

VOL 24

APRIL 1984

NO. 2

# THE WAY

## IMAGINATION AND IMAGES

IMAGES AND THE PSYCHE  
Christopher Bryant

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Philip Sheldrake

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*Theological Trends: Mary and the New Testament  
Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY  
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

EDITORS

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JULIA BELLORD

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THE WAY

Published quarterly (January, April, July, October)

**SUBSCRIPTION for 1984**

<b>Pounds Sterling</b>	<b>U.S.A. Dollars</b>
<b>£11.95</b>	<b>\$24.00</b>

*(inclusive of postage and packing)*

To: THE WAY PUBLICATIONS, Subscriptions Department  
39 Fitzjohn's Avenue, London, NW3 5JT, England

# THE WAY

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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## IMAGINATION AND IMAGES

		<i>Page</i>
IMAGES AND THE PSYCHE	<i>Christopher Bryant</i>	83
IMAGINATION AND PRAYER	<i>Philip Sheldrake</i>	92
IMAGES AND WORSHIP	<i>Mark Searle</i>	103
IMAGINATION AND FAITH	<i>Michael Paul Gallagher</i>	115
JESUS'S USE OF IMAGERY	<i>Michael Winter</i>	124

---

*Theological Trends: Mary and the New Testament* 133

*Traditions of Spiritual Guidance:  
The Guru in Hinduism* 146

Recommended Reading 154

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EDITORIAL OFFICE: THE WAY, HEYTHROP COLLEGE,  
11 CAVENDISH SQUARE, LONDON, W1M 0AN, ENGLAND

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# IMAGES AND THE PSYCHE

By CHRISTOPHER BRYANT

**T**HE HUMAN PSYCHE lives and expresses itself at many levels, from the vision of the contemplative and the abstractions of the philosopher to the level at which the psyche interacts with the body. It is now generally recognized that our conscious thinking and deciding is only a tiny fraction of the total activity of the psyche. Indeed our conscious mental activities are just the tip of an iceberg which swims in the vast sea of the unconscious, the unknown within and around us. At every level the psyche articulates itself largely through images. There is an inborn tendency, to which Jung has given the name archetype, to recognize and respond to specific images. The new-born infant, for example, instinctively perceives through hands, nose and eyes his mother's breast as a source of food. It is highly probable that something similar occurs in the sub-human animal kingdom, and that the spawning of salmon, the nest-making instinct of the thrush, the migratory urge of the swallow and the extraordinarily complex behaviour of ants, wasps and other insects are triggered by the stimulus of specific images.

The image or mental picture of objects in the world around us by no means exhausts the significance of images for the human mind. The image is even more important when it is made the symbol which points to or suggests more than one meaning, perhaps many meanings. The invention and development of language are largely the story of the development of symbol and metaphor to describe new facts and experiences and to convey new meanings. The developed language of today is of many kinds. There is the language of poetry and imaginative prose, full of symbol and metaphor, and there is the exact language of science with its sparse use of metaphor. The difference between these two modes of writing does not lie in the degree of concern for truth, for each is concerned to express truth in its own way. Reality is bafflingly mysterious. Science seeks to eliminate mystery by concentrating on what is measurable and ignoring the rest. Imaginative writing seeks to express something of the mysteriousness, the wonder of the real. As Austin Farrer has put it: 'The purpose of scientific statement is the elimination of ambiguity and the purpose of symbol is the inclusion of it. We write in symbol when we want our words to present rather than analyze or prove

their subject matter'.<sup>1</sup> And again 'exact prose abstracts from reality, symbol presents it. And for that reason symbols have something of the many-sidedness of wild nature'.<sup>2</sup>

In a short article I must limit myself to what seems especially relevant to the spiritual life. I shall first say something briefly about the images of memory and then turn to the function of images in exploring and coming to terms with the unconscious. One of the ways in which psychic life expands is through the development of memory, which enables the individual to profit by his experience. The new-born infant, thrust into the strange bright world out of the warm and comforting darkness of the womb, can at first make nothing of the blur of light that impinges upon the retina of the eye. He has no memories with which to interpret it. To begin with, he explores the world more by touch and taste and smell than by vision. Only gradually does he learn to identify objects through sight. Seeing is in part a mental act, in which the mind sorts out the variations in the light waves that fall upon the retina into images which roughly correspond with objects in the external world. As the infant slowly learns to identify persons and things around him, to form mental images of them and eventually to name them, he begins to grasp a little more of the nature of the real world. Comprehension expands with the development of memory. Just as the perception of persons and things is partly a mental construction, not merely the product of sense perception, so too memory is not just a recording of past happenings but is something constructed by the mind. The psyche weaves the recordings of the past into a pattern or story. In this work it is highly selective, it simplifies and conflates. It comes as a surprise to a person, when he is able to check some vividly remembered incident of the distant past with a contemporary account of it, to find that his memory is inaccurate. He has mixed together two or more events and has inserted into his memory-picture people who were not in fact present and omitted others who were.

The patterning and story-making of the psyche, as it builds past happenings into present memory, is brought about in the main unconsciously. Something similar is done consciously by the historian. History is more than the chronicle of past events, the juxtaposition of successive happenings; it is the discerning and describing of patterns, the discovery of connections between apparently unconnected events. The historian selects, out of the myriad facts known about his period, those facts which illustrate the patterns, the movements of thought, the economic trends and the

political objectives that he believes to be significant. The same kind of selecting and discriminating which the historian does deliberately goes on unconsciously to form our memories. The memory prefers a connected pattern or story to a higgledy-piggledy collection of facts.

Although the process of memory formation is largely unconscious, it can be assisted and modified by deliberately remembering the past and reflecting upon it. This exercise of recalling and pondering past memories can be of great value for our human and spiritual growth. Many of the moral and spiritual frustrations of the present are rooted in past experiences; experiences, for example, of rejection, despair, terror or rage. The past is not something finished and done with; it lives on in the memory and in the form of tendencies, attitudes and habits which were developed to cope with traumatic experiences in the past and persist into the present. These powerful emotions, and the actions or paralysis of action that they lead to, carve out channels along which the stream of psychic energy continues to flow long after the original storm and stress is over. The past, of course, cannot be altered but the effects of the past can; and the key to the repair of these damaging effects lies in the memory, the set of images created by the psyche as it seeks to make sense of experience. These memory images, as we have seen, are highly selective. They by no means exactly correspond with what happened; in fact they may wildly misrepresent it. The images we form of persons close to us will be coloured by the love and affection, or indeed the fear or revulsion, that they awaken in us. These memory pictures of the past can be changed and the emotions attached to them released. This is not to falsify the past, for our memories are anyhow far from true pictures of what happened. Rather it is to correct the memories by setting them in a larger and truer context.

Some of our memories are happy, some the reverse. If we are able to see our good memories in the context of God's love and thank God for these past blessings, the remembered happiness can bring a fresh element of warmth and gratitude into our present relationship with God. But it is of even greater importance to recall the bad and painful memories which keep alive unhealed emotional wounds. If we are able to bring these painful memories into the context of the presence and love of God, disclosed and made real in Christ, to bring them into this context and to hold them there, then the memory-picture will change. It will become possible to see our trouble not as something unique but as part of the world's sorrow

embraced by Christ on the cross and transfigured by him. This exercise of bringing old memories into the larger context of the presence of God is partly a work of imagination, in the sense of mental picturing, partly an expression of faith in God. Further, though they concern the past, the memories are, together with the complex emotions attached to them, an active force in the present. Faith and imagination working together are able to open up emotional wounds to the healing waters of divine grace.

Valuable though this exercise is for those able to practise it, there are many who cannot. Part of the reason for this is that the crucial memories that most need healing are often buried in the unconscious and so are inaccessible to deliberate recall. More importantly, there is a kind of split in the psyche between people's conscious aims and activities and the aims of the unconscious, an opposition between our deliberate purposes and our deep needs and instinctive drives. St Paul vividly described this opposition when he wrote: 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil that I do not want is what I do' (Rom 7,12). This opposition is an effect of our fallen condition and the consequent triple estrangement, from God, from our own depths and from our fellows, that flows from it. This estrangement from our own deep needs is accentuated by the secularist climate in which we live. Secularism, the practical assumption that this world and its values and goals are all that matters, influences us like an atmosphere which we cannot help breathing and causes us to repress our spiritual aspirations. This is a major cause of the aimlessness of many today, the boredom which Teilhard de Chardin called public enemy number one in today's world.

The psychologist who best understood what is wrong is Carl Jung, and in what follows I shall depend largely on him. Fifty years ago Jung was declaring that all the patients in middle life who came to him had fallen ill because they lacked what the living religions of all ages have given to their adherents. It was no good telling such people to go to church for they were alienated from religion and the words and symbols of religion meant nothing to them. Jung developed a method of helping people to make contact with their depths. The key to his method was the dream and the images and symbols which presented themselves during sleep. Jung was a pragmatist and found that by teaching people to pay attention to their dreams he enabled them to reduce their estrangement from their unconscious which was the cause of their neurosis. He wrote modestly about dreams:



I have no theory about dreams, I do not know how dreams arise. I am altogether in doubt as to whether my way of handling dreams deserves the name of 'method'. I share all my readers' prejudices about dream interpretation as the quintessence of uncertainty and arbitrariness. But, on the other hand, if we meditate on a dream sufficiently long and thoroughly — if we take it about with us and turn it over and over — something always come of it. It gives a practical hint which shows the patient in what direction the unconscious is leading him.<sup>3</sup>

In sleep the dreamer's psyche expresses, in the highly symbolic language of the unconscious, some aspect of himself of which he is not consciously aware. Jung used to encourage his patients to recall, write down, think about and sometimes to paint their dreams. The effect of this is to expand consciousness by admitting into it the emotions and ideas with which the dream symbols are charged. Sometimes a dream contains a warning, sometimes it indicates starved or neglected elements of the dreamer's personality, sometimes it caricatures an immature or one-sided aspect of his waking attitude. Jung also taught his patients to enter into waking fantasies in which, in a relaxed and receptive mental attitude, they would attend to whatever images passed across the screen of their imagination. In this exercise a person may have an imaginary dialogue with a figure on the screen, questioning it and waiting for his imagination to throw up the answer. Jung termed this procedure active imagination. The individual who practises it does not expect from it necessarily any profound wisdom but rather a point of view which he would be wise to weigh seriously. Active imagination enables a person to confront, to be influenced by and to come to terms with hitherto unconscious elements of his personality.

If we try to explore the unknown within by reflecting on the images and symbols that confront us in dreams and active imagination, the first image that will meet us is likely to be some form of what Jung has called the shadow. The shadow represents forces within us opposed to our conscious aim and attitude. In the course of growing from child to adult we form, partly unconsciously, partly deliberately, a personality ideal of the kind of man or woman we want to be. This ideal gives us the strength to reject the impulses and feelings which clash with it. These rejected elements of ourselves tend to coalesce and to act like a sub-personality opposed to our conscious aim and outlook. I earlier referred to Paul's struggle with his shadow. The shadow is likely to appear in a dream as a disagreeable

or dangerous character, a thug out for your life, or a tramp, or a disreputable acquaintance who tags on to you and you cannot shake off. I once dreamt of my shadow as a child-murderer, repulsive and horrifying. Not till long afterwards did I realize that he pointed to a violent and aggressive streak in myself which I had firmly repressed. The shadow represents a part of oneself which is not essentially bad but which, through being repressed, has taken on the character of evil. By confronting the shadow not as an enemy, but as a potential ally, we are enabled in time to integrate what is positive in it with our conscious attitude and, by so doing, to become stronger, humbler and more truly ourselves. The seven deadly sins — pride, anger, envy, avarice, lust, gluttony, sloth — list the kinds of qualities that are found in the shadow. Each of them can be understood as the perversion of natural human instincts and tendencies. But the seven deadly sins are abstractions whereas the shadow image is highly real and concrete. For that reason it enables us far more effectively to recognize in ourselves, to confront, and to come to terms with these dangerous forces within.

Jung distinguished between the personal shadow, the rejected elements of one's own personality, and the racial or collective shadow, the elements of humanity which the human race has rejected as anti-human. The collective shadow stands like a demonic adversary behind our personal shadow. It is too powerful to be integrated with our personality, and to attempt to assimilate it would expose us to the danger of being possessed and taken over by it. All we can do is to realize it as a dangerous inner force to be reckoned with and stood up to, and not to be forgotten or ignored.

The probing of the unconscious, through reflection on the images it presents, helps to reduce the alienation between our conscious aims and the deep needs of our nature. No amount of effort can overcome this estrangement from our depths. It is overcome by the right symbol which is offered by the unconscious to the person who seeks it genuinely and persistently. This uniting symbol might be described as a powerful image, focusing the imagination, releasing the emotions, moving to action. The symbol is a kind of bridge across which the energy and insight locked up in the unconscious can flow and be made available to the conscious mind. Jung likened the symbol to the giant turbines which transform the waters of Niagara into electricity and so provide power, heat and light to the neighbourhood. The uniting symbol cannot be thought up by conscious reflection. It comes as a gift from within. It has both to express

the deep needs of the psyche and be capable of relating realistically to the world of everyday. Religion is powerful through its symbols. For Christians the central symbol is, of course, Jesus Christ, crucified and alive, the symbol of the infinite Godhead identifying itself with the human condition as a man among men. I referred earlier to Paul's inner conflict, the division in his own being between his moral and spiritual ideals and opposing forces within, which he hated and despised but could not overcome. He felt himself tied to a body of death (Rom 7,24). Deliverance came not by redoubled effort but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The figure of the crucified Messiah, despised and rejected, not only satisfied his highest ideals but also spoke compellingly to the despised and rejected elements of his own being.

In the prologue to John's gospel the divine Word is declared to be the light of all men (John 1,4.9). Any genuine intimations of the divine that people have had in the long history of the human race have come from the light of the Word. It would seem that that light manifests itself in certain basic images. These images working in the minds of those sensitive to the spiritual, wise men and visionaries, enabled them to construct mental pictures of an invisible world around them, which gave meaning to the joys and sorrows, the disasters and triumphs which mankind has experienced everywhere and at all times. As Austin Farrer has written:

The human imagination has always been controlled by certain basic images, in which man's own nature, his relation to his fellows and his dependence on the divine power find expression. The individual did not make them for himself. He absorbs them from the society in which he is born. . . .<sup>4</sup>

These images are to be found in many forms and combinations in the religions of mankind. It is our special concern to trace their presence at work in the incarnation of the divine Word and the preparation for that event. To quote Farrer again:

There had arisen in Judaism the image of heroic and unmerited suffering for God's glory and the good of the brethren, especially in the figure of Joseph: and this image was tending to fuse with that of the blood-offering in atonement for sin. There was also the image of Messiah in whose enthronement the Kingdom of God would be manifested on earth. There were also the images of the divine power and presence — God is in Heaven but his name is in the temple, his

Wisdom or Word or Spirit is in the mind of the prophet, or, in some degree, wherever there is a mind alive with the divine law. There was an image of divine sonship belonging primarily to the chosen people. In Christ's very existence all these images fused. Joseph, the saint of sacrificial loving-kindness, the ritual Lamb of the atonement, David the Viceroy of God, Adam the new-created Image of God: all these were reborn in one divine Saviour out of the sepulchre of Christ. All this he was by right and in fulness, all this the Christians were to be by grace and participation.<sup>5</sup>

Many other primordial images have met and mingled in the hearts and imaginations of Christians, as down the ages they have meditated on the figure of the divine-human Redeemer. There are the feminine symbols of Mary, Christ's mother, and of the Church, the mother of believers; there is the image of the divine child, born in Bethlehem and in the hearts of believers, the symbol of hope; there are the images of the spiritual quest, of the treasure and the way. These and other symbols, woven into the fabric of public worship and private devotion, have reverberated deep within the being of Christians, renewing and revivifying them.

Why do these symbols, which have meant so much to our christian ancestors, seem to have lost their power to speak to an increasing number of people today? Two qualities must be present if a symbol is to speak with power. First, it must retain the element of unfathomable mystery. To understand a symbol completely would be to destroy it as a symbol, it would be to turn it into a sign, a shorthand expression of something that could equally well be stated in words. The true symbol has to point to an only partially comprehensible reality. The second quality, indispensable if the symbol is to speak with universal power, is that it must make a realistic impact upon the contemporary world, both the world of ideas, the intellectual world, and, perhaps even more important, upon the world of everyday living and action, the world of the inner city for example, and the unemployment queue.

It seems that the old images need to be reborn today in the kind of way, perhaps, that the Old Testament images were reborn through Christ in the first century. Such a rebirth can be brought about only by the Holy Spirit, inspiring and enabling the work that needs to be done. For work is needed on many fronts, the work of christian thinkers and philosophers, of theologians and liturgists, of contemplatives, of poets, artists and musicians, and of those expert in the behavioural sciences. But how are the gospel symbols to be made

powerful in the world of everyday? Partly by the lives of individual Christians in home and market place, in shop and factory. The heroism of Maximilian Kolbe in a nazi concentration camp and the sustained and joyful self-giving of Mother Teresa in the Calcutta slums have made Christ come to life in the imaginations of great numbers. But perhaps the witness of groups of people, living in unity and love and serving the needy around them, may make Christ visible even more clearly than the witness of outstanding individuals. People are symbols to each other, and people by their very being and existence can speak powerfully of the presence of Christ within them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Farrer, Austin: *Rebirth of images* (Westminster, 1948), p 19.

<sup>2</sup> Farrer, Austin: *op. cit.*, p 20.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Ann Faraday in *Dream power* (London, 1972), pp 128-29.

<sup>4</sup> Farrer, Austin: *op. cit.*, p 13.

<sup>5</sup> Farrer, Austin: *op. cit.*, p 15.

# IMAGINATION AND PRAYER

By PHILIP SHELDRAKE

**I**N RECENT YEARS many people, seeking to deepen or expand their experience of prayer, have found great help in what is called gospel contemplation. Stated very simply, this consists in taking a scene from the gospels, and 'putting oneself in the midst of the action', or making it present through the use of the imagination. Perhaps the easiest way to explain how gospel or imaginative contemplation proceeds is to begin by describing the experience of one retreatant, a school teacher, who had never tried this way of praying before. She was asked to use the incident of Peter walking on the water (Mt 14,22-33). When she came to describe this, she said that to start with she had no difficulty in imagining herself in a boat, as she had in fact been sailing as a youngster. She knew what it was like to experience the frustration and fear of fighting against a strong wind and current. This helped her to 'get inside' the scene. She recognized that Jesus was there, and found herself, like Peter, with a strong desire to join him, to be alongside him. However, she also felt unable to get out of the boat. Try as she might, she could not imagine herself doing this 'and so the prayer went wrong at that point'. Why did she feel this? 'Because, up to then I could identify with the actual story in the gospel, but when I could not get out of the boat, it all broke down'. And so, what did she do? 'I said to Jesus, "I can't get out of this boat"'. And then, 'I felt that Jesus asked why and I had to admit that I was scared. You see', she said, 'I can sail, but I can't swim very well'. Then she felt that Jesus was asking her whether she thought that he would make her do something beyond her capacity. 'Yes, you would . . . you often have'. This experience led the person to spend the remainder of the prayer sitting and talking to Christ about the fact that she did not really trust him because she did not know him well enough.

This example, it seems to me, underlines with great clarity some of the more important elements of the imaginative kind of prayer. Most importantly, the person was fully involved and was not just a spectator observing a picture, as one might contemplate a painting in a gallery. Quite instinctively she found herself identifying with

one of the characters in the gospel scene. And yet she did not *become* Peter, she remained herself. In this sense she did not put herself back in time. Rather, the story became present, and became *her* story. In this case she found it easy to enter the scene by some initially detailed imagination of being in a boat. However, as the story progressed, the degree of pictorial imagination grew less and less. Those with a strong ability to picture details find the notion of seeing the people, or feeling the wind on the face, or smelling the fish in the bottom of the boat very easy indeed. However, this is not a necessary part of imaginative prayer. Pictorial imagination is only one way of imagining. Not all are capable of it, and not all find it necessary. This person, as the story progressed, found that this aspect was less apparent. She 'sensed' that Jesus was asking her something, rather than heard specific words coming from a figure whom she could visualize and describe. This fact is important because some people object to trying imaginative contemplation precisely because they feel unable to imagine pictorially, or because it is unreal. Likewise, for those who do find it possible and helpful, there is the danger of becoming too involved in the trivia which, if used at all, are only a means to an end. That end, of course, is some kind of personal encounter with the Lord which touches the deepest parts of my reality. And that encounter was really present for this woman in that the imaginative representation of a particular scene provoked a realization of something very vital to her relationship with Christ: that she did not trust. Did the prayer go wrong because it ceased to follow the gospel story in literal detail? On the contrary, the gospel was a medium for the revelation of something very important and true about herself. And yet the gospel story was not left behind entirely. It was this specific scene of walking on the water which formed the backdrop to everything else that was valid about the prayer. And the prayer certainly remained within the general parameters of the gospel passage.

Another characteristic of this form of prayer is that it can free the person to allow deep-rooted feelings to emerge which are blocking any further growth. Imaginative contemplation, when it works, takes on a life of its own — and the life is that of the person praying. It therefore serves to bring the gospel into direct contact with the reality of this person's life, and frequently in a challenging way. Such prayer may also help a person come to terms with, and admit to, inner feelings which previously he or she felt were inappropriate before God. 'I should not feel angry'. A more distanced approach to

scripture, where one asks 'What did Jesus say? What did he mean? How does this apply to christian action?' rarely does this. For when one is bringing only reason to the gospels there is a tendency to apply *a priori* limits to what is valid. Thus another retreatant, in praying the calming of the storm in Mark (4,16) was brought face to face both with what she felt about Christ, and how she herself behaved in life. Jesus, lying at the bottom of the boat, was in the way as she rushed around trimming the sails in the midst of the squall. At first she was politely apologetic at bumping into him, but eventually she shouted at him 'What do you think you are doing there? Lolling around when we have to do all the work? Why don't you do something useful?' To which the only reply was 'Who is in charge here anyway?' This brought the person to a halt and led her to reflect that this imaginative experience underlined both her feelings that God was generally uninvolved in her concerns, and that, in fact, she rarely let him act because she did not let go, or relax, either in life or in prayer. A similar realization came to the person who prayed the call of the first disciples in John (1,35-39). When Christ asked him 'What do you seek?' his instinctive response was 'To be with you'. Jesus then invited the person to follow, and set off at a rapid pace which prevented him from keeping up. When he cried 'Why do you have to go so fast?' Christ merely smiled and kept going, up hill and down dale and eventually into a town in whose winding streets the person finally lost sight of Jesus. Final panic set in, but with it the realization that the problem was that he felt that Christ was always too fast for him, and that consequently his life was always a struggle to keep up with impossible demands.

The realization of 'impossible demands' raises the question as to whether all images which emerge from such gospel contemplation are true. If we take the example of someone who felt in prayer that Jesus said to him 'I'm not going to start loving you, until you learn how to love me', it is clear that this is not a truly christian image of God. We all come to prayer with images — of God, of self and of our world — but none of them is perfect and some are radically unhelpful. Does this mean that the feeling just described (that God demands that we merit his love) is *totally* untrue? It is true, surely, in that it is what the person actually feels. Distorted images cannot just be repressed; they can only be refined if exposed, admitted to, and offered to God. But such an image is not from God for, if we follow the sound advice of St Ignatius's 'Rules for discernment', we can see that what produces joy, harmony and growth is the gift of the good



spirit, and that which produces sadness, despair or fragmentation is (to use Ignatius's language) a temptation of the evil spirit.<sup>1</sup>

While the most common approach to imagination in prayer is that of gospel contemplation, it sometimes happens that imagination comes into play in other forms of scripture prayer. Thus I may pray through a slow meditative reading of a passage — what was traditionally called, in monastic spirituality, *lectio divina*.<sup>2</sup> When a phrase or word strikes me I cease reading and allow myself to savour it for a time until it fills my consciousness and I am fully centred on it. Then, when I feel drawn to respond, I may converse with God in a personal way for as long as seems suitable. I may feel drawn in the end to remain still and silent before returning to the slow reading. The original savouring of the word or phrase does not imply reasoning about its meaning, but rather a process of letting it sink in — perhaps by repetition. However, sometimes the imagery of the scripture may find an echo in my own imagination. Once again an example may make this point more clear. One retreatant was using Luke 13 for prayer and was struck very much by the phrase 'I do not know where you come from' (verse 27). Quite spontaneously he found himself, in imagination, ejected into the rain from a party because the host had said 'I don't believe we have met, and this party is only for friends of mine'. The feeling of isolation, and how it can destroy a person, was further reinforced by imagining a discussion with others who had been refused entry, where they spent the time disparaging the host to cover up their own feelings. When the person imagined himself trying to get home by sharing a taxi with another, he found himself turned away yet again with the words 'I don't believe we are going in the same direction'. This imaginative experience helped the man to reach a deep understanding of some kind of self-made hell. He felt drawn to remain with this, in order to let it penetrate more deeply, and then to converse with Christ about the realization that he had been offered so many opportunities to recognize Jesus and to be recognized by him. Yet he had always chosen to remain on the fringe. 'I always come to you in prayer as a gate-crasher to a party, but in fact you always do let me in'. Thus this imaginative experience, provoked by the phrase in Luke's gospel, led the man to deep feelings of repentance, and to a realization of God's mercy and faithfulness which were in no sense merited.

Apart from indicating a further way in which imagination may play a role in prayer, the last example also underlines a general

point: that imagination is not an end in itself. Its value is that it can dispose me for an encounter with the living Christ who speaks directly to my present condition. Once that meeting between Christ and my inner desires or fears or ambiguities has begun, the process of imagining ceases to be important and should not be sustained artificially. In practice the person will be drawn into dialogue, or into silent 'being with' the God whose presence is now consciously felt. The imaginative phase, strictly so-called, may last for most of the period of prayer or be a relatively brief experience as a preface to extended silence. The point is that if I believe that it is God and not myself who controls prayer, I shall feel quite free to allow myself to be led wherever the Spirit wishes.

It now seems possible to attempt a summary of the method of imaginative contemplation in a few words.<sup>3</sup> In my experience it is important for the freedom of this prayer not to have to refer back continually to the gospel text for more information. In other words, I would assume that the person has become familiar with the passage to be used before entering into prayer. The text can then be left aside. In a retreat one normally advises someone to prepare the passage some time before (often the previous evening) by reading it through several times and allowing it to sink in. For some people it is important at this stage to sort out more theoretical questions such as 'What does the text mean here?' in order to prevent this intruding into the prayer itself. Something similar may well suit people who want to use this kind of prayer in daily life. John Veltri and others suggest another more systematic approach as a prelude to the prayer time itself.<sup>4</sup> This consists in reading the passage slowly and meditatively and then stopping to let the events sink in and repeating this until it totally saturates the imagination. Once this has happened the bible may be put aside and the scene be permitted to happen. There should be no attempt to force it, but rather there should be an attentiveness to its developments. As you sink into the scene you may well experience that you lose the sense of yourself as you become more absorbed. The essential thing is to take part in the process of development. It is also important to avoid moralizing, or forcing applications of the passage to your life. Nor should you observe how you are affected by the passage, by asking yourself 'What is happening to me here?' Rather, you should allow yourself to be lost in the story — that is to say, in the people, in the words and in the actions. Your own reactions or 'what happens to you' will be noticeable later as you reflect back on the prayer, or perhaps will

appear more subtly in the effects such prayer has on your ordinary life.

While the prayer of imagination undoubtedly has connections with some of the insights of modern psychology (especially Jung's 'active imagination'), it is worth stressing that it has a long history in christian tradition. The medium through which gospel contemplation has come through to our own times is the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola.<sup>5</sup> Until serious research into ignatian texts and other sources became more widespread and systematic in modern times, imagination was associated with a rather rigid and dry form of mental prayer or 'meditation' which involved, above all, the reason and will-power and which, it was believed, was the only authentic ignatian prayer. It is now appreciated much more widely that Ignatius did not promote any *one* method of prayer. The Exercises contain at least ten different ones! Further, it is now appreciated that the form of imaginative prayer which Ignatius recommends at the beginning of the Second Week or stage of the Exercises is really a form of contemplative prayer, rather than discursive meditation. This view is reinforced if we bear in mind its origins in the medieval monastic tradition *lectio divina*. In his teaching on prayer Ignatius is thoroughly eclectic and derivative. His originality lay in adapting and simplifying the riches of christian prayer in order to make them accessible beyond the confines of the cloister, and in weaving the various methods into a wider framework, the Exercises, which was conceived of as a context to enable a person to reach such an inner freedom that he or she could respond wholeheartedly to the call of Christ in everyday life.

Ignatius learned the practice of imaginative contemplation from his reading of the *Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony (a fourteenth-century Carthusian), while recovering from the wound he had received at the siege of Pamplona.<sup>6</sup> Ludolph gives the essentials of the method in his prologue where he recommends the reader to look at the events of the life of Christ as if they were actually taking place. He himself inherited the tradition from the *Meditations on the life of Christ* which were extremely popular in the fourteenth century, and while not by Bonaventure as originally supposed, reflected the franciscan tradition of devotion to the human person of Christ. The origins of this form of prayer are not clear, but aspects of it are present in the writings of Anselm and Aelred of Rievaulx. Thus the tradition seems to have been passed from the Cistercians to the Franciscans and Carthusians. It is also mentioned favourably by

Walter Hilton and Teresa of Avila, who reacted strongly against those directors who suggested that to meditate on the human Christ was a hindrance to deeper prayer.

Some of the reasons why people find the idea of imaginative prayer difficult are really misunderstandings of the whole process. As I have already suggested, gospel contemplation does not depend on one's ability to imagine pictorially. Further, such prayer does not involve the need to control the process, to be logical or to stick firmly to the gospel text exactly as it is. If one is truly involved the process will inevitably 'take on a life of its own'. Is there a danger of sentimentality? Indeed there is, but all forms of prayer have their dangers, and the objection to this kind of prayer often relates to problems about using images at all or about the value of feelings. Certainly our prayer should be free from any straining after emotional reactions that do not arise of themselves. However, many people have been taught to distrust *any* feelings in prayer, and this needs to be corrected. We come to prayer as whole persons, with body, mind and feelings. To exclude, arbitrarily, one or the other part is to risk the danger of an incomplete response. But surely imageless prayer is better prayer? Certainly there are not a few modern writings which give this impression. It is worth reflecting once again that imagination played a significant role in medieval monastic and contemplative tradition. To suggest that praying the gospels gets in the way of reaching out to a God who is beyond all images is to undervalue the 'sacramental' quality of scripture and the christian tradition that the gospels are a privileged context for encountering the living, risen Jesus. To focus on the person of Christ is hardly a side-track from seeking the God who transcends all our concepts and imaginings. For 'It is the Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life' (Jn 6,40). The way to the Father is in Christ: 'No one can come to the Father except through me. . . . To have seen me is to have seen the Father' (Jn 14,6.9). In talking, therefore, of 'imageless prayer' one has to distinguish carefully between those people who are *drawn* into silence and stillness, and those who merely feel bound to adopt still imageless prayer as a matter of principle. Undoubtedly there is a process of simplification by which people need images or ideas less and less as a stimulus for prayer, but this needs some guidance. However, one also needs to remember that progress in prayer is not a matter of straight lines. The need for imagination or some similar starting point recurs at different times even for profound mystics.

Is imagination 'unreal' however? As far as imagining the gospels are concerned, it is a process of making present to myself what is at the deepest level a mystery. For God, all is eternally 'now', and therefore it follows that I can speak to him as present not merely in the imagination but in reality. Scripture, we should remember, has a symbolic character. That is, the events, parables or miracles recorded are, even if factual, more than *mere* facts. There is an open-ended quality to the gospels which points beyond the level of event to universal significance. By universal I do not mean, of course, that there is *one* meaning, but rather that there is a significance which confronts 'all manner and condition of persons'. The significance is a person, Jesus Christ, who is re-presented through the imaginative process. We are not, therefore, talking about going back in time in prayer, but entering rather into the eternal present. There is a parallel in the 'making present' associated with the Eucharist. The risen Lord, although beyond time, enters our experience at this specific moment, and brings the Easter mystery to life for us, and in us, in the Eucharist. Thus too, in imaginative prayer, the Lord can make the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection present to us in their significance now. Is there a contradiction between confronting Christ now, the Jesus of faith, and going back to the Jesus of history? The fact is that we cannot truly distinguish the one from the other. 'The eternal Christ is not just the product or aftermath of his thirty years at Nazareth, he *is* this history now'.<sup>7</sup> Nor is imagination unreal in psychological terms. Jung's method of 'active imagination', in which he encouraged patients to write down, reflect upon or paint their dreams, was based on the belief that one could bring about a healthy interaction between the conscious individual and his unconscious depths.<sup>8</sup> This leads to an enlargement of consciousness by admitting into it feelings or ideas from the unconscious. It is sometimes a question of activating things, for example knowledge and trust, which we already possess deep down. And as a believer I can see that to reach down into my centre is not merely to confront inner feelings and reactions, but to meet God where he is most certainly to be found. The process of revealing my inner feelings and reactions is vital if my prayer is to deepen and grow. I may not be aware of them, or, rather I may not have been prepared to acknowledge them, and for this reason I am only able to meet God with a part of myself. A great deal more is safely locked away. Imaginative prayer, especially when it involves a confrontation with the gospels, frequently serves to bring these feelings to the surface in a creative way.

The question of how gospel contemplation, or prayer with scripture in general, relates to the insights of contemporary biblical scholarship is a complex one.<sup>9</sup> I can only hope to make some very general remarks here. First, an important guiding principle is that it is *not* a question of asking whether we can reach the purely historical Jesus, because that would be to raise problems of its own about relating such a circumscribed experience to the present. The gospel texts are the distillation of a particular writer's experience of the risen Christ, challenging him through the various traditions about the Jesus of history. Thus the value of gospel prayer is not the historicity of particular events in the gospels, but the experience of the risen Jesus acting through those traditions on the person praying. Access to Jesus through scripture prayer is always mediated through the perspective of particular people, and this perspective involves many layers of meaning. To reach the historical involves passing through other layers: the evangelist's own insights, and behind these the creativity of the christian communities during a period of oral tradition. Value does not lie merely in the historical level but rather each layer has its own validity and usefulness. We must be aware that sometimes, even with the aid of the most sophisticated exegesis, we cannot pass beyond the first or the second level. Some people think that biblical scholarship is the ally of imaginative gospel prayer precisely because it seeks out the historical, geographical, cultural, religious *factual* elements, which then assist the vividness and realism of the experience. This approach tends to link imagination too narrowly to the historical. Are we to select only those parts of the gospel where something is written about the supposed historical context (which is not always the case), or, more narrowly, where what is said is thought certainly to be accurate? We should not forget that imagination is a *creative*, not a 'scientific' faculty. The value of modern scholarship to imaginative prayer is rather in the fact of a creative mediation by the early christian community of traditions about Jesus. This freedom to be creative is surely a liberating example for contemplative gospel prayer.

Hopefully, it will now be reasonably clear what are some of the particular values of imaginative prayer. Within the actual prayer experience there is the fact that scripture can become alive, often for the first time. This 'coming alive' often involves the imagination in moving beyond the literal text, while remaining within the general parameters of the gospel passage. Thus it brings the person praying to some very deep personal insights both about self and his or her

relationship with God or the world. Because the process of imagining is not the same as analysing the texts, the result is often strikingly simple. That is to say that, on reflection, one finds that the very varied imaginative experience really centres around one single point. Most important of all, perhaps, is the fact that such prayer *involves* the person — indeed, involvement is of its very essence. And because I am involved personally, the process of putting myself in the scene is equivalent to ‘putting myself on the line’ — that is, exposing myself to the transforming presence of Christ. It is necessarily, therefore, a challenging prayer, in that it disposes me not only to what God wishes to say, but also to his invitation to respond. Such response is not merely a matter of pious sentiments for, because such prayer deals directly with life and experience, it cannot be separated from the way I am involved in the world. Unless a person rigidly excludes his or her social dimension from such prayer, contemplation should help to shape, or at least to illuminate the world within which the person must function.<sup>10</sup> Jesus’s miracles and parables, for example, invite us to change our world view, and gospel contemplation can prove a highly effective way of increasing our awareness of the world as it really is, with its injustices as well as its beauty, and of what God is saying to us in the present about our world. Gospel contemplation, because it brings us face to face with our response to God and with what is preventing a whole-hearted ‘yes’, is inevitably oriented towards collaboration with the divine plan. Thus such prayer, while contemplative, is also necessarily practical. In this context it has often proved of great value in increasing a person’s engagement to the world in the manner of Christ. I am invited to allow the full effects of the gospel mystery to penetrate my whole life and action so that I may be a more effective apostle.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Exx 316-17.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Neuman, Matthias: ‘Contemporary spirituality of the monastic *lectio*’, in *Review for Religious* (1977), pp 97-110.

<sup>3</sup> The method of gospel contemplation is described in a number of recent books. See, for example: Veltri, John: *Orientations*, Vol 1 (Guelph, Ontario, 1979), pp 25-27; de Mello, Anthony: *Sādhana, a way to God* (Gujarat/St Louis, 1978), p 73ff; Bryant, Christopher: *The river within* (London, 1980), pp 85-88; Kelsey, Morton: *Transcend* (New York, 1981), pp 101-10.

<sup>4</sup> Veltri, John: *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> St Ignatius’s brief description of the method is to be found in the second contemplation of the Second Week, ‘The Nativity’, Exx 110-17.

<sup>6</sup> For the origins of Ignatius's gospel contemplation, see for example de Guibert, Joseph: *The Jesuits: their spiritual doctrine and practice* (St Louis, 1972), ch 4 *passim*, or Walsh, James: 'Application of the senses', in *The Way Supplement*, 27 (Spring 1976), pp 59-68. For a more detailed history of this method of prayer, see Spear, Linda: 'Prayer with images', in *The Way* (July 1973), pp 236-44.

<sup>7</sup> Whelan, Joseph: 'Contemplating Christ', in *The Way* (July 1970), p 194.

<sup>8</sup> For a general introduction to the relationship between Jung's understanding of imagination and christian prayer see: Bryant, Christopher: *Jung and the Christian way* (London, 1983), and Kelsey, Morton: *The other side of silence* (New York, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Stanley, David: 'Revitalizing our prayer through the gospels', in *The Way Supplement*, 19 (Summer 1973), pp 3-12 and the subsequent discussion in a pamphlet of the same name which appeared in the series *Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises* (Jersey City, 1973). Also Donovan, Margot: 'Contemplating Christ risen', in *The Way Supplement*, 46 (Spring 1983), pp 78-96.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Wickham, John: 'Ignatian contemplation today', in *The Way Supplement*, 34 (Autumn 1978), pp 35-44.



# IMAGES AND WORSHIP

By MARK SEARLE

IT IS DIFFICULT to speak of images and worship without conjuring up visions of image-worship, or to speak of liturgy and imagination without appearing to detract from the seriousness of the liturgy. Yet it will be the contention of this article that religion is inescapably the honouring of images and that worship is, above all, an act of the imagination. Conversely, it will be suggested, the problems faced by religion in our culture and by liturgy in our churches spring largely from habits of literalism which have wasted our powers of imagination.

It is not difficult to agree that the liturgy is full of images: verbal images of scripture, prayer and hymnody; musical images; visual images in the form of art, but more importantly in the form of the very presence of the participants, their differences of dress, the roles they enact; there are the ritual images of the postures and gestures we are invited to adopt as the ritual unfolds; there are even smells and tastes that are integral to the rite and tend to linger in the memory. Liturgy is obviously a multi-media event, a cornucopia of imagery poured out upon the gathered congregation. This is not to say that it is always well presented, or that it is always as impressive as it sounds. But it is not the aesthetic dimension of the liturgy that we will focus on here as much as the problem of the function of the image to present something more than itself. An image is a copy, a reproduction, a reflection of some original; it is not itself original. It serves to point beyond itself to that which it serves to present. For this to happen, though, it is not enough that the image be good; it is also necessary that those who come into contact with the image have the imagination necessary to go beyond it or to be put in contact with that which the image presents.

It is clear, at least in retrospect, that the liturgical movement was a movement for the renewal of the christian imagination. It originated in a Church which envisaged sacraments simply as causes of graces administered by the few to the many; in which liturgy was thought of as a set of more or less dispensable ceremonies designed to honour the sacrament and edify the observant; and in which devotion was identified with exercises of individualistic interiority. When Pius X wrote that he wished to restore 'the true christian spirit' whose 'primary and indispensable source' was 'active participation

in the holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church',<sup>1</sup> he was inaugurating (perhaps unwittingly) what would later become known as a 'paradigm shift'.<sup>2</sup> What the liturgical movement worked for was not so much change in the liturgy itself (though pressure for such change built up as the movement progressed), as an alteration in the way people related to the liturgy and, ultimately, in the way they saw themselves as Church. Liturgical renewal was, from the beginning, a function of ecclesial renewal, and ecclesial renewal meant a renewal of the christian imagination. 'Body' was to replace 'institution' as the dominant model or metaphor; 'we' was to replace 'I' in the language of prayer; 'community celebration' was to replace 'private administration', 'participation' was to replace 'attendance' in sacramental rites.

Yet, despite all this, the imagination itself was never made the subject of conscious and critical reflection, and this may be part of the reason why, after all the changes that have occurred, the expected renewal of church life has come to something of a stalemate. The failure to attend to the imagination itself, and not just to the images, is understandable, for the imagination is invisible. The imagination is not what we see or think: it is rather the lens through which we see, the very patterns within which we think. Consequently, it is only in confronting the mixed effects of liturgical reform that we have begun to take seriously the anthropological conditions under which rites and ritual language flourish or decline. It is only recently that we have become aware of what Ray Hart has called 'the sedimented imagination',<sup>3</sup> a condition in which the imagination goes flat, substitutes translation for contemplation, forfeits signification for function:

The crisis of our time, as we are beginning  
 slowly and painfully to perceive  
 is not a crisis of the hands  
 but of the hearts.

The failure is a failure of desire.  
 It is because we the people do not wish —  
 because we the people do not know  
 what kind of a world we should imagine,  
 that this trouble haunts us.

The failure is a failure of the spirit;  
 a failure of the spirit to imagine,  
 a failure of the spirit to imagine and desire.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis of our time, liturgically, is not a crisis brought about by poor texts and shoddy ceremonial. These are mere symptoms. The crisis is a crisis provoked by our not desiring, not even knowing, the kind of activity liturgy is: an activity of the imagination. In Romano Guardini's words:

... those whose task it is to teach and educate will have to ask themselves — and this is all-decisive — whether they themselves desire the liturgical act or, to put it plainly, whether they know of its existence and what exactly it consists of and that it is neither a luxury nor an oddity, but a matter of fundamental importance. Or does it, basically, mean the same to them as to the parish priest of the late nineteenth century who said: 'We must organize the procession better; we must see to it that the praying and the singing are done better'. He did not realize that he should have asked himself quite a different question: how can the act of walking become a religious act, a retinue for the Lord progressing through his land, that an 'epiphany' may take place?<sup>5</sup>

The point of Guardini's warning is that the reform of texts and rubrics, while overdue, is not enough. It is not merely a revision of the images presented in the liturgy — use of the vernacular, congregational participation, simplification of the rites — but a renewal of the christian imagination which we bring to liturgy, that is called for. What is needed is what Lonergan calls 'intellectual conversion . . . the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity and human knowledge'. This myth has to do with what we see and how we see it; 'the myth that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen, and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at'.<sup>6</sup> Such mythical thinking fails to distinguish between the world that meets our senses and the world mediated by meaning: it ignores the sign character of the sensible world and fails to see how 'objective realities' mediate a world of meanings within a cultural community. It forgets the caution of Thomas Aquinas *fides terminatur non ad enunciabile, sed ad rem* — faith moves from the sign to the signified, from what meets the senses to that which transcends immediate knowing. The purpose of revising the signifiers is to call them into question so that they can no longer be taken literally, matter-of-factly, but must yield before the meaning they serve.

*Development of the imagination*

Developmental studies of thinking, morality and faith have had enormous impact in our time and this impact will undoubtedly make its mark in catechesis. Yet to be thoroughly studied is the matter of the imagination's development or successive transformations. Dominic Crossan<sup>7</sup> has sketched an outline of a theory which, while based on clinical studies, remains to be tested. Nevertheless, his sketch is of sufficient interest to make its consideration worthwhile here.

The way Crossan poses the problem of the imagination situates it in terms of metaphorical and literal language. Pre-school children reveal enormous creativity in the invention of metaphor: the pencil is a rocket, the table is a castle. Yet the abundance of metaphor at this stage is characterized by two things which must caution us against idealizing the childish imagination. For one thing, while the production of metaphors is astounding, not all the metaphors are appropriate: successful and unsuccessful identifications are all jumbled up together. For another thing, the metaphorical transaction between contexts, the identification of one thing with another, is so complete that it represents a veritable metamorphosis. The signifier and the signified become one and the same. In short, one is really not dealing with metaphor proper, but with that characteristic of naïve thinking which Levy-Bruhl called *participation mystique*: a collapse of the two levels of sign and signified into one, in which the signifier is simply transformed into the signified. One can hardly avoid the question of the extent to which this happens in the liturgy, particularly with regards to the eucharist as sacrament, the effect of the 'words of consecration', and the role of the priest 'as representing Christ'. Crossan suggests that in this, as in other areas of life, childhood is not so much left behind as incorporated into one's adult life. But do the sacramental system and the authenticity of the liturgy require a regression to naïve, magical thinking? Can they survive growing up?

The second stage in the development of the imagination coincides, Crossan suggests, with the early years of school. Between the ages of seven and eleven, particularly, children show a serious concern for literal meanings. This is altogether to be expected, since they are being taught to order and categorize the universe in reading, writing and arithmetic. But Crossan's point is that we have to be educated to literalism; it does not come naturally. On the contrary, our habitual, unreflected mode of discourse is heavily laden with

allusion and metaphor. It is speaking univocally, precisely, which requires care and effort, not speaking allusively and metaphorically. But a person's education in literal language may well be a necessary stage in the development of a proper understanding of the relationship between the *enuntiabile* and the *res*, between signifier and signified. For it is only by overcoming the naïve and childish tendency towards magical identification, where anything can be anything else, by adopting its antithesis (the literal mood: this is not that), that a more careful and sophisticated use of metaphor becomes possible. The problem, however, is that the literalism to which we have been culturally acclimatized by the educational system has become a prevailing and unexamined habit of mind, even in religious matters. Paradoxically, magical thinking is highly literal and can therefore survive in a literalist culture: the sign is taken for granted as identical with the reality and no further thought need be given to the matter — whether it be consecration, eucharistic presence, or the doctrinal definitions learnt in the catechisms.

Lonergan's intellectual conversion, or something akin to it, would appear to be the only way forward. Enough has already been done by people like Tracy, Crossan and Ricoeur, building on Heidegger, Ramsey, Austin and others, to begin to develop some experiments in 'hermeneutical catechetics', that is, a catechesis geared less towards content than towards the proper development of the religious imagination in older children and adults. It will be more concerned with the *fides qua* (in its socio-cultural context) than simply with the *fides quae creditur* . . . and it will have to be closely related to the practice of liturgical participation. It is the liturgy which, as a complex of ritual acts and symbolic speech, suffers most from the 'myth of objectivity' and from the collapsing of sign and signified. What is required is a new mystagogy of faith aimed at converting the way we see, listen and act liturgically. In this sense, what is required is a conversion of the imagination, a re-awakening of the imagination as a desire for the 'Reality' mediated by the words, signs and gestures of the rite.

#### *Liturgy with imagination*

The call for allowing more room to the imagination in liturgy is one that can be (and has been) misunderstood. My point is not that we need to come up with imaginative alternatives to the rites we have received (in the manner of so-called 'creative liturgies'), but that we need to recognize that the language of the rite is primarily

directed to the imagination, and that we need to let the imagination go to work on the texts and rites we have, to discover anew their twofold level of discourse. Perhaps, by way of example, we might take the most basic sign upon which the rest of the liturgy is predicated: the liturgical assembly. Although theologically the liturgical assembly has been re-vindicated as a primary sacrament of the presence of Christ and as the primary celebrant of the liturgy, it is not at all clear that in catechesis and practice we have been taught what to make of this, or how to make anything of it. For centuries the sign value or sacramental quality of the congregated faithful has simply been ignored, and much contemporary effort at encouraging 'active participation' seems intent on continuing to ignore it. The question is: does 'active participation' merely mean joining in, doing what everyone else is doing? Is loud singing and a boisterous exchange at the kiss of peace really what we are after? On the other hand, many who decry the changes in the liturgy seemed locked into a religious individualism which makes even less of the congregation as sacrament. C. S. Lewis described this temptation well:

One of our great allies at present is the church itself. . . . All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham-gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with a rather oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like 'the Body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew.<sup>8</sup>

The christian imagination must find some way forward between the individualism which prevailed so far as to make the congregation dispensable without noticing any significant difference between 'private masses' and 'public masses', and the new sociability which is more often successful in destroying private prayer than in cultivating public prayer. Both are forms of literalism. The first step must surely be to make the gathered congregation an object of reflective awareness as a visible sign of invisible realities, instead of being just the context within which (or to which) things are done. I shall try to spell this out a little under four headings.

### 1 *Contemplation*

'Our problem', wrote Romano Guardini, 'is to rise above reading and writing and learn really to look with understanding'.<sup>9</sup> He was referring to the liturgy in general, but his remark applies *a fortiori* to the assembly itself and to the act of participating in an action of the community. So what would it mean 'to look with understanding'?

The condition of all valid seeing and hearing, upon every plane of consciousness, lies not in a sharpening of the senses, but in a particular attitude of the whole personality: in a self-forgetting attentiveness, a profound concentration, a self-merging which operates a real communion between the seer and the seen — in a word, in *contemplation*.<sup>10</sup>

Given that the prayer of the liturgy, even if articulated by the priest, nevertheless arises from the community as a whole, it is necessary, if one is to be part of that prayer, that one come to that 'real communion' of which Evelyn Underhill speaks. Often it is assumed that congregational singing will produce such communion and under certain circumstances that may well be true. But it is important that those responsible for liturgical music know the difference between the praying community and the cup-final crowd. In both instances, singing is introduced to forge solidarity, but the kind of togetherness which is appropriate, the kind of consciousness which needs to prevail, is vastly different in each of the two cases. If the liturgy really is the prayer of the Spirit of Christ in his body, the assembly, then the assembly's song needs to be perceived as functioning as a sign or image of that other prayer.

More study needs to be made of the role of music and song in the liturgy, but the point here is that if such music does not foster 'a self-forgetting attentiveness, a profound concentration, a self-merging' into the unity of the one body, then it is mere distraction, whatever its aesthetic qualities. In the meantime, the role of silence should not be overlooked: not the silence of mute withdrawal, but the deep ground of silence in which we find ourselves at one, and in which the Spirit of Christ dwells. Out of that silence, the silence of our common humanity, sinful yet redeemed, where the faithful are not only collected but recollected, the prayer of the Spirit of Christ can rise up before the throne of God, articulated in the words and gestures of the community. As Taizé has shown, music and song can foster such recollection, but it is rare. It requires a

discipline of which most congregations and their leaders are pitifully unaware.

## 2 *Discipline*

Discipline might be defined as the kind of self-control which frees one from distraction and preserves one from dissipation. Ritual behaviour is a prime example of such discipline. By putting us through the same paces over and over again, ritual rehearses us in certain kinds of interaction over and over again, until the ego finally gives up its phrenetic desire to be in charge and lets the Spirit take over. The repetitiousness of the liturgy is something many would like to avoid; but this would be a profound mistake. It is not entertainment, or exposure to new ideas. It is rather a rehearsal of attitudes, a repeated befriending of images and symbols, so that they penetrate more and more deeply into our inner self and make us, or re-make us, in their own image.

Kneeling, for example, is not an expression of our humanity: it is more an invitation to discover what reality looks like when we put ourselves in that position. The texts of scripture and the images of the liturgy are not didactic messages wrapped up in some decorative covering which can be thrown away when the context is extracted. They are images and sets of images to be toyed with, befriended, rubbed over and over again, until, gradually and sporadically, they yield flashes of insight and encounter with the 'Reality' of which they sing. Their purpose is not to give rise to thought (at least, not immediately), but to mediate encounter. As Heidegger said in another context: 'The point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but to follow the movement of showing'.<sup>11</sup>

So there is a discipline of listening, looking and gesturing to be learnt: ways of standing, touching, receiving, holding, embracing, eating and drinking which recognize these activities as *significant* and which enable us to perform them in such a way that we are open to the meaning (the *res*) which they mediate. In terms of the assembly, the primary signifier, there is a way of being together with others in the liturgy — a way of which all these ritual activities are a part — which goes beyond mere juxtaposition of bodies and beyond the pain or pleasure of orchestrated responses, and which leads to the loss of self in favour of profound union with the Body. One acts without acting, speaks without speaking, sings without singing: for it is Christ who prays, blesses, touches and sings in the Body to which my own body is given over.



### 3 *Preaching and catechesis*

From all that has been said it must be obvious that preaching and catechizing are crucially important. Do they foster what Guardini calls 'the liturgical act'? Do they know that there is such a thing? They must both become exercises of the imagination which foster the religious imagination of those to whom they are addressed. The accusation has often been made, and sometimes on good grounds, that the postconciliar liturgy is too didactic, that it has destroyed the mystery by explaining it all away. This is not true of the liturgical reforms themselves which, for the most part, have actually restored the symbolic dimension of the liturgy rather than diminished it. A liturgical reform which has restored communion under both kinds, fostered a diversification of ministries, restored the kiss of peace at the eucharist and the signing of the child by parents and godparents at baptism — not to mention the whole elaborate drama of the Rite of Adult Initiation — can hardly be accused of iconoclasm! But the revised books are not always finding their ideals met in practice, while the freedom allowed to the celebrant, and the encouragement to preach, have often resulted in a barrage of words less chosen and measured than one would have liked.

In one particular way we continue to suffer from the inadequacies of our past, and that is in our preoccupation with teaching people the meaning of things. Thus arguments fly back and forth over whether the mass is a meal or sacrifice. Parents and teachers are often at odds over the meaning of confirmation. Would it be too much to ask that we temporarily lay aside our preconceptions and begin to attend to the language of the liturgy? Just as in our youth we were catechized as to the meaning of the sacraments without reference to the actual celebration of the rites (that, after all, was how theology itself proceeded); so in our own day preachers continue to read preconceived meanings (whether progressive or reactionary, it makes no difference) into the texts of scripture, and catechists take their cue for teaching the sacraments from any place other than the ritual itself. In either instance, we have a survival of the idea that images are merely the wrappings of 'truth' and that they can be dispensed with, explained in other terms, and then reintroduced as illustrations of the teacher's remarks. It is an exact parallel to, and perhaps a symptom of, the understanding of metaphor which regarded it merely as a decorative rhetorical device. But in an age where the indispensability, even the priority, of the image has once again been recovered, can preaching and teaching continue unaffected? The

fourth- and fifth-century Fathers only taught about baptism and eucharist to those who had already been initiated by these sacramental rites. Their preaching was not an explanation of what the rites meant, but a commentary on the experiences of the neophytes. Far from defining the meaning of eucharist and baptism, they multiplied the associations evoked by the ritual and prayer, showing how the image opens on to a larger world of reality than meets our eye or ear. The role of preaching and catechesis today must be the same: practical demonstrations of how, by befriending the image — whether it be word or gesture, or even the congregation itself — and by working with it lovingly, it will yield a glimpse of the world invisible, a snatch of the song of the angels and saints, a momentary awareness of myself and the grocer as one Body, one Spirit in Christ.

#### 4 *Conversion of life*

The importance of this re-awakening of the religious imagination goes beyond having better liturgies to what really matters: better living. 'To the extent that he is altered in the recesses of his imagination, indeed of his being, to that extent he must act differently in daily life'.<sup>12</sup> The imagination is not just some gift possessed by some and not by others; nor is it a particular compartment of the personality, along with intellect and will and so forth. It would seem, rather, to be the very way we grasp our existence in the world, the very form of consciousness itself, and thus the foundation of the activities of intellect and will. To shatter, or even to stretch, the horizons of the imagination is to challenge the intellect and to set new desiderata before the energies of the will. To transform the working of the religious imagination is to enable people to situate themselves differently in the world, to challenge their values, to bring them to question their accepted patterns of behaviour.

From this perspective, it can be envisaged that the liturgy might operate in christian life rather like the parables of Jesus, indeed as enacted parable. By opening oneself to be receptive to the symbols of the liturgy, whether verbal or non-verbal, one risks discovery and encounter in confronting the True and the Holy. One risks growing in wisdom and holiness by developing a contemplative attention to words and actions even outside the liturgy. One risks losing one's comfortable ideas and familiar patterns of prejudice by learning really to listen and to act in the Spirit.

It has often been remarked that the renewed liturgy has not proved as effective as some might have hoped in renewing christian

life in general. If the thesis of this article is correct, then the fault is not so much in the renewed liturgy as in what we have made of it. Were there more widespread awareness of the kind of activity liturgy is, and of the discipline it requires of those who would participate in it, it might yet contribute to a renewal of our self-understanding, or rather of the images we have of our place in the world.

### *Conclusion*

To call for a renewal of the christian imagination in order for the liturgy to be more effective may sound altogether more utopian than the call for the reform of rites and texts sounded at the beginning of this century. If it is thought of in terms of a programme to be imposed upon all the faithful that would certainly be true; but, in fact, it is less of a programme than mere 'hints and guesses'. Unlike the reform of the liturgy, it is something which we can each undertake for ourselves: an exploration of the possibilities of a more contemplative approach to liturgical participation. While it would be fostered by 'good liturgy' it is not dependent upon it (indeed, the criteria by which one judges liturgy good or bad tend to waver somewhat in these circumstances). All that it requires is that one strive to relax and centre oneself before the liturgy begins, and to maintain the attitude of attentive receptivity to everything that happens in the rite as it unfolds. Though it helps to have some theoretical knowledge of language and sign theory, and though it helps even more to have some training in meditative or contemplative prayer, one can train oneself. The only important thing is to trust the liturgy and the presence of the Spirit, allowing them to pray through one. This will affect the way one sings, stands, responds, sits, participates in the sacrament, uses the silence, and so forth.

In fact, it is essential that one practise such recollection oneself before attempting to turn it into a programme for improving parish liturgy. If those responsible for liturgy — the celebrant, the musicians, those responsible for the readings, the selection of songs, the composition of the bidding prayers — themselves come to the liturgy this way, the effect will register itself in the celebration without a word being said. We probably do not need more programmes or more explanations: it may be enough if the images of the liturgy — of which our very presence and participation are constitutive parts — are allowed to speak for themselves.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Tra le sollicitudini*, Motu Proprio on the restoration of church music, 22 November 1903.
- <sup>2</sup> Kuhn, Thomas: *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago, 1970).
- <sup>3</sup> Hart, Ray: *Unfinished man and the imagination* (New York, 1968).
- <sup>4</sup> Macleish, Archibald: *Listen to love*, quoted by Patrick Collins: *More than meets the eye* (New York, 1983), p 11.
- <sup>5</sup> 'A letter from Romano Guardini', in *Herder Correspondence* (August 1964), p 238.
- <sup>6</sup> Lonergan, Bernard: *Method in theology* (New York, 1973), p 238.
- <sup>7</sup> Crossan, John Dominic: 'Stages in imagination', in C. E. Winquist (ed.) *The archeology of the imagination*, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Thematic Studies*, XLVIII/2 (1981), pp 49-62.
- <sup>8</sup> Lewis, C. S.: *The Screwtape letters* (London, 1942), pp 15-16.
- <sup>9</sup> 'A letter from Romano Guardini', *supra*, p 238.
- <sup>10</sup> Underhill, Evelyn: *Mysticism: a study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness* (New York, 1930), p 300.
- <sup>11</sup> Heidegger, Martin: *On time and being* (New York, 1972), p 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Hassan, Ihab: *Paracriticisms* (Chicago, 1975), p 6. Cited by Crossan, *art. cit.*, p 60.

# IMAGINATION AND FAITH

By MICHAEL PAUL GALLAGHER

**I**N 1976 Ursula le Guin wrote a preface to her already acclaimed work of science fiction, *The left hand of darkness*, and in this new addition she spoke deliberately in paradoxes:

I talk about the gods, I am an atheist. But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth . . . the truth is a matter of the imagination.

Half a century earlier, one of the greatest explorers of this theme wrote a poem called 'A high-toned old christian woman', in which he mocked at the puritan tradition and argued that poetry springs more joyously from exactly the same source as religion — human imagination:

Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.  
Take the moral law and make a nave of it  
And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,  
The conscience is converted into palms,  
Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.  
We agree in principle. That's clear. . . .

And the piece continues as one of the typically playful poems that Wallace Stevens loved to produce in the twenties, many of them obsessed with the new role that imagination plays, if life is godless. Here he is pondering in a letter the dilemma of his own atheist position:

If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else. Logically, I ought to believe in essential imagination, but that has its difficulties. It is easier to believe in a thing created by the imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, in his view, the calling of the poet is to 'create his unreal out of what is real'. In a shoddy time of things, the poet will seek to

undermine 'the purely realistic mind', whether in literature or religion, because such a mind 'never experiences any passion for reality'.

It is on purpose that I begin with these two quirky and tantalizing voices: they raise the level of discourse to that of wonderment. At least at the outset they prevent us from speaking with questionable reasonableness of what is essentially non-rational. Sometimes faith is experienced, wrongly, as irrational, but it is always non-rational. Aquinas pinpointed something crucially different about the knowing involved in faith when he saw it as an act of the intellect commanded by the will. More attractive definitions are only translations of that insight into other vocabularies: faith is the knowledge born of love, or an interplay between discernment and commitment.<sup>2</sup> In this great tradition of faith-analysis the claims to truth are met by the role given to the mind, and the claims for freedom are met by the special place reserved for decision. But is this the whole story? Surely a third partner is involved and indeed centrally involved: even more fundamentally than the proud tradition of intellect and will, human imagination is the forgotten vehicle of faith. Theologies of faith too dominated by reason are in constant danger of turning divine mystery into a neat human system. Theologies of faith too dominated by will can fall into two families: either dramatic appeals to dark jumping, or else the severe self-imposed imperatives of voluntarism (and ultimately of pelagianism).

If one returns to the New Testament in search of the language of reason, one realizes suddenly and with some starkness to what degree we are now the children of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. The voice of Pilate, who, in asking 'What is truth?', seems to have had what Stevens would term 'a purely realistic mind', is a faint one in the pages of scripture. But both his question about truth and his wavelength of scepticism have been dominant in all the complex rationalisms of the last few centuries. It is not at all surprising that the atheist poet can have more in common with the imaginative modes of scripture than some of our more rationalistic theologians.

From that camp will come a predictable objection to any elevation of imagination into membership, along with intellect and will, of a new trinity of faith-faculties. Imagination, we shall be warned, is the playground of artists, of people who tell lies that they claim to embody some greater truth. But they are lies, nonetheless, as Plato perceived before he banished the poets. However 'supreme' the

fictions, they are man-made, illusory, lacking in valid truth-claims; gestures towards truth, perhaps, but not 'really' true. In all this doubting of the imagination, however, what is lacking is a distinction between the *imaginary* and the *imaginative*. In some of its exercises imagination creates the (merely) imaginative, but in other modes it can reveal the (truly) imaginative. Faith is imaginative, not imaginary.

Once again the opposing voices may insist on a secondary and subordinate role for imagination in any journey to faith or in any understanding of faith. Advancing more subtle arguments this time, their strategy is to deny to imagination a full partnership in the knowing that is faith. One can imagine the counsel for the prosecution: 'Intellect and will are senior members but imagination can be permitted to hold a respected place as a pastoral associate. Yes, of course, Christ himself spoke to the crowds only in parables (as two of the Synoptics baldly state). Yes, of course our images of God are crucial in any communication of faith. Yes, of course the receptivity of humankind before revelation is powerfully akin to the quality of listening required by great poetry. Yes, of course the whole of the bible is more literature than dogma in its level of discourse. But let's be serious. Even if imagination has an important role in the genesis of faith and in the spirituality that feeds the life of faith, and even if imagination need not be equated with the imaginary, it is still excessive to suppose that imagination can be a faculty of religious truth. Imagination — to be generous — often prepares the way of the Lord. But it does not enter into the core of the act of faith'.

### *In defence of imagination*

The remaining pages of this article will resemble a courtroom sequence, where we call witnesses for the defence of imagination against this type of criticism. Drawing on a range of authors, several of whom do not seem to know of the existence of their like-minded colleagues, the aim will be to establish a case for imagination as a crucial vehicle of faith. What will unite these witnesses, as members of a rich if unacknowledged resistance movement, is their tendency to downplay the knowledge dimensions, and to stress instead that faith is much more (i) a matter of disposition or attitude that leads to (ii) a special receptivity of searching and listening, which in turn grounds (iii) a struggling way of living rather than a clear way of knowing.

In this light one can see some of the older authors at pains to

preserve a balance between the cognitive and the imaginative in the process of faith. Thus, to call our first witness, E. H. Johnson would hold that imagination has to do with 'vividness of mental seeing', and that this is the hinge between the usual kind of knowing and the trust that is so central in faith:

Religious faith is grounded in discernment of spiritual things. It is first knowing, secondly imaging, thirdly trusting. . . . The recognition that spiritualities are realities can be put into most effective exercise only by aid of imagination. . . . Faith . . . is the work of imagination fortified by experience.<sup>3</sup>

Long before developmental thinking became self-conscious, Johnson was speaking of stages of faith, or envisaging it as a 'tripod' of recognition, imagining and belonging in confidence to Christ: 'so far as conversion of ideals into energy goes, it is all a matter of imaging Christ'. A final statement from him will serve as a bridge back to an older and more celebrated witness, John Henry Newman: 'It is when imagination sounds the depths of fundamental reality that this reality begins to be felt . . . that is, to be veritably known and actually faced.' This seems remarkably close in spirit to *A grammar of assent*, where one of Newman's constant concerns is a pre-reflective encounter with our images, pictures, parables of divine reality. He takes the example of a child's imaginative apprehension of God and, while admitting that it is incomplete as theology, he argues that it offers a paradigm of adult faith: it is rooted in 'an image, before it has been reflected on, and before it is recognized by him as a notion'.<sup>4</sup> Many readers will be aware of Newman's distinction between a 'notional assent' (a theological act) and 'real assent' (an act of religion or of devotion); but it is fascinating to learn that in the drafts his initial choice of a phrase to express 'real assent' was in fact 'imaginative assent'.<sup>5</sup> His originality in this area lies in his emphasis that faith needs *first* to become credible to the imagination before it can journey towards a fuller and more intellectual theology of faith:

Images, when assented to, have an influence both on the individual and on society, which mere notions cannot exert. . . . The natural and rightful effect of acts of the imagination upon us . . . is not to create assent, but to intensify it. . . . The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination.

After listening briefly to Newman, our jury might benefit from hearing from someone who has translated the relevance of these



more-than-century-old insights into the more complex horizons of today. John Coulson's recent book, *Religion and imagination*, explores the parallels between the experience of faith and the experience of literature, and holds that in both areas it is by means of the imagination that we are 'predisposed to believe'.<sup>6</sup> In his view the 'primary forms of religious belief' are not to be found in formulated truths and creeds but in the stranger modes of metaphor, symbol and story. From this point of view, it is a mistake to give precedence to rational explanation over the imaginative assent as understood by Newman. Coulson would see this as an 'inversion of priorities in religion'. Thus his book begins from the question 'how can I believe what I cannot understand?' and his answer takes the form of a nuanced distinction between *holding* a belief apprehended first by the imagination and *explaining* it in some form of comprehended proof: 'religious belief originates in that activity we call imagination'.

Before calling another major witness, it is worth drawing the jury's attention to an almost exact echo of that final claim of Coulson's in another catholic researcher of the same period. The sociological approach of Andrew Greeley has led him also to

the position that primordially religion is a function of the creative imagination . . . (it) originates in our experiences of hope, experiences which are articulated and resonated in symbols which are stories. . . . Religious images are a much stronger predictor of world view than is doctrinal orthodoxy. Propositions which exist independent of any grounding in the creative imagination are likely to have little impact on practical responses to suffering and tragedy.<sup>7</sup>

### *The nature of imagination*

But what is this 'imagination' of which so many speak? It can seem a slithery term pointing in several directions.<sup>8</sup> For many of the common-sense thinkers of the eighteenth century, imagination was a power of producing mental images of things in their absence (and even as such it would be important for any religious perception of a hidden God). But for a later generation, from being a power of visualizing what was absent, imagination now became a god-like and essentially creative agent. So, is imagination a secondary and subordinate stage on the road to real knowledge? Or is it 'the living power and prime agent of all human perception'.<sup>9</sup> This old debate will find its echoes in the more recent discussions concerning the role of imagination in faith.

It is time to call two major authorities to the witness box, in order

both to clarify what is meant by imagination and to state a strong form of the claim that it constitutes a central language of faith. The first is Richard Kroner, a philosopher of religion, who devoted much of his life to clarifying the non-cognitive and imagination-centred nature of faith. It was from Kroner that I found my own distinction between the imaginary and the imaginative confirmed: 'The content of the bible is not imaginary but imaginative, whereas the content of poems is not only imaginative but also imaginary or fictitious.'<sup>10</sup> Kroner would be openly hostile to any downgrading of imagination as 'the opposite of understanding', and his own works are intended to justify the existence of what he terms 'spiritual imagination', which is central to all religious faith.<sup>11</sup> It is through the medium of imagination that revelation can be received, and hence a theology of faith needs a different starting point than from the one that is usually offered: 'the *idea* of God must be replaced by the *image* of God'. Our knowledge of God is 'not theoretical or objective but imaginative knowledge', or at least its

objectivity must be distinguished from scientific objectivity, because it is inseparably connected with the subjectivity of religious imagination. It is the peculiar and unique nature of ultimate truth to demand the collaboration of reason and imagination; the isolated intellect alone cannot find it.<sup>12</sup>

What then is faith? Does it lose all claims to intelligent truth? Kroner would reply with some qualifications that echo the stances taken by our earlier witnesses. On the one hand, faith is more a matter of attitude than of verifiable knowledge in the usual sense: it is 'the accurate and the adequate attitude of finite man towards the self-revelation of God'. On the other hand, faith should not be too demeaning in abandoning claims to truth: it is not 'a lower degree of knowledge; it is something wider than all knowledge, something different in principle from all knowledge'.<sup>13</sup>

If there is time to call only one other witness to testify at any length, William Lynch will bring our case to a worthy climax. It is a topic that he has meditated through a long career, and he can provide some of the clearest and most persuasive descriptions of imagination:

The imagination is not an aesthetic faculty. It is not a single or special faculty. It is all the resources of man, all his faculties, his whole history, his whole life, and his whole heritage brought to bear

upon the concrete world inside and outside of himself, to form images of the world, and thus to find it, cope with it, shape it, even make it. The task of the imagination is to imagine the real. . . . The religious imagination . . . tries literally to imagine things with God. . . . The imagination is really the only way we have of handling the world.<sup>14</sup>

From this basis it is a short step to thinking of faith either as 'a way of experiencing and imagining the world' or as a 'world within which we experience or imagine'.<sup>15</sup> In words that seem very close to Newman and Coulson, Lynch would invite us to 'try reversing our images' and to understand faith as 'a first and primitive force in life', something universally operative but pre-rational: 'rationality will later come in' to help in the search for explicit meaning. Faith precedes knowledge but it does need to progress towards knowledge: 'the power and beauty of faith or imagination depend on a progressive relationship with reality, and revelation. Otherwise faith remains a permanent child'. It is no coincidence that both Newman and Lynch take the example of the child to explain the role of imagination in faith and at the same time the need for faith to expand from its cherished and crucial seed-bed in imagination. 'Unless one becomes as a little child' can be re-read as pointing to the non-intellectual and non-voluntarist gateway to faith through images and wonderment and listening. Is imagination more than a gateway? Must not the essential moment of the 'child' be transcended as faith progresses into knowledge? Lynch would hold that faith remains stunted unless it finds embodiment *both* in a vertical belief in God *and* in the horizontal 'belief men have in each other'. At the same time he would not see this mature faith as abandoning imagination, as a space-craft might jettison its launching rocket. There is a temptation to reduce the role of imagination in this way, by limiting it to an initial rhetoric or affective invitation into the life of faith. This line of thinking would allow to imagination only a preparatory usefulness as a psychological or pastoral tool. In a more recent article William Lynch protests against this 'belittling' and seeks to establish instead a view of 'the imagination as place of thought'. As against a tendency (even among some of our previous witnesses) to polarize the world of images and the world of ideas, Lynch wants us to recognize the imagination as a form of intelligence or understanding from its beginnings: 'images and the imagination that creates them must be seen as bearers of cognition, truth, knowledge'.<sup>16</sup>

If conceptual ideas alone can aspire to valid knowledge, we would seem condemned to a divorced and fruitless language of faith. But when imagination is admitted as a primary colleague of theological thought, then the faith one defends will be one that does more justice to the double mystery of humanity and of divinity. Ultimately it is through imagination that we cope with the difficult docking manoeuvre between a hidden God and a fallen humanity. If that meeting is the foundation of faith, then one touches at once on two reasons why imagination is crucial: we do not *see* God directly, and often we do not want to *hear* him or hear of him (the hearing whence faith comes). In this situation of essential struggle, it is imagination that helps us to escape from fantasy and falsehood, to be healed into hope, and to receive new vision from the image of God made man.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Postscript*

Our appeal to the jury must rest there. But two further points deserve brief mention. Many important witnesses were unable to be cited this time. The handful that we have heard may represent an intriguing convergence but the club has other potential members. So one should at least list a few authors and titles: Ray Hart, *Unfinished man and the imagination* (1968); Julian Hartt, *Theological method and imagination* (1977); Gordon Kaufman, *The theological imagination*; Rosemary Haughton, *The passionate God*; John Navone and Thomas Cooper, *Tellers of the Word*; David Tracy, *The analogical imagination* (all 1981); Avery Dulles, *Models of revelation* (1983), and, in somewhat different vein, much of the writing of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Finally one might hint at the possible relevance of this field for a new apologetics. The old apologetics has become not so much untrue as inadequate within a very different cultural context. The newer culture, especially in some of its youth forms, often seems a more poetically exploratory one than before. If so, a corner-stone for any new apologetics would be to grasp that the language of knowing God is primarily the language of images. Our colder forms of discourse get the wavelength wrong. A case could be made that the God of the bible seldom either argues or orders; instead he recites poems and tells stories and invites to freedom by way of images. Out of this revelation springs faith, a revelation where imagination is a central strand in the communication of mystery and in its continued life — both as receiving apparatus and as fostering agency. And in so far as faith is much closer to an active attitude than to a piece of

knowledge, it will continue to be shaped and nourished less by clear concepts than by the many images, acknowledged or not, that each person has of his or her life and of its hopes.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York, 1966), p 370. Other prose quotations from Stevens here are from *The necessary angel* (New York, 1951), p 58 and *Letters*, p 597.

<sup>2</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in theology* (London, 1971), p 115, and Avery Dulles, 'The meaning of faith considered in relationship to justice', in *The faith that does justice*, ed. John Haughey (New York, 1977), p 13.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, E. H.: *The religious use of imagination* (New York, 1901), pp 43, 134. Other quotations from Johnson are from pp 9, 187, 63.

<sup>4</sup> Newman, J. H.: *A grammar of assent* (London, 1909), p 115. Subsequent quotations are from pp 117, 75, 82, 92.

<sup>5</sup> Coulson, John: *Religion and imagination* (Oxford, 1981), pp 82-83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p 55. Further quotations from Coulson come from pp 16, 34, v, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Greeley, Andrew: *Religion: a secular theory* (New York, 1982), pp 48, 68, 98.

<sup>8</sup> See James Engell's *The creative imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). See also Ernest Tuveson, *The imagination as a means of grace* (Berkeley, 1960), and Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Coleridge, S. T.: *Biographia literaria*, chapter 13.

<sup>10</sup> Kroner, Richard: *The religious function of imagination* (New Haven, 1941), p 36.

<sup>11</sup> Kroner, Richard: *Between faith and thought* (New York, 1966), pp 98, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Kroner, Richard: *The religious function of the imagination*, pp 33, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Kroner, Richard: *How do we know God?* (New York, 1943), pp 98, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Lynch, William: *Christ and Prometheus: a new image of the secular* (Notre Dame, 1970), p 23.

<sup>15</sup> Lynch, William: *Images of faith* (Notre Dame, 1973), p 17. Further quotations come from pp 36-37, 97, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Lynch, William: 'The life of faith and imagination', *Thought*, lvii (1982), pp 14, 9.

<sup>17</sup> These phrases draw on some other expressions of William Lynch in his book *Images of hope* (New York, 1966), p 209.

# JESUS'S USE OF IMAGERY

By MICHAEL WINTER

**T**HE PREACHING of Jesus as enshrined in the gospels is an invitation to belief. It is not an abstract statement of a theological opinion which was presented for its pure academic interest. The hearer or reader is invited with some urgency to take it up and live by it. If he agrees with the message he must answer it with real assent (in Newman's terminology) as opposed to merely notional assent. This practical response means the kind of assent which engages the whole personality with a view to action. In semitic terminology we can say that it is destined to influence the heart of man, which means not just his intellectual judgment but his emotions, free will and love. In short it will govern his life.

For this purpose graphic, dramatic imagery is far more satisfactory than clear and distinct ideas, which by definition confine themselves to the sphere of the intellect and do not necessarily require any practical steps in the realm of real life. It is difficult to exaggerate the power of images in the first apprehensions of religious truths in infancy. The earliest pictures and stories with which a child comes into contact are likely to stay with him for life, influencing all his subsequent theology, although they may have been forgotten at the conscious level. It has been suggested that Italian children are fortunate in that they frequent churches in which the mother of Jesus is always depicted as a woman of exceptional beauty.

Passing from the consideration of the purely pictorial, it is useful to reflect upon poetic imagery. Its necessity in some spheres was revealed a few years ago when British television showed a film about the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, culminating in the concentration camps. At the time it was remarked that the subject was simply debased by presenting it in what could be called at best a documentary, but which had many features of a soap opera. Similar things have been said about prose descriptions of the Holocaust. In fact a tragedy of those proportions must be presented through a vehicle such as poetry. The most profound experiences of the human heart cannot be conveyed adequately by prose; they must have something like poetry as their vehicle, where symbolism and imagery can evoke what plain words cannot do. It is clear that religious truths come into this category, not only as we perceive

them, but also as God offers them. The richest and deepest truths of religion exceed the bounds of definition in prose or in logical categories; they too require a more comprehensive medium.

In the teaching of Jesus these requirements are fulfilled by the various kinds of imagery which he employed. The concept of the kingdom of God is a useful example. Its existential richness is portrayed vividly in a variety of ways, and it has evaded the restrictive categories which would have impoverished it. By contrast the theology of the Church has suffered through lack of this protective imagery. Because it is a community it has yielded easily to institutionalization, and this can be categorized all too easily in narrowly juridical terms. In this way the science of ecclesiology constricted the mystery of the Church in the period between Trent and Vatican II. The kingdom is less vulnerable to this reductionism, not least because its ideals, objectives and components have been presented in rich poetic imagery.

#### *The parables of Jesus*

The best known examples of imagery in the teaching of Jesus are his parables. It is significant that virtually nothing similar has been discovered among his contemporaries. Joachim Jeremias has drawn attention to one similar kind of story in the teaching of one rabbi who was roughly contemporary with Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Other cultures are equally deficient in the idiom. It is said that the exception proves the rule. The allegory of Meneneus Agrippa which likens civil society to the limbs of the body is reproduced in Livy's *History of Rome*, and turns up again in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Its rarity highlights the absence of this kind of story from virtually all the teachers of antiquity apart from Jesus. It is a strong argument in favour of Jesus's own authorship of these stories.<sup>2</sup>

One feature of their didactic appeal is the conscious use of picturesque exaggeration which extends to the area of sheer impossibility as well as to that which is morally reprehensible. The camel is quite incapable of passing through the eye of any needle, but the image sticks immovably in one's memory. The unforgiving creditor of Matthew 19,23-25 is dealing with the improbable sum of about three million pounds in modern values. The unjust steward was a criminal (Lk 16,1-8), but, since the story is not an allegory, we are not urged to imitate the venality of his conduct. Misunderstandings on that point have led to great but unnecessary agonizing in the past. One lesson is proposed in each parable, and the artistic amplification is

not offered for imitation at every point. Less obvious but no less real is the deceitfulness of the man who finds the treasure in the field (Mt 13,44), yet it is clear that he bought the field for far less than its real value in view of its contents (known only to himself and not to the vendor). Singlemindedness is commended to us and nothing more.

It is reassuring to reflect that the cultural gap of time and place makes virtually no difference to the appeal of these stories. I wish that some of the New Testament demythologizers would stop exaggerating the alleged impossibility of our entering into the thought processes of the palestinian rustics of two millenia ago. Their imagery is so powerful that it has entered the conceptual patterns of modern English. The good Samaritan has become a familiar proverb as well as the name of a social welfare organization. The parable of the talents (Mt 25,1-30) gave a new word to our language. Talent is the transliteration of a Greek word relating to a sum of money, and the fact that we apply it to skill in music, athletics, drama and the intellectual life shows that our ancestors had understood the message accurately. Jesus was referring not just to religious or 'spiritual' qualities.

Clearly the parables of Jesus and many of his other sayings reflect the rural world of ancient Palestine, but only occasionally is that puzzling. The activity of the sower (Mt 13,4-23) becomes intelligible when we appreciate the simple fact that sowing came before ploughing in those days. When the seeds had been scattered on the surface subsequent ploughing was needed to dig them in, at a period when anything like a drilling machine had not been invented. Their availability to the birds was inescapable, but scattering them on the path was not really wasteful because the said 'path' was destined to vanish under the plough soon afterwards. (Perhaps the absence of a militant Ramblers' Association is the only real point of cultural difference!)

The labourers in the vineyard were hired casually, but it is not difficult for us to envisage the system. The London docks had something similar within living memory. The imagery of the vine in John 15 is familiar to anyone who has cultivated the plant in any climate, even in Britain. In December it must be cut back to the main stem. It looks as if it is being killed. In April or May the new shoots appear, and some of them have tiny bunches of grapes. These too must be pruned ruthlessly, cutting away all but one on each twig (so that they may produce yet more fruit). If this is not done the grapes will remain so small as to be useless for making wine.



From the very nature of a story it is clear that some of the parables in the gospels are so short that they are no more than a summary. Professional story-tellers have vanished from our society, and indeed they had gone long before television and radio. However, they are still to be found in other nations, in Morocco for instance. There the narrator will keep going for as long as he chooses, and perhaps until sufficient coins have been thrown into the bowl. It is the idiom of an illiterate and also an unhurried society.

Even the appearance in a parable of full-length treatment, as in the good Samaritan, may represent no more than an abridgement down to the essentials, although it retains the elements of a complete narrative. Other parables are little more than an *aide memoire*, perhaps for a later recitation by another teacher. Consider the sentence of Matthew 13,45-46: 'Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it'. This is just one sentence, which can be said easily in one breath, but with such brevity it cannot possibly have been the original form of the story. Clearly we have no more than a summary. This phenomenon may account for other sentences retained from the teaching of Jesus, which keep the vivid imagery of the parables, yet seem no longer to be even the summary of a story. We can see it in Matthew 6,28-30:

And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields (lilies of the field, in older translations); they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you men of little faith?

Was the description once longer? Was it part of an elaborate story which took twenty minutes to relate in detail? It is impossible to say. What is important for this article is to note that the vivid rural imagery is there, inspiring confidence in God's providence far more persuasively than many purely theological treatments of the matter which one could recall.

It seems that this vivid imagery was so much part of Jesus's teaching idiom that it appeared not simply in well-constructed stories, but also in his moral exhortations which were delivered in the style of wisdom sayings. Perhaps it is pointless to make clear distinctions between parables and other exhortations. The idiom is the same,

and is equally forceful, as can be seen in another saying about trust in providence (Mt 10,29ff):

Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

One of the best examples, indicating just how powerful is this imagery, can be read in the encouragement to petitionary prayer (Lk 11,9-13):

So I say to you, ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked him for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then who are evil know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

The imagery of daily life, and more particularly rural life, was so deeply embedded in the consciousness of Jesus that he employed it even in the unlikely context of his diatribes against the Pharisees:

Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and good faith. These you should have practised without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining at gnats and swallowing camels (Mt 23,23-24).

The choice of animals in the contrast is graphic even to those who do not know the Palestinian environment. When we realize that they were respectively the smallest and largest animals with which the Palestinians were then familiar, the comparison gains more exactitude, but the lesson is vivid even before that final clarification is appreciated.<sup>3</sup>

Not only is the imagery well chosen to make the point convincing, but the underlying lesson is as necessary today as it was two thousand years ago. Recent history in the Catholic Church has provided the perfect illustration, with the disputes about family

planning. The principle is accepted, but the morality of different methods has been debated with such animosity that the quarrel has overshadowed every other ethical issue. The moral consequences of indiscriminate area bombing in World War II, the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, the economic exploitation of the third world and the build-up of arsenals of nuclear and biological weapons, have all provoked restrained condemnations couched in general terms. Priests have never been suspended for 'incorrect' opinions on these matters, nor have the laity been denied the sacraments for their views or actions. But when it comes to the pill, the full severity of spiritual penalties is brought to bear.

I have dwelt on that example at some length because it shows the perennial relevance of Jesus's teaching and the medium in which he couched it. The psychology is just the same in the human psyche today, both in religious matters and mundane affairs. Human beings can become obsessed with trivialities and ignore the gigantic issues. Psychologists have advanced convincing explanations for this all too human failing, but nothing has pin-pointed its moral deficiency as accurately as 'straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel'.

### *Apocalyptic imagery*

Whereas all of us can enjoy and understand the rustic imagery drawn from the farming villages of Jesus's homeland, there is another kind of imagery which is much harder to understand. I refer to the apocalyptic style. In his eschatological discourse Jesus speaks about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, using imagery such as that the stars would fall from heaven and the powers of heaven would be shaken (Mt 24,29). In speaking thus he was making use of a style of imagery which he had heard but not invented, and which was well known among his contemporaries. It is the apocalyptic style. The first and greatest book in this idiom which has survived is the canonical book of Daniel written about 165 B.C. The style was employed in many Jewish religious works up to the second century A.D. The only other book written consistently in this style, and which is in the bible, is the Apocalypse of John, although the idiom occurs occasionally elsewhere as in the eschatological discourse of Jesus recorded in the Synoptics. According to D. S. Russell<sup>4</sup> about twenty books are to be included in this category, all but two of which are non-biblical. The class as a whole is approximately equal to the canonical New Testament in length. They are all

religious in character and include works like the *Testaments of the twelve patriarchs*, and the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*. What they all share in common is not their message but their medium, namely the apocalyptic style which Jesus used in his eschatological discourse. For the most part they were destined to be read privately and not declaimed in public. They did not form part of the Jewish liturgical collection used for worship in the temple and the synagogues. They are esoteric in character, giving heavenly secrets to a select band of the elect. Quite often a visionary is taken up to heaven where he receives the communication which he will then divulge to his coterie. In the recounting of the secrets he uses extravagant imagery, often of a cosmological character. This is exactly what Jesus uses in the passage in question. Sun, moon, stars and clouds will behave dramatically, and the normal course of nature is depicted as undergoing violent change. All this is difficult for the modern reader to appreciate, still less to enjoy. It has led to many disastrous misunderstandings, the worst of which is over-readiness to calculate the date of the end of the world. What is really at stake is something much simpler. It is the employment of this magnificently extravagant idiom to signify the transcendence of God and the greatness of his power.

At an earlier time in Israel's history they had come to know the true God as if he were a warrior deity of the desert, stronger than the gods of other tribes, who could thus ensure the success of Moses's compatriots in battle. From this humble beginning the prophets gradually unfolded to the nation just how great was their God. Eventually they came to realize that he was unique and that no other gods existed. The final stage of this development was to make it clear that the true God was not merely superior in power to Antiochus Epiphanes, the second-century persecutor, but that his power was of a totally different order. How best could this be conveyed except by the use of this gloriously flamboyant imagery? Personally I make no secret of the fact that I love it. I relish the vivid character and the extravagance of the imagery. Once again, as with the parables, it is an imagery which fires the imagination and moves the heart. It is an idiom which does not require the comprehending of a difficult philosophical system. In the long discourse in Matthew 24, Jesus employs this imagery to speak of his own second coming in glory, when his messianic status will be plain to all. Nothing could be more dull than the previous sentence in which I have described these world shattering events in plain prose. To do justice to them, and to

convey their urgency to the hearer, they must be described in an idiom which is literally and graphically world shattering. The Jews understood this, and Jesus made use of this well-known medium in order to convey this part of his message convincingly to his contemporaries.

For those of us who live out the pilgrim vocation of the Church in history the appeal to God's power is no less relevant today. For instance, the apparent impossibility of producing peace in the political arena is a case in point. We read of proposals and counter-proposals at the United Nations and at Geneva, about the parallel phased-out reduction of nuclear weapons. It meets with so little success that it is not unrealistic for us to look elsewhere for a possible solution. For Christians it is by no means unreasonable to seek for the establishment of world peace by looking for something of a totally different order. Something much more powerful is needed than the activities of well-intentioned diplomats trying to work out feasible compromises. Surely it must require the power of God. To convey the urgency and inspire confidence, we can do no better than to meditate on the imagery which Jesus and his contemporaries used in more or less the same situations. We need to be convinced of God's transcending power, and we must employ an idiom which does justice to it. Viewed in this perspective, we can see that the apocalyptic imagery which Jesus employed preserves its relevance even for our culture.

#### *The neglect of Jesus's imagery*

It is said that nature abhors a vacuum, and the realm of imagery is no exception. If Christians do not employ satisfactory imagery, then a plethora of unworthy substitutes crowds in to fill the void.

For example, it is difficult to exaggerate the damage done to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by a mass of sentimental pictures, statues, prayers and hymns. The medieval and ancient artists who kept close to biblical imagery seemed to have the unconscious knack of getting things right; a knack which conspicuously evaded the Victorians. Their pictures in stained glass, on church walls or in the illuminations of manuscripts were always dignified and beautiful, even if perspectives were lacking and if their proportions were wrong. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, instead, produced shocking examples of pictures and statues which are not exactly ugly, but just nondescript (like the representations of our Lady from the time of the Lourdes apparitions onwards). When

Epstein's Mother and Child was first displayed in Cavendish Square, London, viewers were profoundly shocked for it broke out of the pattern of depicting the christian heroes as insipid.

I do not wish to become too serious about this phenomenon of widespread lapse into bad taste. One german writer went so far as to classify it as blasphemy. I am not sure if I would go that far. However, I sympathize with his contention that, since it debased the dignity of God, the sentimentalism was not just a matter of bad taste but theologically offensive too, because it diminished in our eyes the greatness of God. The Church has been vigilant in the censorship of books, but since many people do not read much (even if they are literate), it is the pictures rather than the books which will more powerfully influence their ideas.

As I write this article, I have in front of me a photograph of the second-century statue of Christ the good shepherd taken from the roman catacombs. It shows a young roman shepherd boy with a sheep across his shoulders. It is beautiful, dignified, virile yet tender. By contrast the average repository at any pilgrimage centre contains pictures of the same subject which are insipid in every respect. Is it symptomatic of a correspondingly insipid presentation of religion in general?

Having despaired over the effusions of Catholics and Protestants of the last hundred years or more, it is with relief that one turns back to the classical portraits, the medieval windows, the ancient greek icons and the early christian imagery. They had retained the freshness and vigour of the imagery presented by Jesus himself. Much remains to be done if we are to put the record straight. The first step must be for us to immerse ourselves in the gospels in order to absorb fully the imagery which Jesus himself employed.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jeremias, J.: *The parables of Jesus* (London, 1972), p 12.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremias, J.: *op. cit.*, p 12.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremias, J.: *op. cit.*, p 195.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, D. S.: *The method and message of jewish apocalyptic* (London, 1964), p 37.

# THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

## Mary and the New Testament

‘I SEE NO reason why a Catholic’s understanding of what Matthew and Luke meant in their infancy narratives should be different from a Protestant’s.’ These words of the roman catholic biblical scholar Raymond Brown<sup>1</sup> mark a quiet revolution in christian thinking about Mary, a revolution which is not yet over. The coming of modern biblical criticism is putting increasingly into the past the days when Christians’ views about the mother of Jesus and their understanding of the gospel infancy narratives were partly or wholly determined along confessional lines. Since modern biblical criticism has recognized and developed its own presuppositions and methods of working, denominational differences, prejudice apart, have happily less and less influence on our understanding of what the bible has to say about the mother of Jesus.

Because the infancy narratives hold a special place in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, modern interpreters of the place of Mary in the New Testament have to be clear about the presuppositions with which they approach the biblical text and about their methods of exegesis. These include answers to such questions as: what kind of literature the gospels are; how they came to be formed; how the infancy narratives are related to the rest of the gospels and what might constitute valid methods and criteria of interpretation. It was these and other similar questions that an ecumenical panel of scripture scholars, who worked together for three years to produce the book *Mary in the New Testament*, the most balanced recent study in English of what the New Testament tells us about Mary, tackled first.<sup>2</sup> The composition of the panel — biblical scholars working out of backgrounds of different christian Churches — encouraged a breadth of view, a tolerance of pluralism in theological outlook and an invitation to allow a common scientific method to ease inter-confessional tensions. In this essay I am surveying some recent studies about Mary in the New Testament that follow or claim to follow scientific methods of biblical interpretation. I am not concerned with liturgical, typological or devotional readings of ‘marian’ texts from the bible (such as passages from Wisdom, or Isaiah 7,14). The scope of such a survey would be beyond the compass of a short essay, though such ways of reading scripture are, of course, traditional and enriching. We attend first, therefore, to questions of method.

### *Presuppositions and method*

The authors of *Mary in the New Testament* distinguish three main stages in the formation of the gospels. Working backwards in time, which is the

order of interpretation though not, of course, of gospel formation, stage three is that of the composition of the written gospels. Stage two is the formation of traditions (oral or written) which the evangelists used in composing their gospels. Stage one, historically the earliest and most basic stage and in interpretation the least easy to reach with certainty, consists of the historical deeds and sayings on which these traditions were based. The interpreter's main task begins with stage three: 'to report how each evangelist understands Mary and her place in the salvation accomplished in and through Jesus'<sup>3</sup>; then to work back, as far as possible, to stages two and one. This way of proceeding, whose validity is now widely accepted among christian biblical scholars and theologians, poses particular problems when one looks at the infancy narratives, Mary in the gospels and the question of the 'Mary of history'.

For an understanding of the place of Mary in the individual gospels, several other presuppositions should be kept in mind. With regard to the order of composition of the gospels it is the generally accepted view that Mark was the first of the canonical gospels to appear in its present form, and that the author of Luke also wrote Acts. Secondly, it is important to note that in interpreting Matthew's infancy narrative, the main external key to its meaning will be its conformity with the rest of Matthew. Likewise, the key to Luke's birth and infancy story is primarily the rest of Luke-Acts, and not, for example, Matthew's infancy narrative. (We interpret Shakespeare primarily by Shakespeare, not by Ben Jonson.) Moreover, it has to be recognized that the main focus of both infancy narratives is not Mary but Jesus, though in fact Luke seems to give greater prominence to Mary than Matthew does. With regard to the Fourth Gospel, when it is a question of the scenes in which 'the Mother of Jesus' appears (the author does not give her the name 'Mary'), it is especially difficult to go back beyond stage three of interpretation to pre-johannine traditions and to 'history'. And since many have read the figure of the woman in Revelation 12 as a symbol of Mary (as does the Church's liturgy), and have linked this reading with the Fourth Gospel, the authors of *Mary in the New Testament* thought it important to state that they reject the position that the same person wrote both the Fourth Gospel and Revelation.<sup>4</sup>

These presuppositions about the main books of the New Testament which contain references to Mary have implications for the theological method that one adopts in evaluating the New Testament evidence. This point is especially important because pre-critical ages of biblical interpretation took it for granted that the material of the infancy narratives and the references to Mary in John's gospel were straightforward reports of historical facts and events. Some modern biblical scholars too have laid great emphasis on trying to prove the historicity of the infancy stories, especially that of Luke.<sup>5</sup> Here it would be well to be aware of two extremes



and to eschew them. One is the tendency to assume that, because it cannot be proved that certain events are historical, these events were *not* historical, they never happened, they are 'simply' legend or folklore. The other extreme is to suppose, *a priori*, the opposite: that when historicity is unprovable, it is more likely that the events *were* historical. The key principle is that the New Testament writings do not have history, but faith, theology and christian living as their primary aim. The fact that we are uncertain about the historicity of some of the events connected with Mary does not mean that the task of interpretation is vain and fruitless. The harvest that it yields is the mariology of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John: how our christian forebears understood Mary.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from history there is also the problem of pluralism. The authors of *Mary in the New Testament* accept New Testament pluralism as a fact; that is, they recognize sometimes considerable diversities of outlook and judgement among New Testament writers. They resisted, therefore, the tendency to interpret one author by means of information or theology supplied by another (as, for example, explaining Luke 2,35 by reference to John 19,25-27) except where there is firm positive evidence of a link between them. While it is *possible*, for instance, that other New Testament writers besides Matthew and Luke knew of the tradition of the virginal conception, such knowledge cannot be simply assumed. The burden of proof lies with those who wish to demonstrate that writings which make no explicit reference to the virginal conception of Jesus do in fact show an implicit knowledge of it. Finally, the authors of *Mary in the New Testament* did not feel obliged to try, as earlier generations had tried, to reconcile conflicting information as, for example, that about events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Such divergent views form the 'New Testament picture of Mary'; it is not a uniform picture, just as the New Testament picture of Jesus is not uniform.

Among recent writings in English on Mary in scripture, two trends are evident with regard to presuppositions and exegetical method. One, exemplified by the ecumenical panel of authors of *Mary in the New Testament*, consists in keeping a strict watch on the rigorous scientific evaluation of evidence: not to accept as established what is only possible or probable; not to accept as fact what is hypothesis. The other tendency, among scholars perhaps more subject to diverging confessional influences, is to look more benignly and build more confidently upon tenuous connections and hypotheses, seeking perhaps, in biblical criticism as well as in liturgy and devotion, a modern version of a *sensus plenior* for scripture.<sup>7</sup>

These questions about the presuppositions and methods with which we approach the New Testament are crucial for a modern biblical mariology. Every game has rules; different rules produce different games (rugby union is not rugby league), and not observing the rules changes the result. If these metaphors are too frivolous, one can put it differently: a task for christian

scholars and theologians is to work towards an understanding of Mary by using the best available insights and modern methods of their trades. Not all modern scholars, however, would accept in practice all the principles adopted by the authors of *Mary in the New Testament*.<sup>8</sup> As a final word about presuppositions and method, it will be well to mention Raymond Brown's discussion of these matters in the introduction to his commentary on the infancy narratives. He distinguishes three stages in the development of a valid and scholarly understanding of these narratives:

- (a) the perception that the infancy narratives differ significantly from the main body of the gospel material;
- (b) the problem of historicity becomes more acute through the perception of the degree to which the two canonical infancy narratives differ from one another;
- (c) the historicity problem is somewhat relativized by the perception that the infancy narratives are primarily vehicles of the evangelist's theology and christology.<sup>9</sup>

If the infancy stories in Matthew and Luke are theology, the 'essential gospel story in miniature' and elements in the early christians' development of christology 'not an embarrassment but a masterpiece',<sup>10</sup> the main question to be asked is: what message are the evangelists conveying to the Church through them? Each evangelist's understanding of Mary is part of that message and should be read and evaluated in that context and not in any other.

*Mary in the New Testament: Paul*

In the rest of this essay I shall focus on the principal New Testament passages that carry a reference to the mother of Jesus. I shall discuss them in roughly chronological order of composition, in so far as that has been determined with accuracy, with perhaps occasional minor deviations and different groupings. Commentators have tried to quarry insights about Mary from the letters of Paul, but without much positive yield. It has been claimed that in some of the passages in which Paul refers to the birth of Christ (Gal 1,19; 4,4-5.28-29; Rom 1,3-4; Phil 2,6-7) he is a witness to the belief in the virginal conception. But these passages, taken singly and together, throw very little light either on this or on the mother of Jesus. Paul's main concern in these contexts is with Christ and not with Mary. And while he is certainly interested in the fact that Jesus was fully human (cf Gal 4,4), he is not concerned with the manner of Jesus's conception or birth. Further, as the editors of *Mary in the New Testament* note, the pre-existence of Christ and the idea of a virginal conception are never brought together in the New Testament in the sense that one implies or necessitates the other.<sup>11</sup> Even if Paul, therefore, believed in or wrote of the pre-existence

of Christ (as has been suggested for instance for Phil 2,6-7), this implies nothing about his view of the manner in which Jesus came to be conceived.

The arguments to support the view that Romans 1,3 implies a belief in the virginal conception are at best inconclusive. This passage is generally held to be a pre-pauline confession, and Paul's real intention here is not so much to link Jesus with the line of David as to state that Jesus, the davidic messiah, is risen. Paul never writes about the activity of the Spirit in the conception and birth of Jesus. Likewise, in Galatians 4,4, the context provides the main key. In speaking of Jesus as 'born of woman' Paul is of course referring to Mary. This reference, however, is quite indirect, by way of a stereotyped expression, and Paul is saying nothing about how Christ was conceived. Finally, Dibelius's theory that a belief in Isaac's conception by divine impregnation lies behind Galatians 4,28-29 is inconclusive and improbable. Even if it is valid, it is doubtful whether it has anything to contribute to the problem of the virginal conception of Jesus according to the New Testament. We are led, therefore, to the conclusion that just as Paul was not particularly interested in the earthly life of Jesus, so he does not pay attention, in any significant way, to the conception, birth or mother of Jesus. He does not mention the virginal conception, and we have no reason to think that he was aware of it.

#### *The Gospel of Mark*

One question about the Gospel of Mark that affects our understanding of the New Testament picture of Mary has to do with Mark's presentation of scenes involving the family of Jesus (including his mother) and its implications about the Synoptics' views on Jesus's relationships with his family during his public ministry. Rosemary Reuther states that:

Mary and Jesus's family are unbelievers who stand aside from and even oppose his mission . . . Jesus's family tries to seize him, believing him to be mad (Mk 3,21). . . . At one point Jesus's mother and brothers come to speak to him. Jesus takes the occasion of their arrival to repudiate loyalty to his family in favour of kinship with his disciples (Mt 12,48-50). . . . Jesus's preaching is marked by a negativity towards the kinship group.<sup>12</sup>

The authors of *Mary in the New Testament* present a more nuanced and less extreme view. In the context of Mark 3,20-35, Jesus is shown as indicating a contrast between his physical family and his 'eschatological' family. The point is not that members of the physical family are repudiated, but that belonging to the natural family of Jesus is no guarantee, in and by itself, of a place in the eschatological kingdom. Membership of that depends on a person's acceptance and practice of the word of God. This panel of scholars, anxious not to overstress the apparent opposition of Jesus's

physical family, interpret Mark 3,31-35 as showing that they 'misunderstand' Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

On the interpretation of the 'brothers and sisters of Jesus' (Mk 6,3), John McHugh, intent on being faithful to the roman catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, was at pains to establish that the people here mentioned were first cousins of Jesus on Joseph's side.<sup>14</sup> On this matter the authors of *Mary in the New Testament* point out the important fact that the continued virginity of Mary after the birth of Jesus is not a question explicitly raised by the New Testament,<sup>15</sup> and one must be very hesitant, tentative and careful about method when asking the New Testament writers to answer questions they have not posed to themselves. Later on in christian history it was precisely that question of Mary's continued virginity that focused attention upon Jesus's exact relationship with those 'brothers and sisters'. But it cannot be said, on the other hand, that the New Testament *indubitably* identifies them as Mary's children. It is certainly true that the solution favoured by scholars partly depends here on the authority they allot to later christian and confessional insights and teachings.

Theologically speaking, however, the Gospel of Mark gives us a picture of Mary that is at least verging on the negative. She is not differentiated by Mark from those members of Jesus's family who at best misunderstand and perhaps even refuse to believe in him and who oppose him. We shall see in due course that this view is modified by the later evangelists.

#### *The Gospel of Matthew*

In a recent issue of *The Way*<sup>16</sup> Andrew Hamilton showed how, when one writes a story, the account of the beginnings of the story is often the last to be written, and our interpretations of the beginnings are modified and coloured by later events in the story and later reflections on the story's meaning. This pattern of re-writing could well have taken place in the composition of Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives. Post-easter and later theological views of Jesus have significantly influenced the account of his conception and birth (just as they have influenced the story of his ministry).

There is discussion about the basic plan and structure of Matthew's infancy narrative.<sup>17</sup> Whichever suggestion one adopts, however, several features seem clear: Matthew's prime focus is on Jesus; he is concerned to show that the coming of the Messiah was prepared for by God in the Old Testament; he is at pains to present Jesus as 'Son of David', 'Son of Abraham' and 'Emmanuel'; and in the persons of Joseph (a central figure in the story) and the magi, Matthew is appealing both to Jews and to Gentiles.<sup>18</sup> This brings us to Mary. When Matthew introduces her at the end of his genealogy (1,16) it is to point to her as an instrument of God's providence in the messianic plan. This is what she has in common with the other rather unexpected women in the genealogy: they all contracted

extraordinary or irregular unions through which, nonetheless, God carried out his promises and plans for the saving of his people. The story of the conception and birth of Jesus in Matthew re-emphasizes and elaborates upon what is suggested in the genealogy. In irregular marital circumstances, by means of the Holy Spirit, God causes Mary to conceive the Messiah himself, who is both Son of David and Emmanuel. So Mary plays a key part in God's saving his people, but Matthew never mentions her personal attitudes, thoughts or feelings. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph is given the centre of the stage.<sup>19</sup>

Matthew 1,18-25 raises questions about the virginal conception of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> The authors of *Mary in the New Testament* approach the problem in this way. If we work back from Matthew's account of Jesus's birth, it is difficult to know with certainty whether the idea of a virginal conception was Matthew's own, or whether it was in the tradition which he inherited. And about the factual historicity of the virginal conception, they argue, the evidence is even more limited, and no certain conclusion is possible.<sup>21</sup> In any case, Matthew's christological purpose remains clear: Mary is the instrument by whom God brought into the world the Messiah who was Son of David and God-with-us.<sup>22</sup>

René Laurentin is an eminent marian theologian, but his judgment about references to Mary in the synoptic gospels outside the infancy narratives is mildly and unduly pessimistic:

If there were nothing beyond these texts there would be nothing on which to found a theology of the mother of Christ. Although they attest the existence, within history, of a mother of Jesus, called Mary, living in Nazareth, they have no additional significance; all they do is warn us against erroneous assessments of Mary from a carnal standpoint.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison of parallel scenes in Mark and Matthew shows that Matthew has re-worked his inherited marcan material to bring it into line with the positive attitude towards Mary which he exhibits in the infancy narrative. He tempers Mark's harshness towards Jesus's family (Mt 12,46-50) 'to at least neutrality',<sup>24</sup> and reinforces his own view that Jesus is the Son of David.

#### *The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles*

Luke's material about Mary is more plentiful than that of any other New Testament writer. We do not know for certain the order in which Luke wrote the various parts of his work, and it is conceivable that he composed his story of the birth and childhood of Jesus after Acts and the rest of his gospel. Here, however, I shall discuss the passages in which Mary appears in the order in which they come in the gospel and Acts as we have them.<sup>25</sup>

Because Luke's use of the Old Testament in his infancy narrative is often more indirectly allusive and oblique than Matthew's, it has given rise to more speculation about Old Testament themes that might underlie Luke 1-2. John McHugh distinguishes the historical events that Luke describes from the literary form in which he couches this description. This literary form is like 'a tapestry woven from Old Testament threads. The threads are the various texts or ideas from the Old Testament which Luke weaves together in such a way as to produce a new pattern'. For McHugh, Luke is showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophetic expectations about the Messiah and gave them a more profound meaning than the original authors intended. With Jesus as his central reference point, Luke re-interprets Old Testament passages, with the guiding thought that the son of Mary was also the son of God whose coming has fulfilled Israel's expectations.<sup>26</sup>

For John de Satgé, who approaches marian studies out of an evangelical protestant tradition and background, the theological key to Luke's infancy narrative is the belief that Jesus is Israel's true king, a messiah (anointed) king, a deliverer descended from David. The coming of this king inaugurates a new age, one important feature of which is an outpouring of a spirit of prophecy, upon, initially, Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary.<sup>27</sup>

All of which brings us again to Mary herself. As well as 'Daughter of Sion' John McHugh also sees Mary as the figure of the new 'Ark of the Covenant'. The creative power of God overshadows her as the glory of God had once come upon the israelite tent of witness and filled it with the divine presence. The *Magnificat* for McHugh is a hymn celebrating God's redemption of the 'lowly' and 'poor' whom Mary personifies and in whose name she praises God. The day of Jesus's birth is the day of salvation for these poor and lowly of Israel. John McHugh's general tendency is to try to combine theological and historical interpretations of incidents in the infancy narratives, a combination which is often uneasy and unsatisfying.<sup>28</sup>

The interpretation of Mary in Luke 1-2 as a symbol rather than as a person was taken up again by Marie Isaacs, a baptist scripture scholar. She gives the salutary caution that one should beware of speaking of Mary as a *mere* symbol: 'there is nothing inferior about symbols'.<sup>29</sup> Luke presents Mary as a recipient of God's mercy, a representative of the faithful remnant of Israel, and of the poor who prayerfully and eagerly await the coming of the Messiah. She is also the 'slave of the Lord' (Lk 1,38) and the recipient of the promised Spirit — one of the menservants and maidservants who would 'see visions and dream dreams' (cf Acts 1,16-20 and Joel 3,1-5). Mary's *Magnificat*, which articulates the faith of the *anawim* in trusting to God to reverse common scales of values and to vindicate the faithful remnant, recalls Hannah the mother of Samuel and so presents Mary as a symbol of devoted motherhood and religious piety.

John de Satgé stresses different elements in Luke 1-2. For him, too, the

central figure is Jesus, characterized by both 'brotherness' and 'otherness'. The annunciation takes up the theme that the gospel and the kingdom demand and provoke acceptance or rejection. Mary's response was not a foregone conclusion. By her exercise of free choice the long history of God's choice of Israel and of Israel's consequent closeness to God was vindicated: it prepared the way for the Lord to come to his people. And de Satgé highlights the fact that throughout this infancy story God intervenes and acts through people who are weak, poor, humble in station, unobtrusive and perhaps even ineffectual. The narrative also lays down the main lines of the relationship between Jesus and his mother which will continue through his life as Luke presents it to us. That his understanding of this relationship is different from Mark's is clear from other episodes in Luke (especially 8,19-21, and 11,27-28). The mother of Jesus, in Luke, is definitely included in Jesus's new 'eschatological' family of the kingdom. Her blessedness lay precisely in believing the word of the Lord and doing what that word implied (Lk 1,38; 8,19-21; 11,27-28).<sup>30</sup>

This motif of Mary's belonging from the outset to Jesus's new family of those who hear the word of God and do it is also taken up by *Mary in the New Testament*. The reflective process in a developing christology and mariology that operates in Luke 1-2 seems to be this: Luke is taking some features of post-resurrection christology and carrying them back to the moment of Jesus's conception. So, for example, it is fitting that he who in his ministry was greater than John the Baptist should also be shown to be greater in the events surrounding his birth. Luke presents the two births as a series of diptychs: just as God intervened in the conception of John the Baptist (Lk 1,5-25; 59-80) so he intervened in a more remarkable way in the conception of Jesus (Lk 1,26-38; 2,1-20). And in the annunciation scene Mary is being presented as the first to hear and respond to the gospel. Her response (Lk 1,38) shows that she is already prepared to be a member of Jesus's eschatological family; she is already a believer for whom God's word is enough. So, as the obedient servant of the Lord she goes *with haste* to her cousin who greets her as 'she who believed' (Lk 1,45). In the *Magnificat* she proclaims the good news 'by anticipation': she is the spokeswoman both for ancient Israel and for christian disciples. Additionally, Luke could be portraying Mary as the believing disciple in presenting her as holding on to words and events and meditating over them. Through these scenes, then, Mary grows as a believer and a disciple. At the same time, the story hints that even for Mary complete discipleship is not yet possible (Lk 2,50-51). Her discipleship will be completed and perfected through the ministry, cross and resurrection of Jesus as she continues to search for understanding (Lk 2,51b).

This consistency in Luke's picture of Mary is carried on into Acts. The qualities of discipleship — humble, accepting, obedient to the word in faith — that Mary shows in the story of Jesus's birth are carried through

his ministry, his death and rising into the post-easter community (Acts 1,14), where Christians are called 'servants and *handmaids* of the Lord' (Acts 2,18). Mary's first response to the good news was 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.' The real import of Acts 1,14 is to remind the reader that she had not changed her mind.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Gospel of John*

There are two episodes in the Fourth Gospel in which the mother of Jesus appears (Jn 2,1-12; 19,5-27).<sup>32</sup> Though John McHugh adopts a now unfashionable view of the composition of this gospel, when he explains the Cana story much of his emphasis is on its theological import. The key to his interpretation is Jn 2,9-10: this is the *beginning* of signs which, in the course of this gospel, rise in a crescendo to the raising of Lazarus and then the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the supreme sign. In chapter two Mary is presented to us as the person who believed in Jesus even before the first sign took place, before the disciples believed. By her intervention she occasioned that first sign. In the scene on Calvary, this theme of Mary's faith is continued. The disciple whom Jesus loved and who stands with Mary at the foot of the cross is a representative of all faithful disciples whose faith is not destroyed by the cross. Mary is henceforth to be the mother of these disciples and her faith is to be the pattern for all the disciples. This johannine portrait is intended to embody what faith involves: standing beside the crucified when evil seems triumphant.<sup>33</sup>

Since John McHugh's book was published much work has been done on the Fourth Gospel which would modify this view of Mary. Other interpretations of the Cana story come at different points on a broad spectrum. At one end is the now old-fashioned interpretation that the story exemplifies Mary's intercessory power. At the other end is the view that since Mary persisted in her demand after Jesus's refusal, we are meant to understand this as showing that Mary did not believe in Jesus. The fact that Jesus does provide the wine, however, makes it unlikely that the scene is meant as an attack on his mother. It makes better sense to see her as one of the people who, despite their good intentions, misunderstand Jesus. (Other examples of this 'johannine misunderstanding' — perhaps largely a literary device — are the woman of Samaria and Nicodemus, both of whom later believe and become disciples.) Mary's request for a sign, demonstrating perhaps a certain naïve confidence and imperfect understanding, leads ultimately to solid faith; she remains with him (Jn 2,12) and is present at his death (Jn 19,25-27). It is only on Calvary that she finally becomes a model for believers.<sup>34</sup>

Several more symbolic interpretations of John 19,25-27 have been offered, some seeing Mary as Second Eve or as a symbol of Israel, and others linking this scene with the figure of the woman in Revelation 12.



One which commands more general support continues the faith theme that I have outlined and links this scene with Mark 3,31-35, and Luke 18,19-21. As she stands at the foot of the cross, Jesus gives his physical mother a 'spiritual' role as mother of the disciple. In this way Jesus's physical family is replaced by the beloved disciple who is not a natural relative but someone particularly loved. Jesus's physical mother, however, does become part of this 'eschatological' family, since the beloved disciple is given to her as her son. An interpretation along this line seems the most fruitful and plausible of those recently offered.<sup>35</sup>

#### *The Book of Revelation*

Ancient christian liturgical and exegetical traditions have seen in the figure of the woman in Revelation 12 an image of Mary.<sup>36</sup> And, reading that chapter, one 'feels' it is appropriate, especially as the author refers to the woman as the mother of the Messiah. But most contemporary scholars agree that this interpretation has real difficulties, among which are the following. Early christian writers did not interpret Revelation 12 mariologically; the first known mariological reading is from the fourth century. Moreover, the author of Revelation does not identify the woman, and the description of the birth of her child does not correspond to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The safe conclusion is that an intended reference to Mary in Revelation 12 is very unlikely. The woman appears to be primarily intended as an image of the people of God, the messianic community.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Conclusions*

This survey has been confined to the interpretation of Mary in relevant passages of the New Testament and has not taken account of ancient or modern theological, dogmatic or devotional reflections on the biblical evidence. What emerges from the survey, among writers who owe allegiance to different christian Churches, is a remarkable degree of consensus and relatively few areas of conflict about both presuppositions and methods of exegesis on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the results of the application of those methods. While some Roman Catholics might regret that they have lost some of the riches of a pre-critical 'high mariology', Christians of other traditions might be glad for precisely the same reason. But exegesis once again provides a basis for real ecumenical co-operation in an area where confessional differences have been very marked and sometimes bitter.

The survey also reveals differences in New Testament attitudes to Mary, attitudes which are perhaps more closely linked to differences in christology than I have brought out in this essay. Mark's attitude to Mary is somewhat negative; Matthew and Luke modify their inherited view of Mary in Jesus's ministry in accordance with their portraits of her in their own

infancy stories. The position of Mary in the Fourth Gospel is part of its originality, but has points of similarity — especially the theme of faith and discipleship — with the Synoptics. Paul's theological and ethical concerns lead him to place little or no emphasis on the mother of Christ. In these divergencies we can trace developments.

Questions connected with the conception of Jesus have traditionally been divisive among Christians, and while they are not the most important ones for biblical mariology, they should be mentioned. It will perhaps be helpful to summarize very briefly the present state of play. The biblical evidence is that both Matthew and Luke state or imply that Jesus was conceived without a human father. The first question is, what did they mean by this? In a recent book on christology, Gerald O'Collins, a roman catholic theologian, says that Matthew and Luke probably meant that to be understood as a statement of historical fact. Raymond Brown, on the other hand, stresses the *theological* import of this evidence.<sup>38</sup> One may surmise that the process of reflection went something like this: as time went on, after the crucifixion of Jesus, the christian communities came to understand more and more the implications of Jesus's being both a man and 'Son of God'. This latter does not necessarily imply a 'high' christology of 'pre-existence'. They realized increasingly that he possessed a special divine status as risen Lord. In time, this divine element was seen as active in the ministry of Jesus (e.g. in the account of the transfiguration), in his baptism and in accounts of his birth and conception. This essential fact of Jesus's having a special divine element or status is expressed narratively in the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke by the affirmation that Jesus was conceived without a human father.<sup>39</sup> The doctrine of the virginal conception, therefore, as far as the New Testament is concerned, is important primarily for what it tells us about Jesus. Later ascetical teaching, which gave particular prominence to an ideal of virginity, turned attention more to Mary's virginity as a model of christian perfection. This has sometimes led to the excess that virginity has been represented as the primary or even exclusive way and mark of christian holiness. Whether 'Mary of history' was *biologically* a virgin when she conceived Jesus is a question the New Testament does not try to answer. Nor is it a central question for christian doctrine or for our theological thinking about the mother of Jesus.

*David Lonsdale S.J.*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brown, Raymond E.: *The birth of the Messiah* (London, 1977), p 9 (to be referred to as *Birth*).

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Raymond E.: and others (eds): *Mary in the New Testament* (London, 1978), ch 2 (to be referred to as *Mary NT*).

<sup>3</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, p 10.

- <sup>4</sup> The material of this paragraph comes from *Mary NT*, ch 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf especially, McHugh, John: *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London, 1975).
- <sup>6</sup> Cf especially, *Mary NT*, ch 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf McHugh, *op. cit.*, part I, ch 4, for example.
- <sup>8</sup> McHugh, *op. cit.*, pp 60-61 and part I, ch 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Brown, *Birth*, p 26.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 8 and 38.
- <sup>11</sup> This discussion of Paul is based on *Mary NT*, ch 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Reuther, Rosemary Radford: *Mary — the feminine face of the Church* (London, 1979), p 31.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, ch 4.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf McHugh, *op. cit.*, pp 200-54, especially pp 234-54.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf especially *Mary NT*, p 72.
- <sup>16</sup> Hamilton, Andrew: 'Images of beginning', in *The Way*, vol 24, no 1 (January 1984), pp 8-16.
- <sup>17</sup> This discussion is summarized in Brown, *Birth*, pp 50-56 and *Mary NT*, pp 75-77.
- <sup>18</sup> *Mary NT*, *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, pp 74-97. The view that Matthew later (ch 21) rejects the 'Son of David' title has much in its favour.
- <sup>20</sup> McHugh's discussion of this is on pp 269-343 of *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*.
- <sup>21</sup> *Mary NT*, p 96.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, ch 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Laurentin, René: 'Pluralism about Mary, biblical and contemporary', in *The Way Supplement*, 45 (June 1982), p 81.
- <sup>24</sup> *Mary NT*, p 103.
- <sup>25</sup> Luke's theology and history have been fully discussed by Conzelmann, Flender and Marshall. Cf also Brown, *Birth*, pp 235-55.
- <sup>26</sup> McHugh, *op. cit.*, pp 24-36.
- <sup>27</sup> De Satgé, John: *Mary and the christian gospel* (London, 1976), pp 28-35.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf McHugh, *op. cit.*, part I, ch 6-13.
- <sup>29</sup> Isaacs, Marie E.: 'Mary in the lucan infancy narrative', in *The Way Supplement*, 25 (Summer 1975), p 95.
- <sup>30</sup> De Satgé, *op. cit.*, ch 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, p 177. The previous two paragraphs are based on chapter 6 of this book.
- <sup>32</sup> For basic suppositions about the composition of this gospel, see *Mary NT*, pp 179-80.
- <sup>33</sup> McHugh, *op. cit.*, pp 351-60, and pp 388-403.
- <sup>34</sup> Cf *Mary NT*, pp 180-96.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 206-17.
- <sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the problems of interpreting Revelation, see *Mary NT*, pp 219-34.
- <sup>37</sup> This paragraph is based on *Mary NT*, ch 8. Adela Yarbro Collins, in *The Apocalypse* (Dublin, 1979), pp 82-88, has argued persuasively that Revelation 12 takes up the myth of Leto/Apollo/Python. The woman, mother of the Messiah, is not Mary but the messianic community. She is also the Jerusalem above (cf 12,17) and the pain of her labour is the suffering of the whole people of God as they await their anointed king.
- <sup>38</sup> O'Collins, Gerald: *Interpreting Jesus* (London, 1983), pp 195-201 discusses the virginal conception from a christological angle (with helpful bibliography). Cf Brown, *Birth*, pp 517-33.
- <sup>39</sup> A more nuanced view is given in *Mary NT*, pp 289-92.

# TRADITIONS OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

## The Guru in Hinduism

Not by reasoning is this sacred doctrine to be attained;  
Taught by another it is well understood.

*Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.9.*

NOWADAYS spiritual directors are out and the *guru* is in — a wise preceptor who solves all problems with a mystic saying or some mildly incomprehensible *koan*. The deeper appreciation we now have for indian spirituality is clearly to be welcomed. Even when it takes the form of a sort of craze for oriental exotica there are immense benefits to be gained from an acquaintance with another religious tradition and from the dialogue-in-practice which it occasions. But the *guru* in Hinduism is both more and less than a spiritual director and our homely caricature (which, no doubt, no one takes seriously) does have the unfortunate side-effect of trivializing the richness of the real hindu tradition. Certainly the *guru* is a spiritual guide. But that does not say a great deal for Hinduism is all about *sādhana*, a word which connotes the purposive quest of a particular goal and might almost be translated as the search for one's literal 'spiritual direction'; the *guru* is but one means to this general and all-embracing end.

More importantly, the *guru* is what in India is often called a *jñāni* or 'realized soul'. He is the one who knows, who has experienced the presence of God within. And only the one who has attained such a contemplative knowledge of God can communicate it to others. To speak of the *guru*, therefore, is to take up a theme which is profoundly indian and which only really makes sense against its properly indian background. What is it that he knows? And how is that knowledge to be passed on? The object of this article is to answer such questions by finding the right setting, by considering what sort of a tradition the *guru* comes from, and by suggesting an appropriately indian understanding of his role.

To find our indian setting let us begin in the holy city of Varanasi or Benares. Here every devout Hindu wishes to die, to be cremated at the burning *ghat* and have his ashes returned to the sacred river Ganges and thence, he hopes, to immortality with the gods. Varanasi is a centre of pilgrimage. Every morning, as the sun rises over the river, devotees swarm down to the bathing-places to perform their ritual ablutions. The endless tinkling bells and cymbals, the singing of *bhajans*, the recitation of prayers, and, perhaps more than anything else, the cheerfully chaotic city itself with its narrow winding back-streets where one's progress is quite likely to be halted by a somnolent but quite immoveable cow, all tell of a religion of great power and colour but precious little organization. The

mistake is probably to regard Hinduism as one religion. It is really a whole complex of beliefs and practices, some complementary, some contradictory, which defy reduction to easy dogmas and formulae. To pick out one or two as 'key' is to risk distortion. Nevertheless, a certain ill-defined structure does make itself felt. It is probably best illustrated by the image of the mighty river Ganges itself.

For obvious reasons rivers are regarded as sacred and no river is more sacred than the Ganges. The water which flows down from the Himalayas brings life and a source of purification. More importantly it represents the whole cycle of creation which emanates from the home of the gods, Mount Meru, the centre of the universe, and includes the whole continuum of creation, from the gods themselves to the crops which grow along the river-banks, and the thousands of tiny creatures who depend ultimately on the life-giving waters for their very existence. The act of piety which casts the ashes of the dead into the river simply completes the cycle. Creation returns to the source from which it comes. The river flows on to become one with the vastness of the ocean from whence it will return eventually as rain upon the cosmic mountain and the whole cycle begins again. This is the cycle of *Samsāra*, literally what-flows-together, a word which denotes the endless round of births, deaths and rebirths, and which we have come to call the transmigration of souls. Two other ideas make up the basic structure of Indian religion, whether at Varanasi or elsewhere: the first is the concept of *Karma*, literally work, which refers to the positive or negative value of one's actions as the determining factor of the nature of one's next life; the other is *Moksha*, the state of absolute release, however conceived, from the whole painful cycle of rebirth.

This decidedly unwieldy complex of ideas did not emerge as the logical outcome of an original revelation or teaching. Hinduism can be traced back to the *Vedas*, perhaps as far as 1500 B.C., but formative influences were at work long before that, and perhaps the most significant creative period in the religion comes with the *Upanishads*, the earliest of which are to be dated around 700 B.C. Here we find references to groups of ascetics who have renounced their normal worldly ties and are wandering around the country seeking for the way to achieve *Moksha* and existing by begging in the villages. Where these people come from and how they are to be distinguished from the distinctly heterodox Buddhist and Jain communities who flourished at approximately the same time, is still a matter of scholarly dispute. One point, however, is clear: the religion we call Hinduism is the result of a long-established tension between the traditional religion of society characterized by devotion and ritual, keeping in tune with *Samsāra*, the whole cycle of creation, and the more radical asceticism of the renouncer with its concern for personal experience and assurance that one has achieved true *Moksha*. Both these types of religion are present in modern Varanasi. In large temples and the most basic of wayside shrines people

make their offerings and recite prayers, a witness to the extraordinary faith which characterizes the holy city. But alongside the ordinary devotees and pilgrims are the spiritual élite, the holy men, usually clad in saffron robes, often dusty and dirty and looking more than slightly disreputable, and just occasionally showing by their peaceful and serene expressions that they have come close to the *Moksha* they seek.

Just how many are charlatans it is difficult to say. The influx of western seekers-after-truth on the various well-travelled hippie trails means that there is an adequate supply of gullible customers. But India itself has always been fascinated by the exotic and mysterious. Stories abound of the marvellous feats and esoteric powers enjoyed by all sorts of weird and wonderful characters. In the *Rig Veda*, for instance, we hear of the long-haired ascetic who drinks hallucinatory drugs and 'rides with the rush of the wind'.<sup>1</sup> The ancient epics and *Purānas* are full of the exploits of spiritual virtuosi who find the way to *Moksha* the hard way — by self-inflicted torture, for instance, standing for years on one leg or with one arm held up in the air. Nor are these legends just fanciful stories, as pictures in contemporary magazines indicate. In every temple compound is to be found a gaggle of homeless mendicants, clanking their tins and begging for alms — another hurdle to be negotiated by the intrepid tourist, but, for the devout Hindu, figures of great holiness and sources of religious merit. What began as a rejection of the tradition, born of a dissatisfaction with the ritual of the *Veda*, has now become a respected part of the mainstream and institutionalized under the title of *Sannyāsa*. A true *sannyāsi* has abandoned all ties with the world and wanders homeless, begging his food and eating only enough to sustain his life in a relentless search for Ultimate Truth.

Yet the *sannyāsi* is not a parasite upon society. If anything, the reverse is the truth — at least religiously. For the holy man is a sacrament of the Divine — not just a reminder of religious values in a world given over to the pursuit of gain and self-interest, but a real contact with the God who is 'so hard to see'. Merely to set eyes on a holy man, still more to enter into his presence and hold converse with him, is in some sense a communion with God. The relationship of the pupil with his *guru* is one aspect of this vision of the Divine present in and through the human. The primary religious act is not to seek advice or direction but to receive *darshan* — a word which literally means observation or sight, but connotes the act of entering into the presence of the *guru* in order to benefit from the Divine Power which, as it were, radiates from him. In the first place the *guru* is simply a teacher. The earliest *gurus* were brahmins whose task was to preserve the traditional lore of the *Vedas* by passing it on to the privileged higher castes. Young boys went through a stage of life called *Brahmacarya* when they gave themselves over totally to the direction of their teacher. According to the ancient texts they should revere him even more than their parents, for whereas parents give physical life, it is in the power of the *guru*

to bring about a second, a spiritual birth. But the word *guru* means weighty or authoritative, and that gives some indication of his true function. The real *guru* has personal authority, not something inherited or the possession of a privileged caste, but a clear indication that this man has himself experienced the Divine. He knows. He has entered the presence of God.

The *guru* is more than a teacher or personal mentor. He is also a philosopher and a sort of spiritual artist, conjuring new ideas and themes out of the richness of vedic religion. As the sage who knows, the teacher of the one who seeks to learn, he is the guide to our understanding of the *Upanishads*, those complex mystical writings which are the philosophical heart of so much of indian religion. The word *Upanishad* means something like sitting-down-near. The texts themselves are often couched in the form of a dialogue between the guru and the disciple whom he initiates into the true meaning of the ancient vedic sacrifice. And the teaching is often esoteric, a private revelation. Thus when the young man, Artabhāga, comes to the great sage Yājñavalkya and asks what happens to a person after death, he gets the reply, 'Artabhāga, my dear, take my hand. We two only will know of this. This is not for us two to speak of in public'. The author of the text comments: 'The two went away and deliberated. What they said was *karma* (action). What they praised was *karma*. Verily, one becomes good by good action, bad by bad action'.<sup>2</sup>

This is not book learning. Such teaching is to be assimilated through the heart. The external ritual must be interiorized; the gods are to be found through introspection and meditation. Ultimately, teach the sages, *Brahman*, the impersonal Holy Power which pervades the universe, is to be integrated with *Ātman*, that spiritual power which is the 'spark of the Divine' the individual's own deepest self. In a celebrated dialogue Uddālaka tries to explain to his pupil, Śvetaketu:

'Place this salt in the water. In the morning come unto me.'

Then he did so.

Then he said to him: 'That salt you placed in the water last evening — please bring it hither'.

Then he grasped for it but did not find it, as it was completely dissolved.

'Please take a sip of it from this end', he said. 'How is it?'

'Salt.'

'Take a sip from the middle', said he. 'How is it?'

'Salt.'

'Take a sip from that end', said he. 'How is it?'

'Salt.'

'Set it aside. Then come unto me.'

He did so, saying, 'It is always the same'.

Then he said to him: 'Verily, indeed, my dear, you do not perceive Being here. Verily indeed, it is here.'

That which is the finest essence — this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is *Ātman* (Soul). That art thou, Śvetaketu.<sup>3</sup>

The *guru* is the one who has already experienced this identity in his own life, whose past *karma* has been neutralized through a mystical gnosis, and who has therefore achieved *Moksha*, true liberation of the Spirit which is, as it were, imprisoned in his mortal body. The teaching of the *Upanishads* is often notoriously obscure, but then knowledge has to be thoroughly assimilated; it cannot simply be taken on trust. The *guru's* experience must become that of his pupil. We search the texts in vain for the secret of 'how it is done'. Everything depends not on technique but on the living tradition which is passed on only through a personal and very intimate relationship. For the disciple the *guru* is the means of direct access to God.

The understanding of *Moksha* varies. For some schools — and this is particularly true of the *Upanishads* — it is just a monistic merging of the self back into the One from which it came, as the drop of water is reunited with the ocean. But there are also theistic schools where the *summum bonum* is the vision of a personal God. All depends on the relationship of loving devotion or *bhakti* which is established with him. In this type of religion the most celebrated *guru* is undoubtedly the Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gītā* who appears as the charioteer of the young warrior Arjuna but is really an incarnation of the great god Vishnu. The dialogue of the *Gītā* begins with a careful imparting of information, gradually builds up the level of trust between teacher and disciple and climaxes with the most incredible theophany in which Krishna reveals himself in all his glory to his adoring pupil. Having assumed his human form once again, Krishna addresses Arjuna:

Right hard to see is this my form which you have seen: this is the form the gods themselves forever crave to see. Not by the *vedas* or grim-ascetic-practice, not by the giving of alms or sacrifice can I be seen in such a form as you did see Me; but by worship-of-love addressed to Me, none other, Arjuna, can I be known and seen in such a form and as I really am. So can my lovers enter into Me. Do works for Me, make Me your highest goal, be loyal-in-love to Me, cut off all other attachments, have no hatred for any other being at all: for all who do thus shall come to Me.<sup>4</sup>

Krishna is in fact the *guru* par excellence — the complete and undivided focus of attention. Arjuna is told simply to surrender his entire will and all his actions to Krishna. More than a teacher, Krishna has become the centre of all adoration.

The position that Krishna holds in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, combining the



qualities of the all-knowing sage with the compassion of the Divine, goes some way to explaining the high position which the *guru* holds in contemporary Hinduism. Most modern Hindus follow the way of *Bhakti*, that is to say are devotees of one of the two great gods, Vishnu or Siva, or of one of their many incarnations or local forms. In addition devotion is also accorded to the various forms of the goddess and to any number of lesser gods and spirits. Such religion is often highly emotional and charged with a deep and moving faith; great emphasis is placed on the value of personal experience. For the most part, the holy man or *sannyāsi*, whether he is a *guru* who initiates disciples into the secrets of the sect, or just one of the eccentric crew of hangers-on muttering *mantras* at the temple gate, is a remote and mysterious figure. But without him Hinduism would lose much of its creative energy. At one level the *guru* is just a teacher — of anything, from dancing or singing to the esoteric secrets of religion. But there are also leaders of sects, maintaining age-old traditions, heads of *maths* or monasteries, and men whose claim to fame is simply their very obvious holiness and wisdom. But even such broad definitions fail to fit the complexity of Hinduism. In general a *guru* is anyone or indeed anything (in Sikhism, for instance, the *guru* is the book of sacred scriptures, the *Guru Granth Sahib*) through which one attains enlightenment or *Moksha*. The *guru* is the means, a focus in which the Divine has become so intensely localized that for the devotee he or it *is* the Divine.

While it is difficult to be precise, the career of the *guru* tends to follow a fairly typical pattern. As a young man he leaves home, preferring the wandering life of *Sannyāsa* to the more conventional way of marriage. He moves from one holy place to another, perhaps encountering various teachers on the way, until finally he meets the *guru* with whom he can establish an immediate and lasting rapport. The disciple remains with the *guru* in his *ashram* or hermitage, committing himself to him and promising to obey him in everything. Eventually he will receive initiation or *dīkshā* from his teacher. He is given a special *mantra*, perhaps a verse from scripture or a sacred syllable, which is believed to have an inherent power for enlightenment concentrated within it. The *mantra* is kept secret; it is the personal gift of the *guru* and is appropriate for the age, temperament and spiritual progress of the disciple. In some way it sums up the teaching of the *guru*. The disciple makes it the centre of his devotion, repeating it over and over again. The *mantra* is the key to *Moksha* — the direct communication of *guru* to disciple. Once he has grasped the full import of his master's instruction and achieved great spiritual progress, the disciple, while still maintaining his loyalty to the *guru*, may leave the *ashram* or found his own elsewhere. His reputation for holiness will eventually bring him his own disciples in turn. Or he may succeed his old master when he dies, thus continuing the tradition of initiation handed down from one generation of *gurus* to another.

Strictly speaking a holy man only becomes a *guru* when he has a disciple. In the first place he is the one who has obtained *Moksha* and is therefore able to guide others by his own experience. But the communication of that experience is not a purely intellectual exercise. More often than not it takes place in silence as *guru* and disciple meditate together, and the pupil learns to feed off the deep spiritual riches which radiate from the master. Abhishiktananda, the benedictine priest Henri Le Saux, who led the life of a traditional indian *sannyāsi* for almost twenty-five years and who came under the influence of one of the most remarkable of contemporary *gurus*, Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Tiruvannamalai in south India, tries to explain:

If the *guru* keeps silence, there is between him and his disciple a communion and communication on a level much deeper than that of normal consciousness. If the *guru* chooses to speak, his teaching, behind and beneath the words he uses, reaches and opens up in the disciple the very same depth from which it has arisen in the soul of the *guru*. Such is the only means of communicating spiritual truth.<sup>5</sup>

What is required on the part of the disciple is nothing less than total openness and complete surrender to his *guru*. At which point the Christian may well object that such obedience to a human *guru* must be incompatible with discipleship of Christ. For if Jesus says 'You must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master' (Mt 23,8), then none other than Jesus should be called *guru* either. And in the gospels Jesus does appear precisely as a *guru*: he calls himself teacher but he is also the Way, the Truth and the Life and the Light of the world. Above all he is the Word of God who makes known the Father's glory to mankind. Certainly a Christian will find some difficulty over the degree of veneration given to the *guru* and the seeming ease with which Hindus multiply incarnations of the Divine. The uniqueness of Christ can be easily compromised.

Yet may we not also be missing an important insight? The risen Christ, the Christian's *guru*, speaks through silence in the same way as the ideal human *guru* speaks to his disciple. Our western caricature misses the vital point: the *guru* teaches not by what he does, or even by what he says, but by what he is. The true *guru* does not entice or manipulate. He is but a holy presence, a still silence at the heart of a religion which is restlessly seeking the Divine. Most Hindus practise a religion which is based on the temple and the tiny shrines along the roads and in the corners of their houses. Few have ever sought out the *guru* in the silence of far off *ashrams*. But everyone knows that the holy men are there, that the sacred knowledge is being taught and lived — by a very few, perhaps, but by enough to give life and inspiration to the religion of millions of devotees. That there are men in whom the mystical merging of the soul into the One has actually

been experienced is a fact, not just an ideal. Unfortunately, of course, the exaggerated respect shown to some of the more notorious western exports shows Hinduism in a very poor light; all too easily *gurus* can be treated as super-psychiatrists, the objects of a vapid personality cult. Sometimes they deserve no better. But away from the packaged joss-sticks, the instant *Nirvāna* and the benign images of bearded mystics the real tradition is rather different.

In a religion which looks towards the return of all things to their source in the Divine, the *guru* is no longer an individual, still less a personality. He has died completely to this world. Only the One remains. How much of this essentially monistic vision is compatible with Christianity raises many a tricky theological issue which are not to be solved in a handful of pithy sentences. Suffice it to say in conclusion that the relationship of *guru* and disciple is not to be equated with the western idea of spiritual direction. The disciple may seek advice and the *guru* may give it. But unless both are at the same time actively seeking that deeper relationship with God which transcends all human language, no amount of talk will lead to enlightenment. Ultimately the *guru* teaches through example: that in love and humility a silence can be created in which the voice of God may be heard.

*Michael Barnes S.J.*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Rig Veda*, X, 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 3.2.13. Translated from *The thirteen principal Upanishads* by R. E. Hume (London, 1931).

<sup>3</sup> *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 6.13.1 (*ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 11,52-55. Translated from R. C. Zaehner's edition with commentary (London, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda, a christian approach to advaitic experience* (Delhi, 1974), pp 27-28.

## RECOMMENDED READING

SCRIPTURE. Mission is 'the God-given call to appreciate and share one's own religious experience and insights, first, within one's own community and tradition, and then with people and communities of other cultural, social and religious traditions'. Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmeuller, of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, explore exhaustively the scriptural basis of this missionary call in *The biblical foundations for mission*. In both content and method this is an important book for Churches in which different groups — laity both married and unmarried, parishes, clergy, small communities, religious — are all thinking about their own mission. The book's scope is the entire bible with Jesus appearing as a new 'catalyst' for mission. At the end the authors reflect helpfully on the meaning of the bible for mission in these modern times. How the writers of the New Testament understood and interpreted the Old Testament is the subject of *The living utterances of God* by Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, who was Professor of Theology in the University of Hull from 1963 to 1982. The first chapter sets out the Jewish tradition of scripture interpretation that the New Testament writers inherited. Then Professor Hanson expounds in detail how each New Testament author uses the Old Testament. Three concluding chapters discuss, among other things, what sense the Old Testament can have for us today, and how it is indispensable for understanding the New Testament. This is a book for biblical students. Ways and means of interpreting scripture are also the concern of John Muddiman in *The bible, fountain and well of truth*, which is one of a series of books published to celebrate the current anniversary of the Oxford Movement. The author is anxious to avoid both literalism and an uncritical pious devotionism in biblical interpretation, while trying to combine both a 'method of faith' and a critical method. In using scripture for prayer and *lectio divina* he sees dangers: 'spiritual narcissism'; 'supposing that the meaning is self-evident', and the 'privatization' of scripture. The book has an undercurrent of anxiety and mistrust of modern approaches to scripture.

In *Love and thunder* John F. Craghan is looking for a 'spirituality of the Old Testament'. By 'spirituality' he means responses to the word of God, and his book is an invitation to meditate on selected Old Testament texts, and see their relevance for Christian living, prayer and action in the face of contemporary times and their problems. While trying to avoid naïve literalism (of the kind that says 'Amos castigated the idle rich, so should we'), he spells out how prophetic texts, for example, can be inviting us to exercise a prophetic ministry now. Old Testament personages become Christian paradigms. The book is not entirely free from jargon, but provides another aid towards praying with the Old Testament. In *Antioch and Rome*, a tale of two cities, Raymond Brown and John P. Meier try to

reconstruct two christian cradles, both of them mixed jewish-gentile communities. Their materials are biblical texts, history and a speculative imagination. In Antioch, Matthew's city, the people worked out the meaning of the gospel in relation to the jewish heritage. Rome, meanwhile, inherited Jerusalem Christianity in the 40s and, later on, Jerusalem's missionary spirit. Characteristics of roman Christianity at the end of the first century were an appreciation of the continuing value of the jewish levitical cult and of roman imperial order and authority. Such increasingly popular exercises in imaginative reconstruction and 'negative capability' are dispelling the common picture of New Testament Christianity as homogeneous and conflict-free.

THEOLOGY. Fr Aylward Shorter is well qualified to write on christian revelation, its interpretation and its connection with non-christian religious traditions. After missionary experience in Africa, he has been Visiting Fellow in African Religions at the University of Bristol in England, and has taught pastoral anthropology in Uganda and african christian theology in Tanzania. His *Revelation and its interpretation* is a very comprehensive and readable textbook. 'The word' is a key concept: revelation is 'God's word in the world'; Christ is 'word made flesh'; faith, with its expression in life and liturgy, is 'the ingrafted word'. To find a credible link between a definitive christian revelation and non-christian traditions, Fr Shorter invokes the image of an incandescent lamp 'which, as it is gradually turned up, reflects more and more light from . . . shiny objects in the room' (p 193). So, the Word made flesh, already present in all human history, cumulatively imparts light to and borrows light from the world's religious traditions. This book, along with *Interpreting Jesus* by Gerald O'Collins, who has already written extensively on Jesus, forms part of a new series of theological textbooks for college and university students. The general editor is Michael Richards. In aiming at a 'coherent and substantial christology', Fr O'Collins tries to 'remain steadily aware of my own cultural experience and limitations' (p 32). He follows the order of the New Testament theologians in thinking about Jesus: the central mystery from which we start is Jesus's death and resurrection. From there we look back towards creation and forwards to the Church and kingdom and outwards to 'Christ beyond Christianity', interpreting the ministry of Jesus and what it means to say that Jesus is the Son of God and the world's redeemer. Again a helpful textbook with full bibliographies and questions for discussion. Fr O'Collins's *What are they saying about Jesus?* is a booklet of seventy-four pages which briefly surveys new thinking. It has an interesting appendix on the work of Jesus's imagination. But if Jesus Christ is central to Christianity and Christianity claims to be in some sense universal, what does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord over a world that has more religions than France has cheeses? That is the main problem faced by *Christ's Lordship and religious*

*pluralism*, which brings together a varied band of contributors, among whom are to be found representatives of many christian churches, both men and women, from Ghana, North America, India, Latin America, Italy, Britain. These discussion papers are varied and provocative, with a general evangelical colouring, and tend to open up questions rather than to give answers. The latest volume in Austin Flannery's *Vatican Council II* series brings together in english translation more vatican documents on subjects of the day between 1966 and 1981.

Andrew Louth, the distinguished theologian of Oxford University, is saddened and anxious at the long-standing divorce between doctrinal and spiritual or mystical theology, and his two new books, *The origins of the christian mystical tradition: from Plato to Denys* and *Discerning the mystery* attempt in two different ways to heal the breach. The first is a much needed book on the theology of mysticism in the Fathers of the early Church and the non-christian platonic foundations of that theology. After chapters on Plato, Philo and Plotinus, Dr Louth focuses on Origen, nicene orthodoxy, the monastic tradition, Augustine and Denis the Areopagite. It would have been interesting to find a fuller discussion here of jewish and biblical influences on this early christian spirituality. Final chapters compare patristic mystical teaching and John of the Cross and investigate the presence of a 'full ecclesial mysticism' in the early Fathers. While this is a book for anyone who wants to explore early christian traditions in spirituality, *Discerning the mystery* is more specialized — a discussion of what theology actually is. Since thought about God and the movement of the heart towards God have fallen apart, the centre cannot hold. Dr Louth wants theology to make contact again with the 'inarticulate living' of the personal mystery, God, who is the heart of our tradition. He is distrustful and critical of 'scientific models' for theology, and, rather unexpectedly, pins his hopes on contemplation and allegory as ways of restoring coherence to theology. It is a pity, however, that such a book as this omits even a mention of Lonergan's *Method in theology*. Finally, *The authority of divine love* by Richard Harries, another offering in the tradition of the Tractarians, tries to find an understanding of authority, conscience, tradition and infallibility that is acceptable to both Romans and Anglicans. The true foundation of Christ's authority is the love with which he loves us, and love is the only acceptable basis, for Richard Harries, for authority in the Church. As for the future, the way forward on authority and infallibility has been shown by ARCIC and discussion should start there. Among the books that we have seen in this 'Faith and the future' series, this is the clearest, most cohesive and theologically the most interesting.

**MINISTRY AND SACRAMENTS.** If mission is under review in the Church at the present time, so too are ministries. Thomas Franklin O'Meara, a Dominican who teaches at the University of Notre Dame in the

United States, offers *Theology of ministry* as a description of ministry in the Church past and present, in theology and in scripture and as a pointer towards what ecclesial service might become. In style and format this is a textbook for college students and undergraduates. Fr O'Meara insists that our approach to the variety of ministries in the Church must go beyond simply allowing someone to be a part-time reader or distributor of the eucharist on Sundays, and he incorporates this view in his definition of ministry: 'the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality, on behalf of a christian community, to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God' (p 142). *Mission and ministry* by Nathan Mitchell is one in a series of books on the sacraments which we have commended in previous issues of *The Way*, and of which Monika Hellwig is the general editor. Fr Mitchell sets out with admirable clarity the origins, evolution and theological interpretations of the ordained ministry in the Church. He too is especially interested in the renewal of ministry, pluralism in ministries, the question of women and ministry, and modern movements in which 'grass roots' Christians are assuming responsibility for the Church's mission and ministries. It is a book for clergy and laity alike. *Priesthood and ministry* by Max Thurian of Taizé, who a member of the Steering Group on baptism, eucharist and the ministry of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, was first published in French in 1970. Ministry here is 'ambassadorship in the name of Christ with the aim of reconciliation with God' (p 3). Unfortunately, as it does not incorporate more recent thinking on ministry, this book now seems rather dated, though the author's search for a truly ecumenical concept of ordination is a matter of urgency in all the Churches. James E. Griffiss, in *Church, ministry and unity*, wants to show how the ideals of the Tractarians and the Oxford Movement still have much to offer. He focuses mainly on the influence of the doctrine of the Incarnation in structuring and forming the ways in which we think about the Church and the christian life, and he briefly traces this through from early Councils via recent ecumenical discussions into the future. But the title is misleading as little is said about ministry. The Episcopalian Church in North America has accepted women for ordination to the priesthood. In the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church we are still debating the issue. Now Thomas Hopko, in *Women and the priesthood* has gathered together a selection of essays by Eastern Orthodox theologians living mainly in Western Europe and North America. They are resoundingly opposed to ordaining women to be priests. They draw their arguments from scripture (and 'the biblical doctrine of man and woman'), from traditions in the Orthodox Communion, from theology (the nature of God and man, and of the priest as an 'icon' of Christ), and, it is claimed, from the nature of human sexuality itself: 'women's unique mode of human being and action' is judged incompatible with exercising

'episcopal and presbyteral sacramental offices' in the Church (p 124). Outside the Orthodox tradition, most of the arguments they offer would be unable to stand up under close scrutiny, and would not be widely accepted. On the positive side they offer suggestions for developing ministries which are deemed appropriate for women, including a revival of the order of deaconess.

The series inaugurated to commemorate the anniversary of the Oxford Movement also includes a book on worship, *Sacraments and liturgy: the outward signs* by Louis Weil. It is a plea, guided by tractarian views of the sacramental nature of the world and the Church, for an integration of personal and liturgical prayer, and for a recognition that the Church's liturgy is inherently corporate and social and not a private affair that happens to be surrounded by public ceremonial. *The catholic sacraments* by Joseph Martos is the general introductory volume to the american series on the sacraments that we have already mentioned. Happily Fr Martos breaks away from the traditional treatments of 'the sacraments in general' and dwells in turn on their psychological, sociological and theological aspects (including liberation theology, process thought and the charismatic approach). The fruitfulness of the sacraments for Fr Martos lies in their power to transform — personally, ecclesially, and even globally. This is an interesting and thorough contemporary introduction to sacramental thinking. In the same series, *Christian marriage: a journey together* is an admirable attempt at enriching, for pastors and married lay people, our very undernourished catholic theology of marriage. One of the most valuable parts of the book is that devoted to a spirituality for married christians, with the conviction that the basic ingredients of married love are the essential elements of christian holiness. Integral to such a spirituality, for David Thomas, are: acceptance; the presence of the cross; a 'dialogic structure'; 'earthiness' (this world as the milieu for authentic holiness) and fidelity — on all of which he writes with freshness, insight and sensitivity. James L. Empereur, in *Prophetic anointing*, another volume in the same series, argues that the sacrament of the sick points to anointing as a 'sacrament of vocation': being sick is a genuine way of being a Christian for those whom God calls in this way, a special vocation in the Church which this sacrament acknowledges and celebrates. This approach to the paschal mystery of Christ, alive and present in sickness and old age, is a way of freeing ourselves from current western attitudes whereby often only the fit and well are deemed socially valuable.

**SPIRITUALITY.** *Early monastic rules* seeks to familiarize non-specialists with the traditions that produced the Rule of St Benedict. There are five texts: the Rule of the Four Fathers; the Second Rule of the Fathers; the Rule of Macarius; the Third Rule of the Fathers, and the *Regula Orientalis*. The final three appear in an english translation for the first time. In each



case the latin text appears opposite the translations which try to remain as close to the original as is reasonably possible. A brief but useful introduction indicates the background to each text, their close inter-relationship, the gradual emergence of organized communities, and the background to the definitive Rule of St Benedict. The Cistercians are one of the religious 'families' which originate from this Rule. *The cistercian alternative* is a good and readable introduction to cistercian spirituality by André Louf, a french abbot already well known for his writings on prayer. Fr Louf places monastic life firmly within the context of christian vocation as a whole, yet seeks to do justice to its uniqueness and validity. Particularly helpful are his chapters on *lectio divina* and prayer, and on a positive understanding of asceticism in the light of modern problems about the theology behind it.

Within the tradition of western spirituality the personality of St Francis continues to capture the imagination both of Christians and of people with no explicit religious belief. *Francis and Clare: the complete works*, the most recent volume in the series 'Classics of western spirituality' provides the first comprehensive translation into English of the twenty-eight surviving works by Francis, and five by Clare, which are accepted as authentic by modern scholars. Each collection of texts is prefaced by an introduction which analyzes both the problems involved in establishing the authenticity of texts and the main features of the 'spiritual theology' underlying them. The total dedication to the life of the gospels, the emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit (who is seen as the 'true superior' of the order), and the presence and activity of God in every aspect of the world and human life are themes which are likely to attract the modern reader.

In *Spiritual direction: contemporary readings*, Kevin Culligan, an american Carmelite, provides a selection of articles on various aspects of spiritual direction which he has found useful as background reading to courses he has conducted. His choice is eclectic, reminding us that there is a variety of models and traditions. However, with few exceptions, the writers emphasize more the 'fraternal' or 'adult' model of direction than the more 'paternal' or 'educative' approach. The articles appear under the headings: the nature of spiritual direction; preparing for direction; the practice of direction; and direction and christian tradition.

*TM: an aid to christian growth*, edited by Fr Adrian Smith, is a collection of papers by Roman Catholics which provides a positive assessment of 'transcendental meditation'. The essays merit serious consideration and will, hopefully, stimulate debate on the serious issues connected with inter-faith dialogue. The assessment of the hindu background to TM is sometimes inaccurate in its detail, and one cannot help feeling that the writers often beg some of the psychological and theological questions. However, their case against the often naïve rejection of TM or other forms of oriental meditation is well made. The emphasis on method and technique in prayer

needs to be balanced by the realization that, often, the more crucial question is that of basic attitudes. In *Radical prayer* the American Jesuit David Hassel does provide some indications about method, but this is secondary. The main aim of this helpful little book is rather to assist people to interpret some of the common experiences in prayer, and by this means to deepen positive attitudes and to refine those that inhibit growth. The book is essentially experiential and practical and is based on the writer's own ministry of spiritual guidance within the Ignatian tradition. *Faith, prayer and devotion* by Ralph Townsend is a rather disappointing volume in the series produced to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Oxford Movement. Some of the individual remarks on the nature of prayer and on common worship are valuable. However, the section on personal prayer is rather weak in its treatment of method, development, and inner attitudes. The overriding emphasis is on formal prayer and worship and one feels that the principal concern is to defend the Catholic emphasis on sacraments and traditional devotions within the Anglican tradition.

*The inner rainbow* by Kathleen Fischer of Seattle University draws freely on theology, psychology, the Christian spiritual tradition and modern literature to illustrate the role of imagination in religious faith; reason and imagination are not to be seen as contradictory. Indeed, the essential 'mystery' at the heart of faith demands the language of symbol and metaphor as the appropriate tools of thought. There are chapters on imagination in relation to belief, scripture, prayer and morality, as well as discussions of images of God and self-awareness.

It is a very rare and special vocation to be a hermit. The question is whether such a person has much to say to the majority of us in the midst of everyday concerns. In *The fire of your life* Maggie Ross provides a series of fragments and reflections born of her experience of solitude. It is anecdotal rather than 'preachy' — an honest sharing of the ups and downs of seeking and finding self and God. The struggle with the totality of God's call is something which will find an echo in the experience of all Christians.

Sister Barbara Paleczny has worked successfully for many years in Canada to build basic faith communities, to prepare people for the Spiritual Exercises, and to train them for ministry in the Church and the world. *Becoming followers of Christ* makes the course which she has evolved available to others. This is very welcome. The two volumes are written for leaders and participants respectively. Michel Côté (who shares in the editing of the books) co-operated in providing an explicitly 'liberation theology' dimension to the scheme. The process of creating lay Christian communities is highly organized, being divided into three stages, each consisting of smaller units, and lasts about eighteen months. Charles Shelton's *Adolescent spirituality* is also concerned with Christian formation, in this case of young people. As a resource book it has a definite value with its lengthy bibliographies and occasionally useful summaries. The problem is that the book

is too densely packed with material which one feels that the writer has not fully digested. Consequently the book is weak when it comes to critical appraisal or systematic overview of the insights of developmental psychology, pastoral theology and spirituality.

There are two popular translations of important spiritual texts. Ruysbroek's *Spiritual espousals*, translated by Edmund Colledge, is a reprint of the 1953 edition. This early fourteenth-century work is one of the most highly ordered of medieval theologies of mysticism. The clear layout of the recent edition of *The Lord's prayer* by Cyprian of Carthage, the third-century bishop, indicates that it is produced with meditation in mind. Although the structure of the work depends on Tertullian's *De oratione*, the content is highly individual.

Harry Blamires is a great admirer of C. S. Lewis and would be considered by some a worthy successor to his friend as a leading christian apologist. *A God who acts* is a new edition of Blamires' *The will and the way*, which was first published in 1957. Although the subtitle suggests that the work is primarily about the problem of suffering, it is in fact more of a general introduction to a christian understanding of God's relationship with the world and people. The style is pithy and trenchant, but, one cannot help feeling, slightly dated.

**MORAL AND PASTORAL.** First, two very contrasting books on ethics. *Choices* by David Brown is another volume in the special series to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Oxford Movement. While critical of modern secularism, and possessing some misgivings about christian liberalism and 'liberation theology', Fr Brown is not in sympathy with the brand of extreme conservatism emerging in some Churches. His ethical position is fairly traditional: he believes that there is a specifically christian ethic, best formulated in the catholic tradition and rooted in Thomism. *Toward a christian political ethics* represents a quite different approach, for its author José Míguez Bonino is probably the most prominent protestant exponent of liberation theology. His starting point is the confusion of many Christians about what they are to do in politics because of the great divide between their christian background and an ambiguous world of very different ideas and rules. The need is, therefore, to come to grips with the reality of politics first, and then to rediscover faith in this context. Bonino tackles the problem of the relationship between the normative and descriptive approaches to ethics, and attempts to develop an appropriate model for analysis, reflection and finally action.

Martin Israel, a doctor and anglican priest, has become one of the most respected writers of spirituality and pastoral care. *The spirit of counsel*, while discussing much that is relevant to the specific ministry of spiritual direction, works essentially within the much wider context of pastoral counselling. For Dr Israel counselling is not merely a remedial activity

concerned with specific problems, but must have a comprehensive vision of life in order to help people to find the identity and purpose intended for them by God. He has many helpful things to say about growth, identity, self-love, relationships, liberation and discipline. There are also chapters on death and dying. An important book — not least for what Dr Israel has to say about the nature of 'true counsel'. *Spiritual guidance for the separated and divorced* is a brief, simple but helpful addition to the increasing literature in this area of pastoral concern. The author, Medard Laz, is an American priest and experienced marriage counsellor. He uses specific cases as the basis for his brief descriptions of the most common spiritual problems of divorced people. Each section is followed by a short prayerful reflection. The booklet is addressed to the divorced themselves rather than to counsellors. Fr Laz's earlier *Helps for the separated and divorced* follows a similar format of using anecdotal material to describe the emotional and psychological needs of the recently divorced. Once again it is aimed at those who have had the experience, and tries to encourage them to face up to grief and guilt and to learn how to trust again.

Three of the recent series marking the anniversary of the Oxford Movement fall within the category of 'pastoral care'. *Pastoral care and the parish* prefaces each chapter by a quotation from Anglican canon law, and the emphasis is firmly on improving the traditional activities of preaching, the sacraments and catechesis, rather than on offering a new strategy for pastoral ministry. *The faith abroad* by John Davies is a survey of Anglo-Catholic approaches to overseas mission and the particular contribution of the Catholic tradition. This is based on the writer's own experience as a missionary in southern Africa and as a trainer of missionaries in the United Kingdom. *Church and nation* by Peter Cornwell concerns itself with the very specific question of the 'establishment' of the Church of England, and the effect that this has on the Church's pastoral effectiveness.

**BIOGRAPHY AND CHURCH HISTORY.** Professor Rosemary Rader's recent book, *Breaking boundaries*, is a study of the friendship of celibate men and women in the third to the fifth centuries, based on contemporary sources. Necessarily the author moves beyond the literature associated with church institutions or administration, where women hardly appear. She asks why such friendships flourished in a culturally unpromising climate and why these more equal relationships were associated mainly with celibates. The nature and characteristics of such friendships are analysed from sources about martyrdom, 'spiritual marriage' (celibates living together as brother and sister), and the emerging monastic life.

Since his murder during the pre-independence civil war in Zimbabwe, the life and death of the remarkable John Bradbourne have attracted an increasing amount of attention. In *Strange vagabond of God* his close friend and former fellow officer in the Indian Army, Fr John Dove, provides an

attractive portrait of this perennial pilgrim through life, who was part hermit, part mystic and poet, and indefatigable defender of the lepers with whom he lived and ultimately died.

Anthony Kenny, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and a well-known philosopher, provides a good, brief introduction to a consistently popular Englishman in *Thomas More*. The 'Past Masters' series, of which it is a part, concerns itself primarily with the history of ideas. Kenny tries to do justice to three aspects of More's importance for intellectual history: the principal ideas and interpretation of *Utopia*, the pattern of his life as explanation for the impact on later admirers, and how and why More defended the catholic system. The book has a particularly interesting final chapter on the inconsistencies and paradoxes of More's life.

#### SPIRITUALITY

Armstrong, R. and Brady, I. (eds): *Francis and Clare: the complete works* (Classics of Western Spirituality, SPCK, £9.50, pp 256).

Blamires, Harry: *A God who acts* (SPCK, £3.95, pp 128).

Bonin, Edmond (ed.): *St Cyprian of Carthage: The Lord's prayer* (Christian Classics, Westminster, Maryland, \$6.95, pp 112).

Colledge, Eric (ed.): *Jan van Ruysbroek: spiritual espousals* (Christian Classics, Westminster, Maryland, \$8.95, pp 195).

Culligan, Kevin: *Spiritual direction: contemporary readings* (Living Flame Press, Box 74, Locust Valley, New York 11560, \$5.95, pp 237).

Fischer, Kathleen: *The inner rainbow: imagination in christian life* (Paulist Press, \$6.95, pp 167).

Franklin, C. et. al. (eds): *Early monastic rules* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, \$5.95, pp 88).

Hassel, David: *Radical prayer* (Paulist Press, \$7.95, pp 145).

Louf, André: *The cistercian alternative* (Gill and Macmillan, £4.94, pp 156).

Paleczny, Barbara and Côté, M.: *Becoming followers of Jesus* (Trinity Press, Ontario, n.p., Facilitator's Guide, pp 379; Participant's Manual, pp 207).

Ross, Maggie: *The fire of your life* (Paulist Press, \$5.95, pp 142).

Shelton, Charles M.: *Adolescent spirituality* (Loyola University Press, \$15.00, pp 366).

Smith, Adrian (ed.): *TM: an aid to christian growth* (Mayhew McCrimmon, £3.50, pp 143).

Townsend, Ralph: *Faith, prayer and devotion* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 123).

#### BIOGRAPHY AND CHURCH HISTORY

Dove, John: *Strange vagabond of God* (Ward River Press, Dublin, £IR4.95, pp 296).

Kenny, Anthony: *Thomas More* (Oxford University Press, £7.95, pp 111).

Rader, Rosemary: *Breaking boundaries* (Paulist Press, \$6.95, pp 117).

#### MORAL AND PASTORAL

Bonino, José Míguez: *Toward a christian political ethics* (SCM Press, £5.50, pp 126).

Brown, David: *Choices: ethics and the Christian* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 167).

Cornwell, Peter: *Church and nation* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 113).

Davie, Peter: *Pastoral care and the parish* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 102).

Davies, John: *The faith abroad* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 163).

Israel, Martin: *The spirit of counsel* (Hodder and Stoughton, £4.50, pp 192).

Laz, Medard: *Spiritual guidance for the separated and divorced* (Ligouri Publications/Redemptorist Publications, \$1.50/90p, pp 64), and *Helps for the separated and divorced* (Ligouri Publications/Redemptorist Publications, \$1.50/90p, pp 64).

## SCRIPTURE

- Brown, Raymond and Meier, John: *Antioch and Rome* (Paulist Press, \$9.95, pp 242).  
 Craghan, John: *Love and thunder: a spirituality of the Old Testament* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, \$11, pp 231).  
 Hanson, Anthony T.: *The living utterances of God* (Darton Longman and Todd, £9.95, pp 250).  
 Muddiman, John: *The Bible: fountain and well of truth* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 115).  
 Senior, D. & Stuhlmueller, C.: *The biblical foundations for mission* (SCM Press, £9.50, pp 371).

## THEOLOGY

- Anderson, G. and Stransky, T. (eds): *Christ's Lordship and religious pluralism* (Orbis Books/SPCK, \$8.95/£5.50, pp 209).  
 Empeur, James L.: *Prophetic anointing (Message of the sacraments, 7)* (Michael Glazier, Delaware/Gill and Macmillan, £7.95 [or £50 the whole set] pp 275).  
 Flannery, Austin: *Vatican Council II: more post-conciliar documents* (Fowler Wright Books, £7.95, pp 920).  
 Griffiss, James: *Church, ministry and unity* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 118).  
 Harries, Richard: *The authority of divine love* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 123).  
 Hopko, T. (ed.): *Women and the priesthood* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, n.p., pp 190).  
 Louth, Andrew: *Discerning the mystery* (Oxford University Press, £12.50, pp 150), and *The origins of the christian mystical tradition* (Oxford University Press, £5.50, pp 215).  
 Martos, Joseph: *The catholic sacraments (Message of the sacraments, 1)* (Michael Glazier, Delaware/Gill and Macmillan, £7.95, pp 227).  
 Mitchell, Nathan: *Mission and ministry (Message of the sacraments, 6)* (Michael Glazier, Delaware/Gill and Macmillan, £8.95, pp 315).  
 O'Collins, Gerald: *Interpreting Jesus* (Geoffrey Chapman, £7.95, pp 214).  
 O'Collins, Gerald: *What are they saying about Jesus?* (Paulist Press, \$2.95, pp 77).  
 O'Meara, Thomas: *Theology of ministry* (Paulist Press, \$11.95, pp 221).  
 Shorter, Aylward: *Revelation and its interpretation* (Geoffrey Chapman, £7.95, pp 277).  
 Thomas, David: *Christian marriage (Message of the sacraments, 5)* (Michael Glazier, Delaware/Gill and Macmillan, £7.95, pp 207).  
 Thurian, Max: *Priesthood and ministry* (Mowbray, £4.50, pp 195).  
 Weil, Louis: *Sacraments and liturgy* (Basil Blackwell, £3.95, pp 115).

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- Bickimer, D.: *Christ the placenta* (Religious Education Press, Birmingham, Alabama, \$12.95, pp 239).  
 Breen, E. (ed.): *John H. Newman: Mary the second Eve* (Fowler Wright Books, £1.25, pp 38).  
 Carretto, Carlo: *I, Francis* (Collins/Fount, £1.50, pp 163).  
 Hann, Robert: *The bible: an owner's manual* (Paulist Press, \$5.95, pp 136).  
 Hume, Basil: *Searching for God* (Hodder and Stoughton, £1.75, pp 239).  
 Neary, Donal: *The calm beneath the storm* (Veritas Publications, £2.25, pp 77).  
 Nugent, Christopher: *Masks of Satan: the demonic in history* (Sheed and Ward, £12.50, pp 216).  
 O'Donnell, Edward: *Priestly people: a practical guide to lay ministry* (Ligouri Publications/Redemptorist Publications, \$1.50/90p, pp 63).  
 O'Shaughnessy, T.: *Rest your head in your hand* (Ward River Press, Dublin, £12.75, pp 223).  
 Riley, William: *The bible group: owner's manual* (Veritas, n.p., pp 151).  
 Williams, Harry: *The true wilderness* (Collins/Fount, £1.50, pp 159).  
 Williams, Harry: *True resurrection* (Collins/Fount, £1.75, pp 182).

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHRISTOPHER BRYANT S.S.J.E. belongs to the anglican community commonly known as the Cowley Fathers. He has written several books in the psychology/spirituality area. His other work consists largely of giving spiritual direction, leading retreats and editing a religious quarterly *New Fire*.

MARK SEARLE was born in England and studied in Europe, gaining a doctorate at Trier under Balthasar Fischer. He is currently director of the Graduate Programme in Liturgical Studies at the University of Notre Dame (U.S.A.), and President of the North American Academy of Liturgy. He is the author of *Christening* (1980), and *Liturgy made simple* (1981), editor of *Assembly*, and a regular contributor to *Worship*.

MICHAEL PAUL GALLAGHER S.J. took an M.A. in English at the National University of Ireland before entering the Irish Province of the Society of Jesus. He went on to postgraduate study in Oxford and John Hopkins. As lecturer at University College, Dublin, his pastoral contacts led him to research on the 'theology of atheism', and he received a doctorate from Queen's University, Belfast. His 'middlebrow' book on this theme — *Help my unbelief* — (1983) has already had several reprints.

MICHAEL WINTER, author of *Mission and maintenance* and *Mission resumed*, was educated at the universities of London, Cambridge and Fribourg. Ordained twenty-eight years ago, he has taught theology and served in various parishes, including six years as a parish priest. After several years as a chaplain at London University, he is currently Dean of St Edmund's House, Cambridge.

MICHAEL BARNES S.J., studied theology at Heythrop College, London, and oriental languages and religion at Oxford. Ordained in 1976, he is a consultant to the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, and teaches at Heythrop College.

## SIGLA

### OLD TESTAMENT

Gen	Jg	Neh	Cant	Hos	Nah	Bar
Exod	Ruth	Est	Isai	Joel	Hab	Tob
Lev	1, 2 Sam	Job	Jer	Amos	Zeph (Soph)	Jud
Num	1, 2 Kg	Ps	Lam	Obad	Hag	Wis
Deut	1, 2 Chr	Prov	Ezek	Jon	Zech	Sir (Ecclus)
Jos	Ezr	Qoh (Eccl)	Dan	Mic	Mal	1, 2 Macc

### NEW TESTAMENT

Mt	Jn	1, 2 Cor	Phil	1, 2 Tim	Heb	1, 2, 3 Jn
Mk	Acts	Gal	Col	Tit	Jas	Jude
Lk	Rom	Eph	1, 2 Thess	Phm	1, 2 Pet	Apoc

Exx      *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola.*

