

spiritual life

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Cover Photo: *Our winter scene of snow and stark
beauty reminds us of all of life's losses that we will find
again in Christ. (Cleo Photography of St. Paul, MN.)*

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Letters to the Editor...

Just a note to let you know that I had photocopied articles by Robert Waldron and Dr. Matthews on the benefit derived from reading literature that appeared in *Spiritual Life*. I sent the article to clerics living in 2 different dioceses in upstate New York. Thanks for running them in your magazine.
T.F., New York

I am a grandmother and I would like to thank you for such an excellent publication. I shared this with my relatives in the Philippines. The articles reflect on my journey to God. I look forward to each issue. Rest assured of my love, prayer & concern to all of you. God Bless.
E.S., New York

I have been disappointed with your watering down, so will not be renewing.
D.A. Washington

Your summer edition was outstanding. A Treasure. Articles by Katherine Yohe, Peter Feldmeier, and Mary Brian Durkin equalled the New York Yankees of 1927. Great thoughts for my spiritual notebook.... I hope that your wonderful publication has an article related to: The Mass—Our Greatest Treasure.
J.T., Massachusetts

Professor Mary Brian Durkin, O.P., completely blessed my life with her article on John of the Cross and Evelyn Underhill. I found myself immediately practicing the advise from these two wonderful saints of ours, for Underhill too is truly a saint in her own way.

The release of selfishness on my part, although thimble size, has already put me on the pathway she described so beautifully. Thank you for being so perceptive in allowing her to 'turn us on' to the Lord in deeper ways....
J.S., Illinois



The Staff of ***Spiritual Life*** Wishes You
A Blessed Christmas
and
A Happy New Year



*We welcome your comments. Please send them to The Editor, **spiritual life**, 2131 Lincoln Rd., NE, Washington, DC 20002, or e-mail to: editor@spiritual-life.org. Visit our new web site at our old web address: www.spiritual-life.org.*

Maryanne Hannan

The Discomforts of Discipleship

SAMUEL SPOKE THE FOLLOWING WORDS blindly into the night, in response to a voice calling his name: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Sm 3:10). Without any inkling of what he would hear in return, he went forward and signaled his readiness to receive the Lord’s direction. In this way Samuel began his service to God as leader of the Jewish people during their tumultuous transition from rule by judges to the period of kings.

A Dilemma

As a committed Catholic Christian, I should be able to say Samuel’s prayer with happy abandon. I am fortunate. I have more than an inkling of what to expect: I have God’s revelation of himself in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Yet, I find these words (a *sine qua non* of life in Christ) difficult to pray with an open mind and heart. Why? I have to admit I am a coward. I realize that such a plea would not fade softly into the night and begin again with the morning’s light, in an endless comforting cycle. It is quite the opposite. I believe that God responds eagerly to any person who issues Samuel’s invitation. If I persisted in such openness to God, I would get increasingly clearer answers about how to live the gospel. No

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longer would I have the luxury of considering it a lofty ideal to love God above all else and my neighbor as myself. It would become an imperative. Everything would be changed by this prayer. This prayer is dangerous; it is life-transforming. In such a context, I utter it carefully.

As weak-minded and self-serving as these thoughts are, I could probably live with them. I could justify the corners I constantly cut by reminding myself that I am only human. I could fool myself by looking to a better day, a fuller conversion when the time was right. But it doesn't end there—with me, myself, and I. By the very fact

There is always a tension between the way we live our faith and the ideal to which we give witness.

that I publicly acknowledge my faith by participation in the sacraments and the communal life of the church, I am a witness to my faith, for better or worse. That is true for everyone. For those of us who take up leadership roles in the church, the burden is even greater. There is always a tension between the way we live our faith and the ideal to which we give witness. Sometimes it gets too difficult to ignore the gap between our public and our private selves.

I am a writer. My favorite assignments are scriptural meditations. I deeply enjoy the process of reflecting on and writing devotions for our daily readings. I read whatever the assigned passage is, and then I pray over it, let it simmer, and come back to it over and over again in a loose kind of *lectio divina*. I hold the passage in my mind and heart for however long it takes. “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening” could spring easily from my lips at any point in the process. By the time I come to the actual task of writing, the words come tumbling out.

But what words are these? And who am I to speak them? Over and over again, I discover from my own writing that the real gospel is the social gospel. Jesus came for the poor and the marginalized. Jesus meant what he taught on the Mount. He wants us to take the Beatitudes seriously. These are not sound bites; they are for real. So,

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I sit in my extremely comfortable home and write about the imperatives of a social gospel—what hypocrisy, and of such long standing. I remember wondering, as a young girl, why the rich man in the gospel asked Jesus what else he could do. He should have been able to anticipate the answer. I used to think, “Why didn’t he leave well enough alone?” I believed that to be a perfectly reasonable solution to an uncomfortable situation. The cowardice that seemed so ingenuous in my youth can now be seen for what it is. Sad to say, however, I am changing very slowly.

How can I promote myself as a Christian writer if I pray Samuel’s words, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening,” only when I pick up the pen but not when I get up in the morning to go about my business? What right do I have to preach Jesus’ words in Scripture to others if I am reluctant to live as one who has heard the words of the Lord and believed? How can I, who have taken the easy path time and again, exhort others to do differently? Even more difficult, how can I give expression to my finer moments (if I can find them) without swelling with pride, or worse, being remembered for these moments long after I have reverted to my former self?

Witness to the Word

Mother Teresa, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Eberhard Arnold, and Fr. Henri Nouwen wrote in great humility about living the gospel message, with words of sublime simplicity. I cannot. My words, next to theirs, are like cymbals crashing because I speak without their love. I simply do not have the moral authority to write as they do, yet it is my vocation to try. I write about a set of beliefs that I support but do not fully live. My own writing disturbs my conscience more than what I read of others’ writings. Because I am unworthy of the message, should I stop writing? While I speak now in the context of being a Christian writer, any person seeking to witness to his or her faith in the real world has this same experience. It is the same struggle for balance that people in ministry have always had to face, but from which the laity frequently hid in years past. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48) is something to which we should aspire, but we cannot keep silent until we achieve that state.

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French philosopher-activist-mystic Simone Weil (1909-1943) led a seemingly exemplary life. Her adherence to a radical social gospel was complete. Like the great saints, she insisted on sharing the life of poverty, hunger, and unrelenting physical labor that she tried to redress, despite her affluent family. While she is remarkable for rigorously putting into practice the principles she espoused, I find her religious writings—which painfully articulate the human longing for God and our unworthiness to receive him—even more fascinating. So acute was her sense of personal unworthiness that, despite a desperate longing to receive the Eucharist before she died, she refused to be baptized and formally enter into the church community. She died in this state. She gave witness to how unworthy we are as human beings to share in the divine life that Jesus offers us.

Humble Awareness

Although Weil's life of service to others, profound love of God, and extraordinary humility teach us much, I do not agree with her refusal to be baptized. While neither my life nor my understanding will ever approach the purity of hers, I recognize that my spiritual life must unfold, for better or worse, within an established church community. Whenever I am tempted to retreat behind a cloak of unworthiness, to put down my pen permanently, I can tap into her struggles on this issue and see my own somewhat different answer. Definitely, I am unworthy. That is a given. Yet, for me, it becomes a glorious humility to accept the gift of grace and become new. My life, as well as my writing, is a flawed witness to what I believe, but so be it. All I can do is hold in my heart the words of the prophet Micah: what the Lord requires is "only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

There are always temptations and there is always grace that is readily available to those who seek to do God's will. We cannot mastermind our own salvation, pick and choose among the temptations we find viable. We are not God. Humility, elusive as it is, seems to be at the center of successful attempts to reconcile our public witness and our private struggles with faith. Jesus tells us to follow him "for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your

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souls” (Mt 11:29). Excessive self-scrutiny does not elicit true humility nor any rest from the burden of existence.

Still the question remains: How do we walk humbly with God? Humility is part and parcel of any religious witness, yet it cannot be easily identified in any human act other than in Jesus’s self-emptying on the cross. As the old song has it, “Lord, it is hard to be humble.” Humility is not easily accessed. It seems to disappear as soon as it is identified, but it can be cultivated. J. Heinrich Arnold writes, “Humility is a virtue one can decide for. It softens the heart and makes a person open for God.”¹

*How do we
walk humbly
with God?*

A good friend recently told me that she routinely prays for the gift of humility. We can follow her example and pray for it, and we can read and reread Jesus’ words until some glimmer of truth comes home: “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3-4).

Trust

The hallmark of a child is the capacity for absolute trust. Franciscan peace activist, Sr. Rosemary Lynch, gives powerful witness to her faith. She credits her ability to remain cheerful and forge on with her difficult work to an early upbringing which stressed trust in God. As a child she thought the words of the hymn “Oh Lord, I am not worthy” were actually “Oh Lord, I am not worried.” She thought it natural not to be worried because we are loved by God.²

When we trust God’s love totally, we are humble. One follows necessarily from the other. We can bypass our own agendas and ego-based attempts to do the right thing only when we truly trust in God. Simple gratitude, as well as the willingness to bless everyone and everything that comes our way, fosters a spirit of humility far more than our feeble efforts of thought and writing ever could. Henri Nouwen writes that “the person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands.”³ Oh, Lord,

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I am not worried. And how old was Samuel when he told God, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”? Yes, he was little more than a child.

Maryanne Hannan contributes scriptural meditations regularly to *Living Faith, Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*, and *Words of Life: Daily Reflections for Your Spirit* (Novalis). This is her second essay in *Spiritual Life*.

Notes

1. J. Heinrich Arnold, *Discipleship: Living for Christ in the Daily Grind* (Farmington, Pa: Plough Publishing House, 1994), p. 80.
2. Jim Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 119.
3. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1997), entry for January 16 (unpaginated).

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

Adoring God in Spirit and In Truth

BROTHER LAWRENCE OF THE RESURRECTION wrote, “It is a typical error among the spiritually minded not to withdraw from what is external from time to time to adore God within themselves and enjoy his divine presence in peace for a few moments.” This wise insight from chapter two of his *Spiritual Maxims*¹ challenges us to avoid equating our efforts and exercises in the spiritual life with certain progress. Earlier in the same paragraph, Lawrence instructs us to

stop your activities and even your vocal prayers, at least from time to time, to adore him within, to praise him, to ask his help, to offer him your heart, and to thank him. (2:9)

This frequent, quiet, and interior adoration creates the environment for—and in fact is part of—practicing the presence of God, a practice that is fundamental to Br. Lawrence’s spirituality.

Br. Lawrence bases this insight on Jesus’ own words: “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24). These words express God’s own preference, for as we learn from the preceding verse, “the Father seeks such as these to worship him” (Jn 4:23). How, then, do we worship God in spirit and in truth? How can we make this adoration a living prayer so that it permeates every dimension of our daily life?

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In chapter three of the *Spiritual Maxims*, Br. Lawrence teaches us “how we must adore God in Spirit and in Truth.” Specifically, he offers three points for our consideration. The following reflections will focus on the wisdom Lawrence passed on to us in that chapter.

Appropriateness

“I say that adoring God in spirit and in truth means adoring God as we are supposed to adore him” (3:12). Again, Lawrence alludes to Jesus’ words from the fourth chapter of Saint John’s gospel. Lawrence elaborates by stating that “God is spirit and we must adore him in spirit and in truth, that is, with humble, authentic adoration of spirit in the depths and center of our souls” (ibid.). The first point Lawrence makes about adoration is its appropriateness, that is, it reflects what is worthy of the God who dwells within us.

Appropriate adoration is beyond description. It emerges from and expresses the deepest part of who and what we are as human beings. It reflects the principal truth of our nature, namely, that we are created in the image and likeness of God.² There is within each of us a spark of divine nature, the very spirit which is God’s own nature. Through and with the power of that spark and spirit, we pray and we adore. We are, in fact, most fully human in such prayer and adoration because we reveal our truest selves. However brief our initial experiences of such adoration, during those moments we touch and live what we are created to be: reflections and celebrations of the beauty and majesty of God.

This adoration need not be limited to a few scattered and rare moments. As Lawrence teaches us,

God alone can see this adoration, which we can repeat so often that in the end it will become second nature to us, as if God were one with our souls and our souls were one with God. (ibid.)

Two truths flow from Lawrence’s teaching that adoration can become second nature.

First, adoration is ordinary and accessible to us.

It need not be categorized as extraordinary, reserved for special times and selected situations. It can remain with us throughout the

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day, touching all our activities, tasks, and responsibilities. Adoration becomes a living prayer. The ordinariness and accessibility of adoring God in spirit and in truth clearly echoes Brother Lawrence's understanding of practicing the presence of God. As he writes at the beginning of chapter two, "The holiest, *most ordinary*,³ and most necessary practice of the spiritual life is that of the presence of God" (2:6). Adoration, like the practice of God's presence, is designed to be consistent with our everyday life.

Second, adoration is within our capacity as human beings.

Its ordinariness and accessibility confirm that it is within our reach, that it is natural to us. We are capable of adoring God in spirit and in truth precisely because that is the image and likeness in which we were created. Thus, the union with God to which Lawrence refers is not foreign to our nature. Quite the contrary, our nature and our capacity are fulfilled and perfected in that union for it brings us in contact with the very source of our being. Adoration can become second nature to us because it is consistent with our "first nature," our human nature.

None of this diminishes the wisdom of Brother Lawrence's closing comment regarding the appropriateness of adoration: "Practice will make this evident" (3:12). Even though adoring God in spirit and in truth is ordinary, accessible, and within our capacity, it is not automatic. It must be practiced or we lose touch with that deepest part of ourselves which is destined for such adoration. We would become strangers to that spiritual and true part of ourselves which was created for union with God. Appropriate adoration is a discipline which requires a commitment of our time and energy. Gradually, our practiced fidelity to that discipline gives way to faithful preference, to second nature, so that our adoration and our union with God become a living prayer, a way of life.

Humility

In presenting his first point, Brother Lawrence has given us already a glimpse into his second point since the two are inseparable. Appropriate adoration is, by nature, humble: "Adoring God in truth means recognizing him for what he is and recognizing ourselves for

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what we are” (3:13). This double recognition—what God is and what we are—constitutes the foundation of humility. It is precisely this graced recognition which leads us to pray, to adore God in spirit and in truth, and to depend on God for the transformation which must take place deep within us.

Brother Lawrence further specifies that this

means recognizing truly, really, and in spirit that God is what he is, infinitely perfect, infinitely adorable, infinitely removed from all evil, and so on for all the divine attributes. (ibid.)

Humility is a relationship with God which provides us with a sense, a recognition, of all that God is and all that we are called to be. Humility reminds us of what we are in our deepest selves; it recalls the truth of who we are; it is a matter of identity. Humility challenges us to become an incarnation of the very image and likeness of God in which we are created and teaches us that God alone remains ever the standard for our transformation. It also teaches us that our relationship with God will be the means through which we respond to and cooperate with God’s transforming work.

Humble adoration has nothing to do with self-deprecation, with underestimating our worth and dignity as human beings. In fact, by sharp contrast, such adoration challenges us to accept that our value is founded solidly upon the image and likeness of God. Self-deprecation, therefore, always runs the risk of becoming God-deprecation precisely because our identity as human beings is grounded in God by creation. And yet, humility shows us that we must go some distance to reflect well God’s image and likeness. By God’s grace, however, we do not see that distance in the dark light of discouragement, tempting us to abandon our prayer and remain paralyzed by hopelessness. Rather, humble adoration shows us the gap between God and ourselves as a bright invitation to use the resources of our creation and the power of God’s grace within us to move ever more surely toward a deepening union with God.

Humbly adoring God in spirit and in truth urges us to maintain a vibrant relationship with God. From deep within us, at the very center of our truest self—at the heart of our creation-based identity—the transformation will begin and extend and overflow to influence every dimension of our daily life. Humility, then, is to recognize that

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God's divinity permeates our humanity. This recognition is a gift from God. Our prayer and adoration support us in responding to that gift. With Lawrence, then, we too can ask, "Who are we, and what reason could excuse us from using all our strength to offer this great God all respect and adoration?" (ibid.). Indeed, who are we and what reason could we possibly have for not doing so?

Desire

As we remain ever free in our relationship with God, so do we also in our prayer and adoration. None of what has been said thus far about our transformation will happen by force. We must choose it; we must desire it. Above all, we must acknowledge God's willingness and desire to take up the transforming work of grace within us. Thus, Brother Lawrence articulates his third point: "Adoring God in truth means admitting that, although we are completely opposite, he wants to make us like himself, if we so desire" (3:14).

With this point, Brother Lawrence brings us to the core of adoring God in spirit and in truth: such adoration is rooted in our will and our heart—we must desire it. Four words are exceptionally important in this third point: "if we so desire." Everything is predicated upon that simple, conditional phrase. Lawrence thereby establishes an intriguing relationship between divine will and human desire. God's will uses our desire to complete the work of transformation. Our desire for union with God gives flesh to God's will for union with us. Precisely because God does not operate by coercion, forcing the divine will upon us, our desire has a major role in determining whether God's work in our spiritual life is hastened or hindered.

Desire—the gift of our free will and our ability to act upon it—constitutes an enormous power within us. We have been given the capacity to cooperate with or to constrict God's own work of grace within us. In one sense, though, this is not surprising because our God is incarnational. To continue the work of salvation, God uses our hands and feet and voices and energies. If we choose not to be a partner in the continuation of that work, how is it to be accomplished?

Our desire to adore God in spirit and in truth enables us to tap the resources of this power within us. Before us, then, is the choice to

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respond to or retreat from God's work within and around us. This choice is as blatant as the book of Sirach indicates: "God has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before you are life and death, and whichever you choose will be given to you" (15:16–17). Adoration positions us to accept the gifts, challenges, and responsibilities which accompany our relationship with God. We cannot remain neutral; we must decide. As Brother Lawrence wisely notes, "We must not be so imprudent as to withhold, even for a moment, the respect, love, service and continual adoration we owe him" (3:14).

Living Adoration

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection situates adoration within the context of faithfully practicing the presence of God. Adoration is one manifestation of that practice, and, like that practice, adoring God in spirit and in truth is more than just an action we perform. Adoration penetrates us "so that all our actions, without exception, become a kind of brief conversation with God, not in a contrived manner but coming from the purity and simplicity of our hearts" (2:7). Adoring God is a living and breathing prayer. How do we live this adoration? What can we do? Three practical strategies emerge from the wisdom Brother Lawrence has passed on to us.

First, we must relate to God with our entire self, with all of who and what we are, with all that we have done and now do.

The challenge here is to bring everything before the Lord—our shadows and our lights, our sins and our gifts, our discouragements and our hopes—everything. The spiritual life, our relationship with God and thus our adoration, is not merely a segment of life. The spiritual life is life—ordinary, everyday life—with its triumphs and tragedies, its dramas and drudgeries.

If we compartmentalize our relationship with God by confining it solely to periodic times which we designate as special, then we restrict and even resist its potential to touch and influence every aspect of our life. Even more, we undermine the incarnational character of that relationship by limiting the full extent of its reach and by closing dimensions of our life to God's transforming work. However

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“special” we may interpret our relationship with God and our prayer to be in these particular circumstances, in fact we will have diminished their value in our life.

Relating to God with our entire self echoes the prayer of the psalmist: “Bless the Lord, my soul; all that is within me, bless God’s holy name” (Ps 103:1); or, as Brother Lawrence says, we must adore God “in the depths and center of our souls” (3:12). Living adoration is built upon such a relationship of complete openness before God. If we do not bless and adore the Lord with all that is within us, regardless of how we perceive and evaluate and feel about it, then on what basis do we decide which parts of our life will not be brought to God in prayer? And what of the transformation of those parts? To whom, then, does our life truly belong?

Second, we must ground our identity in God.

The challenge here is to listen for the call of God over the noise of the many cultural sirens which compete to have us fix our ears upon them so we will plant our roots within them. In societies built upon and marked by materialism and consumerism, the pull from the siren songs of wealth, possessions, competition, power, and accomplishments is exceptionally compelling. We have the freedom, of course, to ground our identity in these realities, or in anything else to which we assign the highest priority for our lives.

Apart from God, however, nothing can match the richness and dignity of our nature. Apart from God, our dignity as reflections of a Loving Creator will probably be diminished.

*Apart from God
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nature.*

Drawing our identity, meaning, and direction in life from sources other than God traps us into a never-ending cycle of acquisition, then dissatisfaction, then new acquisition and further dissatisfaction. The span of time between the acquisition and the realization of its insufficiency, leading to dissatisfaction, may be relatively brief or several years—possibly even longer. Nevertheless, the cycle will inevitably begin and continue, fueling itself with our efforts and ener-

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gies. Grounding our identity in God is the only way to disrupt this cycle. The alternative is continued acquiring, to the point that we will no longer recognize our value and dignity as persons apart from more acquisitions and dissatisfactions. We eventually assume this is the way life is meant to be, and we assign priority to that way of life.

Grounding our identity in God opens us to the majesty of our nature. We can stand in awe at seeing our own worth and dignity and beauty. With the psalmist we wonder,

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. (Ps 8:4–5)

In this we recognize, as Lawrence tells us, “that God is what he is, infinitely perfect...and so on for all the divine attributes” (3:13). Living adoration celebrates God’s boundlessness and our own dignity as reflections of that infinity. If we do not seek our fulfillment in the very source of our being, in the One who created us, then where will we plant the roots of our identity? How do we decide which direction to take next? What does our life truly mean?

Third, we must desire only God as the absolute center of our lives.

The challenge here is to know what will fulfill our deepest longings, to choose to move in that direction, and to remain faithful to that choice. To speak of God as the *absolute* center of our lives does not mean that we close ourselves to all else in life. Assuredly, other persons and events will have a significant part in constituting the meaning of our lives. God alone, however, is able to touch and fill the deepest recesses of our nature and longing. God alone created them and knows them fully.⁴

If we do not seek our fulfillment in the very source of our being, where will we plant the roots of our identity?

Desiring only God is a discipline that requires our attention and energy. Easier would be the task of choosing to center our lives in any one of the myriad realities and opportunities which surround us.

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Such a center, though, brings with it a voracious restlessness which cannot be stilled. In truth, it can never be quieted since we are created for union with God. Union with all else but God leaves us rootless. Apart from our union with God, we remain restless sojourners, moving from one promise of fulfillment to another without ever tasting that peaceful contentment awaiting us in God.

Desiring only God as the absolute center of our lives awakens us to the graced realization of our dependence on and longing for God: “Whom have I in heaven but you? There is nothing on earth that I desire other than you” (Ps 73:25). Any other answer will lead us further into restless and unfulfilled longing. As Brother Lawrence says, we must admit that “God wants to make us like himself” (3:14). With that admission, we can respond as does the psalmist. Living adoration proclaims the primacy of God for our lives and our world. It affirms our single-mindedness in maintaining that primacy. If we do not desire God as the absolute center of our lives, then what will we designate as the principal axis for our lives? What certifies the stability and duration of that axis, and where are our lives going?

Enjoying God’s Presence

The insight of Br. Lawrence that opened these reflections indicates one of the principal benefits of withdrawing “from what is external from time to time to adore God” (2:9). Lawrence instructs us “to enjoy his divine presence in peace for a few moments” (ibid.). There is practical wisdom in his teaching. We approach God in so many ways: petition, praise, thanksgiving, question, guidance, comfort, healing, forgiveness, and encouragement. Thus, God has many roles in our spiritual life which reflect our desire and need for God’s presence and activity in every dimension of our lives. As Brother Lawrence himself says, “all our thoughts, words and actions belong by right to him. Let’s put this into practice” (2:10). Our multifaceted approach to God in life and prayer affirms and supports our efforts to put that truth into practice.

Brother Lawrence invites us simply to enjoy God’s presence from time to time, to be with the Lord without an agenda and without something urgent to be said or done. The simple enjoyment of God’s

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presence situates us in readiness for the gift of contemplation. Enjoying God's presence affords us "peace for a few moments," peace which can quiet our anxieties, provide perspective on the busyness of the day, and remind us of God's closeness even when we perceive only distance. Enjoying God's presence corresponds to the experience of being with an intimate friend, which is one way of describing prayer within the Carmelite tradition.⁵

Adoring God in spirit and in truth is the practical means Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection teaches us for enjoying God's presence. The appropriateness, humility, and desire inherent in this adoration confirms our dignity, openness, and single-mindedness in seeking this intimate company with God. Difficult times will come, our fidelity may waver, and we may question our own capacity. Adoration remains ever a discipline needing to be maintained by our time, attention, energy, and effort. Encouraging us in that discipline, Brother Lawrence insists,

We must have recourse with complete confidence at the moment of combat, remain firm in the presence of his divine majesty, adore him humbly, bring him our miseries and weaknesses, and lovingly ask him for the help of his grace. (2:11)

No better recommendation can be used to summarize and conclude these reflections than Brother Lawrence's own words: "Let's put this into practice" (2:10).

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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all texts are taken from *Writings and Conversations on the Practice of the Presence of God*, Critical Edition by Conrad De Meester, O.C.D., trans. Salvatore Scieurba, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994). Citations are indicated by chapter and paragraph numbers.

2. See Genesis 1:26-27.

3. The typographical emphasis is mine.

4. See Psalm 139.

5. Saint Teresa of Avila, *Life*, chapter 8:5: "Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends." (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987.)

M. Therese Casey, Ph.D.

Divestment: A Spiritual Process

WHEN I WORKED IN BUSINESS, I participated in what was called “corporate divestment.” The divestment process required that the people in the company participate in a rational decision-making activity. In the first phase, the people in the company reflected on why the company was founded and on the company’s unique mission, asking the question, “What is our mission now?” Often the mission was reformulated in the light of present concerns. In phase two, the managers subjected each area of the company to scrutiny, asking the question, “Does this area or activity contribute to our present mission?” If an area were judged a poor fit with the corporate mission, the area was separated or divested from the corporation. Finally, the people and resources that were freed up by the divestment were incorporated back into the company in the service of the mission.

Divestment in business is a rational, cognitive process that follows a somewhat predictable course. While it requires honesty, integrity, and courage, its goal is the repositioning of the organization on a more profitable path. I was amazed to discover recently that divestment was a process that I was beginning to use in my own spiritual life. Like the divestment process used in business, the one used in

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my spiritual life also requires honesty and courage. Unlike the business version, however, divestment in the spiritual life is an intuitive Spirit-led process into which God leads the mind and heart. The corporate divestment plan comes from poring over the company's books and sales figures. Spiritual divestment comes from listening to God in prayer.

This type of divestment begins with looking at the purpose of life, the *mission* of one's life. It continues with a re-evaluation of the areas of one's life. When energy is freed up by less emphasis on some areas of life, that energy is reinvested in areas that are seen as newly important.

Beginning of Divestment: What is My Mission?

Corporate divestment starts in one of two ways. A company may be hit with a crisis, e.g., a competitor develops a new technology that will make a treasured product obsolete. Alternatively, in the normal process of reviewing its products or services, the company may decide that a specific product or way of doing business no longer fits with the present company mission. In either case, the people in the company ask the question, "What is our mission?"

My personal divestment experience started with a crisis. In March 1996, my husband, Larry, had a heart attack while driving on a California freeway. He injured no one else in the incident and remained in a coma for eight days before he went home to God. During those days, I began the process of giving him back to God—a God he had cherished more and more deeply during his last years with me.

Watching Larry die shocked me into asking, "What really matters? What is really important in life (and death)?" I questioned my mission in life, not just in a general way but specifically. I began looking again at such things as the ways I used my time, my mind, and my energy. The life I had lived with Larry was over. What was my new life really about?

During my grieving time, I began to notice within me a process of giving up, a withdrawing from concerns and activities that had formerly been very important to me. Part of this was simply the natural grayness that mourning brings, but certainly part of my with-

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drawal was in response to the questioning I was doing of and in my life. Many concerns did not seem important to me in the light of a newly dawning sense of why I was still living. I was painfully aware that much of the time I had spent in constructing our life together was now free.

As I was preparing for the first anniversary of Larry's death, I went to Mass one weekday morning—this was a place I felt close to him. That morning I found that my anger at the Church for its neglect of the gifts of women, its use of all male references to God, and its all-male clergy seemed to dissolve in the wonder and comfort of the Mass. I began going to daily Mass.

Though I had always maintained an eclectic spiritual practice, I went back to reading the masters of prayer and meditation. I incorporated into my practice the light and guidance of Scripture. The divestment that I had experienced enabled me to begin to re-examine and recommit myself to the mission of my life. I began to use the time and energy that had been recovered from my life to focus on my core relationship—the one with the Spirit of God.

The divestment I had experienced enabled me to begin to re-examine and recommit myself to the mission of my life.

Areas of Divestment

When a company begins reflecting on its mission in the first stage of divestment, it is not immediately clear which areas may prove to be the least in accord with the newly reformulated mission. Some areas may have brought little gain to the organization for long periods of time. Others may have drained off resources needed for the main work of the company. It is only after asking the question, "What does this area contribute to our overall mission?" that managers can decide which areas can be divested.

I found that the same was true in my own life. I had no idea which areas of my life would undergo radical change as I began this pro-

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cess. However, as I continued to ask, “What really matters?” What is really important?” I found that I approached certain areas and reflected on their usefulness to me in my new life. I asked myself how certain aspects of my life contributed to my life with God.

I believe that the areas chosen for change and divestment will be different for each person. I share the ones that are important for me, simply to illustrate the process. I think the *process* is important, not necessarily the specific areas.

Divestment of Things

During the year after Larry died, I gave up our house. I gave Larry’s personal possessions to his children and to friends. I even found some quiet joy in giving his fishing rods and cameras to people who would treasure them. As I moved, I asked myself what I really needed and what could be better used by someone else. While part of this was the normal kind of winnowing that goes with moving, another part was a desire to live more simply, to move into a new life unencumbered by a preoccupation with things.

Divestment of Noise

I had spent much of my daily life surrounded by the talking of a radio or television. I would turn on the radio for weather and news in the morning, then get into my car and turn on the car radio when traveling to work. When I got home, I would flip on the TV for news or continue listening to the radio while cooking. During my mourning time, I noticed that these noises distracted and disoriented me. The constant sounds, while I used them for filling a now empty house, were taking me away from any kind of silence. I made a conscious decision to divest myself of much of this stream of sound.

*It was in those spaces
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At first I was aware only of “empty space”—often a painful emptiness. However, I also noticed that the words and jingles from the radio and TV no longer strolled through my thoughts. I noticed then

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that I was using the resource of silence and space to think more deeply about what was important to me. It was in those spaces that I mourned and listened to the voice of the Spirit.

Divestment of Routine

My life with Larry had a certain routine. When he died, I no longer had the anchor of that routine. I soon created a new routine because I knew that a schedule of work, sleep, prayer, family time, and social life is quite helpful in providing a core of healthy living. However, a routine can also be enslaving. When I reviewed the routine I had set for myself, I noticed that it allowed for little non-routine time. Occasionally I scheduled a non-routine day or half day in my personal life. I divested myself of the need to answer the phone and do every errand that emerged. Prayer and reading, instead of being measured, took up as much time as I wished. Freed from the constraints of time, my prayer often took on a different cast. The slower rhythm enabled me to go deeper, to ponder more slowly, to open my soul and body to a fuller message of God. Physical exercise and a listening attitude brought a core peace that luxuriated in the gifts of the Spirit. Now the effects of the non-routine time stay with me when I plunge back into the busy “normal” routine.

Divestment of Gossip

During my period of mourning, I noticed that what people gossiped about, the political concerns of people at work and the spinning of opinions about events, seemed drained of their previous fascination. I was less motivated to hear about the foibles of others and to comment on others’ behaviors that were essentially none of my concern. I didn’t feel that I had to produce opinions on every piece of news. In conversations with my friends and colleagues, I did much more listening than I was accustomed to. To my chagrin, I discovered that the world was not waiting breathlessly for my opinions and thoughts.

As I emerge from the mourning period, I try to keep myself divested of the need to be “in the know,” to hear about what people are doing and saying. With the freed energy, I find that I have more genuine conversations and that I exchange more ideas and thoughts with my friends.

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Divestment of Ambition

There was a time when I was very ambitious. In the organizations that I worked in, I was alert to the next step, the next job, and the next promotion. I knew well the trappings of power, the clothes, and the talk. When I achieved the “next step” or promotion, I enjoyed getting, having, and being in the new position.

Then I took a teaching position at a liberal arts college and was faced with a new set of ambitions, those that academia proposes and enforces. Since I loved teaching, I tolerated the tenure process. With considerably less enthusiasm, I did what was needed for tenure.

Although I had noticed this lessening of ambition before Larry died, his death accelerated the process. Desiring greater prestige and higher standing in my profession could not stand up to the question, “How does this contribute to my real life?” I knew I was satisfied with where and what I was. I let go of these imposed ambitions and looked forward to time spent in pursuits that were meaningful to me. Again, after the stage of letting go of the old ways of doing things, I had energy and time to invest in the core of my life.

Divestment of Judgements

Mourning softened me. My profession involves a great deal of thinking critically and making judgements. However, students, particularly struggling students, can be deeply discouraged by harsh judgements. When I reviewed my teaching, I realized that I was often being too critical of the students themselves. Of course their work had to be evaluated; that was part of learning. They expected and appreciated being called to perform according to high standards of excellence. However, I had connected this legitimate goal-setting with disapproval of students who did not measure up. I decided to divest myself of the need to approve or disapprove of the students’ every action.

I discovered that the energy put into judging could be more usefully spent in compassion. I became more aware of the difficulties of the students’ lives. The result was that I did less judging and more encouraging. As I continue to walk the path of compassion, I enjoy my interactions with students more, and they seem less fearful and more relaxed.

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Reinvestment of Energy and Resources

Embedded in the above examples of divesting is the last phase of the divestment process: reinvestment of energy and resources. Divestment is not simply a process of giving up and letting go. It makes available additional energy and resources, such as time, attention, and focus. In the corporate structure, additional resources are available to be devoted to the newly formulated mission of the company. In spiritual divestment, new energy and time is freed up to devote to the mission of a deepening and growing spiritual life. Before divestment, the spiritual life was one of many disparate concerns. After divestment, the mission of one's spiritual growth gains renewed breadth and depth.

Silence provides a "space" into which awareness of the action of the Spirit naturally flows.

I felt the effects of this reinvestment in many ways. Indeed this shifting of emphasis is still working in my life. Time for reading and prayer is more possible. Silence provides a "space" into which awareness of the action of the Spirit naturally flows. My ever decreasing interest in concerns about status and the actions of others allows me to focus on what I am being called to do. At the same time, my withdrawal from judgement-making has helped me listen more closely to students. I have assumed a more helping role, one that fits more closely my new vision of a teacher.

In corporate life, divestment is done once, the changes are allowed to settle, and a new rational structure builds. While there is some element of learning to live with the effects of divestment in both corporate and spiritual divestment, there are some differences.

I am beginning to see spiritual divestment not as a one-time event but as a continuing process. It is a work of the Spirit and so it involves listening and responding. I am deeply aware that no amount of rational decision-making could have worked the changes I now experience in my life. The impetus of outside events may have begun the changes, but these events were moments of grace into which I was called and given the strength to respond.

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I believe now that I will be called to other divestments and other responses. The question, “What is my mission?” will continue to be asked and answered in different ways and in different areas. Quite wonderfully, new energies will be released for growth and continued depth in the life of the spirit.

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Peter Feldmeier, Ph.D.

Mary: Our Mentor and Our Mother

BECAUSE WE LOVE MARY and venerate her as the mother of Christ and thus the mother of God, we tend to take Mary out of her ecclesial context, out of her relationship to us. She is so holy and her role so special that it seems that our lives can hardly relate to hers. St. Thérèse of Lisieux complained that most sermons on the Blessed Virgin made her seem so unapproachable. She writes, “I must see her real life, [as someone who is] imitable. ...that she lived by faith like ourselves.”¹ We do well to listen to this wisdom, as well as that of the Second Vatican Council. After some debate the Council insisted that Mary be placed in the document on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, since her role is best understood in the context of the Church.²

This article is a reflection on Mary in our lives both as mentor and as mother. As a mentor in faith, we shall see how her holiness teaches us our own path to holiness. She shows us what discipleship means, she shows us who we are before God, and she shows us our ultimate dignity. As mother, we see in her how she both brings about the Church and mothers it still. We also experience, because of her, a maternal image of God’s grace. My hope is that as we come to know her within our theological tradition, we shall also come to love her more deeply and follow her more closely as she leads us to her Son.

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Mary As Mentor

Mary is the first teacher of what it means to be a Christian. She signals that God's redemption in Christ has taken root and has begun in the rest of humanity.³ In Mary we see the beginnings of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Because she is the first disciple, she heralds the beginning of discipleship itself.

In Mary We Understand Discipleship

The Second Vatican Council calls Mary our prototype.⁴ So if Mary is the exemplar of faith, hope, and love, what does she teach us? We begin with Scripture.

The Annunciation

The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." Then Mary said, "Here I am, the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:26b-35, 38)⁵

We may be tempted to see Mary here as a passive recipient of the angel's announcement. We could see her as simply allowing God's plan to proceed while she only submits. Her *fiat*, however, has always been understood as an active engagement of her will. This is Mary's initial greatness. She is afraid, troubled, and confused, but in spite of all this she chooses to align her will with God's will—an act of great living faith. St. Augustine says it this way: "She con-

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ceived Him in her heart before she conceived Him in the flesh.”⁶ That is, she brought her faith to the Annunciation and engaged it during the Incarnation.

Elizabeth recognizes this when Mary comes to visit her kinswoman, now pregnant with John the Baptist. As Elizabeth blesses Mary at the Visitation, she concludes, “Blessed are you to believe that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). Mary’s blessedness, according to Elizabeth, was not based on the grounds of her physical motherhood of the Messiah, but that God had chosen Mary and that she has responded in faith.⁷

What is really extraordinary in Gabriel’s greeting is what the angel says about the event. By calling her “highly favored,” Gabriel describes an overabundance of grace.⁸ We see also that she is twice called a virgin (1:27, 34). This title, “Virgin” or “Virgin Daughter” is a favored title for Israel throughout the Old Testament, and the greeting she receives is one relatively unique in the Old Testament.⁹ The greeting appears to allude to two seminal texts. The first is in Zachariah: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he” (9:9).¹⁰ The second is also from a messianic prophet. Zephaniah writes, “Rejoice, O Daughter of Zion.... The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.... Take heart, Zion.... The Lord is in you, the Mighty one will save you” (3:14-17).¹¹

This is the message that Gabriel brings to Mary: that she is the symbol and representative of Virgin Daughter Zion. Further, she is told that the “power of the Most High will overshadow you” (1:35). This is exactly what God’s glory did over the Tabernacle of the Ark of the Covenant in the desert—it overshadowed the Ark.¹²

The language expressing the profundity of the Incarnation is overwhelming. Most of us would run and hide like Jonah did, for who could handle this? Mary is a simple country girl from the nowhere

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place of Nazareth. It is her ordinariness that becomes the forum for God's revealing his ultimate heavenly endowment. Mary's first lesson for us is her faithfulness, her obedience, her courage, and above all her decision to embrace God's will fully though she could not comprehend it. As Mary is spokeswoman for Israel and for the Church, she models and teaches us an obedience that actively embraces God's will. In the midst of great inner turmoil and confusion, we see her as one not only accepting but gladly taking on the role asked of her.

The Magnificat

Mary's second lesson, greater than the first, we find in her response to Elizabeth:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

This Magnificat, modeled on the Old Testament songs of divine praise,¹³ describes the inversion of earthly circumstances in which one recognizes God's action. It is God's mercy that Mary praises in all the reversals that God has brought:¹⁴ those who are puffed up are upended, while those who depend on God are raised. The "low estate of his handmaiden" is the chosen place of all divinely initiated reversals of the world. Mary, in her lowly estate, becomes a living symbol of divine liberation.¹⁵

She identifies herself with the poor—the Old Testament *anawim*—and the piety of the poor, which requires complete dependence on God. She contrasts this attitude with the spirit of the world—with those who are proud, who are self-sufficient, and who trust their own strength and show no need for God. One is reminded here of the

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beatitudes in Luke's Gospel: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours" (6:20), and its converse, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (6:24).¹⁶

Her response to the praises heaped on her—"O highly favored one, The mother of my Lord, Blessed are you among women"—is not to absorb the praises but to reflect God's greatness. She rejoices in God's fidelity, his wondrous plans for salvation, and she acknowledges that all that we are and have belongs to him.

In Mary We See Our Highest Dignity before God

Because Mary is redeemed in the most perfect sense, what we know of her is similar to what we can know about ourselves and the graced reality of our own salvation.¹⁷ In Mary we Christians are taught who we will become. The Council fathers teach that in Mary we contemplate what the Church, while still on pilgrimage, already is in its fullness.¹⁸ Mary teaches us how to be in relationship to God. Perhaps one can understand such a posture in the following contrasts between a feminine and masculine image.

*We can know
ourselves as
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redeemed and
united to God.*

I believe that there is a real and important difference between a masculine posture and a feminine posture in our spiritual lives. This is not exactly a difference in gender itself, but there is a masculine and a feminine way of being. Carl Jung, the famous pioneer in depth psychology, has described these interior complementary presences in all of us as the *anima* and the *animus*, that is, the feminine spirit and the masculine spirit. While generalizations are trying and often forced, I think we can resonate with the following truths.

Here is one truth: we are a pilgrim people; we are on our way, imperfect and journeying.¹⁹ I think this truth requires a greater engagement of the masculine part of our psyches. Joseph Campbell, the great religious mythologist, describes the hero's journey as essentially a masculine myth.²⁰ Think of the medieval mythic journey to find the Holy Grail—this is a knight's charge. The journey as a

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pilgrim is part of all of our lives, men and women. We have not yet fully arrived but are on our way in both discovery of self and of discovery of God.

Here is another, even more profound truth: we have arrived and are home. In contrast to the hero's journey, we can know ourselves as already redeemed and united to God. We are already holy. This is, in fact, the truth of our baptism.²¹ The Council fathers, quoting the First Epistle of Peter, call us a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (2:9-11).²² It is from this reality that we have the duty and the privilege to offer the Eucharist.²³ We do it because we are holy. We have arrived as a chaste spouse of Christ, utterly united to our beloved, as bride is to groom.²⁴ Following the image of spouse of Christ, we can see ourselves embracing our faith from the intuition of the *anima*.

This is why the Eucharist is the source and summit of our spiritual lives.²⁵ It is here that we express and find our truest nature and our completion, and we do so in a feminine mode. I believe that this is why the greatest spiritual doctors of the Church, such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. John of the Cross, have always referred to the soul in the feminine: she loves Christ and she unites herself to him. The answer is not simply that Latin or Spanish renders soul in the feminine mode, but that there is something far deeper going on here.

Mary, as exemplar of the Church who is the bride of Christ and as exemplar of Christians as spouses of Christ, shows us a posture of both a holy receptivity to grace and an active, loving, and passionate union with Christ. On this side of heaven we keep a creative tension between both masculine and feminine truths, but surely this latter truth is "the better part."²⁶

In Mary We Have an Icon of Ourselves

I once heard that to see our true self, we have to look into the loving eyes of another; to know our dignity, we have to see it acknowledged by another; to know that we are lovable, we have to see this love reflected from another. We look into Mary's eyes, and we see her dignity. The great Orthodox saint and mystic, Ephraim the Syrian, wrote,

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When we look into Mary physically we see the form of Adam now redeemed. When we look into her spiritually we see the Father dwelling in her.²⁷

I would humbly add that when we look to Mary we also see our fullest Christian dignity. She shows us who we are before God. *Lumen gentium* describes contemplating Mary as an act which shows us what we are in our deepest mystery and what we shall be at the end of our journey.²⁸ She shows us our completion even while we are still on our way as pilgrims. Thus, what was fully accomplished in Mary is still in process for us. She teaches us what we look like: the beautiful, chaste, and virgin bride of Christ; the personification of Israel and the Church; and the Ark of the Covenant which the Most High overshadows. We look into Mary because we see in her what God's almighty grace is capable of realizing in us.²⁹

Finally, we see in her an icon of our own vocation to spiritual motherhood—she teaches us how to be mother. In his encyclical *Redemptoris mater*, Pope John Paul II describes this maternal dimension:

The Church's mystery also consists in generating people to a new and immortal life: this is her motherhood in the Holy Spirit. ...with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development of the sons and daughters of Mother Church. Mary teaches us as Church our own maternal vocation of bringing forth and nurturing sons and daughters of God.³⁰

Mary As Mother

I cannot think of a better introduction to the motherhood of Mary than the just quoted words of John Paul II, for it is here in her motherhood that she shines perhaps even brighter as a gift for us.

Mary Is the New Eve

Mary, as well as the Church, is frequently described by the early fathers as a new Eve, even as Christ is often described as a new Adam. In contrast to the disobedience of the first Eve, whose name means "mother of the living," this second Eve, now completely obedient to God, is the mother of those living unto life eternal. The medi-

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eval mystic Hildegard of Bingen describes this change from the life of the first Eve to that of the second Eve:

Today a closed portal has opened to us the door, which the serpent slammed on a woman. The flower of the maiden Mary gleams on the dawn.³¹

Mary is a necessary new Eve. God's self-gift is not an extrinsic addition to the human race, but one that needs to be received within humanity. Mary is the very point in the whole history of redemption in which the saving grace of God descends into our history.³² She conceived Christ, brought him forth, nourished him, presented him to the Father in the temple, suffered with his suffering on the cross, and still cooperates as intercessor for the full realization of his kingdom. It is thus that the Council describes her as mother of us all in the order of grace.³³

Mary's Maternal Role in the Church

Essentially, of course, Mary is both a disciple of Christ and a fellow believer with us. Yet, in another way she exists on an order different from us other co-redeemed believers.³⁵ Mary's salvation, of course, is just as dependent upon the grace of Christ as our own salvation, but in terms of her historical role she acts like a partner with Christ in bringing about the Incarnation. It is because of this unique, immediate, and constitutive role that Mary's motherhood is best understood.³⁵ The Incarnation does not point to Mary as the source of our salvation—Christ is the source—but rather as the mother of our source who, like all mothers, brings forth life.

Mary's maternal role for us does not end with the Incarnation. By her acts of intercession she shows herself still mothering us to salvation. She is constantly present on this journey of faith.³⁶ The Holy Father teaches that what began with her consent to the Incarnation and continued in her sorrows at the cross will continue until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.³⁷ The sole object of her virginal, maternal love is to lead her children to the love of Christ. St. Anselm writes, "How can we fear, when our salvation or damnation hangs on the will of a good brother and a devoted mother?"³⁸ She gives us such great comfort.

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Mary as a Maternal Sacrament of God

My last point in reflecting on Mary as mother can be confounding and can even sound blasphemous. Yet, rightly understood, I think it is profoundly important. In a certain way, Mary serves the Church as a maternal presence of God. One of the important feminist insights in Christian theology is how the feminine in the Scriptures is too often ignored or relegated into non-importance. The biblical witness, while usually describing God in masculine terms, has in fact much to say about God in the feminine. Isaiah writes,

Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have written your name in my hands. (49:15-16)

In this text the prophet compares God first to a mother and then to a betrothed virgin who, according to the custom, has inscribed the name of her beloved on the palm of her hand. Hosea speaks in this way:

When Israel was a child, I loved him. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I carried them in my arms.... I drew them to me with human cords, with bands of love. I pressed them to my cheek like a nurse, bent over to feed them. (11:1ff)

God's love is really very feminine and maternal as it tenderly nurtures us in the Spirit.³⁹ In this sense, because of Christ's masculinity, Mary has the ability to represent a heavenly maternal love in her person,⁴⁰ though she is not God or God's saving presence. Recall her discipleship from the Magnificat: she points to God's saving grace, not to herself in any way. She points to God in the only way Mary could—as woman and mother. Christ's redemption is offered to us by Christ in his Church, which is filled, as it were, with Mary's maternal quality.⁴¹ She is a sacrament of God's maternal care, for in her maternal care we come to experience God's very care for us.

Mary's motherhood was not revealed all at once; it didn't happen in the blink of an eye. It was progressive. She was gradually prepared for her pure motherhood and maternal role for the Kingdom. Her assent made her the spiritual mother of the whole human race, which was awaiting Christ's redemption. Her maternal communion with Christ crucified made her the tender mother of the whole of

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redeemed humanity. Because of Pentecost, she acquired a mature awareness of her maternal task within the redeemed world. Her assumption into heaven and her glorification made her queen and mother. Her maternal care makes her concerned for everyone of us, and she uses her maternal love on our behalf so that the Kingdom of her Son and savior may be fulfilled.⁴²

*Mary truly
leads us to
Christ.*

In our post-conciliar Church, we do well not to forget Mary's meaning and presence in the Body of Christ. For if our hearts allow her space and love, she truly leads us to Christ. St. John of the Cross, in a Christmas refrain, wrote,

The Virgin, weighed / With the Word of God,
Comes down the road; / If only you'll shelter her.⁴³

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NOTES

1. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Her Last Conversations*, tr. John Clarke, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1971), p. 161.
2. Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halks, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), p. 15.
3. Elizabeth Johnson, "Mary and Contemporary Christology: Rahner and Schillebeeckx," *Église et théologie* 15(1984), 181.
4. *Lumen gentium*, 53.
5. My biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.
6. St. Augustine, "De sancta virginitate," 3 in *Patrologia Latina* (40, 397-398).
7. Raymond Brown, et al., *Mary in the New Testament*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 136-137.
8. Brown, pp. 127-128.
9. Gabriel says to her "Rejoice," that is, *chaire*, a specific form of the term used only four times in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament which Luke uti-

- lizes), three of which address the Daughter of Zion. See Brown, p. 130.
10. See also 2:14.
11. Brown, p. 131.
12. See Ex 40:35; Nm 9:18, 22. The term in the Septuagint is *episkiazein*. See Brown, pp. 132-133, and von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, VII*, tr. McNeil, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 60.
13. See, for example, 1 Sam 2:1-10.
14. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary for Today*, tr. Nowell, (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 1988), p. 59.
15. von Balthasar, p. 61.
16. Brown, pp. 142-143.
17. Brown, p. 158.
18. *Lumen gentium*, 68.
19. *Lumen gentium*, 6; 48.
20. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).
21. *Lumen gentium*, 13.
22. *Lumen gentium*, 9.
23. *Lumen gentium*, 11.

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24. This is the image of the eschatological completion of the Church in heaven from the Book of Revelation: the wedding feast of the Lamb, where bride and groom are forever united in loving union. See Rev 19:5-10.
25. *Lumen gentium*, 11.
26. Luke 10:42.
27. von Balthasar, p. 44.
28. *Lumen gentium*, 68.
29. von Balthasar, p. 44.
30. *Redemptoris mater*, 44.
31. As quoted in Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 170.
32. Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, tr. W.J. O'Hara, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 38.
33. *Lumen gentium*, 61.
34. Johnson, p. 181.
35. Johnson. See also Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary: Mother of Redemption*, tr. N.D. Smith, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964).
36. *Redemptoris mater*, 35.
37. *Redemptoris mater*, 13; *passim*.
38. St. Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, tr. and ed. Benedicta Ward, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 123.
39. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary: Mother of the Redemption*, tr. N.D. Smith, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), pp. 109-110.
40. *Redemptoris mater*, 5; *Lumen gentium*, 59-61.
41. Schillebeeckx, p. 113.
42. Schillebeeckx, pp. 114-115.
43. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, rev. tr. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), p. 73.

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St. Thérèse of Lisieux On Suffering

WHEN THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX was eight or nine, a teacher asked her what she did on her afternoon off. Thérèse replied that she sat in a corner and thought. When the nun pressed her to say what she thought about, Thérèse answered rather indignantly that she thought about God, eternity, and other things: “I THINK!” And she kept right on thinking as she grew up.

One of the things she thought about most was the meaning of suffering. This was not an abstract, purely speculative subject for her. She thought about what she had experienced at first hand or seen those close to her endure. While philosophers and theologians may seek to reconcile the goodness of God with the horrors of wars and the devastation wrought by natural disasters, Thérèse had a narrower but legitimate focus: individual suffering. She explored the significance of the suffering endured by good people.

Why We Suffer

In her exploration of suffering, Thérèse did not challenge God. She did not shake her fist at the heavens and demand to know why bad things happen to good people. She did not ask because she was con-

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vinced that faith had already given her the answer. For her, suffering, like everything else in life, is enclosed within the parameters of God's providence. We suffer because God loves us.

This is a hard saying, but Thérèse—who is, we must note, one of the cheeriest and wittiest of the saints—never shrank from it. Indeed, she saw suffering as a great good. She gloried in it. “Sanctity,” she declared, “consists in suffering.” Since she yearned to be a “great saint,” it is not surprising that whatever sufferings she endured only whetted her appetite to suffer even more.

Yet Thérèse was surely no masochist. She had no interest in pain for its own sake. She discovered soon after entering Carmel that the deliberate infliction of pain through the wearing of ascetical devices was not for her. Indeed, she suspected that spiked crosses and the like could become a source of pride to the religious who used them. Her attitude toward self-inflicted misery suggests that she would not have objected if the terrible pain of her last few months had been properly alleviated by medication. Pain was not her goal, but pain—whether physical, psychological, or spiritual—is, of course, a necessary component of suffering. It is, apparently, what suffering is! But there is more than that to suffering for Thérèse. She looks beyond the pain in search of the meaning of suffering. She finds it in the Cross of Christ through which we are saved and sanctified, and by means of which we share in Christ's work of salvation.

*Thérèse regarded
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God.*

This is, of course, the orthodox, Pauline teaching of the Church which John-Paul II reiterated in his 1984 apostolic letter on the meaning of Christian suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*. However, each era gives this teaching a different emphasis and a particular coloring. In Thérèse's time, pious French Catholics were determined to make reparation to God for the blasphemous horrors of the French Revolution, which had spawned the godless state and moral climate in which they lived. God's love was certainly not neglected in the writings of the spiritual masters of the time, but a popular current of fer-

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vent spirituality focused rather heavily on God's avenging justice. Some devout souls offered themselves as victims of this justice. Their intention was to serve as lightning rods, as it were, for God's wrath. The sometimes terrible suffering of these "victims" was seen as a vicarious experience of God's just anger.

Thérèse had a more integral and wholesome view of suffering. Put simply, she regarded suffering as a loving word of God. When this "word" is welcomed and responded to, the individual enters into the salvific mystery of Christ crucified.

Thérèse's Credentials

Those who have read Thérèse's life, letters, and last words are aware that when she talks about suffering, she knows whereof she speaks. She wanted people to know that she had, indeed, suffered. She did not want to be written off as a spoiled little girl who had left the warm circle of her pious family for the monastic enclosure of Carmel and had died young, untouched by trials and ignorant of the unbelieving world beyond the convent wall.

Respect for Thérèse's desire to have her credentials acknowledged obliges us to begin this consideration of her teaching on suffering by noting the range of the sufferings she herself experienced. The record of her losses, traumas, and illnesses can be found in her autobiographical manuscripts. I have no intention of recounting her story once again. I confine myself to a quick survey of the varieties of psychological, spiritual, and physical pain which marked her life.

Thérèse not only wanted her readers to know that she had suffered, she also wanted them to know that her sufferings started early. Thérèse was only four when her mother died. Then, when she was nine, her substitute mother, her sister Pauline, entered the Carmel at Lisieux. Her departure took Thérèse by surprise because she had naively thought that her sister would wait until they could go off to the desert together. She described the blow as a "martyrdom." Perhaps as a psychosomatic reaction to her grief, Thérèse became ill for months in 1883, when she was ten. She was bedridden, immobile, and withdrawn. She would hardly allow her third mother substitute, her sister Marie, to leave her side.

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In addition to these dramatic traumas, Thérèse suffered some of the more common pains of childhood. She felt that her formidable uncle, Isidore Guérin, thought her awkward and not too bright. She found it difficult to make friends at school and soon learned how fragile and one-sided friendships can be. In any case, she always felt somewhat out of things because the games her classmates played bored her. In fact, her discomfort at school became so great that her father withdrew her and had her tutored privately.

None of the losses and upsets of Thérèse's childhood and adolescence equaled the blow she sustained when, soon after Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux, her beloved father suffered a debilitating stroke which affected his mind. After spending three years in an institution and two years in the care of his family, he died in 1894 without ever emerging from his confusion.

By the time of her father's death, Thérèse's own decline had already begun, although no one suspected that she was suffering from anything more serious than a chronically sore throat. Two years later she began to cough up blood. After several months in the Carmel's infirmary, undergoing treatments that seemed, in the main, to increase her discomfort, she died on 30 September 1897 at 7:20 P.M.

Her physical sufferings, which were horrendous, were unrelieved by interior consolations. In fact, almost immediately following her first hemorrhage, Thérèse descended into a terrible spiritual darkness where she affirmed the truths of faith by a sheer act of will. The certainty that there is a heaven whose existence gives meaning to all we suffer here on earth was blotted out. All that stood in its place was a question mark and mockery.

This agony in the last months of her life was the worst of Thérèse's spiritual trials, but it had been preceded by others. She had walked through long stretches of spiritual dryness before the utter darkness of night descended on her. In fact, she had traversed periods of thick

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fog even before she became a Carmelite. In her early adolescence she had struggled through an eighteen-month long period of scrupulosity.

Thérèse knew about suffering, although those who were captivated by her wit, good humor, and the “big smile” she was so proud of might not have realized it. Thérèse had suffered her share of psychological pain through the death or departure of those dear to her. Her strange childhood illness dramatized the depth of her emotional anguish. She had known physical pain as well and was certainly no stranger to the dark valleys of the spiritual journey. Thérèse had earned the right to speak authoritatively about suffering.

Suffering Sanctifies

We noted earlier that Thérèse’s faith in the goodness of God convinced her that we suffer because God loves us. Actually, she expresses this in a more intimate way by saying that it is Jesus’ “gentle hand which strikes” us. He is the source of our pain. He may not enjoy making us uncomfortable, but he knows—Thérèse boldly proclaims—that this is the only path to divinization open to us. Nothing else can transform us. Jesus therefore smiles and sends more bitterness.

Thérèse is so convinced of this that she astounds us by arguing that eternity will be too short for her and her sisters to thank God for her father’s illness. Not only does she see his decline as an honor bestowed on a saintly man but as a providential move to separate Thérèse and her sisters from the love of this world. It is, she states, a “loving blow” of the jealous hand of God.

Thérèse sees suffering as the prerequisite for salvation because it detaches us from material things and reminds us of our destiny. Suffering, therefore, is part of the mix of good and bad we all experience in life. How much we suffer, however, is to some degree under our control. We can pick and choose. We can, as the saying has it, “make things easy for ourselves.” We can walk the broad, safe path of mediocrity, or we can take risks and opt for a more demanding trail. Greater suffering is the price we pay for choosing the more difficult route or—to abandon the metaphor—if we dare to love much, we will suffer accordingly. Suffer we must, whatever our choice.

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But Thérèse has heard the call to follow Christ too clearly to want to have anything to do with picking and choosing this suffering or that. If suffering is the consequence of the attempt to respond to Jesus' love, then she welcomes whatever comes. Indeed, she enthusiastically reaches out to embrace the totality of suffering which, actually, can never be her's: "I choose it all!" She would gladly pay any price over and over again to be able to preach Jesus to every place and time and in every way conceivable.

Her only excuse for her extravagant outreach is the example of Jesus' own "foolish," self-sacrificing love so vividly expressed, for example, in the great kenotic hymn of Philippians 2:6–1. Thérèse wants to be one with her beloved and he, as the second part of her religious name reminds us ("of the Holy Face"), was a man who suffered. Indeed, he became man, she remarks, so that he might possess the capacity to suffer. Since love drew Jesus to suffering, the identical love, alive in his followers, draws them in the same direction. The love and concern they share with Jesus makes them eager to participate in his ongoing work of redemption.

Jesus suffered and humbly accepted the death of a slave, Thérèse states, in order to draw souls into the very intimacy of the Trinity. He suffered on the Cross, and he continues to suffer in the members of his Mystical Body. It is this active, participatory, for-neighbor aspect of suffering that makes it so appealing to Thérèse.

Thérèse opts for suffering because it is salvific. This is why she went to Carmel and why she made herself, as she puts it, a "prisoner" within its cold, brick walls. This is why she volunteered to help a crotchety old sister make her way to the refectory. This is why she silently put up with the inconveniences and annoyances of community life.

Suffering, however, retains its active meaning for Thérèse even when it is not the consequence of her deliberate choice. She bore her father's humiliating illness and her own slow death as a share in Christ's cross. She is, in fact, convinced that the salvation of others depends on our willingness to be so joined with Jesus—so taken over by him—that our sufferings serve his salvific purpose. Like St. Paul, who was confident that Christ was strongest in him when he him-

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self was weak, Thérèse wanted to be able to say, “I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Victims of Love

Suffering is so much the reflection of love that Thérèse believes, as we have seen, that there is a correlation between suffering and sanctity. Great love, great holiness, go hand in hand with great suffering.

*Suffering is an
inescapable
consequence of
love.*

The more the self focuses on Jesus, the more *sympathetic* it becomes. Love much and you will suffer much. We must take care, though, to note that the greatness of love is what matters in this equation. It is only because suffering and love are intertwined that Thérèse speaks of welcoming suffering. God’s love and our love responding to it are what matter,

not the suffering itself. Therefore, she emphasizes that little acts of kindness or little slights ignored *with great love* gain infinite value in Jesus’ hands.

It is clear, then, that when Thérèse announces that she would like to see thousands offer themselves as victims of Jesus’ merciful love, she is not inviting them into some dark pit of misery. She is not asking them to call spectacular sufferings down upon themselves. She is encouraging them to love actively and to make whatever comes an expression of that love. She is asking them to let themselves be consumed by the fire of divine love.

Thérèse—a joyful young woman, if ever there was one—was so bursting with love that one of her sisters described her as being possessed by God the way some are possessed by demons. Therefore, though she maintained that pain is not the measure of the worth of suffering—and though she herself was indifferent to whether she got better or died soon, went to the missions or lived to an old age in Lisieux—the intensity of her suffering seems somehow appropriate. The magnitude of her suffering matched the intensity of her love. God’s merciful providence gave Thérèse a death that resembled the martyrdom for which she had always yearned.

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Suffering is an inescapable consequence of love. Some, according to the will of God, suffer nothing more than the miseries that are integral to human life, while others are called to take on greater burdens or to share more visibly in Christ's salvific action. Thérèse, not surprisingly thinks that, whatever our portion of the Cross, we should suffer joyously and patiently. But she has no illusions that we can suffer without expressing what we feel. Obviously, we must always be considerate of others. Nonetheless, we must not imagine that the worth of our suffering depends on the grand manner in which we bear it. We should not strive to make suffering a proud feather in our cap. It is the interior dispositions that matter.

Thérèse, therefore, glories even in her limitations and her failings. She suffers in union with Jesus, but not in any proud, superhuman manner. She accepts her moments of irritation, her tears and complaints as reflections of her smallness. She has no intention of storming heaven with her heroic credentials clutched tightly in her hand. On the contrary, her hope is to be borne up on the eagle wings of Jesus. Any illusions of grandeur, even in her last days, would have clashed with her lifelong conviction that she is merely a grain of sand on the beach of a loving God or the little ball that Jesus plays with as he likes.

Three months before her death, Thérèse states in a letter that "suffering has become my heaven here below." In the spiritual darkness and physical misery in which she lived throughout her illness, she firmly held to her belief that suffering united her to her beloved. She had lost all sense of heaven. The vision of a heavenly paradise which had played such a large role in her readiness to abandon the world and to suffer for Jesus was clouded over.

It is in defiance of the dark night of her faith that Thérèse speaks so often of heaven in her last days. Her insistence that suffering has been her heaven for so long, making her wonder how she will adjust to the joys of heaven, is more than just an ironic witticism. Thérèse's active love has found its expression in suffering. In heaven she will be more united to Jesus' love than she is now, but she will be unable to suffer. How, she asks, can her face-to-face encounter with Jesus separate her from his own passionate concern for the salvation of

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souls? How can heaven cut her off from love of neighbor? She is sure, therefore, that her love will remain active and productive.

Love prompts Thérèse to make Jesus' concern for the salvation of individuals her own. It also moves her to want to comfort him or, as she puts it a number of times, to wipe away his tears. Her joy, then, is not simply to suffer with Jesus but to suffer *for* him.

Thérèse offered Jesus all the little things of her life, but the greatness of her love pushed her to want to do more than that. She may not have felt that she was one of the eagles called to do great things

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in the Church, but her desire to love Jesus was boundless. This “for Jesus” aspect of her devotion is evident in the heartfelt prayer she offered on the day she made her vows: “Jesus, may I die a martyr for you, a martyr in body or heart or, preferably, in both.”

Conclusion

Thérèse's childhood practice of sitting in a corner pondering the mysteries of faith was the beginning of a theological effort that continued right to the end of her life. Thérèse was a thinker and, while she was certainly influenced by the spirituality of her time, her thought is bold, solid, and distinctive.

The events of her life forced Thérèse to reflect on the meaning of suffering. She could have followed a popular current of spirituality that valued suffering as a means to propitiate the wrath of God, but behind this spirituality lay the image of God as an angry, avenging deity. This was not the God Thérèse knew. When Thérèse uses terms such as “victim” and “holocaust” to describe her own surrender to God's will, she is speaking the familiar language of this spirituality but giving the terms new meaning by addressing her offering to a merciful, loving God. This is not a God who delights in suffering for itself or who measures its benefit in terms of its intensity.

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Consequently, when Thérèse mentions suffering, she is referring to the misery that remains after everything that can be done to alleviate psychological, physical, and/or spiritual discomfort has been done. Unfortunately, no medication, therapy, or consolation can completely rescue us from the losses, pains, and ups and downs of life. Thérèse, therefore, sees suffering as an inescapable experience of our vulnerability and littleness. She glories in it, not for the pain it brings, but because it is a salvific word through which God sanctifies us and makes us participants in the redemptive work of Christ Crucified. Suffering is a word which speaks God's love to us and through which we may speak our love for God and neighbor.

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G. Wayne Barr

To Be Physically Disabled ...No Longer Asking Why

IN A CULTURE THAT PLACES value on youth and beauty, we are physically flawed. In an economy that practices unfettered self-interest, we cannot compete. Some of us will never know the delight of Mozart or fireflies lighting up a July night or the thrill of batting a ball or chasing it. Though our physical circumstances vary, we who are physically disabled know the inability to function in a normal way.

For me, pain in varying forms and degrees accompany my every waking moment. Since the age of twenty-two, I have struggled with a degenerative disease of the spine and hips; spinal fractures have led to substantial deformity. Over the past twenty years, I have spent countless hours curled up in pain. My steps are measured and my body twisted, bent, and tired. I know the dread of surgery, lengthy recoveries, and learning how to walk again after spinal reconstruction. My vision is often blurry and my limbs frail.

Though my physical pain is often debilitating—and the deformity constraining—the social and emotional results of being disabled can, at times, be the greater challenge. I know the disappointment of hopes and dreams denied. I experience the frustration of limited employment opportunities and the high healthcare costs associated

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with being disabled. I am often misunderstood. I know the humiliation of watching someone mock my posture or my irregular gait. Sometimes I feel guilt and shame or the need to apologize for being disabled. I encounter those who mince their words or create false hope. I am exposed, unable to pretend. I know rejection.

I do not expect others to appreciate what I physically experience, nor do I expect others to assume my pain. I do not find what I endure especially noteworthy; after all, suffering is a common fate. The question is when and how much. However, I have learned—as have so many others who live with a disease, deformity, vision or hearing loss, AIDS, or other physical ailment or impairment—that suffering offers not only a unique perspective on life but the ability to be countercultural, to reassess one's priorities and that of one's culture.

We are more tolerant. It does not matter what an individual's IQ may be or their social standing or what they drive, wear, put on their face, or how short their hemline or what faith they practice. We do not buy into the myth of individualism; we see the interdependence of all people. Nor are we meticulous. Our lives are imperfect so we do not seek perfection in others. We have learned to live with the unknown. We accept less than ideal outcomes. What most consider serious, we see as humorous or insignificant. We see through the distractions and defenses and realize the hilarity of self-importance. We do not have a need to be correct. We appreciate how fleeting and spontaneous life can be. We have developed skills to manage multiple problems. Since we lack rigidity, we are creative. We are future oriented—we anticipate obstacles. Because we are subject to others' attitudes, we are adept at sorting out contradictory messages. We can recognize condescension and patronizing attitudes. Through avoidance of our disability, we recognize your fear. We are patient.

If you live long enough or suffer a physical tragedy, you will become like us. We cope in a variety of ways, but there is no magic formula. It is not easy. It takes time and faith. However, if you pay close attention, we might teach you that suffering is not as bad as you assume. Through our physical flaws, you will see honesty because we accept who we are. Beneath our vulnerability, our need for accommodation and assistance, you will find sincerity and under-

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standing. Out of our dependence, you will discover heartfelt appreciation. You will no longer place conditions on your compassion and understanding. Of course, you will continue to curse the pain or limitation or cry out in frustration but, because it is a daily reminder of your mortality, you will understand why we persevere. It is not about fear. It is about realizing the joy and beauty of life, a wonder and gratitude that physical pain or constraint allows. All becomes sacred. All becomes meaningful. We no longer ask why.

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Reviews

Marital Spirituality: The Search for the Hidden Ground of Love. By Patrick J. McDonald and Claudette M. McDonald. New York: Paulist Press, 1999. Pp. 198. Paper. \$14.95.

In *Finding God at Home: Family Life as Spiritual Discipline* (Harper and Row, 1984), Ernest Boyer describes an experience he had while listening to a lecture on “desert spirituality.” Although drawn to many elements of this contemplative path, Boyer, as a husband and father, felt a tug of frustration. This led him to pose the question, “Is there childcare in the desert?” In *Conjugal Spirituality* (Sheed and Ward, 1994), Mary Anne McPherson Oliver explores this problem, noting that traditional spiritualities often feel “slightly out of focus” for married persons. Oliver categorizes traditional spiritualities as generally belonging to one of two groups; either the “one-alone-with-God” lifestyle of the hermit or the “group-together-with-God” communal spirituality of monastics.

Married couples who desire a deep spirituality that speaks genuinely to the married experience will encounter a breath of fresh air in Patrick and Claudette McDonald’s latest book, *Marital Spirituality: The Search for the Hidden Ground of Love*. The combination of their own marriage experience of more than twenty-five years, their work as licensed marital and family therapists, and their obvious interest in spirituality has led to an innovative book geared at formulating a solid marital spirituality.

Just what is “marital spirituality?” In the opening chapters, the McDonalds present it as a joint spirituality, a “shared quest for the hidden ground of love” (p. 36). Rather than pit the love of another person over against the love of God (as sometimes seems to be done in traditional spiritualities), the McDonalds rightly situate genuine marital love as growing out of the fertile soil (“hidden ground”) of God’s own love. Marital spirituality includes intimate sharing of one’s deepest thoughts and feelings, compassionate attentiveness to one’s spouse, and sexual expression as integral elements. The authors suggest that the deeper a couple delves into the mystery of their own love, the more they will discover that the basis of their love is, in reality, God’s love.

In order to come into greater contact with this “hidden ground of love,” the McDonalds propose the use of the prayer practice of *lectio divina* (“divine reading”). In *Marital Spirituality*, this ancient prayer form is expanded into a tool for spouses to listen and reflect on God’s Word, discern God’s message, and respond appropriately to each other and God. Readers are gradually led into the process through sample meditations throughout the book.

The authors also present four “processes” of marital spirituality for our consideration: 1) more sensitized bonding, 2) an experience of the sacred, 3) the search for the living God, and 4) the contemplative marriage. The word “process” recognizes the developmental nature of marriage, in which the onset of romance carries a different flavor from the maturing wine of later years together.

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The first process is explored in the chapter entitled “Toward a More Sensitized Bonding,” which looks at the “three distinct selves” of marriage. Marriage involves “I” (my distinct self), “You” (my spouse), and “We” (our shared self). A healthy marriage respects and develops each spouse as a unique person, while also embracing the “shared self” of the couple. As the marriage progresses through different stages of life, the balance may shift. Understanding this may help couples weather the “dark nights” of “for better or worse.”

Chapter four looks at the next process of marital spirituality in which deeper awareness of the “experience of the sacred” is discovered. Couples begin to see the ways God, the “hidden ground of love,” is mysteriously present in the everyday events of married life. This growing awareness leads to greater awe, peacefulness, deeper honesty with each other, and increasing freedom to live a simple life together.

The third process, “embracing the personal God,” is examined in chapter five. Through the use of the psalms for marital *lectio divina*, couples are invited to a fuller realization of the personal and unique love God has for them. God is not merely sacred energy or mysterious presence, but One who dwells with us, knows our hearts intimately, and loves us deeply and personally.

The chapter entitled “The Contemplative Marriage” identifies the marital process in which the couple’s love evolves into an even greater intimacy with God and each other:

Like the blossoming of a new flower, married love opens under the rays of the warm

sun to present its unique gifts to the spouses who sincerely hunger for them. (p. 137).

Not to be confused with “feel good” or shallow spiritualities, the contemplative marriage experiences a richer awareness of God’s presence, even in the midst of trials and suffering. While sharing much in common with monastic contemplatives, married contemplatives engage in their own unique “flavor” of contemplation (p. 149). The book concludes with a brief sketch of practical suggestions for developing a joint prayer life and an invitation to other couples to contribute to the evolving field of marital spirituality.

As a married couple of sixteen years, we found *Marital Spirituality* helpful and enlightening on several levels. Written in a style that is “user-friendly,” couples do not need much exposure to spirituality prior to reading this book. Unlike some theological marriage manuals of the past, readers are given everyday examples, images, and stories that contemporary couples can appreciate. The book is sensitive to spouses who come from differing faith traditions or who may feel alienated from “organized religion,” yet it challenges all to strive for a more intense faith life.

As a couple unversed in counseling vocabulary—as certainly the typical readers would be—we were left wondering about the use of the word “process.” It was clear that “process” sometimes meant the shared communication between spouses engaged in marital *lectio divina*. However, we were unsure how to ascertain the meaning of “process” for the four marital “processes” discussed above. Are the four

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marital processes “stages” or “phases” a marriage passes through one-by-one, or does a healthy marriage exhibit all these qualities simultaneously?

Teaching couples the practice of marital *lectio divina* is one of the high points of this book. In doing the sample *lectio divinas* in the book, we rediscovered the intimacy of *shared* silence. We began listening to God’s Word in reference to what God might desire for our *marriage*, instead of merely what God desires for *me*. Applying the marital *lectio divina* to the Sunday gospel reading led us to a fuller participation in our own worship service. We think parish ministers will find the marital *lectio divina* process beneficial for marriage retreats, pre-marital counseling sessions, or other marriage enrichment events.

Overall, we highly recommend *Marital Spirituality*. Living in a culture that often disdains prayer or the idea of marriage itself, this book brought us hope and challenged us to grow *together* in our pursuit of God and a deeper marital relationship.

Julie McCarty, MAT, is a freelance writer with a special interest in the theology of marriage. **Terrence McCarty** is a senior systems analyst. Terry and Julie live in Eagan, MN, where they enjoy studying theology, hiking, and bird-watching together.

The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals. By Thomas Merton. Eds. Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. Pp. 374. Paper. \$28.

I echo the enthusiasm of Frank McCourt, the author of *Angela’s Ashes*,

for *The Intimate Merton* when he says, “I...rejoice in this rich volume.... It is a book I will keep by my bed for the spiritual nourishment and the pure joy in the writing.” For anyone who is a devotee of Merton, and they are legion, this book is a must. To read all of Merton’s seven journals is a daunting task, but now thanks to Merton scholars Brother Patrick Hart’s (Merton’s former secretary) and Jonathan Montaldo’s (Director of the Merton Center, Bellarmine College) painstaking efforts to clear a path through the woods (their metaphor for their labor of love) of Merton’s journals, we now have a uniquely intimate view of Merton’s life as man, monk and poet. Keep in mind, however, that a path is only a path: one cannot see everything. Thus, a path serves as an invitation to travel deeper into the woods by reading, someday, the complete Merton journals.

The editors emphasize the importance of rooms in Merton’s life, e.g., the room on Perry Street, the Infirmary Room at Gethsemani, and the final room of the hermitage. Each of the seven parts of *The Intimate Merton* is like a room in the house of Merton’s life. Each part of the book is named after the subtitle of each of the seven published journals. Thus, the first, condensed journal is named “The Story of a Vocation, 1939–1941.” The room analogy is an appropriate and illuminating one: it offers us a snapshot of each room. Naturally, the whole room (or the whole house) cannot be contained in the photo. We see only what the photographers (editors) wish us to see. Both Hart and Montaldo encourage readers to read Merton in his complete context, but they understand the exigencies of modern life. Since time is of the essence,

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Merton lovers and those new to Merton have been gifted at this time with a handsomely bound and covered volume of some of the best selections of Merton's journals.

In particular, the editors have performed a great service for those readers who are interested in dreams. All of Merton's recorded dreams are included in *The Intimate Merton*. Today we have a greater appreciation of the importance of dreams in the inner life. Thus, general readers and scholars alike will now have the opportunity to see more deeply into Merton's psychic life. Those, like myself, who view Merton from a Jungian perspective cannot but rejoice that Hart and Montaldo have so meticulously indexed Merton's dreams into one volume. Their other great service is their inclusion of a generous portion of Merton's prayers (Montaldo is collecting Merton's prayers for a separate volume soon to be published). Dreams and prayers are surely windows into the heart of the inner life.

When I began reading *The Intimate Merton*, I felt I was reading a fast-paced, first-person novel. The exciting pace and skillful telescoping of Merton's life allows the narrative to move along briskly in a way that grabs and maintains the reader's attention. This is an astute strategy on the part of the editors, who clearly comprehend the modern reader's impatience to get to the story, and Merton's story is here—riveting and revelatory. Of course, the panoramic narrative of Merton's life is fully achieved only by reading Merton's complete works. For those like me, however, who need their memories jarred or for those new to the famous Trappist monk, *The Intimate*

Merton spurs one on to desire a more intimate and detailed knowledge of Merton. He can be viewed in many ways: monk, priest, poet, novelist, artist, photographer, calligraphist, scholar, and hermit. All of his personae are represented in *The Intimate Merton*.

Merton's journals are embedded with gems of insight and moments of clarity which flash from the page when you least expect it. The adventure of reading also includes the flashes of insight the reader unexpectedly achieves while perusing these journal selections. For instance, I was pleasantly taken aback by Merton's early description of his reaction to Louisville, KY. His entry for August 14, 1948 says,

Going to Louisville the other day, I wasn't struck by anything in particular.... Louisville was boring. Anyway, the whole thing was obedience. It meant losing a day's work.

Now jump to March 19, 1958, and we have Merton's famous and often quoted Louisville Vision:

Yesterday, in Louisville, at the corner of 4th and Walnut, suddenly realized that I loved all the people and that none of them were or could be totally alien to me. As if waking from a dream—dream of my separateness, of the 'special' vocation to be different. Thank God! I am only another member of the human race, like all the rest of them.

What happened to the indifferent monk imbued with *contemptus mundi* [contempt of the world] in the ten years after August 14, 1948, is a mesmerizing unveiling accomplished with incisive skill by both Hart and Montaldo. They know their Merton! Consequently, *The Intimate Merton* comes across to this reader as a seamless, exciting, provoca-

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tive, and sometimes heart-rending story of a modern man in search of his soul.

The Intimate Merton is a superb addition to the Merton opus. It serves as an excellent introduction to the life of the famous Cistercian monk and writer Thomas Merton. It is ideal for Merton Chapters, retreat reading, seminars, and the classroom.

Robert Waldron is the author of *Poetry as Prayer: The Hound of Heaven* and the novel *The Hound of Heaven at My Heels*. His book *Poetry as Prayer: Thomas Merton* was published by Pauline Books and Media this year.

The Power of Confidence: Genesis and Structure of the Way of "Spiritual Childhood" of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. By Conrad De Meester, O.C.D. Translated by Susan Conroy. Alba House: Society of St. Paul, 2187 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, NY, 1998. Pp. 380. Paper. \$22.95.

Conrad De Meester served on the working *équipe* or team that produced the critical edition of the writings of St. Thérèse in 1973. De Meester's vast knowledge of the Theresian corpus as well as the scholarly literature about Thérèse is evident throughout the book.

The present work appeared originally in 1969 (*La Dynamique de la Confiance*) as a doctoral dissertation. A less detailed edition of his scholarly work was published in the seventies as *Les Mains Vides* (With Empty Hands) and achieved great success. It was translated into fifteen languages. (The English translation appeared in 1982

in Sydney, Australia: St. Paul Publications.) The present volume, a revised version of the dissertation, appeared in French in 1995. It retrieves the detail of his original work and reflects any changes necessitated by the critical edition of St. Thérèse's writings (1973).

At the outset De Meester defines his task: he will examine Thérèse's writings in order to reveal as precisely as possible the development of her way to holiness of life.

The task includes an analysis of her "little way" as well as the images and symbols which identify her spirituality. His methodology reflects the *explication des textes* or the style of textual analysis prominent in French scholarship. He divides his work into four parts.

Part 1, "The Discovery," deals with various questions and issues surrounding Thérèse's discovery of the "little way." For example, the term "spiritual childhood" is not found in her writings but has appeared as an alternate image of the "little way." It is obvious from her writings that the image of the child plays an important role in her experience of her relationship to God. De Meester points out that it may be that Thérèse used the term "spiritual childhood" in teaching her novices. The "little way" is keenly associated with the experience of confidence and love toward God, in particular in her relationship to Jesus Christ.

It is in this first part that De Meester argues for dating Thérèse's discovery of the "little way" between 1894 and 1895, in contrast to Abbé Combes who set 1893 as the logical date. Thérèse had received Celine's notebook of selections from Scripture in 1894. It was there

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that she discovered Proverbs 9:4 and Isaiah 66:12-13, which were foundational to her little way. When she made her “Act of Oblation to Merciful Love,” she provided a summary of the spirituality of her “little way.” De Meester notes that both Ms. B and Ms. C of the *Story of a Soul* as well as the “Act of Oblation to Merciful Love” offer both the fundamental structure and her experience of the “little way.”

Part II, entitled “The Goal,” covers the years prior to her actual formulation of the “little way,” 1873–1894. De Meester shows how elements of her spirituality began to emerge. The experience of weakness, littleness, confidence, abandonment, humility, suffering, and love are woven into the fabric of her life. While it may appear that Thérèse is prone to self-abasement, De Meester counters that she had discovered weakness as a fundamental experience in her life. She also accepted the call to love God above all. Humility, abandonment to God’s providential love, and being little would direct her way to genuine love of God and neighbor. Arms, elevator, and embraces suggest that her way would be direct and simple. For her, God is Father and Spouse, and both images are associated with Jesus who reflects both paternal and maternal qualities to Thérèse.

Part III, “The Unfolding,” offers a close analysis of both Ms. B and the “Act of Oblation to Merciful Love.” It is obvious that, in Thérèse’s experience, she cannot be preoccupied with perfectionism. Weakness and imperfections prompt her to seize upon the scriptural passages that speak of God’s compassionate love. She puts confidence in

God’s merciful love; her relationship to God unfolds in her growing capacity to love unto folly.

Part IV, “The Structure,” offers perhaps the most creative dimension of De Meester’s work. He argues for the centrality of confidence as the core experience of St. Thérèse’s “little way.” Thérèse had experienced life as an outpouring of God’s mercy, and, therefore, her faith was grounded in God’s love for her. Confidence in God’s love grew throughout her life. De Meester notes that confidence has other equivalents in Thérèse’s writing: hope, trust, to hope, to wait, abandonment, to abandon oneself, audacity, love, folly, and little. Thérèse herself wrote that as one appears to advance on the way of perfection, the more one is aware that the goal is far off. So, she could write that “I am simply resigned to seeing myself always imperfect and in this I find my joy.”

The summary of the book hardly does justice to the wealth of detail supporting his arguments. De Meester points out that von Balthasar falsely reported that Père Pichon told Thérèse that she was free of all sin. De Meester comments rightly that it was only mortal sin that Pichon had in mind. As a consequence, von Balthasar’s position appeared to present the “little way” as a pathway for the spiritually advanced. De Meester suggests that the “little way” can accompany and give significance to an initial conversion of heart.

St. Thérèse viewed God as always fulfilling her desires. De Meester raises the question of the origin of this conviction. He suggests that Matthew 7:8 and John 16:23 are the scriptural sources. St. John of the Cross fed her under-

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standing also when he wrote that “the more God wishes to bestow on us, the more he makes us desire.”

De Meester discusses the theme of “merit” in the writings of St. Thérèse. She did not spend much time on the concept because merit, as understood in her day, suggested a just reward for something done. For Thérèse, one simply acts out of love without attention to rewards. De Meester might have clarified the issue by introducing the traditional theological distinction between *meritum de condigno* (a strict claim to justice) and *meritum de congruo* (an appropriate reward for living the virtues).

De Meester has shown herculean diligence in researching the develop-

ment of the “little way” of St. Thérèse. This reviewer would have liked to have seen in this revised edition some dialogue with contemporary literature on human development and self-esteem, the meaning of suffering in an age that tends to view spirituality as therapeutic, and more attention to the prophetic aspect of St. Thérèse’s spirituality.

Not only is this work a thorough analysis of St. Thérèse’s spiritual journey, but it is indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of her “little way.”

John F. Russell, O.Carm., is Professor of Theology at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ.

All books listed in the Reviews and Notices sections can be obtained from
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Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings. By Janet K. Ruffing. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000. Pp. 192. Paper. \$12.95.

The modern resurgence of interest in spiritual direction comes from every occupation and lifestyle, not just those in the religious life. But while some books cover the basic topic, almost none consider the subject of advanced direction. What are the special issues of someone who's been offering spiritual direction for more than five years, and of someone who's been receiving spiritual direction for more than five years? Written by a well-known practitioner, researcher, and theoretician of the art, this clear and insightful book fills the gap by providing concrete help for both veteran directors and veteran directees. The book offers a theological basis for the process of direction, then moves onto such advanced themes as resistance, desire in prayer, transference and counter-transference, love mysticism, and mutuality with God. It also focuses on the special concerns of women in direction. Each chapter includes a section on theory, some illustrative case material, verbatims, and suggested discussion questions.

Praying Our Experiences: A Classic Guide to Prayer. By Joseph F. Schmidt. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000. Pp. 88. Paper. \$5.95.

Praying Our Experiences is the practice of reflecting on and entering honestly into the day-to-day events of our life to become aware of God's word in them and to offer ourselves to God through these events. Noted by some as

one of the best introductions to prayer ever written, this book is helpful for developing our personal prayer lives, as a guide for sharing in groups, or as a gift for someone who desires to live a more prayer-filled life.

Making Senses Out of Scripture: Reading the Bible As the First Christians Did. By Mark P. Shea. San Diego, CA: Basilica Press, 1999. Pp. 262. Paper. \$14.99.

"The book falls pretty neatly into two halves," says Shea. "The first section is called 'The Big Picture' and is designed to take the student of Scripture on a 'flyover' of the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. This allows us to both get our bearings in the overall biblical narrative and to familiarize ourselves with the 'structure' of God's unfolding revelation of himself through the five covenants of the Old Testament which led up to the sixth and final covenant in Jesus Christ. The second section is called 'The Four Senses of Scripture' and invites us to then do a sort of 'post-game wrap up' of the first section and look at the way in which our reading of Scripture is affected by the revelation of Christ. In doing this, we explore the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses of Scripture."

Lessons From the Lives of the Saints: A Daily Guide for Growth in Holiness. By Joseph Esper. San Diego, CA: Basilica Press, 1999. Pp. 270. Paper. \$12.99.

Take a prayerful walk through the Church's liturgical calendar with *Lessons From the Lives of the Saints*. Each

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day contains a concise and pithy biography of these heroic men and women whom the Church venerates as saints. Fr. Esper provides a brief overview of each saint's life and explains simple lessons we can draw from his or her example. This book is a resource for your daily spiritual reading and meditation—a helpful guide that teaches you how to apply the saints' secrets of holiness to your own daily life.

True Self/False Self: Unmasking the Spirit Within. By Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O. New York: Crossroad, 2000. Pp. 127. Paper. \$12.95.

In this new book Father Basil teaches that the false self is constructed out of our attachments to things. He asks, "Are we not unhappy because we cannot do something we want to do, we cannot have something we want to have, or we're concerned about what others will think? The first step towards freedom lies in coming to this realization." *True Self/False Self* suggests that the answer to the problem of the false self leads to the simple meditation known as Centering Prayer.

People of God: The History of Catholic Christianity. By Anthony E. Gilles. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000. Pp. 250. Paper. \$12.95.

"Without understanding how we the Church have grown, evolved and changed as a people throughout our two-millennium existence, we can't understand our place in the today of the Church," says Gilles in his latest book. This revised and updated compilation of the history volumes from Gilles's best-selling *People of God* series exam-

ines how the Church developed in relation to, or in rebellion against, the larger culture. *People of God* details centuries of crucial turning points, from the development of apostolic succession to the implementation of the reforms of Vatican II. Using everything from hypothetical situations to humor, Gilles gives us a view into the history of the Church that is not only expansive but engaging.

Catholic Spirituality from A to Z: An Inspiration Dictionary. By Susan Muto. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000. Pp. 205. Paper. \$11.99.

Catholic Spirituality from A to Z is just the source to discover the answers to the following: who the desert fathers are, what the Illuminative Way is, and where meditation has its roots. Not only will you find the meanings behind the spiritual life and ideas, but you'll also be introduced to the saints who originally practiced them. *Catholic Spirituality from A to Z* is a short, inspirational dictionary, providing facts on important topics in the Catholic spiritual life. No other dictionary about Catholic spirituality speaks to both the head and the heart.

Pray Without Ceasing: Mindfulness of God in Our Daily Life. By Wayne Simsic. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000. Pp. 115. Paper. \$14.95.

"To pray without ceasing" has often been considered a practice reserved for those in contemplative religious communities. Today, however, we realize that unceasing prayer should not be linked to a particular kind of person or vocation but to life itself. To cultivate an attitude of prayerfulness, we need

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live only an ordinary, everyday existence. Our prayer, then, becomes eating, sleeping, relating—life itself. In *Pray Without Ceasing*, Simsic introduces the practice of being mindful of God's presence in daily activities.

Praying with Mother Teresa. By Jean Maalouf. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000. Pp. 136. Paper. \$8.95.

Fifteen meditations seek to immerse you in the spirituality of Mother Teresa and engage you in praying the way she did about issues and themes that were central to her experience. Included are such themes as: Love at the Center, Contemplation in the Heart of the World, the Secret of Joy, Peacemaking, Holiness is for You and Me, and A Life for the Poor.

Raw Faith: Nurturing the Believer in All of Us. By John Kirvan. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2000. Pp. 192. Paper. \$12.95.

In *Raw Faith*, a companion volume to his *God Hunger*, John Kirvan explores a centuries old spiritual tradition—it is called apophatic—that is centered in the pursuit of an unknown and unknowable god. It stretches from the world of Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, through the Cloud of Unknowing in the fourteenth, to Simone Weil and Henri Nouwen in the twentieth. Kirvan's is a highly personal journey that he and the reader take in the "good company" of the great "apophatic" mystics—Christian, Jewish, and Islamic. In fifty theme-centered meditations and prayers, readers are given an opportunity to understand better and more

deeply their own journey by reflecting on the faith experiences and insights of those who have traveled this way before.

An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching. By Rodger Charles, S.J. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999. Pp. 112. Paper. \$9.95.

Fr. Charles's extensive knowledge of the social teaching of the Catholic Church is distilled into an introductory outline of its principles in his new book. It has been written especially for use as preliminary reading material for those studying the Church's teaching in this area but will also serve equally well as a general introduction to the ethics of decision-making in the civic, political, and economic spheres of human society. The social teaching of the Church usually refers to modern documents, but there is social teaching in the Scriptures, and this teaching has developed within the tradition of the Church. Charles gives an overview of the evolution of social teachings.

Companions In Grace: Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. By Marian Cowan, C.S.J., and John C. Futrell, S.J. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources. Pp. 249. Paper. \$18.95

The authors provide a practical companion guide for directors of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Beginning with how one concretely helps a retreatant to prepare for an Ignatian retreat, the book then treats extensively each of the four weeks of the thirty-day Exercises. It also devotes a section to Ignatius's rules for discernment and for thinking with the Church.

—Regis Jordan, O.C.D.

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