

The Theologian as Spiritual Director

Earthenware vessels hold the treasure (2 Cor 4:7)

In a moving book that explores mysticism and resistance, Dorothee Sölle quotes a letter from fifteenth century German mystagogy, where a pastor urges a distraught person seeking consolation to wait patiently: “God will not be torn from the ground of your heart”,¹ he reassures. The question of how this treasure buried in the heart may be unearthed is saturated in a flood of cries to God that evoke power, vulnerability and hope. God is portrayed as the love of a rushing fountain, the power of luminous radiance, the harmony of pure stillness, the peace in concord. God is hidden and yet starkly laid bare. The letter concludes: “thou silent cry no one can find thee who knows not how to let thee go.”²

This vision of God buried in the ground of the human heart, evokes a sense of God who is hidden and yet totally trustworthy. God is concealed and yet revealed, absent and yet even God’s absence is a kind of presence. The hope these reassuring words proclaim is of the gospel: “We hold a treasure in earthen vessels”. This treasure is like “a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; they hide it again, go off happy, sell everything and buy the field” (Mt 13:44).³ If we want to find the treasure, hidden in our hearts we must be prepared to give all that we are. If we yearn to embrace this grace we must know how to let it go.

We may ask: Is this tender hearted writer a theologian or a spiritual director? How do we decide? In this chapter, I will show how he can be both theologian and spiritual director. Through examining the words: “God will not be torn from the ground of your heart”, theologically, I will illustrate how they inspire hope in the statement they make about God and the nature of grace. I will then demonstrate, how, when delved into with a focus on spiritual direction, they draw us to embrace grace. When the theologian and spiritual director are at home together our capacity for embracing grace magnifies.

Before I continue, I wish to make clear that I am not saying that all theologians are spiritual directors, nor are spiritual directors necessarily theologians. However, from the perspective of where I write this chapter I do so as a spiritual director who is a theologian. I was an apprentice theologian with Graeme Garrett, who was both theologian and spiritual director to me. Guided by

¹ Dorothee Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 2001, p.6.

² Dorothee Sölle, *Silent Cry*, p. vi.

³ All translations are from the Jerusalem Bible unless noted otherwise.

Graeme's sharp intellect, passionate desire to seek God and ability to free others to give voice to their experience of God, I engaged in seeking to unearth the treasure by delving into the revelations of Julian of Norwich. Graeme helped me explore how human beings are one with God. He encouraged me to find my own voice and ministry. As a contribution to these reflections about embracing grace, through the lens of the theology and spirituality of the ground of the heart, I will give an example of how the theologian as spiritual director has a critical role to play as we stand at the threshold of living life as a Christian in the twenty-first century.

Theologian – Spiritual Director

The theologian

Although contemporary theology still feels the split that began in the fourteenth century, where theology became a strictly rational endeavour and spirituality was isolated from the main streams of theology, early Christian writers never split the rational and affective. Nor did they distinguish spirituality and spiritual direction as separate to theology. Prayerful reflection on scripture and life were implicit in the search for clarity and insight into how to express the experience of a loving knowledge of God. In the West, Augustine of Hippo's impassioned cry: "our hearts are restless until they rest in thee"⁴ placed the eager yearning of desire for union with God at the centre of theological exploration. In the East, the essential relationship between prayer and theology was always maintained as Evagarius testifies: "If you are a theologian, you pray truly; if you pray truly, you are a theologian".⁵ Prayer was always at the centre of the life of a theologian.

Again, Anselm of Canterbury, the English Benedictine, who expressed one of the most enduring definitions of theology as "faith seeking understanding", never envisaged theology as an intellectual endeavor contained in itself. *Proslogion* gives a taste of how his head and heart were united:

Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek you.
For unless you instruct me I cannot seek you, and unless you
reveal yourself I cannot find you. Let me seek you in desiring you;
let me desire you in seeking you. Let me find you in loving you; let
me love you in finding you.⁶

⁴ *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Translated by F.J.Sheed, Sheed and Ward, London, 1949, p.1.

⁵ *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, Translated by William Harmless, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p 317.

⁶ *Anselm of Canterbury*. Translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson. Vol. 1. Edward Mellen, Toronto, 1974, p. 92.

Seeking, desiring, loving and knowing were all part of a cyclical movement of looking for the presence of God, being present to this presence and discovering language to give expression to the meaning of the experience.

Contemporary theology, influenced by theologians such as Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, Bernard Lonergan and Jurgen Moltmann is once again attempting to integrate head and heart. John Welch identifies this theological task as making intelligible our orientation to God as we experience it, even if only implicitly, in ordinary daily living.⁷ “God matters”, Graeme Garrett would say. Central to this task is an ability to identify our primordial experience of God and to notice how we give language to and interpret this experience. This includes the symbolic expression of how we encounter God revealing God’s self now. The role of the theologian is to en-flesh words about God, human beings and creation, so that our utterances touch into mystery, the finite bursts into the infinite and we glimpse the highest shining peaks of wisest silence.⁸

The spiritual director

The spiritual director seeks the direction of the Spirit. In an intentional relationship she or he listens to the life experience of another assisting them to focus on the presence of the Spirit within their story. The director invites another to enter the ground of the heart, to become aware of and focus on the stirrings of grace already present that are often desensitized by the pressures of daily living. The heart listening of the director creates a safe and sacred space where a companion feels free to follow their desire to be one with God. They explore wounds that create resistance to the fullness of this union. Directors aim to enable directees to discover the length and breadth, height and depth of the Spirit’s freedom and integrate life and prayer, contemplation and action, faith and justice.

Spiritual direction has its roots in the scriptures, especially the way Jesus was with people who were seeking God. It became more formalized in the fourth century, in the desert when one who sought to pray, would choose a companion for guidance. Abba Paul’s simple saying: “Keep close to Jesus”⁹, gives a powerful example of a remark shared in a direction encounter. In medieval time the emphasis was on nourishing contemplative prayer. A classic example of a letter of spiritual direction, the *Cloud of Unknowing*, gives detailed steps in a way of contemplation. The author writes a book about contemplation in which the soul

⁷ John Welch, in Joseph A Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, ed. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1988, p.694.

⁸ James Walsh, *The Pursuit of Wisdom: And Other Works*, Paulist, New York, 1988, p.74.

⁹ Benedicta Ward, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*. Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1998, p. 12.

is made one with God. He encourages silent, still, prayer beyond word and images. In the sixteenth century the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* became influential with its emphasis on meditations and contemplations on the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

In contemporary times, distinguishing spiritual direction from other helping relationships, Janet Bakke describes how a director might say: “My prayers are for God’s will to be done in you and for your constant deepening in God. During this time we are together, I give myself, my awareness and attention, my hopes and heart to God for you.”¹⁰ The spiritual director seeks to foster “contemplative listening”, to listen with “the ear of the heart”. To contemplate is to “be-hold” to be, and to hold in our heart as fully and deeply as possible the person we encounter. Director and directee enter into the story of the directee more and more deeply until the presence of the Spirit almost imperceptibly rises into awareness. We stay with this presence, abide there. Spiritual direction frees us to be who we truly are in God.

A Theological Response

Against this backdrop of the role of both the theologian and spiritual director, in enabling us to seek, desire, find and love God, let us return to the encouraging words: “God will not be torn from the ground of your heart.” We will examine some key scriptural precedents and theological foundations from the point of view of the theologian.

Exploring Scriptural Precedents

If we examine this beautiful metaphor “the ground of the heart” in the context in which it is spoken, there is an implicit sense that the one who speaks and the one who listens share a common scriptural heritage. Though specific scriptural sources are not obvious, there are a plethora of passages that would become part of their vocabulary through the prayer of *lectio divina*. I will point to three texts Mathew 6:6, Ephesians 4:4-6 and John 17:21 that are central in being able to say with confidence: “God will not be torn from the ground of the heart.”

Traditionally, in texts that inspire and encourage prayer in the heart, the heart is identified with the foundational words in Mathew’s Gospel: “When you pray, go to your room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place.” (Mt 6:6) The private room is interpreted to be the heart. When meditated upon these words encourage us to enter through the door of silence, beyond the literal into symbolic mystery, into our inner room, our secret inner chamber where the Father, the source of all being, the ground of all that is, has

¹⁰ Jeannette Bakke, A. *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2000, pp. 28-29.

made a home. It is important to note that the Father is *in* this room within the depths of our selves. The presence of God dwells within us. The finite and the infinite have a meeting place, a room of connection.

This room of the heart, beyond the confines of the physiological heart, is a room that has no boundaries. It identifies the soul-place within that has no differentiation between body and soul. This heart is where eternal, divine love creatively touches us and holds us in being. Over time the very word “heart” becomes what Karl Rahner calls “primordial” because, as if filled with the soft music of infinity, it whispers something about everything.¹¹ It is sacramental because it points beyond itself to mystery. Heart causes and contains the reality of love it signifies.

The early creedal formula sited in Ephesians 4:4-6 also supports this claim that God cannot be torn from the ground of our heart. This creed concludes with a celebration of the oneness of God: “There is one God who is Father of all, above all, through all and in all.” In a rousing article, “Finding God in All Things” Graeme Garrett underlines the profound significance of these words and the role the supposedly insignificant prepositions play in what we are saying about God. “Above, through, in – these three prepositions situate God in relation to the world and the world in relation to God. Note it is the world, the universe in its entirety that is at issue here”¹², he says. He encourages us to see how *all* creation and that includes *all* human beings are intensely encompassed in this divinity. He stirs us to recognize the significance of all: “Not nearly all or all important features, or all human beings, but all in the universal sense, simply every aspect, function, being, system –the whole creation– is situated in relation to God.”¹³ This obviously includes the human heart.

In relation to “the ground of the heart”, this salutation to God in all things describes how God is “above” the ground of the heart, that is, God’s ground is a love that transcends the human heart, a compassion that assimilates beyond all our limits. God is “in” the heart, dwells within, has made a home in our heart. And God is “through” the heart. The implications are immense, because Graeme points out, this “theological through” is what holds together the “above” and “in”. God is through all. “Through” acts like grace transforming the possible dualisms of “above” and “in” into the one ground. This combination of God as, “above”, “through” and “in” the heart make it impossible for God to be torn from the ground of the heart.

¹¹ Lehmann, Karl, Albert Raffelt, and Harvey D. Egan, eds. *Karl Rahner the Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings*, Crossroad, New York, 1993, p.161.

¹² Graeme Garrett, "Finding God in All Things", *The Way* 33, 1993, p. 3.

¹³ Graeme Garrett, "Finding God in All Things", p. 3.

The priestly prayer of Jesus, portrayed in the gospel John, is also foundational as it portrays how the ultimate fulfilment of what it means to be human is to be one with God. The words of Jesus highlight how in and through Jesus, God's ever uniting presence becomes discernible: "May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn17:21). Notice again "one *in* us", "you are *in* me", "I am *in* you". John envisions this oneness as existing eternally through Jesus who is the Word, the Logos of God, who was with God *in* the beginning - "through him all things came to be" (Jn1:3a). John reiterates: "not one thing had its being but through him, all that came to be had life *in* him" (Jn1:3b-4a). Such a repetition of "in" can be no accident. God, one in Christ is one in us. God is the source and sustainer of our life. When the Word becomes a tangible presence, "was made flesh" "lived *among* us"(Jn 1:14), being among is more than mingling. Christ dwells *in* our very fleshiness.

Albert Nolan speaks of the importance of this experience of oneness of Jesus in God and in us. He deliberately adopts the term "oneness" rather than union, unity, reconciliation, harmony, peace or even love, because he doesn't want to convey any sense of human beings separate from God. "Oneness says how we are already one, and always have been and that it is simply a matter of becoming aware of or conscious of that oneness."¹⁴ he explains. "Love", he adds, "is what arises when we become conscious of that oneness."¹⁵ The longing of Jesus that we be true to our being and life in him, and be one, echoes throughout John's gospel: "make your home in me, as I make mine in you" or "abide in me as I abide in you" (Jn15:4).¹⁶ We become aware of this oneness when we enter the heart.

Theological Foundations

Although scriptural sources are implicit, clearly a person of prayer and study, the speaker would have heard the term "ground" in sermons, or read it, in the widely present vernacular works of the Dominican Meister Eckhart. In his writings, Eckhart stretches language to its limits to point beyond, to transcendent, infinite and essential being. "Ground" become what Bernard McGinn distinguishes as an "explosive metaphor".¹⁷ It breaks through previous categories of speech and creates new ways of presenting a direct encounter with God.

Paradoxically though, as the metaphor explodes, it remains within. It stays in its source, even when shared. It retains something of its divine character, while

¹⁴ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*, Orbis, New York, 2007, pp. 137-138.

¹⁵ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 138.

¹⁶ NRSV translation.

¹⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, Crossroad, New York, 2001, p. 38.

exploding into the domain of the intelligible.¹⁸ “Ground” “*grunt*” or “*grund*” journeys far beyond predominant linguistic usages where it refers to the earth, or identifies the abyss, the origin, cause, beginning, reason, proof, or what is hidden and most proper to a being.¹⁹ The word silences, stills and imparts glimpses of God. It helps us envision how we are one in the ground.

Preachers like Eckhart, began to use the term in sermons, because it was so accessible and multifaceted. We can easily picture ground and soil and the quality of our own individual garden, or perhaps desert. But just as readily we can embrace its endless, abyss-like characteristics and the way essential human nature participates in Uncreated Being. As an explosive metaphor “ground” continuously expands our horizons of our experience of how God is “above”, “in” and “through” all things, how God is hidden and yet intimately present to us, how we are “one”. Heard in a rousing sermon, the metaphor sparks the imagination and enthuses. It inspires personal and communal mystical transformation. It unsettles its hearers to long to the point of no return to be one with God.

The “ground” also relates to Augustine’s understanding of the soul’s journey into the heart where the *imago Dei* manifests itself. We participate in this image of God through prayer. Augustine refers to this point of union as *acies mentis*, the mind’s most intimate interiority. It is the point of light that overlaps the eternal light it is already within. This point is within us, and at the same time, above us. Augustine also refers to this as *scintilla rationis*, the spark of reason.²⁰ This is what Eckhart describes as the deepest point of the soul, an uncreated non-spatial place before time with God. It is the “spark” “castle” “nobleman” “highest point” or “seed”.²¹ Always aware of the limits of metaphors, Eckhart wanted to move beyond a purely anthropological point of union, into a dynamic fusing of God and the soul in one ground that is personal, communal and cosmic.

The essential insight is that God’s ground and the soul’s ground is one. But this is not a static state of being one, but a dynamic action of *oneing*. This identity between the divine ground and the ground of the soul is “the event or action of being in a fused relation.”²² The experience of this oneness is silent and still, beyond movement and distinction, and at the same time, dynamic and active. We are eternally being more grounded in the ground. We are one in the ground and

¹⁸ Oliver Davies, "Meister Eckhart: Preaching the One to the Many." *The Way* 37, 1997, 336.

¹⁹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p.39.

²⁰ Denys Turner. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 99.

²¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 41.

²² Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 48. For a helpful discussion of Eckhart’s defence of this union in the ground see Philip Browning Helsel, "Living without a Why." *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 12, 2006, pp. 7-14.

yet God is God. We live and move and have our being in God and yet we are also ourselves.

We must learn to live *in* this ground, responsive to this dynamic fusing. Eckhart directs: “Go into your own ground and there act, and the works that you do there will be all living.”²³ He encourages complete surrender into the ground, so as to live and act “without a why”.²⁴ In living without a why we embrace simplicity, poverty, emptiness, total detachment. We become someone who “wants nothing, and knows nothing and has nothing.”²⁵ We no longer live from a source outside ourselves. We live “without a why” because we live from within our own heart in God who is the ground of our being.

Theological Implications

Thus, we can see how, when the unknown author says so surely “God will not be torn from the ground of your heart” this is not an isolated comment. He or she is saying this with strong scriptural and theological support. A claim is being made that ultimately God is so all encompassing, so present to us that God is the ground of all that is. Deep down in our heart, in the ground of our being, we are one. We participate in God, in each other, in the universe in a dynamic way. We enter this ground through emptying, detaching, contemplating ourselves in God in divine emptiness that is fullness. Whether our experience is of God present or absent, God is a faithful God. Divine presence in human lives and in creation is trustworthy. There is a love, a compassion that is at the ground of all being and this same love is at home in the human heart. The theologian engenders trust. He or she points to hope. But in order to enter the ground of the heart and encounter God, the spiritual director must also have a role.

As spiritual director, the theological position I hold in spiritual direction is crucial. If I listen through the filter that human beings are evil and not to be trusted, my focus will be on what a directee did to feel abandoned by God. The spotlight will fall on sin. On the other hand, if I hold that we encounter each other in the ground of God, the spiritual direction encounter will be responsive to this ground. If I believe that the ground of the heart is the dwelling place of God then my attention will be on assisting the person to enter this ground and live from their heart. If together, we can give our awareness, sensitivity, hopes, our heart to God with deep humility, sooner or later we will encounter grace. When we become conscious of grace we experience love. Only love heals.

²³ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 49

²⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 49.

²⁵ *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons Commentaries Treatises and Defences*. Translated by Edmund Colledge, Paulist, New York, 1981, p.199.

A Spiritual Direction Focus

“God will not be torn from the ground of your heart”, but so often it feels like life has torn God from us. We will now focus on how to be with the heart who heard these words.

In a powerful essay, “The Love of God and Affliction”, Simone Weil makes a distinction between physical and emotional suffering and affliction. She considers affliction to be the most deadly because it takes possession of our soul and marks it through with slavery. It causes us to feel God to be absent. In her words:

more absent than a dead man, more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell. A kind of horror submerges the whole soul. During this absence there is nothing to love. What is terrible is that if, in this darkness where there is nothing to love, the soul ceases to love, God’s absence becomes final. The soul has to go on loving in the void, or at least to go on wanting to love, though it may be only with an infinitesimal part of itself.²⁶

This chilling depiction of the absence of God holds within it every experience of humanity feeling torn from the ground of all being, torn from the ground of God. Weil takes us to the horror of our inhumanity, to cruelty and violence, and the promise of life coming to nothing. Yet in the face of all this pain she adds: “One day, God will come to show himself to this soul and reveal the beauty of the world to it.”²⁷ Weil says this with so much conviction because in her affliction she met God torn. She encountered the crucified one torn for love.

This feeling that God is being torn from the ground of our personal, communal and cosmic heart leaves us nowhere to go, but to the infinite tearing of Jesus, nailed to the cross, where he is torn for love. This is the supreme tearing apart, the incomparable agony, the marvel of love. Weil shows how, in this tearing apart, “supreme love” places the bond of “supreme union” into the depth of silence. “Like two notes, separate yet blending into one, like a pure and heart rending harmony.”²⁸ We only hear this harmony if we detach ourselves from the cacophony around us, and enter into silence seeking love. “Those who persevere in love”, she continues, “hear this note from their very lowest depths into which affliction has thrust them. From that moment they can no longer have any doubt”. The very depths of what feels Godless hides the note of love.

²⁶ *Simone Weil*, Orbis, New York, 1998, p.44.

²⁷ *Simone Weil*, p.44.

²⁸ *Simone Weil*, p.46.

Weil makes a critical point for spiritual direction with those whose lives are torn. If we surrender into silence, enter the lowest depths into which affliction has thrust us, then we will not find ourselves to be isolated and abandoned. We will hear the harmony of two notes blending into one. We will find the song of the ground. This act of seeking God in the very place that seems Godless leads us to the Torn One, and we know irrevocably God is love.

Implementing a Spirituality

In a time of hopelessness, plague, war and famine, Julian of Norwich plunged the depths of affliction. When she thought she was dying she writes: “It was as dark all around me in my room as if it was night, save for the image of the cross, which held a communing light.”²⁹ On this cross, Julian saw the torn head of Jesus bleeding, his torn flesh, his heart torn in two and recognized this as the great *nouthing*, the kenosis, the tearing that is the emptying of love into the loveless, into suffering creation. In the midst of this affliction, Jesus says to her “I am the ground”.³⁰ Jesus is the ground of the afflicted. Because Julian became a theologian through her writing, and spiritual director through people who went to share their hearts with her, I will now present her “mysticism of the ground” as a model for spiritual direction that can free those who feel afflicted to recognize the love in their midst.

Julian describes how our life is “all grounded and rooted in love”.³¹ “Our soul is so deeply grounded in God, so endlessly treasured”³² that it is easier to know God than to know our own soul. She shows how we can enter this ground of the soul through beholding spiritually, being present to God beyond words and images. Like Eckhart she employs multi dimensional metaphors to evoke a felt sense of this reality. The ground of our soul is “in the midst of our heart”.³³ It is so beyond space and time, so boundless it is like “an endless world” “a blissful kingdom.” It resonates with the kingdom of God that is the treasure hidden in the field.

Jesus sits in the midst of this ground, “truly God and truly human.” This identification of Jesus as both God and human is important because it is Jesus tortured and crucified, and at the same time, risen, sitting in “peace and rest”. This presence of Jesus means that when our hearts feel torn, the crucified one is in our affliction. Together, we live the pouring out of love. And we also live the

²⁹ Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1978, 291.

Translations are my own.

³⁰ *Showings*, 460, 468.

³¹ *Showings*, 505.

³² *Showings*, 570.

³³ *Showings*, 639.

transformation, where oneness in love becomes joy. Julian reassures: “The place that Jesus takes in our soul he will never leave. For *in* us is his homeliest home and his endless dwelling.”³⁴ “In” us, in the ground of our soul God is at home.

Julian encourages us to open the eyes of our heart, to be-hold, to gaze contemplatively and see how our ground is love. Through her experience of beholding and becoming one with the crucified one, she presents a way of seeing that has a four-fold cyclical movement of bodily sight, words forming in her understanding, spiritual sight and more spiritual sight.³⁵ Each phase flows into the other, until seeing becomes imageless, contemplative. If we apply this cycle to the spiritual direction encounter we could say: *awakening the wisdom of the body, seeking understanding, opening to the depths of spirit, embracing indwelling grace.*

In the first instance, *awakening the wisdom of the body*, we assist the directee to awaken their physical senses, to notice what they are holding in their body, and reverence how they feel. We then *seek understanding*. We invite the expression of words or images that encapsulate bodily knowing. We sift through feeling noticing, not judging, feelings that are warm and consoling, and feelings that are disturbing or indifferent.

As we *open to the depths of spirit*, in the third phase, we notice what evokes an unmistakable resonance in our own heart of what has been true for us in our experience of God. We observe what draws us deeper into the ground of our heart and what scatters us. We look for mellowness. We listen for the harmony of the love song, following these vibrations until this attunement takes us deeper again, beyond the concrete and we feel we are *embracing indwelling grace*. We know we are embracing grace when silence pregnant with union draws us in “sighs too deep for words”. Julian invites us to maturing spiritual awareness of the oneness we already dwell within. She wants us to see, through grace, how our soul is naturally grounded and rooted in God in endless love. Julian continually reminds us how God says, “See how I love you”. God is saying to our directee over and over again: “See how I love you.”

Let us now look at an example of how we can listen for the experience of God in the direction conversation, help the directee stay with and explore their experience, and notice the awakening of a new awareness in a time of felt absence of God.

This example is of a woman who was betrayed by a loved one. She describes herself as having lost God and fallen apart with nothing to love. When she picked

³⁴ *Showings*, 641

³⁵ *Showings*, 505.

up the pieces of herself and tried to create a new sense of self, it is as if she took fine golden thread and wrapped it tightly around her heart for protection. One day in prayer, she asked Jesus to help her remove the thread. She and Jesus pulled the thread until it came off her heart. Her heart felt torn again. Fear set in. This small vignette isolates an important moment some time later in her healing where surrendering into waiting was crucial for deeper healing and a new sense of God's presence to unfold.

Directee: My heart feels torn, like something that was protecting me has gone. I feel exposed. Where that thread was attached is bleeding badly.

Director: (Softly and sensitively) Your heart feels torn, the thread is ripped off.

Directee: Yees. It is sore. Tender.

Director: Do you feel it now?

Directee: Yes right here (she points to her heart centre)
It is aching, bleeding, I feel so confused -alone again.
I thought I would feel better by now.

Director: Can you gently stay with the bleeding?

Directee: Yes

There is a long silence. Eyes are closed. Patiently, as if there is all day, the director holds this sacred space.

Directee: Jesus is there.

Director: Jesus

Directee: Yes. He is mopping up the blood.

Director: You feel his touch!

Directee: Yes. It feels soft. Tender. Loving.

Director: Jesus is tending you. Tell me more about his tender touching.

Directee: His touch fills me with peace. Silence. His silence. I feel I need to be in the silence.

Sometime after this encounter the silence of God becomes an empty void like silence that is infinitely fertile. It becomes the ground of loving union.

Spiritual Implications

Notice how the spiritual direction encounter creates a sacred space, where the directee can explore how she feels. It enables her to discover that she is not alone and to relate to Jesus in her loneliness. Notice how the movement in this brief encounter unfolds according to Julian's way of beholding. The *wisdom of the body* is awakened. It is honoured. As the directee stayed with painful feelings, there is an organic movement to notice Jesus already present. Silence, body language and just a few words impart enough information about where God is. What is important is not what the director said, but how she held the sacred space so Jesus could be the director. As they both became more responsive to Jesus, it was natural to move more deeply into the movement of the Spirit. The spiritual direction became internal rather than external. This was a very intimate encounter for the directee. She felt she *embraced grace* as Jesus touched her wounded heart. She delighted in this experience but didn't cling. The encounter with Jesus then led to an imageless sense of presence as silence.

Jesus was the "ground" of this spiritual direction session. Though the directee was extremely vulnerable she was prepared to risk deeper vulnerability, enter her experience, turn towards Jesus, and then be prepared to let him go. The directee felt one with Jesus. She still felt torn and disorientated, but she knew the invitation to silence was mysteriously trustworthy. It had a felt sense of urgent longing. It felt unitive. Her way of holding the pain shifted. She had more energy and inner freedom to allow herself to be re-created in a fertile ground of silence.

Conclusions

God will not be torn from the ground of our heart because we cannot be taken from who we already are in God. What can change is our awareness of this oneness that holds us in being. As we embrace contemplative silence our capacity to know irrevocably that God is above, through, and in all our experiences matures. God is the ground of all being longing that we live more truly in the ground in which we already dwell. The theologian helps us to understand, to know the tradition, to plunge the depths of ideas and discover language to give voice to the mystery that inspires hope. The spiritual director urges us to plummet into the abyss of silence, to surrender control, to risk intimacy, to enter the ground of the heart and meet a hidden presence that calls us to a journey of spirit. He or she creates a relationship that enables us to explore and respond to the divine presence and in the process be transformed. Both free us to be endlessly grounded in love in the embrace of grace. Earthenware vessels hold this treasure.