and the Spirit's empowering, lighting the way and illuminating of the sacred page among everything else the Spirit shines upon. And our doing the truth of all that.

Yet we miss something rich if we only think in terms of the context of faith. What about faith itself, "faithing" as it's spoken about in recent decades?

Further, aren't we missing something if we think of spirituality only in personal growth terms? Indeed, if we think of personal growth and therapy of one sort or another as spiritual growth. Yes, faith does involve being remade in the image of Christ our Lord and saviour but it is much more than sorting out messes within or without. It's not simply a matter of the wrongs being righted, or the out-of-kilteredness being corrected. It's deeper than that.¹ As St Paul puts it so simply, we are "justified by faith". That's a theological and eternal issue, and becomes deeply practical as we come to know forgiveness and redemption with practical spins off into personal wholeness and abundant life.

Of course counselling, therapy and psychology are wonderful adjuncts to personal and community health and relationships. Indeed in many instances they open the door for believing and trusting once again where damage has been done.

It struck me recently that I could read a book on some aspect of spirituality and growth as a person and not have heard anything much about what faith is like.

For those of us who are spiritual directors, ministers, priests and pastors, what sort of questions and reflective words can we use with people who come to talk over their deepest issues? How do we aid reflection upon faith itself? How do we encourage exploration of the growing edges of believing, trusting, experiencing the love of God in each person?

So in this issue of Refresh we are presenting a wide variety of material to explore. The biblical articles take us back to the beginnings. Mark helps us to experience the good news of the gospel in the story of Jesus. John has his own profound insights into the Jesus' encounter, "the Word made flesh", and Paul lays a foundation for the future church and its mission in the name of Jesus Christ and his faithfulness.

So what is faith? It's not what Mark Twain's schoolboy friend suggested, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so". Neither is it so confident that it is "dead to doubts, dumb to discouragements, blind to impossibilities" (Answers.com - faith).

There's a sense in which faith grounds us in the deepest realities of life and

existence, not as an escape from the stark realities we face.

For me faith is an openness to the love of God that loves us into an openness to believing and trusting God.

Yes, faith is trust, belief and acceptance of the content of our faith in Christ. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31) is as true today as ever it was.

And yet if we make faith a rigid set of beliefs we can lose the joy of the interaction with the riskiness of going forth, like Abraham and Sarah, and not knowing where it will take us. If faith as belief builds an impregnable shell around us we may end up like the crab that needs to grow beyond its current shell but can't.

For some it will be more energetic, more passive for others. For some it will have more "head" content, for others be more affective and relationship centred. For others, yet again it will be more of a struggle, a wrestle, a debate; and for others more engaging.

For all believers the love language of faith will vary widely and be seemingly unintelligible to the others at times.

Thankfully, faith is also a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). So why not ask the gift-giving God to expand the gift, to throw more light on it and its size, shape and contours? Let faith's gift-giver know you are ready to be taken deeper, further, higher, longer. Then observe what happens as your spiritual formation expands into the growing giftfulness of God.

An image I've received recently is that the landscape of faith is like the expanding universe - there are no outside edges to

its expansiveness, no limits to its beauty, silence, wonder and enticements! Like the current refreshment of the Hubble telescope's systems, lenses and solar panels out in space, which will prolong its life and usefulness before it dies, so the lenses of my soul need cleaning and the batteries of faith recharging for the coming years of following. It would be a pity to fade away and burn up in orbit with eternity beckoning!

Faith is an openness to the love of God that loves us into an openness to believing and trusting God.

Paul uses "expanding" images a number of times as he encourages the saints in Ephesus to explore that way of thinking. For example, in Ephesians 3, he prays that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith as you are being rooted and grounded in love". He prays that they may have the perception to grasp the length, breadth, height and depth, and "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (17-19).

We hope this issue will help all our readers to enjoy expansive images of faith and faithing, nurturing and nourishing faith and to encourage them also in those we serve.

STAGES OF FAITH IN MARK'S GOSPEL

Lynne Wall

Faith in Hard Times

Hard economic times, the threat of swine flu and disillusionment with establishment figures, whether they be greedy finance managers or abusive doctors or priests, put our faith in God to the test. What does it mean to follow Jesus when our world seems to be falling apart? As we stumble along in the darkness, where are

¹ "Have we religious leaders adopted the popular culture to the point that we have lost the language of our own faith tradition?" asks Patricia Brown, Spiritual Direction and Psychological Theory and Practice. Presence Vol 15, No. 2. June 2009. 44

the lamps to guide us, the glimmers of hope to encourage and sustain us on our faith journey?

Mark and the Ups and Downs of Discipleship

The gospel of Mark is the best place to nourish our hungry spirits, to find bread for the journey when the road is difficult and the signposts far apart. For faith is never an easy path in Mark's gospel. The disciples of Jesus are perplexed as to who he is and what it will mean to follow him. The sincerity of their response and the confusion of their commitment seem to reflect our own faith struggles and dreams.

Mark's context was different from our own but no less challenging. He wrote against a background of suffering and persecution of the Christian community probably in Rome about 70 CE. This date marks the crushing of a Jewish revolt against Roman rule in Palestine, which began in 66 CE and culminated in the Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. (Cf. 13:1-2, 14)

Mark presents the disciples as realistic models of a faith journey which is traced in stages as the story of Jesus unfolds. These stages are not those neatly defined by Fowler¹, but reflect the disciples' inconsistent growth in faith and understanding. Their failings and bewilderment sound all too human and familiar. We can perhaps identify with their stages of growth as we reflect on our own spiritual life.

¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

The Journey motif

There are several images which Mark uses to illustrate these stages of faith. First there is the **journey motif** used to give structure to the story of Jesus. Journey is a common image for the spiritual life and Mark uses it to great effect. Jesus and his disciples travel throughout Galilee (9:30) and then head inexorably toward Jerusalem: "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them" (10:32). This physical journey matches the different stages of faith development for the disciples with Jesus treading the path before them. If they wish to follow Jesus, then they must expect to share the same road.

At the beginning of the journey, when we read of Jesus' baptism, it is only Jesus who sees "the heavens torn apart" and hears the confirming words, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well-pleased" (1:11). The disciples hear nothing yet are eager and whole-hearted as they respond to the call to leave behind their past lives and follow Jesus. However, they are puzzled as to who Jesus is, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (4:41).

It is only at the midpoint of the gospel, when Jesus and his disciples are at the furthest point from Jerusalem, in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, that the conversation as to who Jesus is becomes personalized, "But who do you say that I am?" asks Jesus (8:29). Peter's confession, "You are the Messiah," is silenced with teaching about what it means to be the suffering Son of Man.

A revelatory moment follows for Peter, James and John as they see Jesus transfigured before them and hear for themselves a variation of the baptismal

affirmation: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him" (9:7). But again, before the disciples can start rejoicing in their experience, they are ordered to "tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (9:8). For Mark, the resurrection is the key to a true understanding of who Jesus is and what his messiahship will mean for the disciples.

The journey south to Jerusalem is punctuated by three passion predictions from Jesus while the disciples struggle to come to terms with a suffering Messiah. Jesus is leading the way literally and metaphorically but the disciples are reluctant followers on the servant path.

Finally, in Jerusalem, Jesus faces the cross and must also deal with betrayal, denial and desertion from his disciples. The final affirmation as to who Jesus is comes, not from a disciple, but from the Roman centurion who stands facing the cross, "Truly this man was God's Son" (15:39).

So the journey motif is like a roller-coaster ride of faith with Jesus. Nothing is as it seems. The disciples hit the heights of Peter's confession and the transfiguration of Jesus but do they really comprehend what they are saying and seeing? As they come closer to Jerusalem, they drop to the depths and are confronted by their own fears, lack of trust, petty squabbles and desires for recognition.

At the last, they have all deserted Jesus and it is left to a group of women to become frightened witnesses to the resurrection. Significantly, they are told to tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus has been raised and is going ahead of them to Galilee (16:7), just as he promised (14:28). It is a circular journey and we, like they,

are sent back to the beginning where they started in Galilee, but this time travelling in the light of the resurrection.

The Messianic Secret

Another image which Mark uses continually throughout the gospel is what has been described as the **Messianic Secret**. Jesus instructs those he has healed to say nothing to anyone (1:44), he commands the demons not to make him known (3:12), and he orders his disciples not to tell anyone about him (8:30). What is the reason for this secrecy? For despite these instructions, Jesus' fame spreads rapidly and the more he tries to prevent this the more zealously do people speak of him (7:36). It is unrealistic to think that Jesus' identity could be kept hidden.

Mark clearly has another intention in mind and it has to do with stages of growth in faith and understanding. It was all too easy to misunderstand Jesus, to see him as the great wonder-worker, the Messiah who could give sight to the blind and who could perhaps rescue his people from oppression under Roman rule. In the same way we can misunderstand what faith is about - we too would like to be rescued from the stresses and struggles that surround us.

Just as Jesus tries to lead the disciples on to deepening stages of faith, so we too are challenged to a different understanding of discipleship. This is no triumphalistic Messiah that we follow, who has places of honour on offer to his followers (10:35-45), but rather a servant leader who calls his disciples to become vulnerable like little children (10:15), to become least and last, a servant of all (9:35). The call is also to suffering and even persecution for the sake of Christ.

The Two-Step Miracle

Another image used by Mark which can be seen to illustrate stages of faith through which the disciples grow in grace and understanding is the **two-step miracle**.

A blind man is brought to Jesus and the people accompanying him beg Jesus to touch him. Jesus leads him by the hand out of the village of Bethsaida, perhaps to avoid the crowds.

There he places saliva, a traditional means of healing, on his eyes and lays his hands on him. Jesus asks if he can see anything and his reply is that he can see people but they look like trees, walking. Jesus lays his hands on his eyes for a second time and his sight is completely restored and he sees everything clearly.

This story is placed immediately after Jesus expresses his exasperation with the disciples' lack of understanding, despite the signs and teaching they have experienced. Straight after is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. It seems that Mark is using the two-step miracle story to illustrate the faltering growth in the disciples' faith.

The disciples see and hear many wonderful things as Jesus heals and teaches throughout Galilee. But they do not understand, are afraid or misunderstand who Jesus is and what it will mean to follow him. Despite private teaching sessions where Jesus explains everything to them (4:34), they are fearful and lacking in faith during the storm (4:40). They reject the idea of a suffering Messiah (8:32-33) and argue as to who is the greatest among them (9:33-34). There are mountain top experiences of the reality of God's presence and recognition of Jesus as Messiah but there are also moments of betrayal and lack of faithfulness (14:32-42).

Mature Faith

Mature faith then is an unpredictable process of growing insight and understanding. Sometimes we see only a blur and at other times we see clearly.

The stages of faith are not clear cut, moving easily from one to the next. Enthusiasm and devotion may so easily give way to hardened hearts and the baubles of power and control over others, or to loss and disillusionment.

Our prayer is often that of the father who in pleading for his possessed son cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief" (9:24).

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FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Derek Tovey

The noun "faith" or "belief" does not appear once in John's Gospel. However, the verb, "to believe" appears often, in many forms and tenses, including frequently as a "verbal-noun", as in the phrase, "the one who believes" (see John 3:15,16; 6:35; a literal translation of the Greek might be, "the believing one"). Indeed, the verb "to believe" appears almost one hundred times in the Gospel,

almost three times as often as in the Synoptic Gospels put together.

This suggests two things. First, that the theme of believing is very important in John's Gospel. Second, that believing for the evangelist is not simply an intellectual exercise, as assent of the mind to some beliefs (or ideas) about Jesus, or God. It is active and dynamic: it is something you do. Warren Carter puts it this way:

*Whatever else the word ["to believe"] means, the use of the verb rather than the noun suggests "believing" is not static, not an inner possession, not a private disposition. It is an action or activity that constitutes and expresses an identity in an ongoing way of life, an active and continuing commitment. It has the sense of living faithfully and loyally, of acting with fidelity.*¹

At one level, believing in John's Gospel is about believing Jesus' word, or accepting his message about himself and his relationship with God (the Father). For example, in

John 5, Jesus exhorts his listeners to accept his word and to believe what he says about himself (5:31-47). He tells Nicodemus that he cannot hope to believe what he says about "heavenly things" if he doesn't believe him about earthly things (John 3:12). A royal official who comes to Jesus asking him to heal his ill son is simply told by Jesus to go home and he will find his son well again. The man believes what Jesus says and heads for home, finding when he arrives that his son has indeed been healed (4:46-54). Again, we are told in 8:30 that "[a]s [Jesus] was saying these things, many believed in him", meaning,

¹ Warren Carter, *John: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 94.

presumably, that they accepted what he had to say and his claims for himself.

Sometimes it is a matter of believing Jesus' words, or even believing in who Jesus is, on account of what he does. On several occasions Jesus exhorts his audience to look at what he is doing or has done, and to allow his works to speak for themselves (10:38; 14:11; cf. 10:25). In some cases, the works that Jesus does seem to have an effect, and people come to put their faith or trust in him on account of what he does (the royal official in John 4:46-54 is one such). Many believed in Jesus when they saw the signs that he did at the Passover (2:23) and, again, many are said to believe in Jesus on account of seeing, or hearing of, the raising of Lazarus (12:10, 11).

It is, however, the essence of what belief is all about that is the evangelist's real

interest. The Gospel is written not simply that readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, but that by believing they may have life in his name (20:31). The theme of the Gospel is that those who believe in Jesus' name will be given power to become God's children (1:12). What does it mean to "believe in his name"?

It is the essence of what belief is all about that is the evangelist's real interest.

those who believe in Jesus' name will be given power to become God's children (1:12). What does it mean to "believe in his name"?

We may begin to understand this by attending to some of Jesus' own words, and to one or two incidents in the Gospel. In John 8:31, 32 Jesus speaks to some Jews who have believed in him, and says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free". The theme of "continuing" (NRSV, or "remaining", the Greek word is a favourite of the writer, and refers to "abiding", "staying put", "dwelling"), is picked up again in the teaching that Jesus gives to his disciples in chapter 14, where Jesus refers to himself

as “the truth” (14:6) and states that those who love him will keep his word and that both he and his Father will come to such ones and make their home with them (14:23).

In John 6, Jesus has been speaking about the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood in order to have eternal life (see 6:52-59, esp. 53, also 41-51). Many of his disciples find this teaching difficult to accept (we might even say, “hard to stomach”, if you’ll excuse the pun). At this point they are unable to continue to “believe” or “remain” in Jesus’ word and they abandon him. So Jesus turns to the twelve disciples and asks, “Do you also wish to go away?” To this Peter replies, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (6:66-69).

Interestingly, it is said of the royal official who believed Jesus’ word that his son would be healed, that when he discovered that his son had indeed been healed, “he himself believed, along with his whole household” (4:53b, this is very reminiscent of what is often said in the Acts of the Apostles). In other words, he first believed or trusted in Jesus’ words that his son would recover. But then, later, his belief moves to another plane. I think that this second reference to his belief is meant to signal that he came to accept who Jesus was and put his trust in Jesus.

To believe in Jesus’ name, then, is to put one’s trust in Jesus. It is to move into a relationship with Jesus, one that accepts what he has to say about himself (or, if you will, others’ testimony about him), and to take up an attitude which expresses itself in love that translates into obeying

Jesus’ commands. Faith, in John’s Gospel, is relational; it is an active commitment to and association with Jesus. Out of this flow the benefits of “eternal life”, or the life of, and with God.

Scholars often make the point that John’s Gospel puts the matter of believing in Jesus in very dualistic terms: we might almost say in “black and white” language. Those who believe are not condemned (3:1), they do not come under judgment but already have moved from death to life (5:24). They are in the light: but those who do not believe are already condemned, live in darkness, and are under judgment (3:18b-20).

Faith, in John’s Gospel, is relational; it is an active commitment to and association with Jesus.

Yet, in the story that the evangelist tells, the matter appears in hues more grey, and much more nuanced.

There are the exemplars of faith who make a fairly rapid transition from ignorance, or unbelief to faith and acceptance of Jesus and who he is (e.g. the royal official, the Samaritan woman in John 4 or the blind man in John 9).² But the character of the faith or belief of some “believers” is somewhat suspect. In 2:23 many believe in Jesus’ name when they see the signs he does at Passover. Yet we are told that Jesus “would not entrust himself to them” (2:24, NRSV). It would seem that their faith is not of the right sort. In John 8 it is the very Jews who have come to believe in Jesus who then proceed to a bitter and acrimonious stand-off with Jesus, and at the end pick up stones to throw at him (8:59). We have already noted that towards the end of chapter six, we have disciples who cannot accept his teaching and so abandon him.

² There is not space to explore these stories further here, but I deal with these in a book, see Derek Tovey, *Jesus, Story of God: John’s Story of Jesus* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007).

Peter’s ringing affirmation of faith is met not with congratulations on Jesus’ part (compare Matt. 16:15-19) but an ominous reference to the fact that one of the twelve will betray Jesus (6:70, 71).

The journey to faith is not always straightforward and easy. Peter stands as an exemplar of this: in a sense, it is not until after Jesus’ resurrection that Peter, having denied Jesus, is brought into a renewed relationship with Jesus through a painful process of reconciliation (21:15-19). Notice that the last words of Jesus to Peter are, “Follow me!” (21:19b; 22). Nicodemus is an intriguing character: and it is difficult to determine whether he ever comes to believe in Jesus, and if so, what the exact nature of that belief is (see 3:1-10; 7:45-52; 19:38-42; and does the evangelist approve? see 12:42-43).

The narrative’s portrayal of belief and faith through its characters and plotline is complex and intriguing. But there is a clear indication of the source of faith (God, see 6:44), and the promise of faith (6:35-37). Believers are like sheep who hear the shepherd’s voice and follow (10:3-5; 27-28). And, for all that there may appear to be a sharp line drawn between those who believe and those who do not, the invitation to faith is proclaimed to all openly and forthrightly, both by Jesus (see 7:37-39; 12:35-36, 44-50) and the evangelist (20:30, 31).

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PAUL AND FAITH: A CHRISTOCENTRIC CONSTRUAL

Matthew Easter

In the second introduction to his famous treatment of the faith of Jesus in the Pauline epistles, Richard B. Hays offers a sobering critique of the present state of faith in many Protestant churches: “[T]here is too much emphasis on individual faith-experience and not enough grounding of our theological discourse in the story of Jesus Christ.”¹ Perhaps no other word in the Christian tradition functions as such a pop-culture catchword than “faith.” Many of us who have been too generous in passing out our email addresses are inundated with forwards filled with pictures of beautiful scenery accompanied by an exhortation to “have faith” or “just believe” or some other quasi-poetic reflection (for example, “Faith is like radar that sees through the fog” or “Faith is the bird that sings when the dawn is still dark”). Hays appears to be correct. The popular depiction of faith as a self-initiated strong belief in the face of contrary circumstances – i.e. “radar that sees through the fog” – causes the deeply Christocentric nature of faith to become ... foggy.

In Paul, we get a much different sense of what faith is. For the past few decades, New Testament scholars have been debating the meaning of seven key phrases in the Pauline corpus, which we summarily call *pistis Christou* (Greek: *pi,stij Cristou/*). *Pistis Christou* or some variation appears in Romans 3:22, 3:26;

¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) lii

Galatians 2:16 (2 times), 2:20, 3:22; and Philippians 3:9. The debate centers on how to translate this Greek phrase. It is either “faith in Christ” or “faith of Christ.” We might call these the “anthropocentric” and “Christocentric” readings, respectively. To complicate things further, the Greek word we translate as “faith” (*pistis*) also means “faithfulness.” So, the Christocentric reading of *pistis Christou* can also be the “faithfulness of Christ.”

The debate is still raging over how best to read Paul’s phrases in these seven key places. Nearly every English translation still reads *pistis Christou* anthropocentrically (although the NRSV does include a footnote mentioning the Christocentric reading). However, a growing number of scholars are starting to read *pistis Christou* as “the faithfulness of Christ.” A full defence of the Christocentric reading of faith in Paul is beyond the scope of this article.² Instead, I reflect on the implications of the “faithfulness of Christ” reading for Paul’s vision of faith and the Christian imagination.

Philippians 2-3, the faith-story of Jesus, and human participation

The Christocentric reading of faith in Paul is about the story of Jesus. In Philippians 2:6-11, Paul narrates Jesus’ obedience³ in terms of initial height, then humility, and then exaltation. The eternally preexistent

Son of God was fully God, but he was not afraid to descend from his height of glory, as if his deity were something that he had stolen. He was rightfully God. But he humbled himself by becoming a human and being obedient to God the Father, even to the point of death on a cross. For this reason, God exalted him and bestowed on him the name, “Lord.”

This is the narrative of Jesus’ faithfulness. Although he had the right to assert authority, he humbled himself. This humble descent in itself, however, is not the attractive part of the story. No, but as Scripture expects elsewhere (cf. Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6, 10; 1 Peter 5:5), God gives

grace to the humble and lifts them up. The story does not end in humble abasement, but in glorious exaltation.

For those participating in the story of Jesus, this is the pattern to expect and

hope for. Paul saw himself living into this same pattern of Jesus’ story. A few verses later, in Philippians 3:4-11, Paul narrates his own faith story in the light of Jesus’ story. Earlier in his life, Paul had everything going for him. He was born into the right family, he was raised right, and he was a Christian-killing zealot. He felt good about himself; he does not come off as a depressed wanderer trying to earn his salvation.⁴ In Philippians 3:6, he goes as far to call himself blameless according

⁴ This is contrary to many conceptions of the path to Christian salvation, which expects a person to recognize on their own or by looking to nature that they are in need of a saviour, and then wander around aimlessly until they find their peace. For more, see Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963) 199-215.

to the righteousness under the law (that is, the Torah). Despite his robust conscience in his former days, he counted all of his credentials as loss (or trash) so that he might gain Christ. This is the first and second stage of Jesus’ story. Paul – to an infinitely lesser degree – was high initially, but he humbled himself and counted all things loss for Christ. He looked forward to sharing in the sufferings of Christ and becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead (i.e. the third stage). Paul was banking his entire life on Jesus and his faithfulness.

This, then, is how we read *pistis Christou* as Christocentric in Philippians 3:9: “and may be found in him, not having my own righteousness from the law, but the [righteousness] through the faithfulness of Christ, the righteousness of God on the basis of faithfulness.” Paul was not counting on the law to give him some sort of righteousness or to deliver him. It is not about Paul; it is not even about Paul’s faith or ability to believe. It is all about what God through Christ has done: the faithfulness of Christ.

Participation in the life-ending and life-giving faithfulness of Christ

Nevertheless, Paul still looks for human response. Still, we should abandon any conception of faith as “our part of the contract.” Faith is not our effort at mustering up enough belief to fulfill somehow our part of the deal. Rather, faith is all about what God through Christ has done. The faithfulness of Christ comes first, and our response comes only after we are confronted with this life-giving story. The appropriate human response, therefore, is to abandon our

reliance on anything apart from Jesus’ faithfulness that we think can deliver us. For Paul, this meant no longer basing his hope on the Law in which he was raised, but on the faithfulness of Christ. This is a dramatic re-imagining⁵ of his identity and locus of hope. J. Louis Martyn helpfully summarizes: “In this event Paul was torn away from the cosmos in which he had lived, and it was torn away from him. For in dying with Christ on Christ’s cross, this zealous Pharisee suffered the loss of the Law, surely his earlier guide to the whole of the cosmos.”⁶

So also we, having been drawn into participation in the faithfulness of Christ by the Holy Spirit, may find perceptions of ourselves and the world dramatically altered. No longer are we defined by our merit, education, national heritage, or anything else. Instead, we bank all of our hope and identity on what God through Christ has done.

The implication for our participation in the faithfulness of Jesus does not stop with our abandonment of self-reliance. As part of a people who have been drawn by the Holy Spirit into participation in Christ, we bear witness to the fact that God has

We bank all of our hope and identity on what God through Christ has done

² For a accessible treatment of the topic, see Douglas A. Campbell, “The Crisis of Faith in Modern New Testament Scholarship,” in *Religious Studies in Dialogue - Essays in Honour of Albert C. Moore*, ed. Maurice Andrew et. al. (Dunedin: Faculty of Theology, 1991)

³ “Obedience” and “faithfulness” are closely related in Paul and elsewhere in the NT.

⁵ To borrow a phrase from Richard Hays’ treatment of Paul and Scripture, Paul in this case is looking for a “conversion of the imagination” (Richard B. Hays, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) Richard B. Hays, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁶ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, Anchor Bible, vol. 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 280

ushered in a new creation: "If anyone is in Christ: new creation!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ has defeated the powers of sin and death on the cross, and as a people who have died with this Christ, we are sent into the world to be God's ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21). This call

takes many practical forms: evangelistic preaching, Christian social action, intercessory prayer, etc. However one feels called of God to act, the important point is to do so faithfully as a part of the Christian Body.

Since faith is not a simple moral virtue to which individuals can cling, but participation in the life-ending and life-giving story of the faithfulness of Christ, we no longer act as disembodied individuals. When we give a cup of water and a piece of bread to drunken university students, we do so as a part of God's team of reconciling ministers. When we pray for those who are suffering with mental illness, we pray alongside countless others in the Church who pray through the same Spirit who draws us into Christ. When we share the good news of Jesus with someone who is hurting, we speak as a representative mouthpiece for the Body of Christ. This becomes quite a responsibility, but fortunately we do not work from our own abilities to believe, but from our shared participation in the faith-story of the One whom the Father has raised.

Conclusion

Paul's construal of faith is not a cute email-forward faith. Faith is not something like "an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking." No, faith is participation in the death-and-life story of Jesus' faithfulness. In sharing

in the sufferings of Christ, we can look forward to sharing in the glories of Christ. As Paul writes in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ. And I am no longer living, but Christ is living in me. And the life I live now in the flesh I live by

Faith is not something like "an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking". No, faith is participation in the death-and-life story of Jesus' faithfulness.

means of faithfulness: the faithfulness of the Son of the God, the one who loved me and offered himself for me" (2:19b-20). Because of the faithfulness of Jesus, we can find hope in the Scripture: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

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... just to touch the hem of his garment
Matthew 9:21 The Message
Jo O'Hara

QUOTES ON FAITH

Any spirituality of faith needs to see it as a lifelong adventure with many tones, as the friendship with Christ blossoms into mature discipleship. It is more a drama of companionship and vision than a theory, more an event than a philosophy. It is a lived adventure with alternations of light and dark...

Michael Gallagher. *Faith – in The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*.

An attitude of wonder

Years ago my undergraduate philosophy professor ... began the semester with an observation that I never forgot and that has deeply influenced me. Instead of Descartes' stance of doubt, he urged us to approach life and the world in an attitude of wonder. An attitude of wonder begins with appreciation rather than suspicion, acknowledging the limits of what we know. It is an openness to possibilities. David James Duncan defines wonder brilliantly:

... wondering is unknowing, experienced as pleasure.

An attitude of wonder suggests a stance of openness, a beginner's mind, an embrace of surprises, an ability to live with a degree of uncertainty and unknowing. An attitude of wonder requires that we look anew at the familiar, that we stop taking the world around us for granted. An attitude of wonder acknowledges how little we really know. An attitude of wonder is essential if we are truly to experience the creation and the creator.

Howard Zehr. *The Little Book of Contemplative Photography*. Good Books 2005. 33

" ... you cannot produce trust just like you cannot 'do' humility. It either is or is not. Trust is the fruit of a relationship in which

you know you are loved. Because you do not know that I love you, you cannot trust me."

Sarayu speaking to Mackenzie in *The Shack* - Wm. Paul Young. Windblown Media. 2007. 126.

Doubting is not a sin. Nor does it denote a lack of faith. Lack of faith is a pure and simple disbelief. Doubting is an invitation to enter into the mystery more deeply, to go beyond the superficial.

John Aurelio

In His Presence

Here I am Lord, my mind like a jar of
muddy water
swirling madly round and round,
flotsam and jetsam eddying
up and down on top.

As I sit quietly
in Your presence
may I sense and feel
the mad rush and whirl of life
gradually subside,
heart-rate slow down,
breathing ease,
and the flotsam and jetsam
of my thoughts and plans
sink to rest
like mud to the bottom of the jar
leaving clear, clear water
on top,
and mind and heart
calm and collected
ready to face the day.

Joy Carter
Moments of Grace - 39

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son,
our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

New Zealand Prayer Book. 1989. 461

BISHOP POLYCARP

St John the apostle, late in life, taught a young man named Polycarp the way of Christ. Polycarp became a leading figure in the early church and was ordained Bishop of Smyrna with a very fruitful ministry. Only one of his many letters has survived, a letter to the Philippian Church.

In old age (around 155 AD) he was tried by the Roman authorities and offered leniency and his life if he would deny Christ and declare Caesar as Lord. This he refused to do. They threatened him with savage animals and with burning at

the stake. "Have respect for your old age," the Proconsul said, urging him to repent and to swear by the "genius of Caesar" (an oath of allegiance to the Emperor). "Swear, and I will release you; curse the Christ."

Polycarp replied with these famous words, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?" "... hear plainly that I am a Christian. And if you are willing to learn the doctrine of Christianity, grant me a day and listen to me." Then, threatened with wild animals and fire, he continued, "You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for you don't know of the fire of the judgement to come, and the fire of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring what you will."

So they brought firewood and were going to nail him to a stake when he said, "Let me be as I am. He who gives me strength to endure the fire will give me strength to remain in the fire unmoved without being secured with nails."

"When he had prayed, the fire was lit and a huge flame flashed forth: and we who saw it saw a marvel. ... The fire took the shape of a ship's sail billowing in the wind, and it made a great wall around the martyr's body; and there was the body in the midst, like a loaf being baked or like gold and silver being tried in the furnace."

Adapted from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, a letter from the Church of Smyrna. 155 AD.

In Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*. 2nd ed. 1963. 12-16.

The Editor

FAITH

Faith's a funny concept
A bit nebulous, really
believing something
you can't see

As God-people
it's supposed to be
part of our vocab
part of what makes us tick

Noah had it
as he built a huge ship
in the middle of a desert

Abraham had it
as he took a sharp knife
and prepared to kill his dream

Moses had it
as he led thousands
on a 40 year walk-about

They weren't delusionary dimwits
just people who heard
your voice, God
and acted on it

I wish I were as sure
about doing things
as they were
but either I have
hearing problems
or you've stopped talking

Of course, it's all written down
but I can't just grab bits
and force them to fit
like Cinderella's sisters

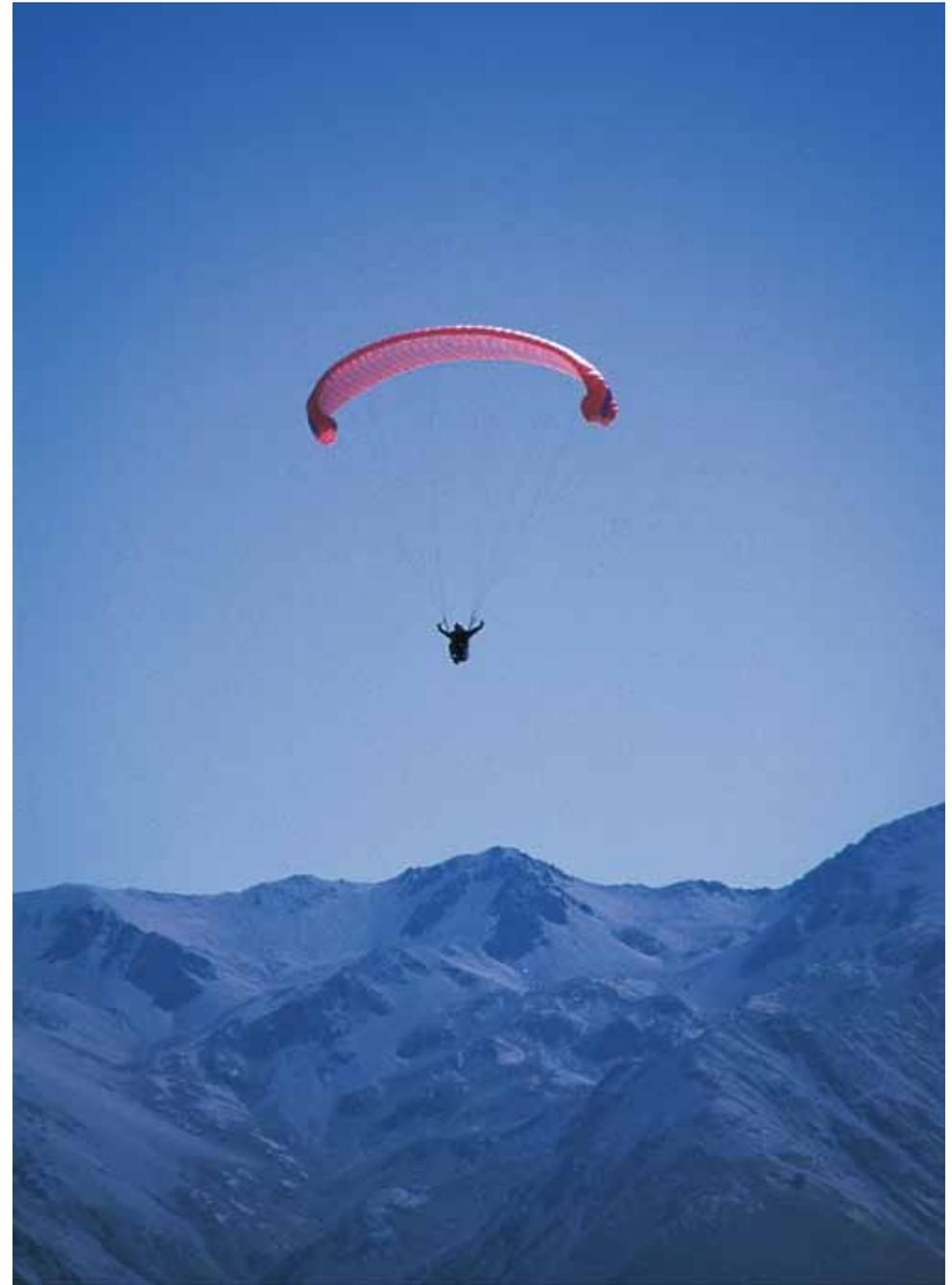
Maybe it's not certainty
in what I should be doing
that's important
Rather, a deepening faith
in who you are, God

Knowing that the one
I'm hanging onto
the one who holds
my hopes and dreams
is still strongly in business

Believing that you really
mean what you say, Jesus
when you tell us
you love us
you're with us
you'll never leave us

Focusing on you, God
helps me believe
that my parachute
will definitely open
as I jump from
the safety of today
into the unknown
of every tomorrow

Anna Johnstone



Paragliding over Porter's Pass
Photo by Anna Johnstone

KIERKEGAARD ON FAITH

Murray Rae

Caricatures and misrepresentations of the Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard, abound, and most common among them is the view that Kierkegaard is a fideist. He holds the view, it is alleged, that Christianity can be believed in only by virtue of a blind 'leap of faith'. Accompanying the allegation is the further accusation that, for Kierkegaard, Christian faith is inherently irrational and absurd and one can believe it only by a sacrifice of the intellect, that is, by faith! As with many caricatures, the little bit of truth contained in this view of Kierkegaard is distorted by a great deal of error. The truth must be disentangled from the error in order for us to gain a better appreciation of what Kierkegaard really does have to say about faith.

Kierkegaard lived in the early part of the nineteenth century, from 1813 to 1855. He lived in an era known as Denmark's 'Golden Age', an age marked by the flourishing of Danish culture and the ready adoption of the latest trends in philosophy and theology emerging from German universities in particular. It was also the era of Christendom, in which, on account of the close allegiance in Denmark between the Lutheran church and the state, it was possible to believe one was a Christian just by being born in Denmark and by then going along with the crowd. Christian faith, it was sometimes thought, could be comfortably fitted into the structure of middle class society and demands nothing of us other than being a good citizen in a supposedly Christian

nation. To Kierkegaard's fury, the clergy and the theologians, on account of their privilege as state employees, commonly went along with this impoverished notion and contributed thus to faith 'being sold off at bargain price'. To this tragic misconception, Kierkegaard felt called to offer a corrective.

To begin with, Kierkegaard emphasised that Christian faith is not just the same thing as being a good citizen, as living a 'good life'. Plenty of people do that without any allegiance to Christian faith. But the life of a good, especially middle-class, citizen bears little resemblance to the kind of life that Jesus lived and that resulted, in the end, in his being put to death on a cross. 'No', says, Kierkegaard; there is a radical discontinuity between being a Christian and going along with the crowd. It is the discontinuity signalled in Jesus' 'harsh' sayings about selling all your possessions, giving the money to the poor, and then coming to follow him. It is the discontinuity reflected in the insistence that one must hate even one's father and mother in order to follow him, or in the insistence that one must take up one's cross. It is the discontinuity famously expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who learned much from Kierkegaard) that 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.'¹ That, of course, is what is signified in Christian baptism, the beginning of a life shaped and formed in the company of the crucified and risen one.

Kierkegaard's description of this transition as a 'leap of faith' emphasises the discontinuity involved in setting aside

one's old life and beginning a new life of faith in the crucified and risen Christ. Being born anew is something radically different from being born in Denmark. A gulf lies in between! Kierkegaard was aware, however, that, theologically speaking, the 'leap' is not the best way to describe how it is that one traverses the gulf between common-garden good citizenship and Christian discipleship. Kierkegaard himself did not invent the idea of a 'leap of faith'. It had been used before him by the philosophers, Lessing, Kant and Hegel. In Kierkegaard's hands, however, the phrase is employed principally to represent what Christian conversion looks like from the perspective of unbelief. We must note also that Kierkegaard published many of his works pseudonymously and it is the pseudonyms, rather than Kierkegaard himself, who look upon conversion as a leap of faith. The phrase is used in particular by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus who, in a 'thought experiment' published as *Philosophical Fragments*,² sets out to discover how he may attain the blessedness that Christianity promises. Climacus is a genuine seeker after that blessedness, but he is also a man of his age, an Enlightenment man who supposes that knowledge of truth, and the blessedness that flows from such knowledge, is most likely to be attained by a disciplined and dispassionate exercise of reason. The trouble is, Climacus discovers, the deliberations of reason won't help him arrive at the confession that in Jesus of Nazareth we are encountered by God in person, nor to discover that precisely in that encounter our weakness and

our sinfulness is forgiven and we are embraced by a divine love that alone can be the source of a truly human life. That realisation, sadly for Climacus, is not the outcome of rational calculation.

Neither is it the outcome of meticulous historical investigation into the life of Jesus. Kierkegaard was a contemporary of D.F. Strauss who famously instituted a 'quest for the historical Jesus' under the assumption that the historians would determine, once and for all, the significance and truth of the enigmatic figure from Nazareth. But, after extensive consideration, Climacus finds little help from that endeavour. The historians tell of a good teacher, a moral exemplar, a revolutionary, but they do not tell of one who in his own person is the very presence of God.

Climacus tries a third time to engage the resources of human ingenuity, this time drawing upon the Romantic Spirit and the resources of imagination advocated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, a widely influential theologian of Kierkegaard's time. But again Climacus is disappointed. Imagination deals only in possibilities. It cannot confirm the actuality of the God-man. It cannot confirm the claim of faith that the lowly one from Nazareth who appears in the form of a servant is the revelation of God's glory. It cannot confirm that the crucified one is indeed both saviour and Lord. What is more, the quest for truth through feeling and imagination is vulnerable always to Feuerbach's charge that it is all just wishful thinking.

Climacus, therefore, is stuck! He has deployed all the resources at his human disposal but cannot convince himself of the truth that Christianity proclaims. It

There is a radical discontinuity between being a Christian and going along with the crowd.

Must he take a leap of faith out over the abyss of uncertainty?

¹ Bonhoeffer wrote, of course, in an age that was not attuned to the need for inclusive language.

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

appears that he will have to let go of his cherished certainties, and of the resources he has brought to the inquiry. They have not helped him, except by bringing him face to face with the strange, even offensive, claim of the gospel that cannot be assimilated to his present world-view and that is inaccessible to his preferred modes of inquiry. What is he to do? Must he take a leap of faith out over the abyss of uncertainty? Must he leave behind the carefully calculated logic of his life thus far and venture beyond the certainties and the securities in which he has placed his trust? Well, yes! That is the invitation placed before us by the gospel. It is an invitation to trust, an invitation to embark upon a life of faith that has for security only the word and the promise of one who says, 'leave your nets and follow me.'

Is it a blind leap of faith that is required? Climacus thinks so, but he looks upon the matter from much the same perspective as the rich young man, who, when asking what must he do to be saved, was concerned above all, for what he might have to give up (Luke 18:18-23). The venture, for him, appears to be too risky and involves the sacrifice of far too much. And that, suggests Kierkegaard, is precisely what faith looks like from the perspective of unbelief.

Climacus, however, is not quite done. Through the deliberations of *Philosophical Fragments* and in a subsequent book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus learns that the gospel offers something in addition to the claim that the lowly one is saviour and Lord. The Christian gospel also tells that in the matter of discipleship we are not left to our own devices. Everything, indeed, depends upon divine assistance. The gospel has language for this divine assistance³: grace

and the gift of the Spirit are named as the crucial conditions for understanding the Truth and for living within it. They are the crucial conditions for this life of faith that Climacus only dimly apprehends. They are the conditions by which we are held fast by the Word who has appeared among us as the God-man. So it is not the case, strictly speaking, that faith is a leap, a feat of human prowess. Faith, rather, is a gift, a divine gift, given in the moment of encounter with Christ himself, and sustained in us by grace. In the matter of faith, as in the matter of our life itself, we are wholly in God's debt. That is not a fearful thing, for, as Kierkegaard elsewhere observes, it is a joyous thing to be wholly in the debt of the God who is love, and who deals with us only in love.

Faith is a gift. That is the first thing. But, says Kierkegaard, faith is also a task. Faith, he insists, is a mode of being, a form of life. Faith is *persistence* in the task of following Jesus. That means, the nets really do have to be left

behind; a new life really does have to begin. The certainties and the securities of the old life can serve us no more and we must persevere in a life in which the Word of the God-man is trusted above all. Kierkegaard thought that such a life would put the person of faith out of step with the world. Increasingly he believed that it would produce suffering, for faith is despised and rejected in the world. The task of faith, however, is to persevere.

Here we must introduce another theme that is prominent in Kierkegaard's

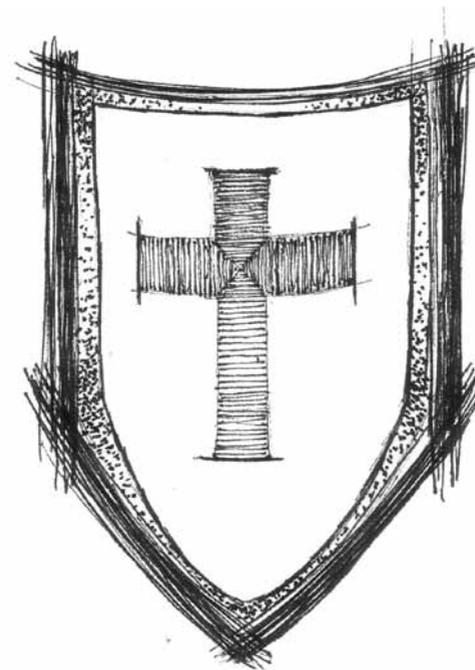
³ See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. 1, ed and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 258.

writings. The task of faith is one in which we often fail. Christians manage only falteringly to follow in the way of Christ. What are we to make of that? We may react—and we are often inclined to react—by lowering the bar, by supposing that the life of faith is something much less demanding than the way set before us in Christ. We may make faith out to be our own particular versions of good citizenship, perhaps with church on Sundays thrown in. And thus we, and our world, remain fundamentally unchanged. Kierkegaard saw that accommodation in his own age, also in himself, and, as mentioned above, he rebukes his age for thus selling Christian faith off at bargain price. What is needed, by contrast, is an honest admission, an admission that we

fail in the task of faith as it is set before us in Christ.

And then; then we find that God is all mercy. Then we find that the gift of faith is restored to us, the gift, that is, of contemporaneity⁴ with the God-man in whose company we find the truth, the life, and the blessedness of God. Christ is not only the prototype, the one in whose way we are called to follow. He is also the redeemer, the one who again and again shows mercy, who forgives, and who calls us again and again to follow him. Faith is the life lived in obedience to that call.

⁴ 'Contemporaneity' was one of Kierkegaard's favourite terms for the company that the disciple keeps with Christ.



And take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
(*Ephesians 6:16*)

FAITH: CONTEMPLATING A JOURNEY

Paul Fromont

Faith, Fowler and a Jesus-Shaped Journey

In the beginning was the road. The long and winding road...¹

The November 1995 "Spiritual Growth Ministries Newsletter" took as its theme, "The growth of faith". It offered a "synopsis of [James] Fowler's stages of faith", a series of developmental "faith stages" that "encourage growth away from the limitations of our current place" on a continuum of faith.

This was my first encounter with the work of Professor James Fowler² and an understanding of "faith" as "primarily about 'making meaning'". I encountered faith as "a process", a dynamic, and an "orientation". Faith was something that grew and "transitioned". His was an understanding of faith that was informed and shaped by developmental psychology.

Fowler was able to describe "faith" in the following terms:

"...I believe faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith. How these capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and

what kinds of environments we grow in. Faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual and nurture. Faith is also shaped by initiatives from beyond us and other people, initiatives of spirit or grace. How these latter initiatives are recognised and imaged, or unperceived and ignored, powerfully affects the shape of faith in our lives."³

[Faith] is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence.⁴

This was quite different from the understanding of "faith" that had gotten me to that stage in my Christian journey. To that point I'd understood "faith" in a multilayered sense. One layer had to do with faith as being about "trust" (cf. Rom 1:17, Rom 15:13, Titus 3:8); another layer was "belief" (the act of believing, cf. Rom 1:16, Rom 4:18, and Rom 4:24); another was the faith itself that is "believed" (its content and contours). Faith was something that was able to be taught or passed on (cf. Col 2:7). It could be expressed as a story⁵, one that could be lived into and out of. Equally too it was something that could be "abandoned" (cf. 1 Tim 4:1).

³ James M. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p. xiii.

⁴ Ibid p. 14.

⁵ Importantly however for me is that, "...no story worth being told ever stands still or lies in a book all silent and neat. It wiggles into your eyes and ears and turns over in your belly and mouth. It is quiet for a while only because it is growing like a seed...A story... is something you look through to see things more clearly..." Glenn Colquhoun, in his introduction to *Amazing Tales of Aotearoa*, Raupo Publishers, 2008.

Faith was also a *virtue* and a way of life, one that is characterised by faithfulness and trust.⁶

It also spoke of God's relation to us, i.e. God's covenant faithfulness.

Fowler's understanding of "faith" was something I remixed appreciatively, yet also critically, with an intentional Christian faith commitment. In particular I was interested in the ways that faith, rather than being a *fixed* belief system, might actually transition, change and thus *grow* as it remained open to questions, doubt - a willingness to explore both - and the disruption (and oftentimes necessary "penance") that comes as a result of deep challenges to faith (not least, to *my* faith) by the "other" who is not like me/us, and the circumstances and contexts within which I/we live.⁷

We need to expand the areas of uncertainty in our lives, not certainty...

⁶ For a very useful theological expansion of these "layers" see NT. Wright, *Faith, Virtue, Justification, and the Journey to Freedom* published in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, Grand Rapids: Eedrmans, 2008.

⁷ In this sense, and perhaps more importantly for Christian "faith" and spiritual formation (in times such as we presently find ourselves in), I wonder if rather than understanding "faith development" as something almost linear - something that simply "matures" through stages, a more helpful framework is that offered by Walter Brueggemann's cycle of "orientation", "disorientation" (the result of *disruption* by, for example, questions and experience), and "reorientation".

⁸ Alan Jones in his farewell interview at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. Available online here http://www.gracecathedral.org/forum/for_20090125.shtml See also his book *Journey Into Christ*, 1977.

We need to deepen our bewilderment about existence.⁸

From the perspective of "the psychology of human development" faith was also inviting me on a journey, on a Jesus-shaped quest for deeper experiences of God, life and living. It was drawing me, undoing me, and "unraveling my certainties", though not rendering me faith-less. Instead, as time has gone

by, this faith-journey has expanded and enriched the content and shape of my experience of faith. It has helped me navigate the difficult and oftentimes paradoxical inner and outer terrain of transformation and human becoming.⁹

"Knowing who God is for oneself means that *you are on a path of discovering who you are and who other people are, which is always in a sense leading you deeper and deeper into mystery. This is not because you are continually more baffled, but because you're aware of an ever-greater plenitude of being which is beyond our conceiving. You are led deeper and deeper into this, but what matters is not your comprehensive understanding, but the fact you are a follower ...*" (Emphasis, mine)¹⁰

(Christian) Faith, I was finding, had as its end a "specifically Christ-shaped refashioning of a person from the heart

⁹ So, for example, Rowan Williams could say of poet/priest George Herbert that within his faith he embraced "*emotional ambiguity and doubt*", **but** did so "*on the basis of a deep and sophisticated doctrinal conviction.*"

¹⁰ Janet Martin Soskice in Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*.

¹¹ NT. Wright.

and the mind, outward".¹¹ And in this refashioning, questions and uncertainty were playing a vitally important role as they become stepping stones on a transformative journey. Faith, like God, is concerned with enlarging our lives, not making them smaller.

Faith: Ongoing conversion and being willing to live with questions

So how might I want to describe, what on the surface of it, sounds like a mismatch: faith and questions?

Poet Rainer Maria Rilke gets as close as anyone I know to describing something of this relationship. We should, he suggests

"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything, live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live some distant day into the answer."¹²

Good advice! In often surprising ways, questions, paradox, mystery and doubt prove themselves vitally important to faith. They encourage a "transformation and intensification of faith" when all too often "faith" is used to fuel a flight from intensification and depth to rigidity.

However, "faith" is actually a dynamic that should deepen over the course of one's life journey. It invites *ongoing* conversion, experiences of which occur as the result of a willingness to honestly acknowledge our questions, while also being willing to follow them and see where they lead.

Faith-development results from a willingness to allow some dimensions of our faith and belief structure to die; to in

¹² Rainer Maria Rilke.

effect be pruned so that there might always be the possibility of new or deeper faith.

"I strongly believe that doubt is not indicative of a faith that is weak. Doubt is inevitable. It's human and it's honest. To have the freedom to voice that doubt without being judged is so important. To have the courage to explore the doubt, that is what gives faith its strength. Faith has to be dynamic, not static, because life grinds on and its experiences continually mould us. Our faith has to be able to incorporate what we experience of our world otherwise it is based on nothing that has any meaning to us."¹³

Faith's Invitation

Christian faith is, as Rowan Williams helpfully describes it, "essentially about a path to human maturity"¹⁴, though this path is far from straightforward and linear. And we do not become "mature" in our faith without a willingness to change often:

Fear not that thy life shall come to an end, but rather that it shall ever have a beginning.

Growth is the only evidence of life.

If we are intended for great ends, we are called to great hazards.

If we insist on being as sure as is conceivable... we must be content to creep along the ground, and never soar.

Let us act on what we have, since we have not what we wish.

Nothing would be done at all if one waited until one could do it so well that no one could find fault with it.

To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.¹⁵

¹³ Attributed to "Anne Marie", source: Alan Jamieson.

¹⁴ Rowan Williams.

¹⁵ Cardinal John Henry Newman.

So faith's invitation is to be, in the words of poet T.S.Eliot, "*still and still moving into another intensity...*"¹⁶ It is to be willing, like Abraham, to journey into uncharted lands; to "leave the surface and without leaving the world, plunge into God"¹⁷, to plunge ever more deeply into the "darkness"¹⁸ of this world, of our own lives, and of the mystery of God in whose love we are held, and by means of which we become more fully human and more joyfully alive.

But there's more here than just that we should become more fully human and more joyfully alive; as important as those invitations are. Teilhard is clear. "Yes", "leave the surface", the superficial, the illusory, and the shallow and allow our lives and our humanity to be deepened. "Yes", "plunge into God" and find one's truest and deepest self by losing oneself in God. But, importantly too, do so "without leaving the world". Do so without losing a self-giving and practical concern and love for the "other" (1 Jn 3:16-18).

This faith journey is a Godward journey in Christ, an inward journey, and an outward journey. But, paradoxically, it is *one* journey. For as Thomas Merton reminds us, "*If we attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressiveness, our own ego-centered ambitions . . .*"¹⁹

¹⁶ T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*, in *Four Quartets*.

¹⁷ Teilhard de Chardin SJ. (1881-1955)

¹⁸ Cf. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, 1995.

¹⁹ Quoted in *Seeds* (selected and edited) by Robert Inchausti (Boston, MA, Shambhala Publications) 2002, p. 131.

FAITH AT MIDLIFE

Lynne Baab

Three common midlife experiences have significant implications for the Christian faith journey. I'll give you brief illustrations of those experiences, then discuss each of the three in more detail.

I was 41 when one of my closest friends died. The same year, I had a life-threatening lung disease with effects that lasted for the better part of a year. Only a few years later, I was back in bed with a serious liver disease after shoulder surgery. Throughout human life, we experience an assortment of losses, but at midlife those losses often seem to accelerate. Job issues, family crises, health problems, and deaths seem to stack up in the midlife years, and sometimes it feels like our faith can't quite keep up with the demands made on it.

A second common midlife experience is new and enriching discoveries. My husband was always good at drawing and had longed to learn to use colour. But he never had time. In his early fifties, right about the time our nest was emptying, he took a watercolour painting class. Whole worlds of colour opened up to him. Now retired, painting is a major part of his daily life.

Thirdly, midlife for many is a time of questioning, in part because of these losses and discoveries. A friend of mine, as she approached her forties, found herself questioning the relevance of the church. She had experienced several significant challenges, and she felt hurt that the people in her church seemed to abandon her. Where was the Christian community when she needed it? Where was God? Why did she feel so abandoned and discouraged? Disconcerting and

challenging questions are common at midlife.

When is midlife? Some experts define it as 35-55. Some observers say it's most likely to begin when there are teenage children in the house. Others say it happens whenever we start to look back as well as ahead, wondering if we have lived the first half of our life wisely and pondering what we want to do in the second half of life.

Research shows that only about ten percent of people have a full-blown midlife crisis. But many people experience the "messengers of midlife": increased tears, sleeplessness, and a sense of loss that can be focused on many different areas, including work, family life and personal life. These messengers are a call to look deeper and spend some time nurturing the inner life of faith.

Losses

Losses at midlife can happen to us or to those we love. Many people at midlife are sandwiched between parents whose health is declining and children who have entered the challenging teenage years or who are leaving the nest.

Losses can also relate to the way we view ourselves. Some people at midlife talk about the loss of certainty. They feel less positive they know how things should be done or life should be lived. They are less certain that God works in the way they have been taught at church. Some people experience the loss of illusions about themselves as they discover they aren't the great parent or partner they always thought they would be. Job challenges can create this sense of loss as we have to face up to the fact that we aren't going to

set the world on fire professionally. For those who didn't marry or have children, or for those whose marriage or parenting relationships didn't turn out as they hoped, that sense of loss accumulates.

For many at midlife, our physical bodies betray us. Illnesses, weight challenges, and reduced fitness are common. Suddenly physical health requires a lot of intentional action on our part. It doesn't come easily or automatically any longer.

Research shows that only about ten percent of people have a full-blown midlife crisis.

All these losses require a kind of mourning. We know that God comforts those who mourn, but it takes time and effort to receive that comfort and find ways to renew our trust in God. Giving ourselves

the space to feel the intensity of loss is a humiliating exercise, and many find it easier just to keep racing along, attempting to ignore the losses that are piling up.

Discoveries

In the decade of my forties, when I was mourning the death of my close friend and having a series of medical adventures, I also discovered I could write books. Almost nothing compares with the joy I find in writing. In that same decade, I was ordained as a Presbyterian minister and began to discover my professional path after being a homemaker for much of my twenties and thirties.

The big and "small" discoveries of midlife can have a profound impact. One of my friends took up ballroom dancing in her forties. Dancing makes her smile like nothing else in her life. Another friend started competing in triathlons and then found great satisfaction in helping other women train and develop their physical strength. Scrapbooking, making cards, quilting, gardening, painting and drawing, and writing poetry and fiction

are some of the many creative endeavors that people discover at midlife.

Many people at midlife describe finding God in nature and in creative activities in whole new ways. They find their faith enriched and deepened. However, the juxtaposition of the losses and discoveries at midlife can be bewildering. The midlife journey of faith requires time. Time to ponder the losses and receive comfort from God, time to engage in new activities that bring joy and connection with God.

Questions

One of the bestselling Christian books on midlife is called *Halftime*. The author, Bob Buford, uses the metaphor of halftime in a football or basketball game to describe the kind of pause that is required at midlife. The pause is caused by the common drive to stop and look back on the first half of life and ask some questions. Did I spend my time wisely? Did I do the things God was calling me to do?

The halftime pause allows a person to look ahead as well. I'm going to have to start taking care of my body better. How can I best do that? My parents are going to need more of my time and attention. How can I make that work? My kids are getting ready to leave the nest. What will life be like for me without kids around? I've never had children and have passed the age of fertility, and I'm looking ahead at the rest of life knowing I'll never be a parent. What kinds of relationships should I nurture in order to avoid being a lonely person in my old age?

And, most profoundly, where is God in all of this? The loss of certainty that accompanies midlife for many people often includes a loss of certainty about faith. The things we were certain about

in early adulthood seem to have evolved into shades of gray. In the midst of uncertainty, what truths about God can I cling to? Can I find new ways of drawing near to God that will bring richness in the second half of life?

Take Some Time

I have talked with dozens of people about their midlife journeys, and almost every one of them talked about the drive to spend more time alone and more time in reflection. That drive makes sense. If a person is coping with a bewildering array of losses and discoveries, some time and space are necessary in order to discern where God's hand is working in the midst of it all. If new spiritual paths will have to be found, some time and space will be necessary for experimentation and discovery.

People at midlife talked with me about finding God in nature in new ways. They talked about their faith moving from head to heart; many found joy and comfort in reading the variety of emotions expressed in the Psalms. They talked about visiting monasteries and retreat centres and learning

to practise contemplative prayer and other spiritual disciplines. They talked about finding Benedictine and Celtic forms of spirituality helpful and enriching. They talked about building sabbath rest into their lives in new ways.

They talked about a journey of self-discovery that enabled them to affirm the way God had made them. This enabled them to make wiser choices about choosing commitments.

They talked about growing in their embrace of mystery, learning to hold onto what they know of God, but also being

willing to rest in the deep reality that we simply can't know everything. They talked about the growing significance of community. While spending more time alone, they also grew in finding the places of human connection that nurture faith for them.

For many people, the second half of life is rich and full. Slowing down at halftime to reflect and nurture new paths of discipleship builds a foundation for joy and fruitfulness in the later years of life. Mourning losses in God's presence, watching for new discoveries, and being honest about questions are three of the valuable tasks of midlife that bring good fruit and deepened faith in the second half of life.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND FAITH

Adrienne Thompson

A number of years ago I was companioning two women who shared a name. They had other things in common. Neither was married, both had partners, both were adult immigrants to New Zealand. They were also different: one of them was in her 40s, the other in her 20s, one a full-time mother, the other advancing a high powered career, one a 'missionary kid', the other with almost no church background.

The name they shared was not Mary or Marie but to preserve their privacy that is what I will call them. I don't want to lose the serendipity of their common name however, because it continues to feel significant to me that over the same period of a few months I walked with Mary towards the death of explicitly Christian faith and with Marie through the gestation and towards the birth of Christian commitment.

I met Marie at a Week of Guided Prayer. At the first gathering of participants and prayer guides each of us introduced ourselves and said what we hoped to gain out of the week. Marie's response was in stark contrast to the other 20 or so people there. 'I've come along to this week of prayer,' she said 'to find out whether there's a God to pray to.' It was with some trepidation that I introduced myself to her as her assigned prayer guide.

At our first meeting I had hopes that God might have already met Marie in a way that she could recognise and identify. I asked her about the 'guided meditation' at the group gathering the previous day. 'That was appalling,' she said. 'So manipulative.' (I had facilitated this prayer experience for the group.)

So, inauspiciously, began our encounters. In Marie I met intelligence, honesty and a scathing rejection of jargon or platitudes. At the end of the week of guided prayer she had no experience of God to report but we had begun to develop a friendship. We continued to meet not for spiritual direction but for coffee and conversation. At that point she described herself, 'I am passionately committed to being a pilgrim.'

During these months I was also meeting with Mary. She too was intelligent and honest, but unlike Marie she came from a strongly evangelical background. She knew all the answers, she'd had all the experience but she was disillusioned with church and faith. This didn't worry me. I've several times accompanied people who gradually shook off cloying or damaging experiences and rediscovered a depth of life and meaning in their relationship with God. Not Mary. I still remember the moment of her decision to lay down and abandon her Christian faith. 'That's it. I'm not going to carry on with it any more.'

There was a look of relief on her face and a note of finality in her voice.

Mary terminated our meetings from that point. Marie however continued to read, think and talk with many Christians, and at a slow and gradual pace developed a deeply Christian faith.

I struggled with Mary's decision. I felt blank and disappointed. Almost always in my experience of offering spiritual direction God has 'come to the party'. This time God didn't appear to be showing up. I couldn't help asking the question: was it my fault?

And in the early months with Marie it was the same. It felt like a hard and at times pointless struggle to hang in there as she voiced her disbelief. I wondered often whether we could not just let it rest and enjoy the coffee.

All of us who accompany others know as axiomatic that it is their journey; we simply walk with them a few steps of the way. In practice of course, walking alongside means walking together. I lean into my own faith as I hear others' stories of belief or unbelief. I click into my own sense of God as I connect with their sense of God's presence or absence.

If you tap a crystal glass it will ring. If you place two crystal glasses side by side and tap one of them the second glass will vibrate with a small ring of sympathy.¹ In the same way, being alongside another person in intense and empathetic listening causes me to 'chime' with what moves them.

My interaction with Mary and Marie was very specifically about faith - questions of God's being, God's goodness, God's concern - or unconcern - with persons,

¹ I'm told this is true. Unfortunately I don't own any crystal glasses to check it out. It's a nice analogy however.

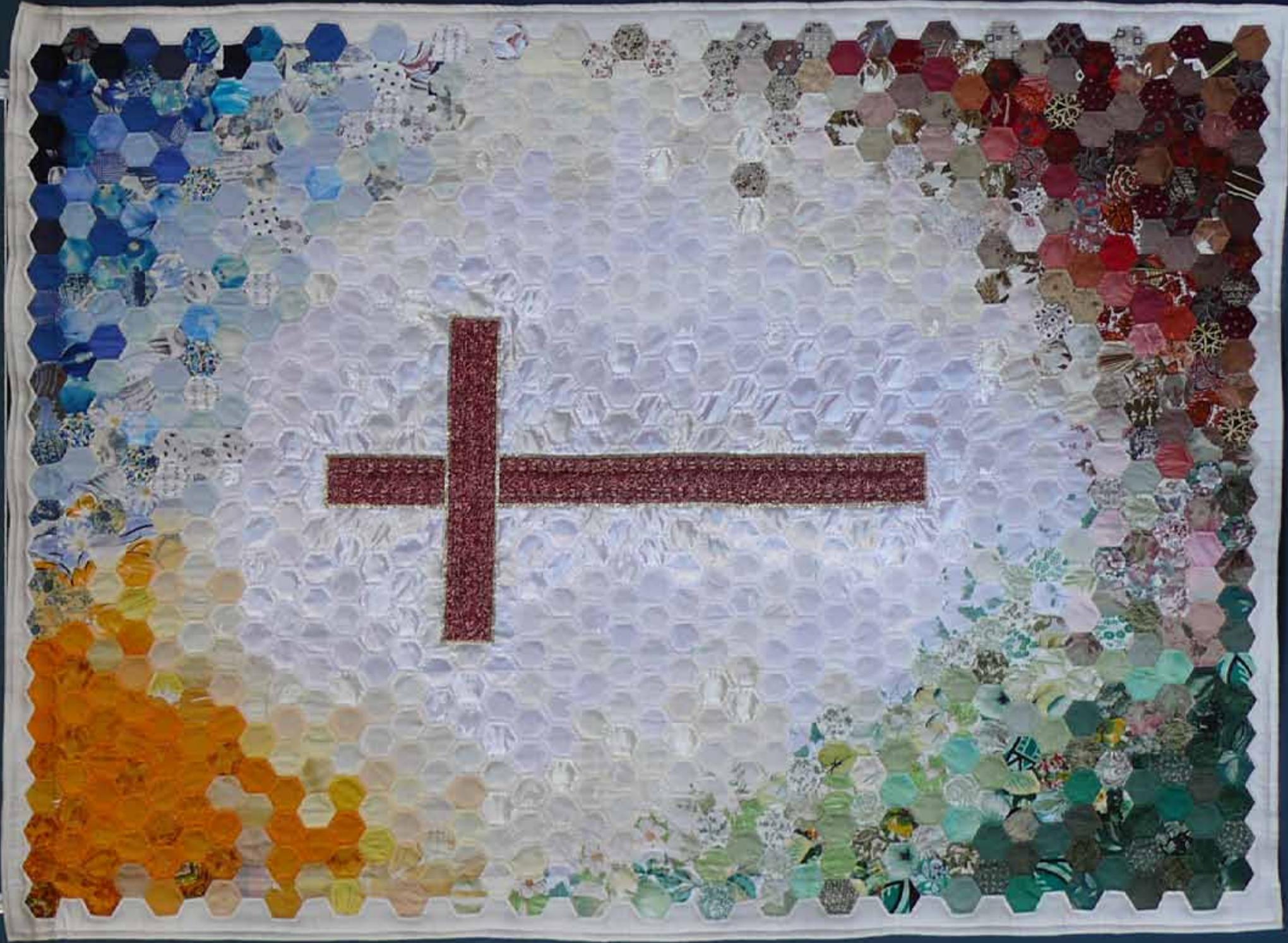
God's demands on their allegiance. Listening to each of them became a discipline of honouring their experience and questions and discoveries and at the same time holding onto and honouring my own experience of God. It was hard.

Mary's decision to give up her faith tested mine. It was another reminder - perhaps I needed it - to trust the mystery of God's ways. Even though it felt like closing a book halfway through the crucial chapter.

At the time Mary ended her meetings with me Marie was still a long way from confessing Christian faith. But I kept hearing new chapters of her story as we continued to meet for several years - most recently that she has found a spiritual director who is helping her repair her distorted image of God. I'm consoled and encouraged by her journey.

And while I've heard no more from Mary I've recently received a gift in the form of another story. For a couple of years I've talked with a young man who, while he'd explicitly rejected Christianity, still liked to meet with me and reflect on what was going on in his life. With Duncan, as with Mary and Marie, I tried to respect his unfaith and at the same time let my listening be informed by my own faith. A few weeks ago Duncan made an appointment with me and in the course of our conversation casually informed me that he had 'become a Christian again'. I'm waiting with interest to hear the next chapter.

Walking with people who are on the edges and sometimes (by their own definition) beyond Christian faith feels disturbing and difficult. My own doubts and my own convictions enter the relationship; to claim to be just a listener would be dishonest. But at the same time, the more I explore this country the more I experience God here on the edges. God, bigger than my beliefs and more faithful than my faith dares fathom.



His presence, my life
A quilted wall hanging by Margaret Dunn
Photo by Andrew Dunn

SHARING OUR FAITH WITH FRIENDS WHO DON'T (YET) BELIEVE

Ray Galvin

Acts 17: 16-34, Mark 1:14-20

One of the great challenges for Christians in the western world today is to communicate the Gospel to millions of people who don't understand it. Often we can see how much they'd benefit from a strong faith in Christ. But to get this faith they've got to hear the message. And more crucially, they have to hear the message *in language they can clearly understand*.

I have a very close friend overseas who believes there's a God 'of some sort', and lives an exemplary life, but isn't sure about Christ. Recently he asked me, very seriously, why did Jesus have to die? Why was this *necessary*? What did it accomplish?

That's a very stimulating question, and I could have opened my mouth and rattled off some of the well-known, central tenets of Christian belief. But I thought, no, he wants me to speak in language he understands, in terms that relate to life as he experiences it, and it has to touch him and make him sit up and say, 'I can see what you're getting at. That's food for thought.'

So I thought very hard, and finally sent him a one-page email, in the clearest, most relevant language I could express myself in. And then we got together and talked about it.

Are we good at communicating our faith to our friends?

I want to challenge you today to think about this. If we can learn how to explain

our beliefs in everyday language, and clearly express what these beliefs do for us in our daily lives, then I think we're doing our friends a very big favour. I think they want to hear this.

I'm out of touch with what's going on in New Zealand, but in Britain the 'credit crunch' is pressing down hard on people. Thousands are being laid off; many pension schemes have collapsed or been reduced; house values have plummeted; bankruptcies have increased. Economists still seem to have no idea how long it might last, how deep in might go, or how to reverse it.

A year ago Britain was so awash with money, many people had no interest in spiritual questions. Now I think they're much more ready to listen. When the party's over, it's not just that people have real worries about their future. It's also that, now that the glitzy distractions are gone, people no longer feel invincible,

and they're forced to think about more fundamental questions - like 'What are we here for? Can we be happy without getting drunk twice a week? What gives dignity to human life when the prop of riches is taken away? What's the bond that joins us all together in this precarious world?

I think this is a crucial moment, when we mustn't fail our friends. We must find ways to tell them of the love and hope Jesus can give them. But we must do it clearly, simply, without super-spiritual 'in-words' and 'catch-phrases'.

So lately I've been challenging myself to get better at explaining what my faith in Christ does for me. How does trusting my life to Christ benefit me in everyday life? Can I put my finger on some of the key benefits of my faith, and learn to talk about them in words that *anybody* can understand?

And I want to share some of the results of this with you, as a kind of challenge - hoping you might feel moved to go home and sit down and think out how *you* would explain to *your* friends, what putting *your* faith in Christ does for *you*.

It'll be different for each one of us. There'll be different emphases, and you have to think out how to explain *your particular story*. That's what your friends want to know. They know you, they like you, they know you're a Christian, they'll want to see what's real to you about *your* faith.

So here are three of the main benefits I get from trusting God - from trusting my daily life to Christ.

1. It gives me the courage to live in a more daring way

By nature I'm a restless and inquisitive person. I need constantly to be learning new things, facing new challenges, extending myself mentally and physically, discovering more of the abilities I've been given.

So two years ago, for example, I gave up my job and became a full time student again. I did an MSc in climate change science and policy, and now I'm doing a PhD on environmental policy issues.

Mental challenges, but also physical challenges: Every summer my partner and I do a thousand-plus kilometre cycling trip on the Continent. We live in a very small tent and carry all our luggage on the back of our bikes. Last summer it was 1500 km, and because students get longer holidays than workers, I did most of it alone. It included pedalling along German river valleys, over the Austrian Alps, a romp through Slovenia, then over the Julian Alps, back into Austria, then the German Alpine route.

Not everybody's like this. Many people don't like doing adventurous things, and I certainly don't blame them, because life can be pretty scary. But even for such people, *the little challenges of everyday life can be frightening*. Wherever we start from, life is risky. It's uncertain. We have to make big decisions without all the relevant information. Bereavements and illness come along. We lose our investments; our budget doesn't balance; life is never fully under our control.

But when I put my faith in Christ each day, I can trust that he's there with me and up ahead of me, and will be my companion through every danger and calamity.

Faith in Christ turns difficulties into an adventure. A few months ago when I was cycling high up in the Isonzo Valley, the day before I pedalled over the Julian Alps, I camped at a tiny Slovenian village called Trenta (pop. ~20). Its one shop was shut for the holidays and I only had dry bread left. A tent-pole on my brand new tent broke, and that night it rained

bucket-loads. The thunder roared and the lightning flashed, as water dripped steadily through the tent onto my sleeping bag.

I prayed (rather desperately - I think even an atheist would have prayed that night) and eventually a kind of peace came over me as I realised that this was not a disaster, it was an adventure. I didn't know what God might bring out of it, but I knew, I just knew, that God would turn this into a very strengthening and meaningful life-experience for me.

And I won't go into all the details, but that's exactly what happened. Being alone and wet and a bit cold, and surviving on dry bread and water, and not knowing whether I'd have the leg-power to get

over the Alps was a very good experience. Looking back, I can see the hand of God everywhere in it.

And now when I'm facing trouble, of any kind, I can look back on those moments in Trenta I feel that strength and assurance again.

2. My faith helps me deal positively with difficult world issues

I mentioned my concern about climate change. You may know that for the last 10,000 years the earth's climate has been remarkably stable. For hundreds of thousands of years before that it was up and down like a yo-yo. The global average temperature was almost always changing, as it tracked up and down on its cycles from very hot to very cold. The sea level followed the temperature up and down. Deserts and fertile areas waxed and waned and swapped around. But about 10,000 years ago the climate stabilised, and it's been fairly reliable since then. (Scientists call it the 'Holocene' period)

This is an important reason why civilisation's been able to develop. Think of all those coastal cities, close to both fishing grounds and fertile alluvial soils, with ports for trade and commerce. London's been there for 2000 years; the Nile Delta for two or three times as long. Think of the great river valleys in China, fertilised and watered from melting snow on the Himalayas. A huge infrastructure of roads, farms, fisheries and cities has grown up on the basis of this Holocene climate.

Climate change is threatening to break the pattern of this steady, reliable climate and send us back in to the age of massive swings and changes. In theory that's not

such a big problem. Human beings like you and me can live in a huge range of different climates.

But 6 or 7 billion people can't. And you can't suddenly shift 6 or 7 billion people from a stable, reliable Holocene climate to a hotter or colder one, let alone to an unstable one. The human disruption of suddenly shifting out of a Holocene climate would be horrendous.

So my research is concerned with how to improve the political processes of protecting the climate from the human influences that threaten to destabilise it. I also feel committed to being involved in influencing politicians and other key players in this direction.

You can imagine that that's not an easy task. There are so many vested interests in things that pollute the earth. And many very well-informed people have grave doubts as to whether we've left ourselves enough time to make any difference.

My faith in Christ is a very important support and encouragement in this task. I feel that Christ has not only called us to try to make a difference, but he also gives us the courage, the persistence, the sense of hope, the sense of moral commitment, and the good humour to persevere and not give up. There are many people who are just as concerned about climate change as I am and who work just as hard or harder to prevent it, yet without any faith in Christ, or in any version of God. I greatly admire them. I often wonder how they keep going. For me the presence of Christ in my heart is a huge source of strength and encouragement. It stops me getting cynical, puts a song in my heart, helps me understand the people I disagree with, puts a warm glow in my heart and

the sense that it's worth doing even if we don't succeed.

It's been the same with every social or political issue I've been involved in. And I'm sure there are many things that you do, for the world or for your neighbours, in which Christ also gives you strength and encouragement, even when you seem to be up against a brick wall. My faith helps me deal positively with difficult world issues.

3. It answers my spiritual experience

My friend Rinny Westra recently wrote a very engaging little book, which I enjoyed reading. In this book Rinny set out very clearly some of the big, challenging questions Christians have to face: questions that stop us thinking religion is problem-free and we've got it all wrapped up.

For me his two biggest questions (put simply) were:

- (1) If there's an all-loving, all-powerful God, then why do the innocent suffer so much?
- (2) If science has explained more and more of the secrets of life and the universe, why do we need a God to fill the gaps?

These questions have always challenged me. But reading the book helped me realise that the main reason I believe in God is not an intellectual one, it's based on my experience. The questions raised in the book are *very* important. But for me they come *within the context* of my having *experienced* God and trusted my life to Christ.

Why? Because even though I don't look for it, I keep experiencing a reality that seems to be beyond the physical world.

It's something I can't get away from, it just happens. God is just there.

It's a bit like falling in love. First you fall in love with your partner and commit your life to her, then you realise there are things about her you'll never understand. And because I have this *experience* of the spiritual realm, I need to find a framework that explains it, that makes sense of it, that integrates it into my life. And it's not just that I find the Christian faith the best framework I know of for explaining this experience. It's that the kind of Being I meet in this experience calls me to trust him.

It's not that God peeks out from behind an existential cloud and shouts, 'Hello, it's me, I really am there. You'd better believe it.' It's more like a voice saying, 'Yes I'm here, *but I'm no use to you unless you trust me.*'

It's something I can't get away from, it just happens. God is just there.

This is a God who doesn't really mean much if all we do is argue about him and try to prove he exists. So what? Rather it's a spiritual experience of a God who's personal and wants to get to know us by us trusting our lives to him.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing nets and spend time with him, so they can become 'fishers of people'. We're not all called to be apostles but we do have a faith story to tell. People need to hear our faith story. *Your* friends may need to hear *your* story. Even people who are hostile to religion in general might be curious about *your* faith, if they know you and like you.

In our epistle reading, from Acts, Paul makes a big effort to explain the Gospel to his Greek audience *in terms they clearly understand*. It's the only place in the Bible

you hear God referred to as the one 'in whom we live and move and have our being.' It's the only place in the Bible you see a direct link being made between 'the unknown God' and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was a very practical man who knew how to explain things to the particular people he was talking to. This is a challenge

for each one of us – to explain our faith to our friends in their language. We don't need religious jargon, it just gets in the way. We don't need to explain why our pastor or former pastor has faith in Christ, they don't know him or her. It's *you* they know, it's *you* they like. Will your friends get to hear what *your* faith in Christ means to you on an everyday basis?



Faith the size of a grain of mustard seed
Matthew 17:20
Black mustard shedding seeds - 'Brassica Nigra'
Jo O'Hara

FAITH AND DOUBT

A reflection on John 20:19-31

Warren Deason

In 2006 John Updike, the American writer who died recently, gave an interview, and part of that interview was quoted in many of the obituaries written at the time of his death:

I remember the times when I was wrestling with the issues that I would feel crushed. I was crushed by the purely materialistic, atheistic account of the universe – I am very prone to accept all the scientists tell us, the truth of it, the authority of the efforts of all the men and women spent trying to understand more about atoms and molecules. But I can't quite make the leap of unfaith, as it were, and say, "This is it. Carpe diem (Seize the day), and tough luck."

So there seems to be contrast, if not a tension between the robust certainties of Updike's earlier writings and these later remarks

which express a greater hesitancy, more uncertainty, greater doubt – yet not able to make, as he cleverly put it, the leap of unfaith! Thinking about John Updike made me think of this story of Thomas so often told at Easter where Thomas seems to move from a vigorous scepticism to a certain faith – from, "Unless I see the marks...I will not believe" to "My Lord and my God".

The gospel story ends with these words, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

The translation "believe" can mislead us when the issue is really about faith. It's not a story in search of belief, but a story in search of faith, trust and commitment. We might wonder about our own place in what seems to be a doubt - faith tension; though we might ponder the thought that the opposite of faith is in fact not doubt, but mistrust, fear and anxiety.

Jesus' opening gambit whenever he appeared to his disciples following the resurrection, seems to have been to speak to, and overcome the fear that was present in them. In this gospel story the words, "Peace be with you," occur twice. On the surface it seems that in the story we have a competition going where faith wins out over scepticism. Thomas starts as sceptic (bad) and ends up as a man of faith (good).

We need both trust and wariness/caution in a healthy tension on our lives.

I want to respond to the story slightly differently and say that if we want to live our lives by faith, a faith that is life-giving and growing, then faith will probably be a healthy mixture of trust and

doubt/uncertainty. We live with them both every day, sometimes in healthy, sometimes in unhealthy ways. We exercise trust every day of our lives - we could not live without doing so.

Nor could we live without some degree of doubt or wariness. We need both trust and wariness/caution in a healthy tension on our lives - and I think we need it in our relationship with Jesus in order for that relationship to grow.

Trust and doubt are often portrayed as being opposites but in some ways they both encourage growth. Trust enables growth because it invites us from the secure/safe places into new territory and discovery. Doubt can do the same - doubt helps us be open to new possibilities, keeps us from accepting easy answers and

looking for new and more helpful and better explanations about the way things are.

It's the same in our faith journey. The way that I see things now may not always be the best way. It may be challenged by my experiences and I may need to find new ways of understanding. So I have a faith in search of understanding. It encourages the journey because it helps us to say that some of the things we think are certain are not, and that everything is provisional, temporary or makeshift. We may find that at some stage our way of seeing things no longer fits - it has to be "unbuilt" so we can move on.

Now while I probably wouldn't have too much trouble convincing you that the Christian community should be "big on faith" I'm sure you would be much less sure about the Church being "big on doubt"! (If you don't like the word "doubt" then substitute "not taking at face value" or "questioning or enquiring.") But I'm encouraged to see how the community allowed Thomas his doubts. They made space for him. It seemed that the community was secure enough for Thomas to say "Unless I put my hands in the marks if the nails I will not believe!"

He was still with that community the next time Jesus appeared!

We have to make space for the Thomas in each other in the Christian community and we also need to make space for the Thomas in us. The value and role of a faith community as a safe and secure place for faith explorers and travellers and doubters cannot be overemphasised. Updike once said,

When I haven't been to church in a couple of

Sundays I begin to hunger for it and need to be there. It's not just the words, the sacraments. It's the company of other people, who show up and pledge themselves to an invisible entity.

A friend who often suffered severe mental/emotional distress, which for them resulted in a bleak sense of God's absence, often asked us to pray for her - but not in the sense that she was an object of prayer that needed fixing, though I'm sure she valued the prayer of compassionate people, but rather a person who asked us to pray on her behalf - to be a prayerful for her when she couldn't pray. She was asking us to say, "We'll do the praying that you can't do. We'll have for you the faith you cannot find."

When Mother Teresa's journals were recently published we became aware

of her own darkness and questioning. The woman who could write,

"When I haven't been to church in a couple of Sundays I begin to hunger for it and need to be there".

"Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in

His love than in your own weakness", could also write, "So many unanswered questions live within me I'm afraid to uncover them - because of the blasphemy. If there be a God - please forgive me...I am told that God loves me, and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul."

So within the Christian community and within us, faith and uncertainty exist - we ought not to fear that "uncovering of the questions" for faith and uncertainty can befriend each other rather than exist in a hostile way. Doubt and trust are like different cultures that need to learn from each other not try to make one into the other. Yes, at its worst doubt can become

hard and cynical scepticism, just as faith can become unthinking, unquestioning gullibility. So I think it's important to keep them pliable/flexible within us and not allow that hardness in either. The interplay between the trusting and uncertainty which shapes our faith is dynamic. Faith is not just a set of things we think or believe. It is not a static thing. Faith is a response, an on-going response to Jesus, to God within our lives; it is a journey. So we are invited again by the gospel writer, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name".

GEORGE MACDONALD'S FAITH

Carolyn Kelly

Today, George MacDonald is known to many through his influence on C.S. Lewis but he was a popular writer and speaker in 19th C Britain. He was born in the North East of Scotland in 1824, so his faith was shaped during a formative period in the Scottish church characterised by revivals, trials for heresy, the Great Disruption and wide-ranging debates on the nature of salvation and faith. He was a pastor and preacher, teacher, husband and father. He suffered many personal losses in his youth, and the premature deaths of several children. In the 1850s MacDonald himself nearly died of tuberculosis (the 'family attendant') which killed his brothers Alec and John. MacDonald's spirituality was shaped by all this experience and expressed in his work. He wrote in an early letter, "this life is a portion and will blend very beautifully into the whole story".

He more subtly shaped a Christian view of reality.

In 1851 MacDonald wrote of his intention to write for the good of his generation. Increasingly, doubt was acknowledged publicly and intellectual honesty (the 'conscience') equated with a loss of certitude. Faith was more personalised, and reflecting on its loss a literary preoccupation. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was published which MacDonald described as 'the poem of our age'. Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* was also emblematic of mid-century loss. Such works expressed ambivalence towards the Christian tradition, and uncertainty about the world. Where earlier had been a more unified vision of beauty and order in the cosmos, now many questioned whether nature witnessed to God's providence. Arnold's sea of faith was ebbing in a world which 'Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.'

MacDonald would become friends with Tennyson, Arnold and the influential art historian, John Ruskin, and engaged with their ideas. But although he struggled with faith in his early years, his theological vision was fundamentally different. From 1853, following a short career in parish ministry, he preached and wrote independently, publishing poems, fantasies, essays, fairy tales, novels and sermons. In novels and sermons MacDonald explored the concerns of his own place and time; in fantasies and fairy tales through the creation of other worlds, he more subtly shaped a Christian view of reality.

All called for imaginative response, and all articulated MacDonald's mystical, biblical faith. His literary expressions, although innovative, were rooted in the experiences of MacDonald's childhood faith and informed by the filial theology

of Scottish theologians John McLeod Campbell and Thomas Erskine. The federal emphasis in his Calvinist tradition had not served MacDonald well, but these moderating influences, particularly the faith of his own father, helped nurture a robust understanding of God's grace and belief in God's intimate care. In novels and sermons he explored analogies of fatherhood and familial love; in fairy tales he developed remarkable images of divine feminine figures. In 1858 when he wrote *Phantastes*, MacDonald's father died suddenly. He wrote to his step-mother:

I dreamed last night I saw my father... May God help you, dearest Mother, to go nearer to Him - that is the only thing that can comfort you for the loss of my father. Whatever good things we can fancy for ourselves, God has better than that in store for us. (Cited Sadler, p129-30).

This belief pervades his work, and places MacDonald within an ancient Platonic-Patristic tradition (somewhat hijacked by romantics) that acknowledged desire. This strand of Christian spirituality, first articulated in Augustine's *Confessions*, locates human beings' deepest wants and needs within a vision of God as the longed-for Other who evokes, anticipates, reorients and fulfils desire.

It advocates a yielding of one's will in order to receive; a losing of oneself in order to be found. Thus, MacDonald's work challenged both romantic idealism (with its primacy of the human self), as well as versions of Calvinism that denigrated the human. For him, the starting place for Christian theology was neither the isolated, autonomous individual nor their depravity, but the filial love between the Father and Son who came to seek and save the lost.

This pastoral vision motivated MacDonald's writing engagement with doubt. In *Robert Falconer* (1868), Robert remembers crying out to God, but 'it seemed that he cried and was not heard' (Part 3, chapter II). In the same novel the agnostic young poet and scholar Ericson was probably modelled on his brother John. Ericson's acute perceptions were fuelled by education and speculation; his enquiring faith met nothing but a 'fog' in the law-bound teaching and formal worship of the church. He was plagued by the restless fear 'that he might awake in a godless void'. Ericson's dark night of the soul was described as 'an agony of ... silence':

"O God," he said, "if thou art, why dost thou not speak? If I am thy handiwork - dost thou forget that which thou has made?"

He paused, motionless, then cried again:

"There can be no God, or he would hear." (RF, 2: XV)

Ericson's 'troubled heart' eventually finds rest not through argument, but a vision and words of hope that 'breed and unfold' his intellect. This portrait shows MacDonald was sympathetic to such questions but did not indulge speculative doubt.

He understood poets' and visionaries' predilection towards melancholy, and that a superior imagination could be a double-edged sword, making real life and specific actions seem meaningless. MacDonald wrote for those who felt acutely and were vulnerable to despair; for disillusioned youth lacking guidance and tossed by speculative winds, but also for those with a childlike spirit smothered by the church's authoritarianism. Such conflicts are developed in novels, and these themes

" God help you, dearest Mother, to go nearer to Him".

recur in the sermons published in 1867 as *Unspoken Sermons, I*.

One sermon, 'The Eloi', reflects upon the 'last temptation' and what might have prompted Jesus' cry from the cross, 'My God...why hast thou forsaken me?' MacDonald develops an unusual application of this:

When the inward sun is shining, and the wind of thought... rouses glad forms and feelings, it is easy to look upwards, and say My God... But what is to be done when all feeling is gone? When a man does not know whether he believes or not, whether he loves or not...when art, poetry, religion are nothing to him, so swallowed up is he in pain, or mental depression, or disappointment, or temptation, or he knows not what?

The person 'swallowed up' in such experience can no longer see what is true and good. MacDonald suggests that during this final trial the Lord was tempted to hopelessness and a-theism; to say there is no God:

For Satan had come ...yet again, to urge him with his last temptation; to tell him that although he had done his part, God had forgotten his; that although he had lived by the word of his mouth, that mouth had no word more to speak to him.

MacDonald imagines the voice of the enemy whispering to Jesus at his weakest and most vulnerable: "Despair and die, for God is not with thee. All is in vain. Death, not Life, is thy refuge". He then asks,

Is it possible that even then he thought of the lost sheep who could not believe

that God was their Father; and for them, too, in all their loss and blindness and un-love, cried, saying the word they might say, knowing for them that God means Father and more, and knowing ... what a fearful thing it is to be without God and without hope?

MacDonald urges a change in focus:

Troubled soul, thou art not bound to feel, but thou art bound to arise. God loves thee whether thou feelest or not. .. He changes not because thou changest... Say to him: "My God ... thou art my God. I am thy child. Forsake me not." Then fold the arms of thy faith, and wait in quietness until light goes up in thy darkness.

The subject of the verbs shift: the Father 'sees thee through all the gloom through which thou canst not see him'; the 'true self' looks to Jesus, and says, 'My Lord'. A similar turn occurs after Robert Falconer's time in the desert:

The time of doubt and anxious questioning was far from over, but the time was gone by...when he could be like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind and tossed. He had ever one anchor of the soul, and he found that it held - the faith of Jesus (I say the faith of Jesus, not his own faith in Jesus), the truth of Jesus, the life of Jesus. (RF, 3: II)

In such texts MacDonald offered a hope that 'lies within our reach every time ...we are thus lapt in the folds of night'. He advocated a freedom that sounds very modern, yet called for an old-fashioned yielding of the will which 'not seeing God... yet holds him fast'. And prophetically, he urged his readers look beyond the time, if ever (it) should come,

when God himself shall be but a name, and Jesus an old story. (*The Eloi*)

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REFLECTING ON WORSHIP-IN- COMMUNITY FOR GROWING FAITH

Rosemary Dewerse

Faith, according to Hebrews 11:1 'is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' Embedded within this statement I perceive a significant sense of the intangible as well as a profound groundedness: mystery and certainty both/and, the interplay of the divine and the human, both/and.

I am pondering these words about faith and their inherent 'both/and' elements having just experienced a four day intensive for a course entitled 'Worship and Community'¹. I am finding many connections. For example, in that course, we have been encouraged to begin by asking, exploring and lingering over foundational questions: 'Who is God?' and 'What does it mean to be human?' While of course it is possible to find answers to

these questions, to affirm certainties, we discovered that they always come with a caveat: God and humans are essentially mysterious.

It was suggested that when we gather as communities of God's people, however, those of us who facilitate worship don't take enough time to ponder and seriously grapple with those two big questions before asking 'How then shall we worship?' We too quickly think about practical details - what songs we will sing, who we will ask to participate etc. As a result, we miss the opportunity to reflectively and discerningly contribute to moving and challenging our worshipping community and ourselves towards a deeper contemplation and celebration of, and wrestling with, the mysteries and certainties of God and the question of what it means to be human. The elements of our worship itself risk feeding a long-term milk, or unbalanced, diet to a faith that will consequently remain immature.²

There is also in Hebrews 11:1 the inseparable interplay of the divine and the human, another both/and of faith and its expression in worship. In our course we discussed how this comes both by way of 'outer words' and 'inner words': the life and example of Jesus, scripture and its interpretation, tradition, history, creation, the arts and culture, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit within us, the pull to truth and goodness, the power and act of love, and experienced trust. None of these separates the divine activity from human collaboration.

Yes, God initiates and we respond and yet there is a dynamic communion within and without each of these which demands authentic, attentive and active involvement on our part. How often, in

the context of worship-in-community do we, however, behave as if human faith and worship is a passive-receptive thing, or perhaps something to be practised for us by our leaders up-front? What did it mean for Christians like the Celts to know, live and pray blessing from the Christ 'within and without us', or for the writer of Hebrews to live convinced and assured of things not seen? If *our* faith also knew this dynamic communion of the divine and human, how might it transform our worship together? Not only that, however, but the whole of life?

From another angle, how often do we find ourselves singing to a God so divine as to be unknowable, or so human that we underestimate him, rather than holding a deepening understanding of the implications of God-in-Christ fully divine and fully human for our own relationship with him together, and living that understanding out?

Alongside the thoughts above I am conscious as I read Hebrews 11:1 of the wider context in which it appears. It follows a call to perseverance and to 'not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another' (Heb 10:25) and

is followed by an account of our *whakapapa* of faith. In a society whose philosophical underpinning has separated the individual from the community we have lost an understanding of the profound opportunity for growth that connection with others can bring.

Even our worship spaces are the poorer for it. We worship as individuals facing the back of the person in front of us, some of us so deafened that we cannot even hear ourselves. Our service structures leave us little time to attend to each other, and to learn from not only our leaders but also those, nameless, sitting nearby (cf Heb 11:35-38). Faith is deepened not only by vital engagement with God but also with others, past, present and into the future and our worship together provides a perfect opportunity for that.

I wonder, however, not only what our current worship-in-community says about the depth of faith understanding we have already, but also what it is doing to facilitate our maturing together towards an ever-growing assurance of things hoped for and conviction of things not seen? I suspect it could contribute much more.



Faith is getting started

¹ 'Worship and Community' is being offered by Laidlaw College in conjunction with Donna Dinsmore and Carey College, Vancouver, Canada.

² And those who long for maturity may leave.



Faith, too, has seasonal shades of colour
Photo by Andrew Dunn

FAITH AND THE PRACTICES OF CONTEMPLATION

Paul Fromont

The old way of doing religion and being religious no longer works. The old way was based on belief and bolstered by authority and fear. The new way will be based on faith and bolstered by spirituality and *experience* (italics, mine).¹

Contemplation, for me, is the practice of “finding God in all things”. It is a significant but often neglected means of “opening space” for ones “inner life” to grow, and for the transformative work of the Spirit whom we discover in the activity and inactivity of our lives.

Living contemplatively (and thus faith-fully) seems to me to be about growing in attentiveness and alertness, and in becoming increasingly aware of the moods and movements of our own spirit, as we engage with the ordinary and the everyday. At the same time we are also growing in our ability to notice and discern the mysterious presence of God, the Spirit deeply present and active within us, and within all of creation.

Faith is a relational and attentive trusting which allows us to daily hear the call of Jesus to follow him ever more intentionally into his own journey to the Father in the Spirit.²

¹ David Tacey, author of *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*.

² I’m grateful to Francis Kline OCSO for this insight.

Imaginative prayer is one of the most profound ways of encountering and engaging with Jesus.

Faith of the kind evident in Jesus’ life, ministry and mission is embodied and enacted by *responding* in trust to the trustworthy God.³

So how might we learn to recognise and respond, as the historical Jesus did, to the discerned invitations of a “trustworthy God”?

Faith: Its need for practices that sustain and nourish it.

There are many helpful practices⁴ that enable us to do this; however, the two I’ve felt most drawn to in my own journey are St. Ignatius of Loyola’s practice of imaginative prayer and his *Examen of Consciousness*.

Imaginative prayer

“... [St Ignatius’] was a mysticism of seeing God in all things, of experiencing God in the hurly-burly of life. He

loved the mighty cities and I suppose he would have loved the noisy household. He had an insight ... that what matters is not a long time spent in prayer but loss of the ego. And one loses the ego by following

Jesus, poor, despised and humiliated. It has been said that Ignatius preferred ascetics to mystics. I prefer to say that he liked a healthy mysticism built on a healthy asceticism...”⁵

³ NT. Wright, in his *Faith, Virtue, Justification, and the Journey to Freedom*.

⁴ A good example of a NZ church congregation trying to explore and experiment with “practices” is Cityside Baptist in Auckland. They do this under the heading “Wisdom Christianity. You can read more by visiting their website: <http://www.cityside.org.nz/node/385>

⁵ William Johnston S.J. in his wonderful little book, *Letters to Contemplatives*, Fount Paperbacks, 1991, p. 31.

At one level we nourish our faith by learning to live *into* and *out* of the Biblical narrative, or more particularly, into and out of the Jesus story centered on the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In doing this we are allowing ourselves to be formed by his story.

Imaginative prayer is one of the most profound ways of encountering and engaging with Jesus⁶ in a way that allows the full expression all of our senses: taste, touch, sight, hearing, smell and intuition etc. We enter into the gospel stories by using our imagination. We place ourselves in the story as a participant, noticing such things as:

- Where am I in the story?⁷
- What am I seeing, feeling, smelling, hearing and experiencing?
- What am I doing in the story?
- Am I standing beside anyone? Who are they? What are they doing?
- Where is Jesus in relation to me?
- What effect is his presence having on me? On others?
- What's he doing?
- Is Jesus asking anything of me?
- What do I want to ask of Jesus?
- What do I need from Jesus?
- What am I being invited to take from the story with me?

The most significant experience for me in the use of imaginative prayer was my regular participation, a few years ago, in a small group – my “three”. It was actually four persons (one a spiritual director), and it was an experience centered on a time of imaginative prayer, the journaling of that prayer experience, the sharing of those

6 Monk, Michael Casey OCSO helpfully notes that “the quality of our communion with God will be largely shaped by our image [and experience] of Christ.”

7 Try for example Mark 2:1-12.

parts of our experience that we wished to talk about, and the responses of others in the “three” who listen deeply to us and to their own inner responses and reactions. “Threes” were for me “an inner journey *in* community”⁸ and my first real foray into imaginative prayer.⁹

Prayer for Finding God in All Things¹⁰

“...What God is waiting for is not so much the right conclusion [to] a practical question as our suppleness in falling into the divine hands so that God can work in us”¹¹

The second practice that has grown in importance to me as a means of sustaining and nourishing my faith journey is Ignatius’ *Examen of Consciousness*. At its heart it opens space for an encounter between the person of faith who seeks God, and God who responds. Indeed the life of faith can be described in terms of

8 Parker J. Palmer.

9 I’m tremendously grateful to Anglican Priest/Spiritual Director, Rev. Pamela Warnes for the introduction to “threes”, to Ignatian Spirituality and for the rich experiences that flowed out of both for me. For more detail on the process that out “three” followed you can find it online here: http://prodigal.typepad.com/prodigal_kiwi/2008/07/threes-a-way-of.html

10 The title of one of the most helpful little introductions to *The Daily Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola* that I’ve discovered. It is a 46-page booklet written by Joan L. Roccasalvo and published in 2005 by The Institute of Jesuit Sources. Another great introduction is *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives you Life* an illustrated larger format 71-page book by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, Paulist Press, 1995. For a larger and more technical resource on the Examen, try *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* by Timothy M. Gallagher, Crossroad: 2006.

11 John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

12 Rowan Williams.

“human actions that seek to be open to God’s action.”¹²

“Over time we become more and more able to discriminate, to discern, and our potential as human beings in relation to God becomes ever more liberated... We ...become ever more sensitive to both the positive and negative forces that lie beneath the surface of things, and to how the Holy Spirit works with us through both of them”¹³

Ignatius’ *Examen* provides a methodology for learning to open oneself to this work in one’s life. Its regular practice enables a person to grow in a conscious awareness of God and to God’s acting in the ordinary and everyday activities and experiences of one’s life. As we regularly take time to listen we are attuning ourselves to God, to God’s promptings, and to God’s invitations.

The *Examen*, and the practice of discernment that is at the heart of it, allows us to grow in true self-knowledge and availability to God in the rhythms of our everyday lives. Indeed, “the quiet rhythm of the ordinary is the best framework for ... [listening at] depth... We need much peaceful monotony to enjoy surprising happenings¹⁴ and we also need the help of good questions such as the following:

- What caught and held my attention during the day?
- How would I describe the experiences of my day? When did I feel most alive?

13 Andrew Walker, *Daydreaming Revisited*, p. 102 <http://www.theway.org.uk/back/423Walker.pdf>

14 Ladislav Orsy SJ. *The Lord of Confusion*, Dimension books, 1970.

When did I feel least alive? When did I feel that I was only going through the motions?

- Were there images, feelings, experiences that made a deep impression on me? What were they?
- How would I describe my responses to these experiences?
- In what ways, and by what means was I aware of God in my day?
- What “invitations”, if any, did it seem God was extending to me?

The life of faith can be described in terms of “human actions that seek to be open to God’s action”.

Typically Ignatius’ *Examen* is divided into 5-stages; however, Joan Roccasalvo helpfully expands the *Examen* into nine. These are listed below, and I’ve also added one or two questions that will help you get started

in “plunging below the surface” of your day and finding God present and active.

1. **Gratitude** – what am I grateful or thankful to God for today?
2. **Prayer for self-knowledge or awareness.** I ask God for eyes to see the significance in the last 24-hours, or the period under review.
3. **God** – who was God for me today? How did I experience God? How did I respond to God? “*Love consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to please God in everything.*”¹⁵
4. **Self** – How did I experience myself today? What feelings were dominant? What feelings were ‘pushed down’ or resisted? What feelings were given expression?

15 St. Teresa of Avila.

16 Gerard Manley Hopkins, “*As Kingfishers catch Fire...*”

5. **Others** – How did I respond to others? What about to their needs? “...For Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his...”¹⁶
6. **Circumstances** – How did I respond to the circumstances of my day? Was I aware of God’s promptings, how did I experience them, and how did I respond?
7. **Ecology** – As a steward and co-creator with God, how did I express gratitude today for the beauty of God’s creation and work responsibly to preserve and care for it?
8. **Sorrow for my faults.** What are the things that didn’t go so well; the things I could have responded to differently?
9. **I resolve to make a fresh start.** “... What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done. Let it be...”¹⁷

The whole *Examen* should take no more than 15-20 minutes, and should ideally be carried out once a day. It should also be used flexibly. If some part or parts of it feel more alive and important for you on a particular day, then just spend the 15-20 minutes with those ones and what emerges for you in each.

17 A New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 184

JESUS JAZZ

David Crawley

Reflecting on jazz as a metaphor for faith has its risks. There was a time when Christians debated whether rock and roll belonged to the devil. The same controversy surrounded jazz music in its early days. It was associated with gin joints, gangsters and loose morals. In the

days of segregation, jazz was regarded by many as Negro music, driven by jungle beats that could stir up primitive and undesirable passions!

I am aware, too, that not everyone enjoys jazz. In fact, I developed an aversion to it at a young age. My father was a huge jazz fan and had shelves lined with LPs: Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and the like. These were played on our old stereogram, as loudly as my mother would tolerate, and much louder still when she was out. I didn’t really “get” jazz, and had the natural inclination of a boy to push against the ways of his father. As a teenager, my modest LP collection reflected a preference for the music of Led Zeppelin, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix (now I’m dating myself, I know!)

Forty years later I have grown to appreciate jazz alongside other forms of music. Best of all is the opportunity to listen to live jazz. There is pleasure in listening to a familiar standard being given a fresh treatment – never the same twice – as each musician offers their creative take on the piece, yet remains attuned to what the rest of the group is doing. Until the year my father died, we enjoyed an annual pilgrimage together to the Tauranga Easter Jazz festival.

In thinking about what it is to have and live faith, many analogies with jazz come to mind. Here I want to suggest three, each sparked by an essential aspect of jazz music: the fundamental influence of the blues, the elusive element of ‘swing’, and the role of improvisation.

Emerging from the call and response work songs and spirituals of the African American slaves, the raw form and feel of ‘the blues’ were major ingredients in the development of jazz. Like the Hebrew Psalms of Lament, the blues were born

of suffering and struggle. In *Piano Jazz*, a documentary film directed by Clint Eastwood, legendary jazz pianist Dave Brubeck recalls what a friend from New Orleans would say in times of trouble:

*Lord, Lord, what will tomorrow bring?
Today I felt an arrow stinging, and a wound so deep,
my eyes refused to weep.*

With echoes of lyrics such as these, the prophet Jeremiah was a bluesman before his time:

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?
Oh, that my head were a spring of water
and my eyes a fountain of tears!*

Louis Armstrong dominates the early history of jazz. The sound and words of his own compositions reflect the influence of the blues and the experience of an

African American born at the turn of the century in New Orleans: “*How would it end, ain’t got a friend / My only sin is in my skin / What did I do, to be so black and blue?*” Billie Holiday, a friend of Armstrong’s, sang of “Strange Fruit”, referring to the bodies of those lynched by the Ku Klux Klan. The theme of suffering is evident, yet jazz also has a way of lifting people’s spirits. It acknowledges the harsh realities of life, yet holds the hope of a better day. In its more upbeat expressions it takes people out of their woes and on to the dance floor.

Like the blues, Christian spirituality is about humanness, struggle and raw honesty. We are people of the “already and the not yet.” As Paul says in Romans 8, we have the “first fruits of the Spirit”, yet as broken human beings we “groan”

along with the rest of creation, longing for liberation. The Spirit prays in us “with sighs too deep for words.” We have hope, but not hope that is seen. On Good Friday we bring our darkness and struggle to the cross. On Resurrection Sunday we allow ourselves to feel the hope of our faith and to celebrate with “the Lord of the Dance.” This, then, is one rhythm in the music of our faith. To follow Paul again, it is the rhythm of “dying and rising with Christ.”

Harder to explain is the way jazz music “swings.” In part, it is a matter of rhythm. As my saxophone teacher told me, it is typically a “humpty dumpty” rhythm, full of dotted quavers. But that doesn’t really get to the heart of swing. Played as written it would have a mechanical feel, whereas jazz musicians allow their instincts to dictate the phrasing. My favourite jazz singer, Billie Holiday, is a classic example of this. She is often well behind the band in her timing, yet it sounds so exquisitely right.

It’s about freedom, about feel, and very often about fun. Swing, or “groove,” is something you get by listening to jazz, rather than by reading definitions. It’s infectious, and gets your feet tapping, your head nodding and your face smiling.

Applying these ideas to our faith, what makes it swing? What makes it more than doctrinal creeds and ethical codes? How is it infectious? You will have your own responses to those questions, but they evoke for me thoughts of *Spirit* and *freedom*. Those who listened to Jesus heard something that sounded like *good news*, and they wanted to hear and see more. His truth was liberating, rather than oppressive. He sang from the same songbook as his contemporaries, but his inspired phrasing contrasted with their legalistic renderings. Jesus lived and

taught “the unforced rhythms of grace” (Matt 11:29, *The Message*).

In the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 3, Paul expounds contrasts between old covenant faith and new ...

... you are a letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts ... the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life...

New covenant faith can't be learned from a book or encoded in rules. Nor, at its best, could the old covenant. It was always intended to be a response of the heart to grace. Just as swing is a quality that jazz musicians imbibe from their mentors, so Paul concludes this chapter by suggesting that the Spirit forms the qualities of Jesus in us as we contemplate him:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

That takes us to the third point of connection between jazz and faith. Since the church's beginning, our calling has been understood to be the *Imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ. Jesus himself extended this mandate: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” The WWJD movement gives contemporary expression to the *Imitatio*, “What Would Jesus Do?”

The principle sounds simple enough, but it isn't always easy to apply. We face situations today where we have no example in Jesus' life. And even where there is an example, it's questionable whether we should do exactly as Jesus

did. After washing his disciples' feet, he said to them: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.” So why don't we follow his instruction, except on special symbolic occasions? Because foot washing is not part of our culture. Instinctively we look for other appropriate ways to apply the underlying principle of serving one another in humility.

There is a pleasure in listening to a familiar standard being given a fresh treatment.

This is “Jesus Jazz.” It reflects the ability to improvise, which is essential to playing good jazz. Each jazz standard has a basic melody and chord structure, but it is never rendered slavishly or unimaginatively. The musicians absorb the tune as written, and then creatively express the piece in ways that reflect their own gifts, ideas and influences. Improvisation is risky stuff, with not even the artist knowing exactly what will emerge. The results may seem to stray far from the original, but practised ears will recognise the underlying theme.

So for me, Jesus Jazz is a matter of soaking up the theme (especially by meditating on the Gospels), reflecting on my own experience of grace, taking account of my context, praying for the Spirit's help and then stepping out in faith. My aspiration is to live a creative, Spirit-inspired variation on the life and good news of Christ. No doubt the actual result contains many discordant notes! No one learns to play jazz without getting it wrong sometimes, and that can be embarrassing and upsetting. But if the parable of the talents is anything to go by, I think the leader of the band would rather we stand up and play our hearts out, bung notes and all, than resort to rigid and risk-free performances out of fear.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE STANCE IN LIFE AND FAITH

Andrew Dunn

How we stand in faith is a very important matter. We can take a critical or analytical stance to everything. We can stand on truth dogmatically and so become defensive with lines drawn firmly. We can lean on the faith of others and their experiences and understandings. We can lean on the Church and its teachings. We can adopt a stance of absorbing anything and everything “spiritual” and be at the mercy of every wind that blows. We can even see ourselves as technicians of the Spirit! We can readily become overworked and under-loved. Or we can take an open and receptive stance towards God and life and let the encounters shape and mould us within the parameters of biblical stories and Gospel understandings – a contemplative stance.

Margaret Magdalen puts it well: (Contemplation) “is primarily a way of looking and listening, of beholding, marvelling, considering. It moves on into the depths of the will, sometimes in great darkness and aridity, but it often begins with wonder. In one sense we are all called to contemplation.”¹ It is “the awareness of God, known and loved at the core of one's being”², “looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now” (Thich Nhat Hanh), and “a continual condition of prayerful sensitivity to what is really going on” (Douglas Steere).

Indeed, “there are no part-time contemplatives ... From the day that

¹ Margaret Magdalen. *Jesus Man of Prayer*. Hodder. 1989.

² *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Penguin 1962. 36

we begin to believe in Christ and to acknowledge him as Lord, there is no moment ... that is not marked by God's hold on us, which is not lived in the name of Jesus, in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (Henri le Saux. *Abishiktenanda* – Delhi. 1967).

If it is true that we were all born experiencing the world and life contemplatively then there has been laid a very profound base for further growth and understanding of this faculty of human beings. And it can be rebuilt, recovered!

Thomas Merton puts it more actively than I experience but he gets right to the centre of recovering the contemplative stance or attitude:

“You should be able to untether yourself from the world and set yourself free, loosing all the fine strings and tensions that bind you, by sight, by sound, by thought, to the presence of others. ... Let there be a place somewhere in which you can breathe naturally, quietly, and not to have to take your breath in continuous short gasps. A place where your mind can be idle and forget its concerns, descend into silence, and worship the Father in secret.” (New Seeds of Contemplation).

It takes some recovering after the inroads of pace, pressure, noise and production but when it is recovered this place becomes a natural stance or attitude in the life of prayer. Merton is correct with his “You should be able to ...” as a starting point in reclaiming contemplation. The more we practise it the more readily we will arrive in the quiet place until it becomes second nature. Then it will be our natural attitude, our favoured stance in meditation and prayer. In fact, it will develop as our natural base out of which we approach all of life. I have named this “place” the contemplative platform, not

in the sense of a place for performing or acting but as a foundation on which to be, the launching pad for every activity in life and work, prayer and relationship.

It offers a sense of security even in the dark and desert times. It allows a long and steady journey in the same direction (to use a Eugene Petersen turn of phrase), and, in the times of deep questioning, a place from which to live the questions.

Rainer Maria Rilke's advice to a young poet fits well here:

"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.

Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."³

However, the fruits are usually much more present and immediate. De Caussade's statement that "Contemplation is the sacrament of the present moment" is true to much of our experience. It has the note within it that one should not live in the hurts and dramas of the past, nor in the what if's and hopes of the future. "God is here and that to bless us", says the old hymn, and with this sacrament there's a rich lode of discovery each moment of each and every day and night. I can't control the future, but I can approach it with the confidence of daily encounters with grace. One of the richly rewarding questions to explore in my journal on a regular basis is "What signs of grace have I seen today?" The contemplative stance seldom yields nothing!

And faith? What does all this mean for faith and the activity of trusting and journeying as disciples of Jesus?

It gives us a way of standing in the light of Christ and his good news and realizing our union with him and in our life in his body, the Church.

It helps us to develop an attitude of openness and receptivity that expects to hear the word that is addressed to us.

There are no outside edges to grace-full encounters.

It enables an expectancy that is open to God whispering into our hearts his words of grace, correction, light and life.

It develops a way of praying from the heart that reaches out to God's presence in and through everything.

It offers a way of orientation of the heart and mind towards relationship with God as God is known best to us at present. It brings regular encouragement to keep on keeping on in The Way as disciples of Jesus for we are never alone. It keeps us expectant and open to the new and deeper insights in our doctrines, spiritual truths and Scripture passages as we read and meditate.

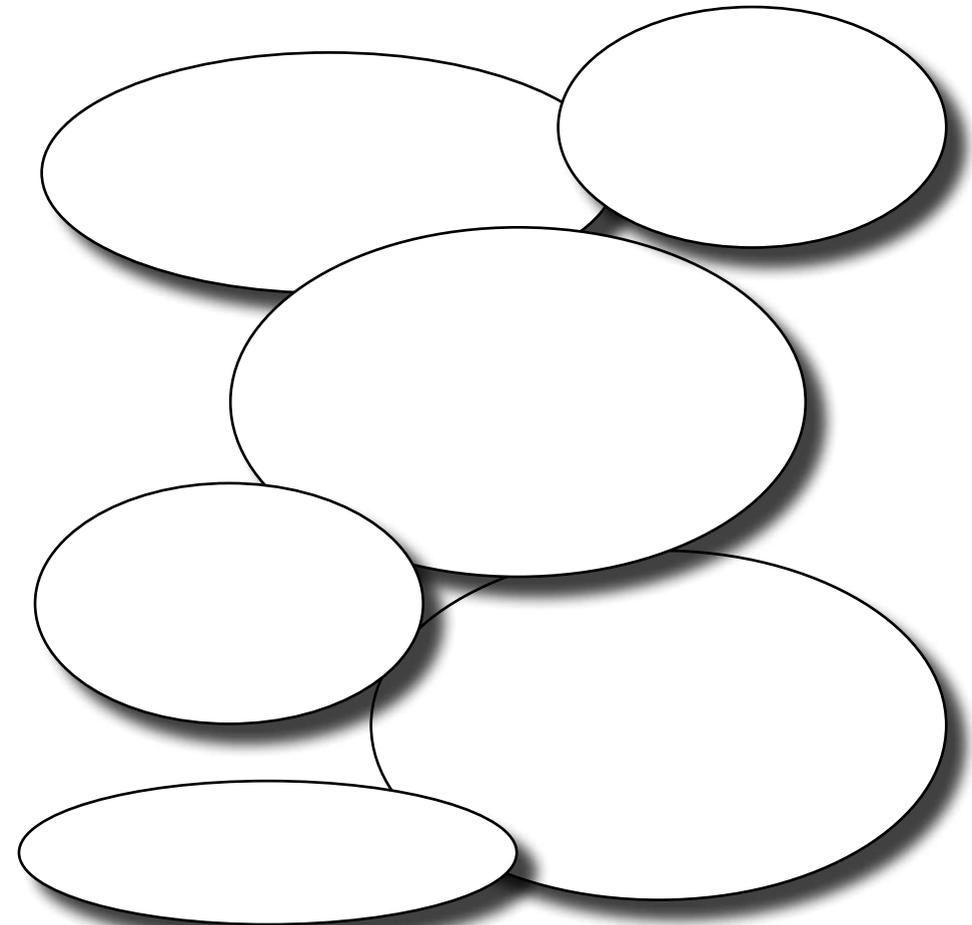
In fact there is no end to the fruits of a contemplative attitude of heart and mind in the richness of life's experiences and God's love. There are no outside edges to grace-full encounters. Faith built on this contemplative base produces an assurance about things hoped for and a lively conviction of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1) as well as enjoying the riches of faith that are to hand.

FAITH DISCOVERIES

So, what stands out for you in pondering faith? One important insight for me as I've compiled Refresh has been that in my ageing there has developed an ability to roam freely across all the steps and stages of my life and faith. It's like seeing these steps and stages of faith, to use Fowler's term for faith development, as concentric circles starting with the simplest childhood discovery that "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible (and Mum and Dad) tells me so" and widening out through the well-defined truths of

earlier years to the richness and intimacy of the contemplative and mystical. Now roaming freely across the whole spectrum brings enjoyment and rich memories while reclaiming the treasures of it all. I'm finding that "standing on the promises" is as nourishing as swimming out beyond the flags!

What have you found? You might like to use the spaces on this page to jot down your own treasures.



³ Rainer Maria Rilke. Letters to a Young Poet. Random House. 1984. 34-35.

MORE FAITH

Actually, God
it's **your** faith
that's so amazing
Faith that allows us
freedom to choose to believe
freedom to choose to follow
Or not

The faith that trusts us
with your world
and your world-shaking
Message

You know, God
you run huge risks
with people like me
on your team
I often drop the ball
and seldom hit
a home run
In fact, I seem to
live permanently
on first base

You smile, understanding
my black and whiteness
often turns to muddy grey
but say it's the desire
of my heart
you care about
not the ticks or crosses
I give myself
In fact, the shiningness
of my heart's longings
is all you see

Tears fall as your words
wash away the grime
of self-reproach
of disappointments
of failings
and I look again
into your eyes
of loving faith

Anna Johnstone

BOOK REVIEWS

Prayer for People Who Can't Sit Still

by William Tenny-Brittian

Published by Chalice Press 2005.

Price and pp 161. \$39.63

Reviewed by Lionel Brown

Some people find it difficult to sit still in silence and pray for any length of time without becoming restless and being distracted by a multitude of thoughts running through their heads. This book is written with such people in mind. The author is a pastor who had become frustrated with his lack of concentration in prayer especially as his wife appeared to be able to sit for hours communing with God. It actually turned out that he had ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Tenny-Brittian deals with ten types of what he calls 'kinesthetic prayer'. This is prayer that involves the whole body and senses; not just your mind and mouth. The ten types of prayer are:

- Journaling
- Dance
- Action Prayer
- The Labyrinth
- Prayer Beads
- Sensational Prayer
- Prayer Walking
- Artistic Prayer
- Musical Prayer
- Technology-assisted Prayer

Each type of prayer has a chapter to itself in which he explains the basics of that particular type. Within each chapter he suggests several ways of putting the prayer into practice often drawing examples from his own experience.

In the chapter on 'Technology-assisted Prayer' he explores some methods made possible by modern technology. He mentions a number of interactive websites where it is possible to take part in Guided Prayer Tours and Labyrinth Walks. He also introduces his readers to AlphaChurch which is a website where you can take part in a full worship service including Communion (you supply the bread and wine).

This book caught my attention as I was browsing in our local library. Out of curiosity I took it home and could not put it down. I found it a very practical book which deserves the attention of a far greater audience than just those with ADHD.

PLAYING WITH CANCER - poetry, prayers and prose, with a smattering of patchwork

by Christine M. Newman.

2008. pp 113. \$30 + pp. Available by
emailing Trish Harris, harrist@paradise.net.nz,
and at some bookshops.

Reviewed by Libby Hinton

I found the title intriguing! Christine writes about her own cancer journey in a way that is refreshingly honest, courageous and very readable.

I have worked as a Grief Counsellor in Hospice for a number of years and am now offering Spiritual Direction. The

content of the book would be useful to offer to someone confronted with cancer, however I would tend to select what seemed appropriate, rather than giving them the whole book.

Christine includes a letter to people newly diagnosed entitled 'My dear friend'. She also writes openly about the challenges faced by family members including her two teenage sons and how these challenges are addressed. She asks 'Has the Almighty made a mistake?' 'Am I to blame?' Her answers give insights into her relationship with a loving God. Her conclusions are relevant for anyone seeking to confront suffering in its various forms.

I began reading the book when a close family member was undergoing chemotherapy. I was feeling vulnerable at the time, and Christine's advice to the reader proved helpful. She says 'Aspects of my writing are raw and painful' and then quotes Dinah Craik (1826-1877): "Please take what you can take and with a breath of kindness let the rest be blown away".

Christine says as her cancer journey progressed she found herself turning to prayer. She questions the place of prayer within this book of poetry and prose. She says 'I have included it (*prayer*) for it expresses in a different way how I have travelled. For me it makes the book complete'. I agree. I highly recommend this book to those accompanying someone journeying with cancer.

Pascal. "It is the heart, not the reason, which experiences God. This then is faith: God perceived by the heart and not by reason."

The Love of God xxx. J. Houston.

BE FERTILE WITH YOUR INFERTILITY

Christine Bannan and Winnie Duggan.

Bateson Publishing Limited,
New Zealand, 2008.

NZ\$29.95 + \$5.00 postage.

Available from christine.bannan@xtra.co.nz

Reviewed by Joyce Rupp

As a spiritual director, I am forever learning how to listen to the deeper resonance in the human heart. Sometimes this learning comes through my mistakes and failures. I still remember the moment when a woman retreatant approached me after I had just finished giving a presentation. As soon as she spoke the first word, I heard her anger. I soon knew why.

As part of my presentation, I related an experience with one of my directees. With permission, I related her story of an unwanted pregnancy in midlife. She had struggled with this reality and what she considered to be God's part in it. Eventually she moved to acceptance and gave birth to a beautiful child who became her great joy. As I related the story, I made a point of noting how easy it is to blame our struggles onto God's doing, saying, with a smile, "God did not cause her pregnancy."

It was this comment that stirred deep anger in the retreatant who spoke with me. She was furious, and with good reason: "How dare you make fun of anyone who is pregnant?" Although I did not intend to make fun of my directee, I felt small as the retreatant poured out her experience of infertility, her long, futile, expensive and exhausting process of trying to bear

a child. As she wept, she expressed such deep longing to give birth. Obviously, the thought that I would make light of anyone's becoming pregnant added to her sorrow.

That revelatory moment awakened me to become more knowledgeable and attentive to couples for whom infertility is their greatest cross. Theirs is, indeed, a deep heartache - which leads me to highly recommend a book unlike any other in its focus. *Be Fertile With Your Infertility* is "a book for people facing infertility in all its stages and forms," and it is also for every spiritual director. This resource not only enables spiritual directors to assist the healing process of their directees who are suffering from infertility or recurrent pregnancy loss, but it also provides a good amount of information about the body/mind/spirit aspects involved in treatments related to infertility.

Co-authors Christine Bannan and Winnie Duggan created this resource out of a conviction of the value of ceremony and ritual as vital aids to the healing process. After first describing the power of symbols, they then present personal stories of infertility which help to name the disappointments, frustrations and suffering involved. Following this, the book then offers numerous creative options for prayers and readings, including twenty-five pages of prayer-poems. The book also includes four pages of organizations, websites, and associations related to infertility.

Because those who suffer from infertility receive little or no support from their churches, this book supplies options for spiritual directors to provide for what is missing. In some instances, churches also censure and criticize couples who pursue fertility treatments. This reality points to an even greater need for spiritual directors

to offer these couples their understanding and compassionate presence. In either case, *Be Fertile With Your Infertility*, is a valuable resource.

Oh Light

ed. Anna Gilkison, *Disability, Spirituality & Faith Network*, 2008

129 pages. \$22.50

Reviewed by Trish McBride

The newly formed Disability, Spirituality & Faith Network organised and hosted an international conference, Through the Whirlwind, in Wellington in 2003, to acknowledge the special challenges and invitations of faith and spirituality when one lives with a significantly impaired body or mind.

The compilation of **Oh Light** has been another major project. The works of local writers and artists are blended with those of the famous to provide a soul-full book of reflections on life, struggle, spirit and peace that must speak eloquently to every reader. Trish Harrissays in her foreword "It's as if living with a disability sends you on a journey and takes you to a place where you are changed...And we had things to bring back to our wider community - shedding new light on the workings of the Spirit - as many other marginalised groups have done in the past." And so they have!

Tim Denee's selection of photos adds a potent dimension to the book. He pairs Rhonda Swenson's sculpture *The Cross* with a poem by Anne Griffiths which in part says:

"As a result of a particular journey to the Cross I no longer see it as symmetrical.

Now I see the Cross disproportionately

constructed, it is not aesthetically comfortable, it irks me, it discomfords me ... it is not a pretty sight."

And Anna Gilkison's sensitive editing includes deep words in the brief introductions to the six sections: "With our dependable parts, our unreliable parts and our unusable parts we create - we pain, write, dream, dance, sing and join wholly with the creative spirit which is in us, everyone."

This book is a precious gift from a community that has had to dig deep to those of us who are amongst the 'temporarily able-bodied', hopefully with open ears and hearts. It will be a resource for our own times of struggle, and a wise teacher to anyone walking with someone with a disability.

Oh Light can be ordered through the Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network website www.dsfnetwork.org cost \$22.50 + pp. And through Epworth and Pleroma bookshops.

SGM NEWS

Andrew Pritchard

In my Summer 2008/9 News column I wrote of Sue Pickering's decision that her eight years as Coordinator of SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme would come to an end at the end of July 2009. I expressed my sincere thanks to her for the wonderful leadership that she provided over those years and gratitude that she will remain as a member of SGM Workgroup. The closer we get to July the more aware I am of the tremendous contribution that Sue has made. I know that participants in the Programme over these years have been substantially impacted and blessed through Sue's

ministry and seeds Sue has sown continue to bear much fruit. Thank-you!

I am delighted that Barbara McMillan has accepted the position of Coordinator. Barbara completed her spiritual director formation through SGM's programme in 1998/1999 and over the past several years has contributed to the Programme as a workshop facilitator and supervisor.

Barbara works as a Christian Spiritual Director and is particularly interested in assisting people to recognise and be open to responding to God in the midst of everyday life. She is a mother of four daughters, and is currently working towards her Masters Degree in Spiritual Theology from Regent College in Vancouver BC. Barbara has a professional background in nursing and chaplaincy. Her love of mountains and gardening comes from growing up on the West Coast of the South Island, and spending her early married life sheep farming in Otago.

When Barbara and her family return to New Zealand in July they will be making their home in Auckland.

I commend Barbara to you and know that she brings enthusiasm, energy and a clear sense of call to this work.

As I write this in early May three other items of news stand out:

- The professional development workshops that we offer from time to time have been particularly well received this year. In February Rev John McAlpine facilitated another **Supervision Workshop** for us, this time 16 enthusiastic participants, from Gore to Auckland, met for the Workshop in Wellington. **The Art of Facilitating Retreats Workshop**

scheduled for May 25-27, attracted more participants than we could cater for. Even with shifting to a bigger venue we had to decline some applications, capping attendance at 23 with participants from Warkworth to Christchurch.

- On a disappointing note we have just had to cancel the October Muriwai Wilderness Retreat. Increased costs for the venue mean that the retreat is no longer financially viable. This continues a trend in which closure of retreat centres and increased accommodation costs have made longer retreats less viable. In many centres Retreats in Daily Life/Weeks of Guided Prayer are being supported well, enabling people to benefit from a retreat without the cost of accommodation and without the necessity for time away from work.
- A happy SGM Convenor is planning for some sabbatical/reflection time during an overseas trip in September/October. A significant part of this will be in Ireland where I will spend some time in reflective pilgrimage and then attend a Spiritual Directors International Conference in Dublin, October 16-18. I very gratefully acknowledge SGM Workgroup's support for me in this, granting me paid leave from my SGM responsibilities and a contribution towards the Conference fees.

Muriwai Wilderness Retreat ... October 11-18 2009

We regret that because of increased venue costs this retreat is no longer viable and has had to be cancelled.

BOOKS

Joy Carter. *Movements of Grace*. Poems by Joy with a New Zealand flavour in aid of Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia. Cambridge NZ. pp40. 2008. \$25.00. Copies available from Joy Carter, 123A King St, Cambridge 3454. NZ Email: joyc@orcon.net.nz

Neil Darragh. Ed. *The God Book. Talking about God Today*. Accent Pub. 2008. 250 pp. \$34.95. The aim of these essays, all written by New Zealanders, "is to articulate as clearly as possible and in language that is as public as possible how we understand the reverberations of God in our world" P.6.

H. Edward Everding Jr and others. *View Points. Perspectives of Faith and Christian Nurture*. Trinity Press International. 1998. 178pp.

James W. Fowler. *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*. Fortress Press. 1987. 132pp.

Alan Jamieson. *Journeying in Faith in and beyond the tough places*. SPCK 2004. 166pp. "a composite of many people's journeys" that Alan Jamieson has collected and worked with in his research into the faith journeys of Christians who move "toward unknown horizons of Christian faith".

Alister McGrath. *Doubt - Handling it honestly*. IVP 1990. 144pp.

Murray Rae. *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation - By Faith Transformed*. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1997.

Wm Paul Young. *The Shack - where tragedy confronts eternity*. Windblown Media. 2007. 248pp. \$33.00. The story of the father of a stolen daughter who finds healing and a deepening relationship in his encounter with the Trinity. A novel with profound insights.

WEBSITES

www.sgm.org.nz for the latest research papers from the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme.

Faith websites abound and can be readily found using Google or YahooXtra search engines.

www.newstatesman.com/religion/2009/04/conversion-experience-atheism
A. N. Wilson, biographer of C.S. Lewis, tells his story of sudden conversion to and his slow rediscovery of faith in God. A very significant piece of writing.

ARTICLE

Patricia Brown. *Spiritual Direction and Psychological Theory and Practice*. In *Presence, An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*. Vol 15, No. 2. June 2009 43-48.

FILM

Man on Wire. A BAFTA award winning film by James Marsh, 2008, featuring the high wire accomplishments of Philippe Petit's in 1974 when he walked between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre. A docudrama full of analogies of faith, among other things, and described as "exhilarating". 90 minutes.

God does not demand that I be successful. God demands that I be faithful. When facing God, results are not important. Faithfulness is what is important.
— Mother Teresa

CONTRIBUTORS

Lynne M. Baab, PhD, is a lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago and adjunct tutor at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. She is a Presbyterian minister and the author of numerous books, including two books on midlife. See www.lynnebaab.com, for information on her and access to her articles.

Lionel Brown is a retired Presbyterian Minister who is currently the National Chaplain for the Order of St Luke the Physician in New Zealand and lives in Christchurch.

Joy Carter spent many years working as a teacher in East Africa with SIM and other organisations. On return to NZ she helped re-settle Somali Refugees and now enjoys retirement in Cambridge, Waikato.

David Crawley lives in Auckland. He is a spiritual director and lecturer in spiritual formation at Laidlaw College.

Warren Deason is pastor of Albany Presbyterian Church.

Andrew Dunn lives in the bush at Albany.

Margaret Dunn has become a quilter in retirement and lives at Albany.

Matthew Easter is a PhD student at the University of Otago, writing a thesis on the narrative of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Paul Fromont lives in Cambridge (NZ) but wanders via the spiritual disciplines of blogging. <http://prodigal.typepad.com>

Ray Galvin is a former minister of St Andrews and St Philips, Birkenhead, now living in the UK and working on a doctorate on climate change at Cambridge University.

Trish Harris is training to accompany others on their spiritual journey. Drawing and other creative outlets are vital aspects of her own journey. www.ribbonwooddesigns.co.nz

Libby Hinton loves living close to the sea and bush in Eastbourne. She has a background in grief Counselling and recently completed SGM Formation in Spiritual Direction.

Anna Johnstone is a photographer and writer living at Glenfield, North Shore City.

Carolyn Kelly has just returned to New Zealand after 5 ½ years in Aberdeen, Scotland, where she completed a PhD on George MacDonald's thought. She is married to Mark Johnston and they have three children. She lives in Auckland (but sometimes longs for Scotland).

Trish McBride is a Wellington spiritual director, writer, grandmother and chaplain in a mental health context. She is particularly interested in the spiritual journeys and God-images of older women.

Murray Rae is a Presbyterian Minister and associate professor of theology at the University of Otago. He has published widely on the thought of Soren Kierkegaard.

Joyce Rupp describes herself as a spiritual midwife and is an acclaimed Christian spiritual guide and writer living in Des Moines, USA.

Derek Tovey is a Lecturer in New Testament, College of St. John the Evangelist and School of Theology, University of Auckland.

Adrienne Thompson lives with a husband, a married couple, a teenage boy, a toddler and a newborn, and a variable number of extras. She practises spiritual direction and supervision and is involved with Stillwaters Community and Wellington Central Baptist Church.

Lynne Wall is a Methodist minister who taught biblical studies at Trinity Methodist Theological College and the University of Auckland's School of Theology. She now teaches adult literacy in Auckland.

Learning to trust – that is the great thing.
You realize that you do have to do your work,
you have to provide what you can,
but also you have to learn to believe
that Providence is going to provide
all that you really need.
One learns to trust like that, day by day.
Of course, it does not mean
that you just sit down and wait
for things to happen.
You have to do something,
and you do what you need to do,
in the belief that Providence
is working in and through you,
not that you alone are responsible.

Bede Griffiths

Again we thank all who have contributed to this issue on Faith.
The Summer 2009-2010 theme will explore how contemplative spirituality responds to the current economic crisis and its impacts on life and faith.
A possible title is *Facing Realities – economics and spirituality*.
Please submit material (articles, verse, reviews, books, artwork and photographs) to the Editor by September 30th for consideration.

Radical Living

Jesus said,
"I say to you that listen,
Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from anyone who takes away your coat
do not withhold even your shirt.
Give to everyone who begs from you;
and if anyone takes away your goods,
do not ask for them again.
Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you,
what credit is that to you?
For even sinners love those who love them.
If you do good to those who do good to you,
what credit is that to you?
For even sinners do the same.
If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive,
what credit is that to you?
Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.
But love your enemies, do good, and lend,
expecting nothing in return.
Your reward will be great,
and you will be children of the Most High;
for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.
Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:27-36 NRSV