

Jigsaw Puzzle of Human Behaviour



Correcting Imbalances
Through Psychology
and Theology

by Donald Stoesz

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Preface

This book offers psychological and theological reflections on imbalances in our lives. It is based in large part on the work that I did for thirty-five years as a prison chaplain.¹ Psychological insights were needed for inmates to move on with their lives. Theological resources represented a counter balance to the emotional and personal turmoil of their incarceration. Repentance, confession, and forgiveness offered freedom, acceptance, belonging, and integrity.

I am assuming that we all have imbalances in our lives that need correction. I am also assuming that faith and belief provide a way forward for coping and thriving in the midst of these realities of the human experience.

The book is organized accordingly. The introduction gives several examples of imbalanced people. These illustrations give way in the first chapter to identifying ten imbalances that may be part of our lives:

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. impulsive behaviours | 6. codependent relationships |
| 2. unconscious desires | 7. saviour figures |
| 3. oedipal complexes | 8. delusional thinking |
| 4. insecure identities | 9. manufactured innocence |
| 5. conflicted personalities | 10. post-modern identity |

The second chapter explores these themes through an analysis of James Lapine's play, musical, and movie, *Into the Woods*.² The woods represent a liminal place into which fairy tale characters such as Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk go to discover their true desires. Needless to say, they get lost and disoriented while striving for fulfillment of their dreams. Modern successes of independence, marriage, and children are achieved in the First Act. Divorce, disillusionment, death, and dissembling of identities occur in the Second Act.

¹ Donald Stoesz, *Chaplaincy Journey*, [Donald Stoesz, site-based prison chaplain and published author](#) Retrieved 2 January 2023; Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace: Reflections of a Prison Chaplain* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2010).

² James Lapine, *Into the Woods* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987); *Into the Woods*, DVD (Walt Disney Studios, 2015).

Disappointment of fairy tale endings gives way to a second naivete of innocence in which maturity, responsibility, and contentment emerge.

The third chapter continues this exploration of imbalances through an analysis of the movie, *American Beauty*.³ The husband and wife resort to infantile behaviours because they cannot cope with the disaster that is their marriage. The emo young man turns to voyeurism for pleasure while his girlfriend becomes infatuated with the delusion of stardom. The cheerleader is mesmerized by the idea of love while the military commander represents repression writ large. Denouement occurs when the characters, like those in *Into the Woods*, come to terms with the resourcefulness of their lives in the midst of diminished expectations, or not.

The fourth chapter relives nineteenth century ideals of marriage, children, and a happy life ever after. The Eaton's store, now defunct, embodies metaphors of desires called material objects. These objects have been placed strategically on seven floors within a cauldron of ambiance and luxury to entice and satisfy. The womb of maternal care is placed on the fourth floor, at the heart of the exhibits. The delight of eating and dining are featured on the fifth floor. Infatuations of love along with invitations to commit flow into responsibilities of house ownership along with the joy of making a home.

The second half of the book contrasts this psychological analysis with a theological response. True contentment comes with an *interiority*, as the Catholic Catechism likes to say,⁴ that requires inward assessment and commitment in order to achieve the richness of life alluded to above.

This single fact was brought home to me as a prison chaplain. Chapel services were full of men seeking ways out of the crime and punishment in which they found themselves. Crises precipitated by offences drove them to seek more durable solutions. Countless interviews convinced me of the need for a spiritual, religious, and theological response to the situation.

Dwelling on taboos creates a deontological emptiness into which the teleological themes of hope, love, and faith flow and flourish. Most inmates know what they did was horribly wrong. Most inmates accept, and feel that they deserve, the punishment that they received.

³ *American Beauty*, DVD, director Sam Mendes (Warner Brothers, 2013).

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2019), 1779.

Lacking from these experiences is a sense of hope for the future. What can get them out of this morass? How will they be able to cope, years from now? What sustains them in the midst of loss, remorse, grief, regret, self-loathing, and dread?

The book answers these questions by considering eleven theological themes representing different stages of the transformation process:

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|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. remorse | 7. surrender |
| 2. conversion | 8. love |
| 3. absolution | 9. discipleship |
| 4. creation | 10.honesty |
| 5. restoration | 11.punishment |
| 6. beatific vision | |

Each chapter analyses these steps through the use of novels, stories, movies, drama, and personal experiences. We are complex beings, in need of healthy psychological and theological resources to sustain us.

Donald Stoesz
Bowden, Alberta
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Introduction

Jigsaw Puzzle of Human Behaviour

Have you ever put pieces together in a jigsaw puzzle? Were you able to match the shapes and colours of different sections? Were you able to relate them to the larger picture? I sometimes feel as though I am putting puzzle pieces together when I work with people. There are so many fragments scattered about that I am not sure which one to pick up first. After matching two shapes, I am stymied again because the other pieces are of a different colour. I spend hours putting two or three pieces into the right place.

Some sections of the puzzle are easier to put together than others. Pictures of faces, birds, and wagons go together because the images are recognizable. Multiple pieces of blue sky, green grass, and dark shadows are more difficult to work with. We wait until the border and familiar images emerge before tackling the larger opaque sections.

Jigsaw puzzles represent an analogy of what human beings are like. We are complex beings that come in different shapes and sizes. The reasons for our actions, relationships, and personality types are hard to understand. One aspect of our character varies significantly from other ways that we relate.

The complexity of human behaviour has been evident in my work as a chaplain. Inmates come to me because they only know the superficial reasons for committing their crimes. They do not understand the deeper reasons for acting out in such a violent and abusive manner. They regard themselves as rational human beings who have made responsible decisions in the past. And yet here they are, in prison, serving time for serious offences.

Their lives are a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle. Some aspects of their personality are well grounded. They excelled at school and kept a steady job. They fell in love and

were married for a number of years. They were respectable members of the community.

These inmates' characteristics are the easier pieces to put together in a jigsaw puzzle. A mature adult emerged as the offender grew up, became responsible, and fit into the community.

Other pieces of the puzzle are hidden from view. The inmate put on a brave face when they went for a job interview. They did not know what they were doing when they said yes to a life long relationship with their spouse. Challenges of these commitments became evident as time progressed. The inmate was unable to put the knowledge that he learned in school to good use. He pretended to know how to do things. He was unable to form an emotionally healthy relationship with his wife. He felt inadequate in raising his children. His children reminded him of how poorly he had been raised, how insecure he felt as a teenager in making decisions, and how immature he still was, in his thirties and forties and fifties.

These aspects of an inmate's personality can be compared to the more difficult puzzle pieces to put together. The pieces remain scattered because of their obscure colours. The greys, blues, and greens all blend together. Inmates cannot put these pieces together because aspects of their character have not yet matured.

One man that I have worked with only looked at how he had excelled in life. He told me, "I have been a good worker all of my life. I do not know why I keep being punished." I asked him when he had committed his crime. "Well, during the week of holidays when I was binge drinking. I am not an alcoholic. I only go on a long drunk once or twice a year." This man was over fifty years old when I met him as a young chaplain. He had first come to federal prison before I was born. This was the third time that he had been in prison.⁵

This man did not want to look at his alcoholism. This habit was entrenched in his life. He had learned to function as an alcoholic while getting into serious trouble every ten years. This man defined himself primarily in terms of his work ethic. He was told when he grew up that as long as he worked hard, nothing else mattered.

This conversation took place thirty years ago at the Federal Training Centre (CFF) in Quebec. The government established this medium-security prison in the early 1960s to teach trades to inmates. Inmates could enroll in bricklaying, construction, school, culinary arts, gardening, metal fabrication, upholstery, and cabinet making.

⁵ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 90.

In the 1980s, the government made programming for alcoholism, spousal abuse, violence, sexual offences, gang involvement, and selling drugs mandatory. Many of the trades listed above were abandoned in favour of a programming model. Inmates had to identify the sources of their offending patterns.

The life of the fifty-year old inmate described above reflected the priorities of his generation. He was told in the 1950s that work was the most important aspect of life. This inmate decided that as long as he only binged on his holidays (and drank on weekends and during evenings after work), that he was alright. The fact that he was in jail two or three years of every decade was simply an inconvenience.

This man could not adjust to the fact that he had to take programming for his offences. He felt that it was no-one's business that he drank on weekends and evenings. He was doing time for his offences. That was punishment enough. He could not face the fact that he had caused serious harm to other people (as well as to himself).

The second example comes from the true story of a British woman executive. She married an American man by the name of Clark Rockefeller. The story has been made into a movie entitled, *Who is Clark Rockefeller?*⁶ The man claimed that he was related to the famous Rockefeller family. He invited himself to their family reunions. He told his wife that he only worked *pro bono* (for free) on architectural projects because he could not as a Rockefeller stoop to working for hire for real money.

The woman accepted his explanations. They had a child together and were married for ten years. There came a point when the woman no longer believed everything her husband was telling her. She hired a lawyer to look into the case. The lawyer discovered that the man was originally from Germany. Rockefeller was not his real name. After the spouse filed for divorce, the husband kidnapped the girl. He claimed that he should get custody because he had spent the last ten years raising their daughter. It took the police a few months to find the man and arrest him.

The woman acknowledges imbalances in her life in a poignant scene at the police station. Given the trauma of having her daughter kidnapped and the true identity of her husband revealed, she looks at the policeman and says, "Am I that dumb (stupid)?" The policeman looks at the bottom of his coffee cup without answering.

The woman's financial success as a well-paid executive blinded her to the lies that her husband told her. The woman was attracted to her husband because of his so-

⁶ DVD (Sony Pictures, 2010).

called elite connections to the Rockefeller family. The woman wanted to believe that she had married into an historically rich and famous family. Her need for recognition deflected her ability to see the real facts at hand.

The woman in the story is not much different than the alcoholic man that I interviewed. The older man who went binge drinking and committed crimes wanted to believe that he was alright. He wanted to be accepted on the basis of the generational mores with which he grew up. That generation believed in the value of hard work, regardless of the personal state of one's alcoholism or marriage.

I suggested to the alcoholic man that his life priorities could be compared to the four walls of a house. Work represented one wall. The man had had numerous financial successes. He became a pilot later in his life. He flew around the country in his small Cessna plane (sometimes while being blacked out).

The man's family represented the second wall. The man had been married and had raised a family. Although he recently had divorced, the man's ability to be part of a family represented a second positive aspect of his life. The man had a sense of belonging to something beyond himself.

The third wall had to do with the man's Christian faith. He came regularly to the worship services I conducted in prison. He expressed regret and remorse for what he had done. He experienced God's comfort and love as he spent time in jail.

This man's work, family, and faith represented three solid walls of his house. He had spent years building these walls and securing them on a solid foundation. The problem was that the fourth wall was missing. This non-existent wall had to do with the man's alcoholism.

The man's inability to acknowledge this non-existent wall allowed rain to fall and snow to blow into his house. The house could not be adequately heated in spite of the fact that he had provided a roof over his family's heads. The family could not live comfortably in the house because of this missing wall. They decided to move out because they could no longer tolerate the situation. The man also had to move out and go to jail. Living in the house was not sustainable.

The man was unable to see this missing wall. The man was so entrenched in viewing his alcoholism as normal and in maintaining the other three walls that he refused to see the "big" thing that was causing his house to crumble.

The woman described above was in the same situation. She had worked so hard to become successful that she had neglected personal aspects of her life. The love of her life who happened to be a Rockefeller represented a winfall. Not only was she now wealthy and successful. She now had status and fame because she had married into the Rockefeller family. Her need to be recognized blinded her to the real situation at hand. The lies and false image of her husband represented the fourth missing wall that brought her house of cards to the ground. The woman had to take another look at the personal aspects of her life in order to grow into a well-rounded person.

The movie, *Life as a House*,⁷ uses the idea of a house to portray imbalances in people's lives. An older divorced man discovers that he is dying of cancer. His ex-wife has married another man. The two younger children resent their new step-dad. The third insecure teenager is drawn to selling drugs and doing sexual favours.

The dying man decides to rebuild his father's old house. He takes custody of his teenage son and recruits him to remodel the house. The man reconnects emotionally with his ex-wife. The family learns to love each other all over again. The man's discovery that he is dying represents a wake-up call. The rebuilding of his father's house represents a metaphor for rebuilding his own life. The story ends with his son giving the house to a young girl in a wheelchair. The son's grandfather was responsible for her injury as a result of a car accident.

We as an audience only find out at the end why the father in the middle of this situation had such anger and resentment in his life. We realise only at the end why it was so difficult for the father to rebuild his father's old house – perched as it was in an elite neighbourhood overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles. The father's courage to rebuild his father's house gave him the courage to rebuild his own life. It also brought healing to his son, ex-wife, and other children.

These examples demonstrate imbalances in peoples' lives. They show that a crisis can cause people to change, to take stock of their lives, and to build a fourth wall. Acknowledging the missing fourth wall helps to put everything else into perspective. Accepting the fact that one is an alcoholic, that one has not worked at healthy relationships, and that one is dying represents the first step in healing and righting the ship that is listing to one side (to use another metaphor).

⁷ DVD (eOne Film Distribution, 2001).

Chapter One

Naming Imbalances in Our Lives

The time has come to name imbalances in our lives. These lacuna represent pieces of the larger puzzle that are harder to put together. They are illustrative of the interviews I have had with inmates. They are reflective of personal experiences. Naming these tendencies and habits help us correct inadequacies.

Let me start with imbalances in inmates' lives. The divorced men that I met lived in dysfunctional, codependent relationships. The older adults were conflicted between impulsive behaviours and mature responsible leadership. The middled-aged impetuous ones had lived a life of fantasy and excess. The insecure young men were controlled by the overbearing influence of their single mothers.

Some of these behaviours are evident within us. How often have we acted impulsively to seek immediate gratification? Have we done things that are difficult to explain on a conscious level? When have we reacted like a child to the unconscious hold that our parents have over us? Why do we feel inadequate in a career in which we have excelled? Why have our decisions led us in the opposite direction from which we intended? Why are we hooked emotionally into the adult decisions that our children have made? Why are we nostalgic about the way that things once were? Why do we feel the need to reinvent ourselves every decade or so?

1. Impulsive Behaviours

Each of these behaviours, relationship dynamics, and personality traits have a name. Grief counsellors John James and Russel Friedman refer to impulsive behaviours as “short term energy relieving behaviours.”⁸ Going to movies, shopping, using drugs,

⁸ John James and Russel Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 82.

having sex, gambling, accessing pornography, or buying things at convenience stores provide us with immediate pleasures in life.

Reasons for these short term energy relieving behaviours have to do a person's inability to live an integrated life. James and Friedman speak about these STERBs in relation to people unable to grieve the loss of a loved one. People substitute their feelings of pain, anguish, despair, and loneliness with temporary solutions. They eat too much, binge watch TV too much, become obsessed about sex, going shopping a lot, or work out daily in the gym. These activities are appropriate in moderation. They become problematic when one begins to fixate on them.

Let me give examples from my own life. When I am bored, I sit in a liminal space in which I am neither satisfied with what I have accomplished nor motivated to think about the future. I dwell unhappily in the present. I am either nostalgic or goal oriented. Instant gratification is the only thing I am familiar with when I live in the present.

My challenge is to regard each of the above activities in terms of a larger whole. I become more satisfied with eating when I prepare meals, take time to digest the food, and eat with other people.

I become more satisfied with sex when I engage in it in relation to a committed relationship. My wife and I have spent years finding the right balance of loving activities, sexual intercourse, mutual interests, visiting family and friends, and conversation.

I become more satisfied with movies and television when I take the time to debrief. My wife and I watch movies together. I pick a movie that has to do with relationships, adventure, intrigue, and suspense.

I become more satisfied with shopping when I take the time to buy something for someone else. I become more satisfied with buying things when I think about how that purchase fits into our lives.

I become more satisfied with isolation when I dwell in the loneliness that I feel. In spite of outward appearances, I am an intrinsically introverted person who likes camping alone in the bush for a week or two. Being by myself is the only way that I feel real. I own the emotions that I have. I am intrinsically afraid of other people. I feel as though they are looking for a way to intrude on my life.

I like exercising because it makes me understand how physically fit I am - not. Running twice around a quarter mile track gives me a precise idea of how my heart and lungs are doing.

Work is how I ground my identity. I starting working full time one year after retirement because I had no idea what to do with my free time. I can only golf, swim, exercise, have coffee with a friend, and travel so much. I became bored all over again. Working at a career has given me a sense of purpose and fulfillment. My hand fits nicely into the glove of my career. I am the one who shaped the glove to fit into my life.

I am writing this book to come to terms with the way that imbalances influence our lives. The nonrational aspect of our Being has a great deal to say about how we process things rationally. Sex is out of control if it is not connected to the body. Eating is out of control if not connected to being physically hungry. Watching movies is out of control if not connected to our actual lives. Exercising is out of control if it becomes a way of avoiding other things. Shopping is out of control if it does not contribute to our overall physical and social wellbeing.

2. Subconscious Desires

This book concentrates on the nonrational aspects of life to show how these unconscious desires feed our conscious hopes and dreams. I am excited about the libido aspect of life because it drives our desires to be fulfilled and successful. Instant gratification is a warning sign that not all is right with the world. The unconscious nature of our Being drives the ways in which we are fulfilled on a conscious level.

Couples counsellor Harville Hendrix has written a book about the way our subconscious desires drive our relationships. Entitled *Getting the Love You Want*,⁹ Hendrix suggests that the five minutes of exhilaration we feel when we meet someone for the first time represents a falling in love that may last a lifetime. Two people fall in love because of mutual sparks of *recognition, timelessness, reunification, and necessity*.¹⁰ Echoes of the other person's experiences within one's own emotions, influences, and social interactions trigger these feelings. The other person can see right through us. The person understands us at a deeper level than anyone else.

⁹ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1988, 2008).

¹⁰ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 38, 50-53.

Harville Hendrix uses the unconscious aspects of this attraction to help couples save their marriages.¹¹ The partner expects their spouse to provide nurture and care in the same way that their parents loved them. The husband's realization that their spouses are unique and need to be accepted for who they are moves the imbalance of the relationship from a parent-child to an adult-adult one. Unconscious desires are brought to consciousness so that love can flourish again.

Sociologist Macolm Galdwell has found the unconscious helpful in explaining things. He defines intuition as "the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under stress."¹²

Malcolm Gladwell gives several examples of how this works. In *What the Dog Saw*, Gladwell shows that a dog's behaviour has everything to do with its master.¹³ In *Outliers*, he describes how the frequency of Korean plane crashes had everything to do with an unspoken culture of deference.¹⁴ In *Blink*, he follows an art expert who believed on the basis of a hunch that the marble statue he was looking at was a fake.¹⁵ Seemingly insignificant details and hidden factors have everything to do with the matter at hand.

3. Oedipal Complexes

Oedipal complexes are another way of identifying the manner in which unconscious influences shape us. The Oedipal Greek myth tells the story of a son who unknowingly kills his father and falls in love with his mother. The moral of the story has do to with the fact that parents influence their children in unconsciously negative ways. The son serves as a substitute husband for his mother while killing off the competition.

This myth became real for me when I worked with young offenders in jail.¹⁶ Their single mothers had raised them without the influence of a father figure. The young men became the substitute husbands for their mothers in lieu of a non-existent adult partner. The down side of this arrangement became evident when their mothers began dating men their own age. The sons intervened in the budding romance. They did not consider their mothers' new suitors worthy enough. The mothers

¹¹ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 3 – 100.

¹² Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005), 16.

¹³ Malcolm Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 126-148.

¹⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), 177-223.

¹⁵ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*, 3-17.

¹⁶ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 48.

reciprocated by rejecting any new suitor that their sons entertained. This codependent relationship was debilitating for all concerned.

Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has noted the importance of the oedipal complex in therapeutic settings. Bettelheim worked with severely disturbed children.¹⁷ These children were unable to solidify their own identity because they were hooked negatively into the emotional and social dynamics of their parents.¹⁸

Bettelheim discovered that fairy tales were invented to illustrate this Oedipal complex. Jack in the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* could not throw off the influence of his mother until he had climbed the beanstalk, stolen some gold, and killed the giant.¹⁹ Rapunzel could not escape the co-dependent clutches of her mother until she fell in love with a prince, cut off her hair, and went to live with him in his castle.²⁰

These stories demonstrate that children can move from a psychologically dependent phase to an independent one. They can leave the superego dominance of their parents by becoming attracted to their own heroes and mentors. They fulfill their dreams of becoming adult men and women by taking risks and acting on their desires.

The Oedipal complex helps explain the lives of the men with whom I worked. In addition to their single mothers' dominating influence, the men were hooked negatively into their fathers' absence. The young men told me over and over again that they hated their fathers.²¹ They never wanted to grow up to be like them. Yet here the sons were, sitting in the same place that their fathers had sat thirty years ago, in jail. These men as young children had visited their fathers in jail. They had watched their Dads self-destruct through their addiction to alcohol. They were not like their fathers at all, they claimed. These young men were addicted to drugs rather than to alcohol.

These young men were hooked negatively in relationships with women their own age. They almost always referred to their girlfriends or spouses as their "baby's

¹⁷ See Bettelheim's biography, Wikipedia, *Bruno Bettelheim*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Bettelheim, retrieved October 2020.

¹⁸ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 38-39.

¹⁹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 183-193. Cf. James Lapine's depiction of this story, *Into the Woods*, 91-92.

²⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 16-17.

²¹ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 48. Cf. Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), 120-121.

Mom.” They treated their significant others in terms how they were mothers to their children.

This situation mimicked the sons’ child-parent relationship to their Moms. Their mothers considered their sons to be the most important emotional connection in their lives. This parent-child relationship skewed the adult-adult relationship that was necessary for mothers and sons to mature. Their mothers could not marry because of their codependent relationship with their sons. Their sons could not marry because of their mothers’ interference.

This co-dependent, parent-child relationship of mother and son defined the way that the sons viewed their own girlfriends. They regarded their girlfriends in relation to their role as mothers to their children.

The challenge of this situation had to do these young men moving from a parent-child to an adult-adult relationship with their mothers, fathers, and spouses. A biblical quote from the Book of Genesis sums up what I am trying to say: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, NRSV).

4. Insecure Identities

Dependent relationships on their mothers resulted in these men having insecure self-identities. They transferred the codependent attachments with which they were familiar to anyone else that would let them. These men would obey the orders of their gang bosses, do favours for the stronger inmates who were protecting them, and run around in small groups so that they did not feel so vulnerable.

The men had not yet learned to stand up for themselves. They transferred the emotional and protective blanket that their mothers had provided to their new-found group or gang. Peer pressure continued to exercise a lot of influence. They defined themselves according to how other people liked and accepted them.²²

5. Conflicted Personalities

These men were deeply conflicted. They had committed adult crimes and severely injured other people while remaining deeply insecure about themselves. They represented emotionally debilitated souls within adult bodies. They were passive when relating to their own Moms. They were aggressive when relating to their gang “brothers.” They told their friends that they were proud of the fact that they had sold

²² Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 91-100.

drugs. They told their parents and girlfriends that they were ashamed and felt guilty for having broken the law. These men had to come to terms with the influence that their parents had on them. They had to respond to the peer pressure of their friends.²³ They had to integrate the offences for which they had been convicted into the pro-social lifestyle that they envisioned.

6. Codependent Relationships

Former alcoholic Melodie Beattie has defined codependence as a relationship in which one person lives their life through another person.²⁴ The stereotypical example involves an alcoholic and his spouse. His wife spends her life pleasing her husband because she believes that this is what love is. She does not feel worthy of love herself. Her negative self image contributes to her futile attempts to have her husband pay attention to her. She enables and covers up his alcoholism because she believes that her husband will love her for her selfless efforts. It took Melodie over ten years of being an angry “dry” alcoholic to realise that she had to learn how to love all over again. Her new goal is to help others become detached, find freedom, remove the victim stance, live one’s own life, have a love affair with oneself, and learn to feel one’s own feelings.²⁵

7. Saviour Figures as Part of the Problem

Inmates try to redeem themselves by helping a person more needy than themselves. I recall innumerable examples of this type of behaviour.²⁶ One ex-husband who was released on parole fell in love with a woman who had four children. The man got a job and rented an apartment in which they could all live. He took care of the children and became a husband to his new girlfriend. Within three months of this arrangement, the man fled the scene and starting using drugs in another town. He could not cope with his intentions to live a normal life.

I worked with this person for six months after he had been suspended from parole. He received parole again. This time, he contacted his ex-wife and moved her into the city in which he was living. Unable to make this arrangement work, the man stole some cellphones and groceries and came back to jail. The woman was left to fend for herself. She had worked for nine years to establish a new life for herself, far from her toxic husband.

²³ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 115-124.

²⁴ Melodie Beattie, *Co-Dependent No More* (Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 1986).

²⁵ Melodie Beattie, *Co-Dependent No More*, 55-113, 119-150.

²⁶ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 45.

In another case, a young man was released on day parole to a half-way house in a city. Within a few hours of arriving there, his younger brother phoned him. He said that the gang was after him because he had stolen ten cellphones from them. The older brother met with the gang and paid his younger brother's bill.

A former girl-friend phoned the young man on parole in the middle of the night. She was being sexually assaulted by some men and needed help. The young man showed up at the apartment and intervened.

The young man told me these stories after he had been suspended from parole. He could not cope with the codependent relationships in which he was in. He had to break close family and friendship ties in order to become healthy.

Melodie Beattie explains how this toxic cycle of becoming a saviour figure works. She uses the illustration of a Karpman triangle.²⁷ A man is attracted to his girlfriend because she needs help. The man helps her out by giving her money, taking her away from her abusive boy-friend, and moving her into a new apartment. The man represents the peak of the triangle while the girlfriend is the person being saved on the lower right hand side.

The next stage of the relationship involves the two people living together. They feel that they have found true love. Their previous problems are over. They are living an idyllic situation represented by a form of mutuality. Each person is getting something out of the relationship.

Unfortunately, this mutual relationship often falls apart. The boyfriend is upset because his new girlfriend is not showing him as much love as he wants. The girlfriend is upset because her boyfriend is treating her like a child. She is thankful that he has helped her. The girlfriend nevertheless wants to be treated like an adult. The man looks at love in terms of a parent-child relationship. He expects love on the basis of the fact that he is protecting and taking care of his girlfriend.

Mutuality represented by the lower right hand side of the triangle is no longer a possibility. The man begins to see himself as a victim. The bottom left side of the triangle represents this self-pity stance. The man is resentful and hurt. His girlfriend has not reciprocated the love that he has shown her by feeling sorry for her. He leaves his girlfriend. He retreats into self-loathing. He isolates himself and no longer believes true love is possible.

²⁷ Melodie Beattie, *Codependent No More*, 83-95.

After grieving, the man moves from the bottom left hand side of the triangle to the top. He once again believes that love is possible. He once again finds a person more needy than himself. He establishes a new relationship with this person. The cycle repeats itself all over again: from saviour figure to true love to victim stance to saviour figure.

Melodie Beattie believes that true love is possible when each person treats the other as an adult. There was a point in the three month relationship described above when the situation could have changed. The man could have stopped seeing himself as a saviour figure. He could have decided that he really loved this person, irregardless of her circumstances. He loved this person for her own sake, not because she was needy. The true love that this couple had for each other could have diffused the way in they saw themselves as a parent figure taking care of the other person.

All of us need to be cared for by others. We do not want to see this neediness as defining the relationship. A relationship has to move from a parent-child to an adult-adult situation in order to become viable.

8. Saviour Figures as Part of the Solution

Various movies portray saviour figures in a good light. One thinks of the film *Inception*.²⁸ A private company hires a team of experts to plant a false memory into the mind of one of their rivals. The team leader recruits his wife to help with the complicated procedure. It involves putting the victim into a coma through the use of drugs in order to complete the implant. The team is in an induced state of unreality during this process. It returns from this parallel universe once the experiment is complete. The spinning of a top indicates transformation from the virtual reality of the experience to reality itself.

The husband's wife falls in love with being in this parallel universe. She finds that life feels much more vital and alive when living in a drug-induced state. Unfortunately, this means that she is unable to tell the difference between dream and reality. At one point, she sits on a window ledge and questions her husband about whether he truly loves her. Her husband pleads with her not to jump. He tells her that this situation is real, not a dream. She jumps to her death anyway.

The man is heartbroken. He accepts the blame for having introduced his wife to these elaborate experiments in virtual reality. He is in despair and grieves deeply.

²⁸ DVD (Warner Brothers Entertainment, 2010).

The situation changes when the man recruits a new female member to his team. This female member intuitively understands and empathizes with his grief. In a virtual reality experiment, she takes an elevator down four floors to the basement of the man's mind to visit his deceased wife. She reminds the dead wife that she has to take some responsibility for her own death. She tells the woman to stop interfering in her husband's life by injecting memories of her into his mind.

The new female character empathizes with the widower in order for him to move on with his life. She represents a saviour figure in the sense that she validates his grief while galvanizing him into living a new life.

A similar dynamic is at work in the fictional film series about Jason Bourne.²⁹ Jason is an American assassin trained to kill people in clandestine operations for a secret spy agency. The people he is mandated to kill represent a threat to American democracy and its way of life. Jason reaches a point when he cannot carry out his assignment. His epiphany comes when he sees two children sleeping beside a foreign official that he has been sent to kill. He flees the scene and is shot two times in the back. He is left for dead in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

The first movie in the series, *Bourne Identity*, begins at this point in Jason's life. Jason has amnesia as a result of being shot. He is rescued by a passing boat and brought back to life.

Bourne Identity, *Bourne Supremacy*, and *Bourne Ultimatum* follow Jason as he redeems his life. He retraces the steps that made him into an assassin. He confronts his past and changes his future.

Two women aid him in this recovery. The first person's name is Marie. Like Jason, she is living a nomadic existence in Switzerland. She moves from place to place without finding any real grounding in her life. Marie agrees to help Jason retrace his steps. She stays by his side as Jason slowly realises who he is and what he has become.

An assassin mistakenly shoots Marie at the beginning of the second movie, *Bourne Supremacy*. Nicky Parsons, an American agency assistant, replaces Marie as a saviour figure. She helps Jason remember an assassin assignment that he completed

²⁹ *Bourne Identity*, DVD (Universal Studios, 2008); *Bourne Supremacy*, DVD (Universal Studios, 2008); *Bourne Ultimatum*, DVD (Universal Studios, 2016); *Jason Bourne*, DVD (Universal Studios, 2016).

in Berlin. Nicky finds the location of a bureau manager who knows more about Jason's past.

Nicky Parson appears again in the fourth and final movie in the series, *Jason Bourne*.³⁰ She finds Jason earning money boxing against rivals of the highest bidder. Nicky retrieves valuable agency documents that show Jason's father was involved in Jason's recruitment and training. She helps Jason escape the agency's assassins while being shot in the process.

Marie and Nicky serve as valuable saviour figures for Jason. They normalize the situation while Jason slowly regains some of his memory. They provide relief and comfort while Jason is starting a new life.

Jason's new perception of himself comes into focus at the end of the second movie. He is on the verge of killing a bureau manager who has ordered his death. The bureau executive challenges Jason to pull the trigger. Jason responds by saying that he no longer wants to kill people. He adds, "The only reason you are alive is because Marie wouldn't want me to (kill you)."

Marie's salvific role becomes clear. Jason does not know how to live a new life. Marie shows him that he can become a normal person again. Her love and care for him is reciprocated by his love and care for himself. This new validation of himself ripples outward. Jason visits the daughter of two parents that he killed and says he is sorry. He kills the next assassin in self-defence in order to save Nicky. He continues to move forward without knowing how to live. All he knows is that he wants to be different from before.

The above mentioned movies show that there is a healthy role for saviour figures. Marie, Nicky, and the woman in *Inception* intervene in the lives of their friends and lovers by showing empathy, love, compassion, and care. These actions are carried out without the creation of a codependency relationship. Saviour figures are indeed needed.

9. Delusional Thinking

Delusional thinking is yet another imbalance that affects people's ability to live a fulfilled life. I remember a conversation I had twenty-five years ago in Leclerc prison with an enforcer of the Hell's Angels. He had recently been sent back to jail with a

³⁰ DVD (Universal Studios, 2016). *The Jason Bourne Legacy*, published as a DVD in 2012 (Universal Studios) also includes a woman saviour figure. A woman scientist helps the chief protagonist assassin "viral off" the dependence on drugs that he is on to enhance his physical and mental capabilities.

new sentence. The man told me that he had enrolled in a continuing adult education course while in the community. He was trying to graduate from high school and required a few extra credits.

During one of the classes, he got into an altercation with another adult student. As the argument escalated, he pulled a gun from his duffle bag and aimed it at the other student. He was charged with threats to harm and kill another human being.

I asked the man: “How many people do you think were carrying guns in their backpacks on that day in adult education class?” “All of them,” he replied. He felt that the only way to respond to a perceived threat was to threaten the person first.

This gang member’s perception of the world included the fact (sic) that many people were “out to get him.” He lived in a world of the Hell’s Angels gang where guns, violence, threats, and personal safety were every day issues. He himself had killed people on orders by the Hell’s Angels. He transposed this experience of life onto the rest of his encounters with people. This man was paranoid and schizophrenic. He believed that people were a fundamental threat to him. It was necessary to carry a gun to “protect oneself.” People heavily involved in gangs and crime have a conspiracy theory of the world.

Delusional thinking is also present in other cases. I am thinking of the many alcoholics and sex addicts with whom I worked. The alcoholics believed that drinking was a normal part of life. One drank beer at every meal because this was how one belonged, coped, and dealt with life.

Sex addicts believed on the basis of their access to pornography that many women wanted to sleep with them. All the men had to do was show up at a bar. The women would come flocking. These men believed that sexual intercourse was the basis of most relationships. That was what one did on a first date. Sex is what one asked for when a woman flirted with them.

The above groups of men fed on a conspiracy view of the world. Gang members hung out with gang members. Alcoholics hung out with other alcoholics. Sex addicts went to Sexaholics Anonymous meetings because this is where they met other addicts who “may want to hook up.”

10. Response to Saviour Figures and Conspiracy Theories

Each of us has had to decide how to respond to difficult situations. I bailed someone out after they were evicted from their apartment, after they became too inebriated to

drive, after they smashed a window of their apartment, and after they were arrested for drinking and driving. I had to decide in each of these cases whether I was enabling or truly helping the person. Some of the persons that I helped returned to drinking, to gambling, to unhealthy relationships, and to continuing the lifestyle with which they were familiar.

I would do the same thing all over again. I continue to believe in the ability of human beings to recover and get on with their lives. At the same time, I have had to decide when “enough is enough.” I have declined to help the same person again and again. I told the person that I had done everything that I could for them. It was up to them to decide where to go from here. If they wanted live on the street, that was their decision. I stopped projecting my own assumptions about what a fulfilled life was for them. They had a better idea of what was possible, or not.

The trick is to get off the Karpman triangle of self-pity. People did not always appreciate the help that I gave them. I become emotionally involved and care for others without becoming codependent on them. The mystery involves becoming a saviour figure without believing that one is indispensable. The story about a “grand” saviour figure has been told to diffuse and lessen the thoughts that we can become one. We are companions on the journey.

11. Manufactured Innocence

Two final topics are apropos to our discussion of healing, correcting imbalances, and getting on with our lives. Fiction writers in the early twentieth century came up with ideals of childhood that emphasized innocence and trust.³¹ Children were detached from responsibilities in order to enjoy the pleasurable things in life. They played out their fantasies of real life by mimicing adult behaviours.³² Parents bought dolls and dollhouses for their children to play house. The parents bought plastic kitchen sets so that their children could cook and prepare pretend meals. They bought their sons toy cars and tractors so that they could pretend that they were farmers like their Dad.

These writers envisioned a period of childhood that lasted from five to twelve years of age. Children could indulge their fantasies because they were young enough to be shielded from the harsher realities of life. A child was allowed free time to develop into the person that parents wanted their children to become.

³¹ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010); Eleanor Porter, *Pollyanna* (New York, 1912). Note William Leach’s discussion, *Land of Desire* (New York; Vintage Books, 1994), 244-260.

³² William Leach, *Land of Desire*, 330-331.

Frank Baum's children story, *The Wizard of Oz*, represents a quintessential journey of this fairyland existence.³³ Dorothy and her friends travel almost effortlessly along a road that leads to a glorious city. They are told that confidence and courage are all that are needed to overcome obstacles. The Wizard at the end of the road is nothing more than a shaman behind a curtain. He controls levers that are attached to nothing. The Wizard suggests to Dorothy and her friends that all they have to do is reach deep within themselves and access the love, courage, and fortitude that they lack. Self-actualization in a land of plentiful opportunities are what constitute the American dream.

Children story writer Dr. Seuss was a successor to Baum and his fairy tale about Dorothy. Dr. Seuss suggests in his stories about the Cat³⁴ that all the two children need to do to be successful is learn how to control their inner desires. The house is a mess because "Sally and me" have allowed their infantile desires to run wild. Permissiveness has its place in a land of youth and fantasy. There comes a time when "Sally and me" exercise internal authority in order to make everything come out right.

The Cat acts as a trickster in Dr. Seuss stories in the same way that the Wizard of Oz operates as a change agent in the lives of Dorothy and her friends. The cat represents a projection of "Sally and me's" impulsive desires. The cat also represents a way through language and human will to control these infatuations. *The Cat in the Hat* is a moralistic tale set in a modern age that exists without Puritan religious underpinnings. Accessing and engaging one's unconscious desires while bringing them under control are possible through the exercise of internal authority. Neither religion nor parents are needed as external modifying authorities.

Historian William Leach suggests that this Freudian emphasis on infantile desires resulted in the consumer driven society of America.³⁵ Material possessions embody externalizations of inner emotions and flights of fancy. Christmas parades, large toy sections in department stores, and consumerism set the standard of internal fulfillment and happiness. Clothing, household goods, elaborate homes, and cars objectify Dorothy's search for the Emerald City. The monetary ability to buy these objects of desire represent the goal of the American work ethic. The ecstatic pursuit

³³ L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (West India Publishing Company, 2021). Note William Leach's discussion, *Land of Desire*, 56-61, 248-260.

³⁴ Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat* (New York: Random House, 1957), *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* (New York: Random House, 1958).

³⁵ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, pp. 3-38. Cf. Martin Wain's broad philosophical treatise on this subject, *Freud's Answer* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

of these symbols of contentment enable one to forget the pain and suffering needed to produce these goods within assembly lines of monotony and drudgery. The ends of fantasy justify the means of factory labour.

I suggested to the men in prison that they needed to return to a second naivete of innocence and trust in order to regain their lives.³⁶ They had to relive their childhood of wish fulfillment in order to contrast that fantasy with the harsh ways in which they had tried to fulfill their desires. Their impulsive behaviours, immature decisions, and conflicted attitudes resulted in criminal offences which made their lives and other people's lives worse. They needed to return to the core of their being in order to separate needs and wants. They had to restore their lives in order to move on.

12. Impact of Post-Modernity

Contrasting modern ideals with the post-modern reality in which we live illustrates this transformation. The self-sufficiency of a nuclear family -- in which husband, wife, and two children live in a modern bungalow -- represented an ideal middle class existence in the twentieth century. Economic opportunities and the manufacture of convenience made it possible for the husband and wife to live on their own. Separated from their parents, the couple could organize their own lives while raising a manageable number of children. Cars provided mobility. Day care centres and senior citizen homes offered parental relief from care on both ends of the age spectrum. Material goods, vacations, and travel became attainable for a rising middle class.

New economic challenges, increasing divide between rich and poor, impact of racism and extremism, rising divorce rates, new formations of identity and gender relationships, blended families, and an increasing lack of moral and social cohesion make it evident that we are living in a different age from the one described above. Industrial production represented the driving engine of the modern age. Information technology and the service industry dominate the current age. Soft goods in the form of data and news define the new era. Human services for the young, old, and in between have replaced the self-sufficiency of an earlier time. Restaurants have replaced home cooking, transit systems have replaced cars, long term care facilities

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur refers to this experience for adults as a second naiveté, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 131-144. I have linked this naivete to original righteousness and the Catholic Catechism's reflection on a beatific vision in chapters ten and eleven.

have replaced family care, and day care centres have provided relief for parents who want to work.

This generalized outline of societal changes pinpoints the need to redefine ourselves. Modern ideals continue to inform our thinking and actions. Post-modernity has forced us to reimagine the way that we now live. This redefinition was necessary for the men with whom I worked. They owned the losses, defeats, harm, and hurt that they had experienced and inflicted on others in order to move on. They reclaimed the innocence and naivete of their youth in order to know what it was that was now worth living. Recovery and restoration represented a key part of this journey. New visions and ideals replaced the broken ones that they had inflicted on themselves and others.

We live in a different reality from the one in which we were born. We need to reshape modern ideals of success, identity, relationships, and work in order to live a rich and fruitful life.

Chapter Two

Into the Woods to Find Our Identity and Make Up Our Minds

Introduction

The following three chapters analyse various psychological themes, identified above, to show how transformation is possible. Chapter two deals with oedipal complexes, post-modernity, and impulsive behaviours by analysing the play, *Into the Woods*. The third chapter focuses on conflicted personalities portrayed in the movie, *American Beauty*. The fourth chapter analyses the staying power of modern ideals.

1. Oedipal Complexes

James Lapine's play, *Into the Woods*, deals with ways that fairy tale characters are caught up in oedipal complexes.³⁷ Jack can not grow up until his mother has died. Rapunzel is fated with never being able to grow up because of the stringent control of her mother, the Witch. Red Riding Hood can not grow up until her grandmother has replaced her red cloak with a wolf skin coat. Cinderella can not grow up until the tree by her mother's grave has been destroyed. Her discovery of the philandering ways of her charming Prince husband convinces her to seek a more lasting relationship.

The dialogue between Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood at the end of Act II sets the tone for overcoming Oedipal complexes. Little Red Riding Hood is crying because her mother and grandmother are gone. She suggests that they would be very unhappy with her. She is about to help the other fairy tale characters kill a giant.

³⁷ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*. I am referencing the book while being aware of its differences from the movie version, *Into the Woods*, DVD (Walt Disney Studios, 2015).

Cinderella responds by singing the following lines:³⁸

Mother cannot guide you.
Now you're on your own.
Only me beside you.
Still, you're not alone.
No one is alone, truly.
No one is alone.
Sometimes people leave you,
Halfway through the wood.
Others may deceive you.
You decide what's good.
You decide alone.
But no one is alone.

Little Red Riding Hood is not alone because Cinderella is beside her. Cinderella is willing to support Little Red Riding Hood with what ever decisions she makes. At the same time, Little Red Riding Hood has to make these choices on her own. Becoming an adult means letting one's parents and friends influence you while taking the consequences for making a decision on your own.

Jack and Rapunzel go through the same experience of "deciding alone" with only "me beside you." Jack proved his worth by climbing the beanstalk and stealing gold, a hen, and a harp from the giants. He made his mother rich beyond her wildest dreams. Jack helped kill the first giant. His mother continues to treat him like a child. In the middle of the second Act, she exclaims:³⁹

You're still a little boy in your mother's eyes.
I want you to promise, Promise (not to leave your surroundings).

She is afraid of what the second giant will do to him.

A similar fate awaits Rapunzel. She runs hysterically off into the sunset with her two children when her mother tells her to "stay here." She cannot handle the power that her mother has over her. The Witch bemoans Rapunzel's subsequent death under the feet of the giant:⁴⁰

³⁸ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 128-129.

³⁹ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 92.

⁴⁰ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 105-106.

Couldn't you listen? Couldn't you stay content, safe behind walls, as I could not? . . . No matter what you say, children won't listen, No matter what you know, children refuse to learn (You will only lose them in the end).

Rapunzel could not transfer her affections to the Prince so that she would be rid of her mother's voice for ever.⁴¹

Red Riding Hood's destiny is more fortuitous. The Baker's rescue of her and her grandmother from the stomach of the wolf has the desired effect. Red Riding Hood learns how to fend for herself and become a woman. She appears with a knife as well as a wolf-skin cloak. She brandishes the weapon when Jack comes upon her at the end of Act I.⁴² She calls his bluff by daring Jack to climb back up the beanstalk to retrieve the harp about which he gloats. A possible budding love interest between these two adolescent teenagers is left to the imagination.

Then there is Cinderella. She dillies and dailies because she cannot make up her mind about why she wants to go to the Ball. She wants to go because her step-mother and step-sisters are going. She wants to go because it sounds so exciting to meet a Prince. She wants to get away from her drudgery.

None of these factors is enough to convince her that the Prince will fulfill her desires. The audacity of a poverty-stricken girl to wish after royalty is delusional thinking. Cinderella decides while dithering that she will put the shoe on the other foot. The prince will have to decide if she is really worth it. She leaves her slipper as a tempting clue.⁴³

Cinderella is not happy in spite of her subsequent marriage to the Prince and dream fulfillment of living in a castle. She sends her Prince husband off to look for the second giant. She goes back into the woods to find the missing pieces of her life. Cinderella discovers that her Prince Charming is a philanderer, not only with the Baker's wife, but with Sleeping Beauty and Snow White as well. She also finds out that the Baker needs someone to look after his son.

Growing up can be defined as that which you become after that-which-you-became comes undone. Cinderella rejects the reconciling advances of her husband Prince because of his inability to grow up. She becomes a mother figure to Red Riding Hood. She becomes a willing compatriot -- significant other -- of the Baker because

⁴¹ Rapunzel's prince pulls her away from her mother in Act I, James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 73.

⁴² James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 61-62.

⁴³ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 64.

he needs someone to take care of himself, his son, and his house. Cinderella realises that she is indeed a cleaning woman, albeit reborn.

One of the main characters of the play, the Baker, is an ambiguous figure. He dithers, unable to make decisions. The Baker's father appears in shadowy form as an omnipresence. The Witch's curse of his wife's barrenness was the result of his father's past actions. The Baker reforms his ways by searching in the forest for four items to reverse the curse. He tells his wife to stay home in order to protect her. He brushes off "vague suggestions" by his father figure.

The Baker finds it difficult to fulfill tasks on his own. He and his wife argue until they realise that doing things together is better. They learn adaptability through their adventure in the woods. Their mutual objective of removing the curse can be fulfilled through greater respect, patience, and affirmation of each other.⁴⁴ The husband and wife reverse the curse by feeding the four items to the cow. The wife gives birth to a son. They live happily together as bakers and parents.

This newfound focus and confidence by both parties do not last long. The Baker remains unsure of himself as a parent. The baby cries when he holds it. His wife falls to her death after a tryst with Cinderella's Prince. Faced with the sudden death of his wife and task of defeating the second giant, the Baker runs away. He tells himself that avoiding responsibility is better than facing it.

Baker's subsequent dialogue with his Dad's shadowy appearance reveals the oedipal nature of this insecurity. His father ran away from his guilt of having brought on the curse. He became the Mysterious Man because of his need to be invisible. The Baker is doing the same thing. He runs away from grief at his wife's death and insecurity at having to be responsible.⁴⁵

The Baker comes to his senses in spite of it all. He returns to Jack, Red Riding Hood, and Cinderella as much to be with his son as to help them out. They decide together on a plan to defeat the giant. The play ends with the five of them becoming a family that support each other and live together in the Baker's home. A love interest between the Baker and Cinderella, and between Red Riding Hood and Jack, is left to the imagination.

⁴⁴ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 54-55.

⁴⁵ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 123-125.

2. Post-Modern Nature of the Tale

The characters overcome their oedipal complexes and become independent of their parents in a post-modern way.⁴⁶ The easiest way to explain the transition from modernity to post-modernity is to take the example of Cinderella. In the first Act, she fulfilled her dream of marrying the Prince and living in a castle. She believed that this was about as much as life had to offer.

Cinderella becomes disenchanted in the second Act. She finds out that her husband Prince is not faithful to her. Her mother's magic tree that took her to the Ball is destroyed. Cinderella re-embraces a negative aspect of her past life as a cleaning lady to become family and community to the Baker, Red Riding Hood, and Jack. Her negative experiences galvanize Cinderella into reinventing and reaffirming aspects of herself. This journey represents the death of a modern fantasy in favour of a thoroughgoing mundane and contented post-modern existence.

This is how commentator Robert McLaughlin describes the process:⁴⁷

. . . at the same time the characters are moving narratively forward in pursuit of their wishes, many of them are motivated by a contrary desire to move narratively backward so as to repair their damaged, fractured families, and reclaim their prefragmented, presocialized, pre-adulthood selves, selves that are marked by a peaceful, contented, holistic unit. The unity here is connected not just to an infant's relationship with the mother but is also a complex family unit: mother, father, child, and home.

A similar transformation happens to other characters. Jack becomes more manly after the death of his mother. He comes up with a plan to kill the giant. He wants to kill the Steward for killing his mother. The Baker affirms the need for the Steward to be punished while suggesting to Jack that killing is wrong. The fact that Jack listens – and evidently obeys -- the Baker represents a more mature attitude on his

⁴⁶ Olaf Jubin explains the post-modern nature of the tale in relation to death of the Narrator half-way through Act II. The Narrator pleads with the characters that he is the only one as an objective observer who knows “the proper ending of the story.” The Witch pushes him into the path of the Giant anyway. According to Jubin, the death of the narrator makes the “disorientation and confusion of the characters become *our* confusion,” making their moral decisions “easier to relate to and easier to evaluate,” Olaf Jubin, *Sondheim and Lapine's Into the Woods* (London: Routledge, 2018), 36. Act I represents a modern tale in which characters live happily ever after because they have fulfilled their deepest desires. Act II represents post-modernity. The unexpected malaise of a routinized existence of contentment furnishes the wherewithal for characters to enter the woods again, to see what they can see. Some are reborn while others die in the liminal state of being in the woods.

⁴⁷ Robert McLaughlin, *Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 171.

part to adult authority figures. Jack has progressed from an infantile oedipal relationship with his mother to internalizing values of authority and justice.

Red Riding Hood fulfills her post-modern destiny when Cinderella comforts her upon the death of her grandmother. Cinderella acknowledges that Red Riding Hood is “now alone” and that she will have to “decide alone.” She also tells Red Riding Hood that she will be making these decisions with Cinderella “beside her.”⁴⁸

Not “being alone” does not mean that everyone is in this together. Red Riding Hood knows what it was like to have been raped and eaten by a wolf. There is a reason why she carries a knife at her side. While sharing grief with Cinderella, Red Riding Hood alone experiences despair and loneliness at being abandoned. Post-modernity means living bravely in an imperfect world, where bad things happen to us. We have to come to terms with them in the solitude of our existence.

The Baker’s grief over the death of his wife galvanizes him into responsibility after a brief bout of self-pity and avoidance. He realises that there is no one else who can defeat the giant. The Baker is the oldest member of the group. As a recent widower and father who loves his son, the Baker inspires other members to come up with a plan to defeat the giant. Cinderella calls on the birds to help them. The Baker spreads pitch on the ground to get the giant’s feet stuck. Jack comes up with the idea of climbing a tree and hitting the giant with a club.

After the giant has been defeated, the Baker accepts his compatriots’ help in spite of himself. His house is in shambles. Comradery in the face of danger, companionship in the face of loneliness, and parenting in the face of death represent the post-modern nature of this tale. A blended family of solidarity has replaced the biological logic of filial love.

3. Taking Responsibility for One’s Actions

Neither an oedipal complex nor post-modernity adequately explain how reclamation of identity and purpose are actualized. What gives these fairy tale characters the capacity, willpower, and willingness to embrace common companionship with strangers when so much has gone wrong? The Baker suggests to Jack that he will have to “take care of himself” now that his mother has died.⁴⁹ How is this act of adulthood achieved in relation to the difficulties encountered?

⁴⁸ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 128-132.

⁴⁹ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 134.

One answer comes when everyone is blaming each other for the arrival of the second giant.⁵⁰ The difficulty of accepting responsibility for times when we are less than good is shown in plain view. I was struck by this extended deflection on the part of all the characters. I have worked with inmates who are masters at playing the blame game. I repeatedly tell them: “Spread the blame as widely as possible so you have to take less responsibility for your part.”

The characters do an admirable job of tracing the source of the problem to the person next to them. The blame goes from Jack who planted the beans to the Baker who gave them to him. Blame is shifted to the Witch who cursed the house and to the Baker’s father who stole the beans. Fingers are pointed at the Baker’s wife who pocketed an extra bean and to Cinderella who threw the bean away. Each person finds a way of linking the arrival of the second giant to their neighbour.

The characters circle the wagons of blame. Blame is brought back to Jack and his mother, to Red Riding Hood, and finally to the Witch who planted the beans. The Witch stops the deflections by taking responsibility.⁵¹ She speaks about an apocalypse that could take place as a result of what happened. She returns to a state of ugliness as punishment for having lost the beans. The Witch disappears in a swirl of magic. Is it any wonder that no one wants to take the blame? There are consequences for erring on the side of wrong and evil.

Some characters admit responsibility after the Witch has disappeared. Jack replies that he should not have “stolen from the giant.” Red Riding Hood says that she should not have “strayed from the path.” Cinderella says that she should not have “attended the Ball.” These characters are willing to take responsibility for their part in the catastrophe that has occurred.⁵²

A second dimension of “no-one being alone” becomes evident. The offenders with whom I worked were unable to take other people’s feelings into account when they committed their crimes. The offenders had to suspend empathy in order to offend against their victims. They considered themselves to be the only ones that mattered in this situation.

Some inmates owned up to the fact that their actions had caused a ripple effect of hurt. This regret represented a beginning for inmates to understand the amount of harm and grief they had caused. The physical, social, and moral consequences of

⁵⁰ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 114-122.

⁵¹ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 120-122.

⁵² James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 122.

these men's offences against other people are what James Lapine is communicating in his statement that "no-one is alone." Everyone affects everyone else.

4. Consequences of Impulsive Behaviours

A second dynamic at play in taking responsibility has to do with losses that occur as a result of impulsive behaviours. The woods represent a place where anything can happen. Innocence is lost in the case of Red Riding Hood. Rapunzel and Cinderella meet and marry their true loves. Jack and his mother become exceedingly rich. The Witch is turned into a woman of beauty because of her willingness to reverse the curse. The Baker and his wife are able to have a child.

The Baker's wife shows what can happen when one moves from the wish fulfillment of one's modern dreams to something else. After a happy marriage to the Baker, removal of the curse of barrenness, and birth of her son, the Baker's wife decides to go back into the woods.

She becomes obsessed with Cinderella's fairy tale of infatuation and love. She asks Cinderella what going to the Ball and marrying a Prince was like. The Baker's wife meets Cinderella's Prince in an isolated spot in the woods. She shows an interest. The Prince interprets her interest as desire. They make love even as the Baker's wife remains confused about whose story she is in and which identity she has retained.⁵³

The affair reveals the dynamics between pleasurable moments of infatuation and modern ideals of family life. After the incident, the Baker's wife exclaims:⁵⁴

Oh, if life were made of moments,
Even now and then a bad one --!
But if life were only moments,
Then you'd never know you had one.

Life is made up of continuity of identity as well as momentary flights of fancy. Continuity of identity refers to the fact that the wife still loves her husband. Marrying her husband set boundaries for her life.

She nevertheless has an affair with the Prince because of her search for something more. The Baker's wife went into the woods a second time because she was not content being a wife and mother. She was willing to seek momentary satisfaction knowing that this might lead to an *either/or* situation.

⁵³ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 109.

⁵⁴ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 112-113.

Either/or means that life is made up of *either* moments *or* a continuous existence. Living in the moment means that that moment becomes more important than anything else. I can speak to this existential reality in my work with offenders. They reduced their lives to the one moment when they killed their wives, raped a young girl, sold drugs for money, became enforcers in a gang, or robbed a bank. The Baker's wife's identity as spouse, mother, businesswoman, and care giver are disassembled at the moment of the affair.

Offenders have one criminal act to remember in the face of their disassembling selves. Impulsivity, premeditation, unconscious desires, revenge, momentary pleasure, and obsession reduced the once respectable husband, businessman, father, and community leader to nothing but the deed done. The Baker's wife's epitaph of "never knowing you had a moment" comes true.

There are no moments to remember if there is nothing left of one's continuous existence called normality and self-identity into which to place that moment. It was only a moment, and a moment is all it will ever be . . . except for the hurt that victims and society continue to experience – and the punishment inflicted on that continuous existence and self-identity called an offender who committed the crime in a momentary display of rage and subconscious revenge.

The accidental death of the Baker's wife⁵⁵ after her affair completes the losses that the four characters left on stage experience: Jack with the death of his mother; Cinderella with the destruction of the tree by her mother's grave and her husband's infidelity; Red Riding Hood with the death of her mother and grandmother; and the Baker with the death of his wife as well as his father, the Mysterious Man.

The four remaining characters are brought together as much by grief as by mutual need and cooperation. The common cause of fighting the giant is what sparked the initial community affair. What keeps the story going is the fact that these people are grieving the loss of loved ones.

The consequences of grief become abundantly clear in Cinderella's talk with Red Riding Hood. Cinderella exclaims that she will always be "beside" Red Riding Hood. Cinderella cannot, however, make the hard choices of life on her behalf. "Now you're on your own . . . you decide what's good, you decide alone."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Some commentators have suggested that the Baker's wife's death is too high a price to pay for "such a small indiscretion," Olaf Jubin, *Sondheim and Lapine's Into the Woods*, 40-41. Although convenient, the Baker's wife's death accentuates the loss of identity that she experiences as well as the grief that the Baker experiences.

⁵⁶ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 128-130.

The same scenario is repeated with the Baker and Jack. The Baker consoles Jack after the death of his mother. He cautions Jack regarding the Steward's punishment. The song sung as a communal response by the four remaining characters includes these lines:⁵⁷

Someone is on your side.
Our side.
Our side –
Someone is not
While we're seeing our side.
Our side --
Our side . . .
Our side –
Maybe we forgot;
They are not alone.
No one is alone.

Not being alone is brought home on the last page of the musical. Cinderella becomes Red Riding Hood's surrogate mother. The Baker becomes Jack's surrogate father. Both children welcome the care and affection of their substitute parents while becoming adults. Cinderella can learn to be a mother. The Baker can learn to be a father to his (their) son. It is a new role for both of them.

The post-modern ending has as much to do with self-identity and the dangers of disassembling moments as with reconfiguration of modern ideals. Re-conception is necessary in the face of losses, death, grief, and negative experiences. Assurance that self-identity will survive and flourish is not a given.

Neither the Witch nor Rapunzel, neither the Baker's wife nor Jack's mother, neither the two Giants nor the Narrator survive their experiences in the woods. I have met many people like these characters. Some of the men that I have worked with have survived – or not.

The play, *Into the Woods*, offers opportunities of modern success reconceived as acceptance of loss and reconfigured familial loyalties. Post-modernity flourishes in the midst of muted ideals, communal fellowship, and a growing self-identity.

⁵⁷ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, 131-132.

Chapter Three

American Beauty of Conflicted Personalities

Conflicted Personalities

The movie, *American Beauty*,⁵⁸ portrays a series of characters who are struggling with life while exhibiting dysfunctional behaviours. 40-year-old Lester Burnham fantasizes about sleeping with a teenage girl named Angela. Lester's wife, Carolyn, is searching for love and fame wherever she can find it. She is attracted to her real estate idol and mentor, Buddy Kane. Daughter Jane's spoken wish to her boyfriend, Ricki, is that someone should get rid of her geeky Dad.

Then there is Ricki, the next door neighbour who sells drugs and voyeuristically videos various family scenes. Ricki's Dad, US Army Colonel Frank Fitz, collects Nazi paraphernalia and is a repressed homosexual. Angela, in turn, is a beautiful, high school cheerleader star who seems to have only one friend, Jane.

All of these characters are deeply conflicted. Husband Lester fanaticizes about young Angela because he and Carolyn have not had sex for years. He hates his job and does not know how to relate to his daughter, Jane.

Spouse Carolyn is deeply conflicted because she does not know how to live up to her dream of success represented by her alter-ego, Buddy Kane. She sees her life as a failure, including her non-relationship with her husband and daughter.

Daughter Jane is emotionally and socially estranged from her parents. She is emotionally dependent on her friend, Angela, whom she sees as the "perfect girl."

Ricki's father, Frank Fitz, sent Ricki to a mental hospital when he was sixteen because Ricki beat up a fellow classmate at school and severely injured him. Ricki

⁵⁸ *American Beauty*, DVD, director Sam Mendes (Warner Brothers, 2013).

mimics his Dad's military attitudes in order not to get into trouble while selling drugs and videoing scenes of life.

Frank Fitz, in turn, is a repressed homosexual who vilifies the gay couple living next door. He has no way of getting in touch with his own sexual identity.

Then there is cheerleader Angela, who pretends that she has slept with many boys. She flirts with Jane's father Lester because she does not know who else to turn to for attention.

These dysfunctional behaviours are evident in prison. The difference between the above characters and the men that I worked with is that the offenders did not only fantasize about killing their parents. The sex offender did not only watch pornography or take suggestive videos. Others did not only have insecurities and confusion regarding their sexual identity. All of them took their deep-seated frustrations and fantasies of others by taking their lives.

Then there were the drug dealers and drug users. They found ways of medicating themselves through life, either by making a lot of money or using the product themselves. Gang violence was an integral part of what it meant to enforce the rules and regulations of one's trade. The movie's depiction of each of the above scenarios was very real for me.

The question I asked throughout the movie was whether the characters depicted were able to resolve what I am calling their conflicted personalities.⁵⁹ This is a real existential question for me. Many of the men that I worked with were faced with similar situations. All of them made bad decisions, involving serious harm.

Events get worse as the movie goes along. I was surprised upon a second viewing at the manner in which most characters were able to come to some resolution of their situation.

Upon realising the futility of his life, husband Lester quit his seventeen-year career as a reporter. He took the lowest paying, least responsible job that he could find -- a fast-food jockey. He started lifting weights in his garage. He began to be honest about his anger toward his wife, even in front of their own daughter.

Spouse Carolyn found out how much love and acceptance she needed when she jumped into bed with Buddy Kane. She started shooting guns at the firing range.

⁵⁹ I deal with some of these issues in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 91-100.

Guns throughout the movie represent latent violence lurking below the surface. The pathos of the situation is revealed when Carolyn leaves Buddy for “appearance” purposes. She drives home with a pistol in her purse. She repeats over and over again on the way home that she will not let herself become a victim. Upon entering the house, she throws her purse into a closet. She clings to her husband’s clothing hanging there.

Daughter Jane finds reprieve from her alienated existence by associating with another person who is other. Jane and Ricki fall in love because there are so few people who are like them. The relationship begins when Jane takes Ricki’s hand in a show of solidarity and trust. Jane transfers the negative energy that she exhibits toward her parents by confiding in Ricki that she hates her Dad and Mom.

Transformation for teenage son Ricki occurs when he videos a person in the context of a relationship, Jane. The seductive power of voyeurism’s virtual reality is diffused and becomes real when Jane and Ricki are able to video each other.

Cheerleader Angela becomes real when she acts on her need to have sex by inviting husband Lester to sleep with her. She recognizes her need to be a star, beyond ordinary. She wants to feel great about herself. She turns to Lester as a substitute father figure because she does not know how to act on her sexual desires.

Angela admits to Lester in the context of being undressed that she has never had sex before. Lester realises in that moment that he can become a responsible father to this young vulnerable girl. He is reminded of his own daughter. He remembers the love that he had for his wife when they first met. Lester realises the supreme selfishness and inappropriateness of his own desires.

The second climax occurs when Frank Fitz shoots Lester in the back of the head. Hours before, Frank showed his vulnerability by kissing Lester in the garage where Lester was lifting weights. In a perverse twist of logic, Frank believed Lester was available because Frank’s son Ricki told him that they had had oral sex together. Unable to live with the reality of what he had just done -- “come on” to Lester -- Frank killed Lester in order to erase this memory and knowledge.

I identified with the emotional turmoil of Frank Fitz. The similarity between his actions and offenders’ crimes was palpable. Like Ricki’s father, offenders were unable to resolve their conflicted personalities. They acted out violently to let everyone know that they could not live with themselves. They could not live with the other person with whom they were so upset. In all of these cases, guns were

meant to kill, destroy, and annihilate. Some modicums of solace, peace, security, and reconciliation are necessary in order to guns to be used in a responsible manner.

The latent violence that guns represent points to their great potential for evil. Jane tells Ricki that someone should get rid of her father. After Ricki agrees to kill Lester, Jane says that she was only joking. The same thing happens when Carolyn goes to shooting ranges with Buddy. Guns represent the anger and victimization that she feels regarding Lester. She drives home with a gun in her purse. Upon entering the house, she realises that her anger has to do with what she has lost in life. She throws her purse with the gun in it into a closet.

Guns and the violence they represent are the reasons why so many offenders come to jail. Drug dealers tell me that selling drugs is not a violent crime. They were simply supplying customers with what they needed.

My reply has always been the same. What did they do when their customers could not pay? Did the dealers call the police in order to have their debt paid? A level of violence is implied in illegal actions of any kind. People take the “law into their own hands” because they want to live “above the law.”

The ending of the movie touched me in a profound way. Ricki and Jane go to live together on their own. Carolyn realises what she had lost. Lester becomes somewhat responsible. Angela gets in touch with who she really is. These scenes represented redeeming moments.

The violence that occurred when no resolution of conflicted personalities was possible also affected me. Frank Fitz was unable to live with his own identity and so he killed someone else. How sad and ironic.

The only normal and content people portrayed in the movie are a gay couple living next door. They bring a bouquet of flowers to Fitz and Ricki as a sign of welcome. They represent the new post-modern family. Again, how ironic.

The question of Being is raised when Ricki and Jane watch a video of a plastic bag floating in the air for several minutes. The state of being at rest -- implied and portrayed in this viewing -- represents what Ricki, and the movie producer, consider *the beauty of America*. The question I had to ask myself is this: Is it enough?

Chapter Four

Eaton's Department Store as an Ethic of Desire

Introduction

We as a family would travel every Christmas from southern Manitoba to the window display at the south-east corner of the Eaton's Department Store in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba (Figure 1). Snow was on the ground, winter was in the air, and people were crowded around the large window that housed a display of Santa's workshop. Warm in our parkas, we were eager with anticipation as we lined up to see (Figure 2). Children and elves were scurrying about inside, packing Christmas presents for Santa to bring us (Figure 3).

Figure 1: South-East Corner Window of Eaton's Store in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Figure 2: Lining up to See



Figure 3: Example of Christmas display



An enticing aspect of the display had to do with the Eaton's Department Store inviting us inside. Glass display windows surrounded the whole store on the main floor. High ceilings inside accentuated space. Escalators took customers to every one of the eight floors (Figure 4). A restaurant called the Grill Room was situated on the fifth floor (Figure 14).

We were mesmerized by these features. We would ride the escalators up and down -- again and again. We would get lost from our parents' care. We were astonished at the sheer amount of goods being sold. We would wander from one aisle to another, wondering what we would find next.

Figure 4: Eight Floors of the Eaton's Store in Winnipeg



The Eaton's Store represents a capsule of desire. It contains all the things a family needs. It forms a hierarchy of values that leads its customers on a series of steps. These stages proceed from desire to intimacy, from intimacy to love, from love to commitment, from commitment to marriage, from marriage to a house, and from a house to a home. Children represent consummation of desire as well as a progenic future.

The Eaton's Store encapsulates all of these things in an analogical and structural manner. Historian William Leach has shown in his book, *Land of Desire*,⁶⁰ how nineteenth-century commercialism became so successful. Mind cure, imagination,

⁶⁰ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, 244-260.

happiness, dreams, and fairy tales fomented desire through enticing department store displays.

I. Eaton's Store as a Hierarchy of Values

The best way of showing how the Eaton's Store entices customers into its hierarchy of values is to take the reader on a journey. We begin on the ground floor, where everyone starts as they meander their way to success and happiness. Most of the items on this floor are portable, easily accessible, and represent impulsive purchases (Figure 5). What person does not yearn to check out the jewelry, cosmetics, wallets, umbrellas, hats, lingerie, flowers, shoes, souvenirs, gloves, silverware, watches, and other "notions" that tickle one's fancy?

Figure 5: Detailed Description of Items on First Floor⁶¹



The main floor entices the imagination. We have entered the store with a subconscious urge to buy something. The store provides plenty of opportunity. The small portable items are just the right thing to buy for oneself or for one's friend. A hat or wallet is needed to complete one's wardrobe. A gift card allows one's girlfriend to visit the cosmetics department, check out the handbags, and linger at the glass jewelry display. Who knows, maybe some earrings or even a ring is going to be a present soon for someone special?

Inviting glass windows with their displays surround the store, The large double oak doors provide ready ground floor access. The many portable items within easy reach

⁶¹ Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston: History Press, 2014), 410.

stir the desires of the heart. Manufacturing desire is indeed a truism. Who would have thought one needed a new wallet until it was right in front of you, waiting to be picked up? Who came up with the idea of buying flowers every time you visited a friend's house? Then there are the more intimate items on display, such as lingerie and fashion accessories. The sheer availability of these items gets the imagination going.

These examples are illustrative of what takes place at any party of single peers. The women are looking their best, flashing glances at the men. The men are taking in the possibility of getting to know someone new, wondering how they are going to introduce themselves. The stage has been set for fulfilling interactions between the sexes. Each exchange, suggestive gesture, and animated conversation give the parties concerned the idea that the other person is available -- or at least, looking. Why invite all of these young adults to a party if not for the purpose of having these individuals take the interaction further?

Figure 6: Alluring Displays in the Large Store Windows



The buying of merchandise such as a skirt fulfills a desire for consumption and ownership. Why dress up if not to attract someone else? Why flash one's jewelry if not to show off the fact that one might have money? Why look handsome and dashing if not to give the impression that one has a successful career to sustain this lifestyle?

Desire for consumption and attraction to another person are alluring because of the fleeting, momentary, and transient nature of the purchases and encounters. Tomorrow, the flowers will fade. The souvenirs will look cheap. The makeup has been overdone. The jewelry is unaffordable.

Tomorrow, one will have regrets about the one night stand. The suggestion that one was actually interested was misconstrued. The idea that one had a successful business was slightly inflated. The notion that one was available was not true.

These momentary flings and exciting encounters give us immediate, gratifying pleasures. The play of our imagination gives us great satisfaction. We have let our mind wander far beyond what was intended. We believed the suggestion that the person left with us. They gave us the idea that all things are possible.

These flights of fancy are fundamental to the yearnings of the heart. We all believe that love and happiness are possible. This longing is especially true if we are not experiencing contentment at the present. The hungrier we are for love, the more impulse buying we do. Human and material goods are there to satisfy the emptiness of our souls.

We believe the innuendoes of the store merchandise -- that we are worthy and deserving of love. We believe the love that others tell us that they have for us -- in the form of flowers, a card, a glance, or a suggestion. We have not yet come to love ourselves. We fill the void by grabbing onto as much as we can grasp.

Grief counsellors John James and Russel Friedman have suggested that these “short term energy relieving behaviours” are precisely what are needed to gratify the soul.⁶² Going to movies, shopping, using drugs, having sex, gambling, accessing pornography, or buying things at convenience stores represent STERBs. These activities foster the idea that many things in life are immediately available for gratification.

Easily accessible items in the Department Store gave us this idea. Consumerism is alive and well precisely because we need so much of it. The sheer amount of merchandise on the first floor leads to flights of fancy. So do the fleeting parties that we attend. We long for a connection that is more than momentary. Satisfaction is so hard to come by. Why not indulge in what is available to see whether it is enough?

⁶² John James and Russel Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, 82.

Harville Hendrix, in his book on relationships, *Getting the Love You Want*,⁶³ accentuates the importance of impulsivity in finding love. You feel five minutes of exhilaration when you meet someone who understands you only too well. These brief moments represent a falling in love that may last a lifetime.

Sociologist Malcolm Gladwell defines intuition as “the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under stress.”⁶⁴

This statement illustrates the connection between impulse buying and the desires one has when one “falls in love.” Buying things on the first floor of Eaton’s Department Store is like the beginning of a relationship. Let us follow these bread crumbs to see where they will lead.

II. From Enticement to Love

The second floor always scared me as a young man. I arrived via escalator. Endless rows of women’s dresses, skirts, coats, blouses, lingerie, shoes, and accessories surrounded me. I fled the scene, finding my way to the third and fourth floors.

The fourth floor was just as scary. It added more of the same as the second floor. Bridal gowns, prom dresses, fur coats, bathrobes, bras and panties, hairdressers, and beauty salons were there for the asking (Figure 7).

My anxiety reminded me of an incident that occurred shortly after I graduated from Bible College. I went to visit a girl friend of mine. I had worked together with her during the summers in between studies on a farm in southern Manitoba. We knew each other casually. We had not seen each other for a while. We liked the camaraderie of each other’s company.

On the evening in question, the young woman appeared for my visit at her home in a dress. I was nonplussed. I had never seen her in a dress before. We had always worked in overalls and jeans. We had dressed casually on various social occasions.

I realised that something was going on. Her wearing of a dress meant that she considered this a more formal occasion. She was sending a nonverbal message about what she understood as possible reasons for my visit. I was not prepared to meet whatever expectations she may have had.

⁶³ 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1988, 2008).

⁶⁴ Malcom Gladwell, *Blink*, 16.

I fled the scene as soon as I could. Even though I was an adult, I was quite immature about relationships. I did not realise the message that I may have been sending.

Figure 7: Items on the Second and Fourth Floors⁶⁵

Second Floor

Fashion Fabrics 233 • Creative Stitchery 224 • Sewing Machines • Flame and Flower 208 • Popular Price Sleepwear 209 • Popular Price Loungewear 209 • Popular Price Lingerie 209, 509 • Body Fashions 609 • Slipper Bar 238 • Women's Shoes 238 • Popular Price Dresses 345 • Popular Price Sportswear 545 • Popular Price Coats 445 • Shoe Repair • Custom Gift Wrapping

Fourth Floor

The Colony 744, 246 • Colony Dresses 341 • Young Sophisticates 341 • Mayfair Place 444 • Women's Place 446, 546 • Shoe Salon • Millinery 264 • Wigs 304 • Fur Salon 248 • Bridal Shop • Lingerie 609 • At Home • Loungewear 609 • Foundation Garments 609 • Beauty Salon • Fourth Gear 640 • Attitude 646 • No. 1 Shop 442 • Coats and Suits • The Weather Vane • Like Young Shop 611 • Mayfair Place 444 • Beauty Salon • The Trimmers • Junior Dresses 241

The second and fourth floors at Eaton's represented a world utterly foreign to me. The merchandise displayed was attractive. Like the visit with my friend, however, it was also quite intimidating. Women's shops generally outnumber men's stores. Eaton's mimicked this trend by having two whole floors dedicated to women's fashions.

In contrast, men's clothing was relegated to twenty per cent of the space on the first floor (Figure 5). Men are lazier about buying clothing for their wardrobe. They need it readily at hand in order to give it some attention. Two dedicated floors of women's fashions, on the other hand, showed me that dressing up is serious business for women.

The difference that a dress made for me was revealed in glaring detail when my girl friend showed up in a dress for our evening encounter. I interpreted the message she was sending me in this way: "We have flirted long enough. We have become friends. We like each other. You recently graduated from college. You are ready to get down to business. The attraction I feel for you could easily turn into love. I am ready to take the next step in our relationship. Are you?"

⁶⁵ Bruce Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store*, 411.

See what happens when one gets on the escalator and discovers two floors of women's fashions? The friendship that this woman and I had developed was interpreted as something that could become more. The dress gave a clear non-verbal sign that she was ready for a more serious relationship. I realised quite quickly that I was not ready.

Figure 8: Window Display of Women's Dresses



I (literally) descended quickly back to the first floor. I was much more familiar with innuendo, flirtation, friendship, and impulse buying. The seriousness of women's fashions had not yet made its impression on me. In case of doubt, there was a bridal shop on the fourth floor.

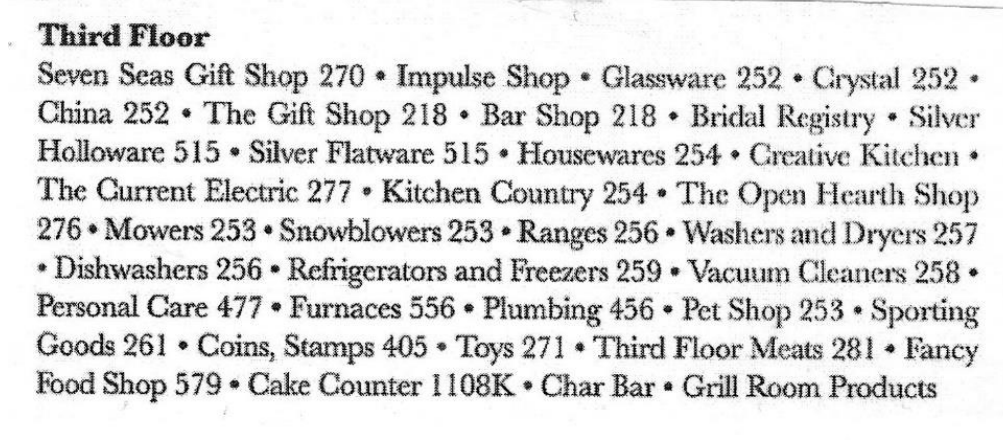
III. Reality Check

The third floor should be enough of a reality check for any male college graduate. Culinary items, kitchen appliances, washing machines and dryers, vacuum cleaners, and home maintenance equipment -- along with sporting goods and toys -- occupy the space. Given the friendship experience described above, I may want to linger as a single man among the sporting goods and toys for some time to come -- shall we say ten years or so?

The other items denote a similar type of reality check. Lawn mowers, snowblowers, hedge clippers, and furnaces give one the idea that owning a house may be preferable

to renting. One can only accumulate so many culinary items before one needs a bigger kitchen to put them in. One can move couches and beds and tables and chairs only so many times before one wants to opt for a more permanent arrangement.

Figure 9: Items on The Third Floor



The third floor leaves the impression that something more solid is available to meet one's housing needs. I may continue to engage in sports for some time to come. I may find bikes and exercise equipment enjoyable to use. I may use these pursuits to avoid thinking about relationships and more permanent arrangements. I may be content to rent and move to different apartments for some time to come.

The third floor brings the idea of home ownership into full view. While remaining a bachelor, I may continue to visit the third floor to furnish the new house I have purchased. The size of the space afforded by a house begs the question of companionship. None of the items described on the third floor encompass the richness of relationships indicated as possible by the second and fourth floors. The steps from intimacy to love and commitment implied on these floors, regardless of gender issues, can be applied to any type of relationship. Changing fashions and dividing divisions of labour differently can just as easily be adjusted.

The second, third, and fourth floors point to a reality not evident on the first floor. I may wear a handsome tuxedo to the prom. I may really be a pauper living out of the back of my truck. I appear loving and charming and interested. The truth of the matter may be that I am unable to give of myself to others. I may be so self-absorbed that I have little time for anyone else.

These other realities -- masked from view by presentation -- are warning indicators. Not all is as it seems when one remains on the first floor. The alluring trinkets and

momentary pleasures give the impression that there is more to come, more to experience, more to achieve, more to gain. None of these expectations or imaginary flights of fancy may be real.

The second, third, and fourth floors reveal a place where fiction and reality, fantasy and enjoyment, attraction and commitment come together. We can stay on the fiction, fantasy, and attraction side of the equation. Or we can think about what real relationships mean – and imply.

Every person can name a time when a relationship went from the first to the second and fourth floors -- from attraction to love and commitment. One can also name reality checks that appeared along the way, causing relationships to go sideways. The third floor represents a hiatus to what is possible and satisfactory – in relationships as well as in material possessions.

I have offered relationship courses during my chaplaincy career in prison. Inmates discovered the jarring reality that their partner, spouse, lover, and confidante were fundamentally different from what they had assumed. Their impressions were based on the initial, first floor experiences of infatuation, intimacy, immediacy, and pleasure. Expectations and demands of commitment were not yet real.

Harville Hendrix has written a book about relationships for couples who are on the verge of breaking up.⁶⁶ He believes that the love experienced in the first five minutes of infatuation can, in fact, last a life time. Couples jarred from their illusory perches when visiting the second, third, and fourth floors need to descend once again to the impulsive pleasures experienced on the first floor. What was it about the fleeting glance of fancy, endearing smile, and inviting stance that meant so much in the first place? Can one be attracted to the same person for the same reasons ten and twenty and thirty years after the initial encounter?

The Eaton's Department Store encapsulates all of the things necessary for living. The eight-floor displays represent an organic whole that is alluring precisely because of its non-existence in reality. Many of the Eaton's stores have been torn down. The ever expanding ranch-style malls that feature ground level access to everything has put hierarchy into question. The Eaton's store is an organic metaphor that speaks about belonging to something that is larger than life. It is about finding one's niche within family dynamics, institutional realities, and webs of meaning.

⁶⁶ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*.

Structural analysis of the store reveals dynamics of attraction, consumption, and intimate relationships. The displays provide visual ways of conceptualizing the nature, progression, and destiny of love. The physical accoutrements of the cosmetic department speak about why anyone would adorn themselves in that way in the first place. What are these accessories but entrapments of love? Where do these entrapments lead but to the purchase of washing machines, fridges, ranges, and dryers?

Figure 9: Entrapment of Love through Fantasy



IV. From Love and Commitment to Babies and Families

The fifth floor represents the store's organic centre. Children are most protected here, in the womb of all beginnings. Couples who arrive as lovers and significant others, husbands and wives, leave as parents. The fifth floor is far away from the lure of relationship beginnings. Infant apparel and children's accessories have been placed here because so many people are not ready for this next step. Ascending the escalator from the fourth to fifth floors has everything to do with the nine months of pregnancy necessary to become prepared to care for a baby. There are, of course, many couples who cannot have any of their own biological children. They may adopt or provide foster care of children who become their own. Others give of themselves in other ways as single adults, volunteering, writing books, and caring for others.

Each in their own way live tremendously fruitful lives. The Eaton's store represents an arbitrary snapshot of average life, in which children are often included as part of the overall picture.

Figure 10: Window Displays of Love and Passion



The fifth floor represents a transition from the mutual benefits that each person receives from the love and passion of relationships to the responsibility of caring for a third, utterly helpless baby. Parenting displaces the mutual benefits of interactive adulthood with something called responsibility: selfless care for another human being. There are many benefits that result from having children. Some of these may only become apparent thirty years later.

Parents are caught up with the sheer enjoyment of throwing themselves into this new adventure. The fifth floor provides many opportunities to satisfy these desires: baby carriages and baby clothes, cribs and baby car seats, family pictures and mementos of this auspicious occasion. Then there is all the fuss that goes along with caring for this tiny little infant.

Figure 11: Items on the Fifth Floor

Fifth Floor

Hostess Shop • Portrait Studio 612 • The Grill Room • The Valley Room •
The Soup Kettle

Young World—Infants' Wear 210 • Nursery Shop • Young Happenings •
Children's Wear 210 • Eaton's Juvenile • Children's Shoes 239 • Girls' Wear
211 • Jean Tree 211 • Younger Crowd Shop 211 • Children's Hosiery 201 •
Junior Shoes 239 • Action 5 611 • Boy's Clothing • Students' Clothing 432 •
Abstract Shop 332 • 1-2-3 Boutique • Blue Tube

Figures 12: Christmas is for Children, Dolls, Toys, and Baby Carriages



Children appear in Christmas window displays, on the cover of the Eaton's catalogue, and in a variety of promotional materials about toys. We as adults relive the innocence, excitement, anticipation, joy, and sheer embrace of life that we experienced as young children. Why take your children to the Eaton's display window if not to get some satisfaction for yourself? Why take your children on the Ferris wheel if not to relive the enjoyment you experienced thirty years ago in being lifted weightless into the sky? What does a visit to the toy department represent but an opportunity to buy toys for oneself: boats, trucks, furniture, paintings, rugs, dressers, snowmobiles, and building equipment that one played with in miniature fashion when one was young?

V. Gratification of Culinary Delights

A second delight in visiting the fifth floor has to do with the opportunity to dine in fine style in the Grill Room. Silver cutlery, cloth napkins, crystal glasses, fine china on clean white linen tablecloths adorn the tables. Indian rugs grace the floor. A sacred canopy of glass chandeliers, opulent paintings, and open space set the scene. Every Eaton's store was furnished with one of these restaurants, personally designed and looked after by Lady Eaton.⁶⁷

In contrast to Winnipeg's Grill Room, which was located on the fifth floor (Figure 13), the Georgian Room in Toronto and the *9ieme* in Montreal were located on the top ninth floors (Figures 15 and 17). An array of analogies suggests themselves. Breakfast, lunch, and supper are when family meets most often as a collective unit. Agreeing on meals, disagreeing on chores, and commiserating with each other about work travails are daily fare. Teasing each other about possible boyfriends, noting *faux pas* in etiquette, and sharing news about family and friends completes the scene.

Sitting around a table with family and friends represents a microcosm of society. Young and old, helpless and responsible, peers and mutual friends experience camaraderie and belonging on a deeply intimate level. We are more than the sum of our parts. Families participate vicariously as a microcosmic collective with all of the associations, concerns, anxieties, and joys of larger society.

Families consume the pleasures of contemporary life as a niche market at the dinner table. We are convinced that we have arrived and are living securely. The fruits of our labour, our love, our care, our commitment, and our loyalty are evident in the people around us. Children, adults, and friends gather around us in a secure living

⁶⁷ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004), 50, 67, 72-73, 98.


space. We lap in the luxury of sumptuous food before us, with gleaming plates from which we eat, appreciating the warmth of our winter homes.

Figure 13: Grill Room on the Fifth Floor of the Eaton's Store, Winnipeg⁶⁸




Figure 14: Recipes of Some Dishes on the Menu⁶⁹

Original Georgian Room Chicken Pot Pie



- 1 pastry for one double-crust pie
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 tbsp. soft butter
- 2 tbsp. chicken fat
- 8 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 1 cup mushrooms — sliced
- 4 oz. jar red pimento — drained and chopped
- 12 potato balls — steamed until just tender
- 1½ generous cups cooked white chicken meat in large pieces
- 1½ generous cups cooked dark chicken meat in large pieces

Iced Beet Borscht



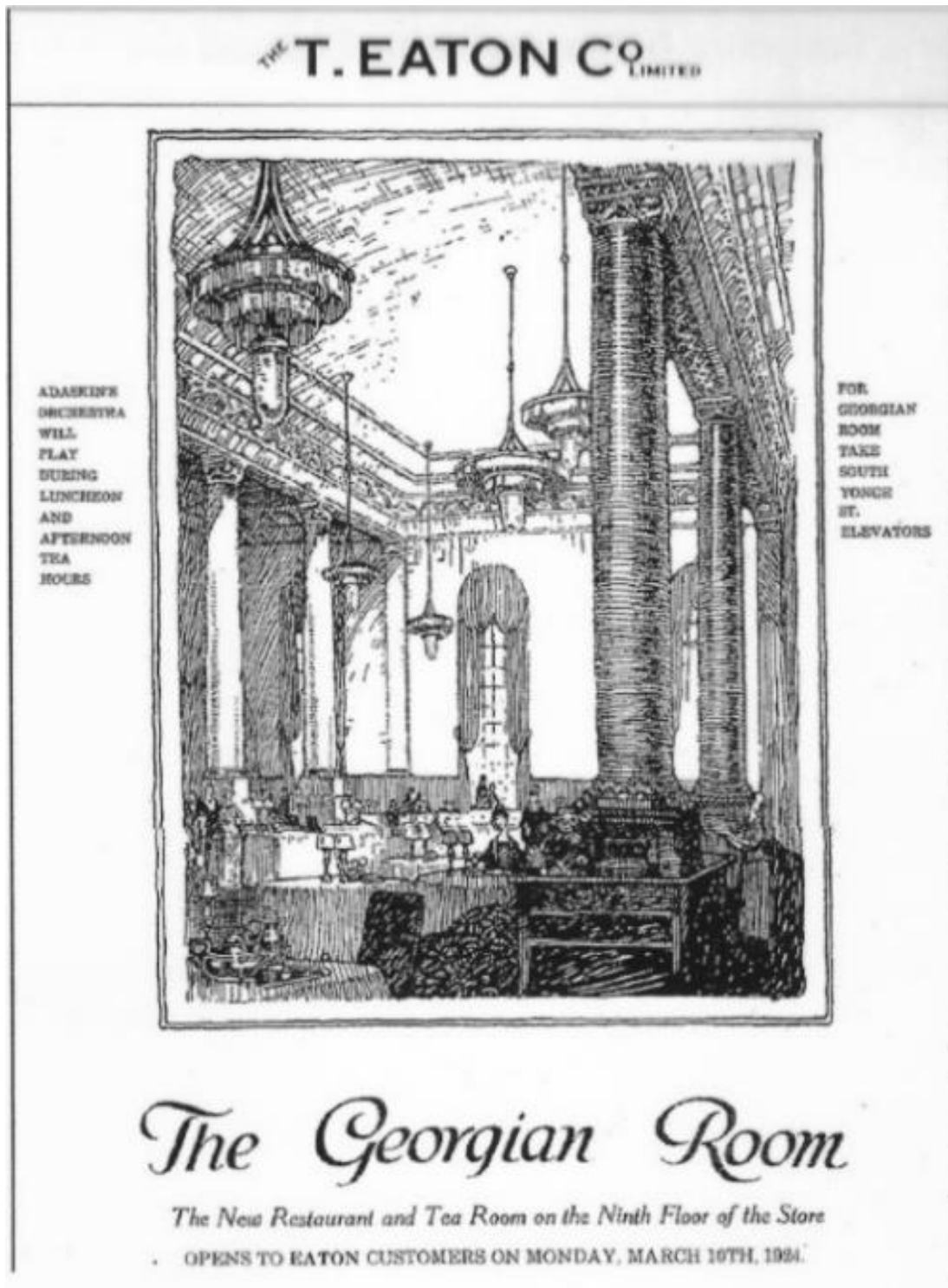
1. Bring stock to boil. Add vegetables and simmer for 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender.
2. Heat tomato juice and stir in.
3. Mix flour and butter into a roux. Whisk into above mixture. Add sugar and vinegar.
4. Simmer 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Push through a fine sieve and chill.
6. Re-season if necessary. Serve cold with a tablespoon of whipped cream with each serving.

- 4 cups beef stock
- 1 cup tomato juice
- 1½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup beet (finely shredded)
- ¼ cup carrot (finely shredded)
- ½ cup cabbage (finely shredded)
- 3 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2½ tbsp. soft butter
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. vinegar
- 1 tbsp. whipped cream/bowl

⁶⁸ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton*, 98.

⁶⁹ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton*, 158, 163.

Figure 15: Georgian Room on the Ninth Floor in Toronto's Eaton Store⁷⁰



⁷⁰ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton*, 50.

Figure 16: Feasting at Christmas



VI. Captain of our own Ship

The fact that the Eaton's dining rooms in Toronto and Montreal were situated on the top floors invite the analogy of a captain in charge of a ship. Lady Eaton designed the Montreal restaurant (Figure 17) after the elongated formality of the first-class dining room located on the luxury ocean liner *Ile de France*. She had just completed a transatlantic voyage from Europe to Canada on the ship. She included as many exotic elements into the design as possible:

. . . seven shades of Scotch Ruboleum tiles, *Escalette breche* to complement the use of black Belgian marble on the floor, raised balconies with railings of Monel metal, beige and pink French fabric to cover the walls, opal glass to reflect light from the windows, columns, lintels, bas-reliefs, large ceramic vases on either end of the room, and to top it off, two large murals by Natacha Carlu entitled "Amazonian Arcadia, representing 'The Pleasures of the Chase' and 'The Pleasures of Peace.'"⁷¹

A colleague of mine explained why he went on cruises. "All the drinks and dining and entertainment and sleeping arrangements are supplied. You are served by

⁷¹ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton*, 71-74.

waiters and waitresses at every turn. You live like a king. It is the only time that I feel as though I am in charge of my own life, with others at my beck and call.”

Figure 17: Montreal’s *Le 9ieme*, on the Ninth Floor of Eaton’s⁷²



How true that statement sounded to me. I was living on a similar, middle class income. Given the responsibilities of family life, I marveled at the riches and opulence of these restaurants, which ordinary people could enjoy for the length of their brief stay.

The design of the Eaton’s store replicated this contrasting reality between rich and poor. It left the functionality of daily living on the lower floors while offering more exotic pleasures on the top floors. The fact that the Grill Room was located on the middle floor of the Winnipeg store reflected the lower class existence of this small prairie city’s residents. The same could not be said for Toronto or Montreal. That (upper) society deserved so much more. These two cities had restaurants touching the sky and reflecting the richness of their (deserved) wealth. Who says we do not live in a class society?

Our wish fulfillment to live the American dream was fulfilled when we ate at these restaurants. Us commoners could partake of the lavishness of the 9th floor restaurants

⁷² Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton*, 72-73.

of Toronto and Montreal. We could claim our humble working class roots when we dined at the fifth floor restaurant in Winnipeg.

A healthy amount of imagination is needed to know what a million dollars can buy. Just ask Lady Eaton for the price of those Scottish tiles, French bricks, and Belgian marble. Their price range is well beyond that of actual items for sale in the Eaton's store. The consumer items featured on the lower floors have been presented as attainable on a middle class salary. More luxurious items are available on the upper floors -- should one choose to ascend the escalators.

Eating at these opulent Eaton's restaurants gives a person the sense that one is master of one's own destiny and ruler of one's own universe. Being on top of the world in these dining facilities allows one to think that one is captain of one's own ship. Eaton's stores were located in the heart of Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal. These department buildings represented the largest retail outlets in the area.

Shopping and dining there gave one the impression that one was part of something larger. One was no longer simply part of a family microcosm. The consumer and luxury goods displayed spoke of an economic reality that drove the engine of society. One identified with this macrocosmic industry of production through one's presence in the store. The displayed goods projected a reality of labour of which everyone was a part. Everyone contributed their own labour in order to become masters of their respective houses and homes.

VII. From Common Goods and Fleeting Pleasures to Durability

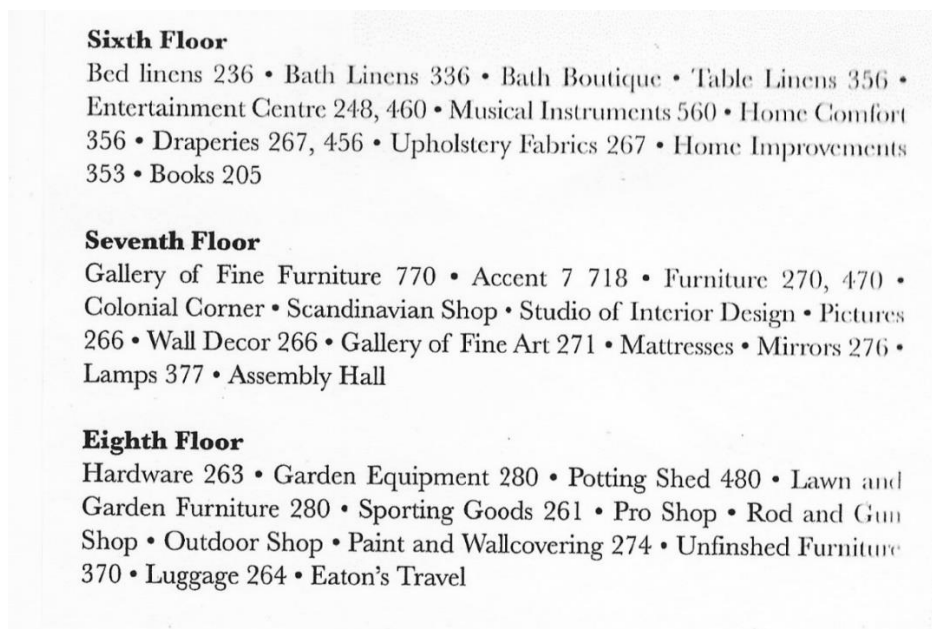
The seventh floor of the Eaton's Department Store is the one I remember the best. I rarely ventured there, for fear of being turned away in my dowdy attire. *The Gallery of Fine Furniture, Studio of Interior Design, Colonial Room, and Gallery of Fine Art* were not arbitrary designations. An endless supply of Persian rugs graced the floor. Soft leather couches, maple dining room tables, oak desks, mahogany buffets, wrought iron end tables, and matching bedroom sets were scattered randomly throughout the large space. I had arrived. I did not ask for prices. I could not imagine that I would ever be able to afford such luxuries.

My financial inability to purchase these items was the point. These unaffordable consumer goods served the same purpose as the opulent items featured as décor in the dining rooms. They were meant to excite the imagination. They were there to elevate the possibilities of what might be – one day. Their alluring presence could be compared the car salesperson who asked me which car or truck I really wanted.

The salesman's knowledge of my wish fulfillment gave him an idea of how much I was willing to spend. Affordability was not the issue.

The fact that the Persian rugs looked so lush meant that I now knew what I really wanted. It did not matter how many *faux* imitations I would buy to convince myself that this or that “knock-off” would do. The real thing continued to tempt, just out of reach.

Figure 18: Items on the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Floors



An analogy to relationships is apropos. Antique furniture, expensive paintings, and luxurious rugs represent the state of existence once one has arrived. These material items symbolize a solidity, heritage, fondness, trust, bonding, and familiarity that cannot be replicated. One can compare these items to a marriage, well lived over a number of years. Love turns into durability, strength, elasticity, and firmly etched faces.

Compare this state of affairs to a person who decides to descend to the first floor. New infatuations, momentary pleasures, and immediate gratifications are available there. Film director Tyler Perry describes what this contrasting dynamic is like in his movie, *Why Did I Get Married?*⁷³ After being married for twenty years, the husband falls in love with a young woman and separates from his wife.

¹⁵ Tyler Perry, *Why Did I Get Married?* DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2007).

After two years of living with his new girlfriend, the man comes to the following realization: “The young woman can only give me 20 per cent of the love and affection and caring and loyalty and bonding that my ‘real’ spouse gave me during the last twenty years.” Alas, this insight came too late. Reconciliation was no longer possible. His ex-wife had moved on.

This new relationship is like buying items on the first floor all over again. These fleeting transitory treasures are immediately satisfying and immeasurably pleasurable. Unfortunately, trinkets, jewelry, hats, gloves, and lingerie cannot compete on a substantial level with the fine furniture that is meant to last on the seventh floor. Fine furnishings are acquired when they mean something, A celebration of love that has flourished and endured represents the same thing.

Carefully selected pieces of art along with carelessly arranged couches, buffets, and mantles within a breadth of space on the seventh floor shows the customer what being rich is all about. One needs so few things with an exorbitant price tag (of sacrifice) to say so much.

Figure 19: Celebration of Family at Christmas



Conclusion

This journey through “Santa’s winter wonderland” called the Eaton’s Department Store has hopefully endeared itself to the reader. Consumerism is alive and well. Let us celebrate its presence among us by knowing exactly why it is there. It points to

the things that really matter: love and intimacy, commitment and time-honoured celebrations.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Eaton's Store Catalogue featured a whole-house-in-a-kit that they were willing to ship to your door. How we wish for such things today. Is it any wonder that tiny houses have become a fantasy item to buy and build? The world has become too large. We need it more manageable, at our supper tables, in our bedrooms, in the yard, with our children, with our parents, and with each other.

Chapter Five

Theological Insights into Transformation

The time has come to look at the theological side of things, at those things that are spiritual, holy, sacred, and mysterious. The thesis of this book is that the material possessions and psychological theories presented in the first half represent the foil through which we can see the need for faith, spirituality, and religion. My work as a prison chaplain showed me the superfluous value of so many things. Inmates were forced as a result of their incarceration to come to terms with what was really important. I have had to do the same thing.

What is it about living that forces a person to look at the resources necessary to live a full life? While the psychological dynamics detailed above have helped me understand human behaviour, they do not address the issues of crime and punishment in the same way that faith does. Where do remorse, regret, forgiveness, and grace fit into this picture? Given the various behaviours in which inmates have indulged, is it not necessary to look at the spiritual dynamics of hurt and harm, brokenness and sorrow, revisioning and renewal?

The second half of book proceeds on the premise that theological issues of remorse, conversion, restoration, imago dei, surrender, honesty, love, and discipleship are integral to what it means to be human. We can only face our regrets if we believe that there is a God who forgives us. We can only say sorry and repair damage if we believe that reconciliation is possible and that relationships are fulfilling. We can only be honest if we believe that there is some merit in doing so. We can only commit ourselves to the road of discipleship if we believe that the end is worth it. All of these things and much more are included in the second half of the book to show that a deeply spiritual faith speaks to the heart of the human condition.

Let us go over the steps necessary for a spiritual transformation. We begin with remorse, an attribute that looms large regarding our failures. Most of the men that I worked with deeply regretted what they have done. They had no idea that they were

capable of so much harm. They were broken men, looking for any signs of redemption that they could find.

Conversion represents a second stage of salvation. One has to leave one's past behind in order to become a new person. The men in prison understood this fact very well. They did not need to be told that something had to change if life was going to "turn out right."

Conversion represents an intrinsic part of the salvation story. I was converted at six years of age during a Conrad Brunk II revival meeting in southern Manitoba. I knew that I needed to be saved. That salvation gave me a lot of comfort.⁷⁴

Absolution represents an objective fact of forgiveness that undergirds the subjective act of confession. Victory over sin needs to be proclaimed in order for a new person to emerge. Chaplains participate in this process by proclaiming assurance of salvation. The Book of Hebrews commands believers to approach the throne of grace so that they may "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16, 10:22).

I grew up with a Sommerfelder Mennonite background that stated that we had to wait until our death to know if we had been saved. To claim salvation was an act of pride. There are biblical passages that speak about the future state of salvation. Romans 13:12 says, "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." Others, like the ones quoted above, speak about the assurance of salvation.

Affirmation of the fact that we have been created in the image of God grounds believers so they can claim that which is good about themselves. Too many inmates look outside of themselves for affirmation and belonging. Too many inmates loathe themselves because of what they have done. God has created them in a unique way. Integration of self is required in order for their faithful selves to emerge and shine.

We all struggle with the wonderful news that we have been created in the image of God. Knowing that we have been created special gives us the wherewithal to proceed with courage.

Restoration to original righteousness is necessary because of what has been lost and left behind in the conversion experience. Inmates flounder because they do not know

⁷⁴ Donald Stoesz, *Conversion Narrative*, [Donald Stoesz, site-based prison chaplain and published author](#) Retrieved 12 December 2022.

how to replace the past lives that they have lived. Affirmation of their imago Dei represents a way of experiencing a second naiveté in which innocence, trust, belonging, love, affection, commitment, and honesty are once again possible.

A beatific vision represents a deeply religious experience that complements and undergirds conversion. Conversion represents release from sin as a result of forgiveness. A beatific vision is a positive encounter with God that can be called divine intimacy. Men have been so hardened in prison that a breakthrough religious experience is one way they can understand that there is something deeply lovely about life. God is the source of all light and love and intimacy and belonging. Being enveloped in the arms of Jesus returns one to the womb of one's existence that is called restoration to a new creation (John 3:4).

Surrender is integral to this process of faith, belonging, restoration, and vision. It is only as inmates let go of control that they are surrounded by the love and faith of God. Letting go through an act of confession along with the granting of forgiveness provide the wherewithal for the process of conversion to take place. Affirming oneself as representing an image of God places one within Divine Being. Inmates have placed their lives into the hands of an Almighty Presence.

This palpable reality of cosmic acceptance is a sign for both chaplain and inmate that life will be alright. Both people can move forward because they are being accompanied by Someone greater than themselves. They are standing in the presence of the Divine that affirms their sense of belonging in their longing for acceptance and love. The community of faith envelopes them in the arms of a Faithful One that points the way forward.

Love and discipleship are two actions that follow from this interconnected journey of conversion and absolution, creation and restoration, faith and surrender. Knowing that a person is loved gives them the wherewithal to love others. Disciplining one's mind and body brings relief from the impulsive emotions and irrational thoughts that rage in one's life. Resting in the calm that represents the Divine brings relief to others as well as oneself.

One no longer has to prove oneself, to pay for one's salvation, or to punish oneself needlessly for what one has done. The punishment has already been rendered. Inmates are living with the aftermath of what that judgment means.

Chaplains accompany inmates along their faith journey, cognizant of how much confession and forgiveness, guilt and shame, and surrender and control play in their

conversion experience. The ability to love and to disciple oneself goes a long way in incorporating empathy, commitment, and routine into one's spiritual journey.

The ability to be honest and understanding the hidden costs of punishment represent two consequences of love and discipleship. The ability to become honest represents a counterproductive reflex that needs to be invoked in order for offenders to move on with their lives. Inmates are so used to making things up as they go along that they do not know what to do when someone asks them for a straight answer. It takes awhile for inmates to trust someone enough to give them an honest reply.

Inmates are cognisant of the cost of sacrifice that is involved in being labelled an offender. Stigma and recuperations are a very real part of their world, years after they have paid for their sins in terms of a prison term.

Worship represents a last theme that impacts one's experience of the Divine. I have organized worship into a trajectory that moves from low-church evangelicalism to high-church liturgy. Understanding the ways in which God moves us through worship helps us to ground our Being.

Each of these themes are elaborated upon in the next few chapters through the use of stories, experiences, theologies, and illustrations.

Chapter Six

Feelings of Remorse⁷⁵

Fiction writer J. K. Rowling is psychologically convincing in her description of what happens when one commits murder. She suggests that a person's soul is ripped apart every time someone kills another human being.⁷⁶ The individual becomes less human. They have increasing difficulty in feeling grief or pain because they have had to numb themselves from the awful deed they have committed.

The distancing of emotion and empathy enables the killer to go on with life. He represses feelings of guilt and shame associated with the crime. Indeed, the killer is prepared to kill again because those receptors that register pain and those inhibitors that regulate taboos have been turned off. A taboo is easier to break the second time around. A person who comes to prison for the first time finds it less intimidating to come back again. The groundwork has been laid to live beyond law and morality.

Living beyond morality is what happens to Tom Riddle Junior as we journey with him through the seven Harry Potter novels. In the first book, we meet him in a weakened state, inhabiting the body of another person. Tom grows stronger in each novel as he rallies his troops and uses his cunning to gain a new body.

The climax of his rebirth occurs in the fourth book. Tom uses the arm of a servant, the bone of his father, and the blood of an enemy to make a new body.⁷⁷ Tom is convinced that he can defeat Harry and become the new headmaster at Hogwarts. Through stamina and fortitude, Tom shows how much he wants to defeat the forces of good in order to rule with power and might. His Death Eaters gather at the end of the fourth novel to wage war on Dumbledore and the Ministry of Magic.

The extent of Tom Riddle's evil deeds becomes evident as the fifth and sixth novels unfold. We learn that Tom has not only killed Harry's parents. He has killed various

⁷⁵ This chapter represents a modification of chapter one, Donald Stoesz, "Can Tom Riddle Be Saved?" *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2018), 13 -31.

⁷⁶ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 246.

⁷⁷ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 556-557.

staff members of the Ministry of Magic and his own father as well. These murders are more than strategic ploys to gain power and control of the wizarding world. The deaths serve Tom's purpose of splitting his soul into seven pieces and hiding them in different objects called Horcruxes so that Tom is safe from being killed.

J. K. Rowling graphically demonstrates the fact that each death takes Tom further and further from humanity. Tom is unable to feel or experience loss because he has split his soul into so many pieces. His obsession to hide his soul within wizarding trophies shows the extent to which his very being is within these material objects.

How to Put One's Soul Back Together Again

Is it possible for Tom to put his soul and life back together again? I meet men every day who are somewhat like Tom Riddle. They have committed serious crimes that have made them into emotional-less beings, preoccupied with themselves, and the material world around them.

They have cut themselves off from their feelings because they are not sure what they would do if they let these emotions run free. They have become afraid of themselves and their proven capacity to harm others. They have retreated into a shell from which they may not emerge.

Female fictional protagonist Hermione gives us the answer to this question in the seventh novel. After Dumbledore's death, she takes the liberty of retrieving an ancient book, entitled *Secrets of the Darkest Arts*, from his library. Hermione finds out that people can put themselves back together by feeling remorse. She tells Ron, "You've got to really feel what you've done."⁷⁸ The book suggests that the pain of feeling remorseful can be so horrible that it can destroy a person. The group agrees that Tom would not attempt such a thing.

Remorse is a relatively innocuous attribute that does not count for much in the world of power and strength. Remorse has to do with admitting one is wrong. This change of mind appears to others as a vacillating characteristic. It assumes that human beings are deeply fallible and should admit their shortcomings. This is not easy to do for a person who feels justified in what they have done.

Tom feels entitled to take revenge on his father because he abandoned him. Tom feels entitled to kill James and Lily Potter because their son, Harry, represents a threat to him. Tom was acting in self-defence, so to speak, because of a prophecy that predicted a young child would gain the power to kill Tom. Tom has embarked

⁷⁸ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 89.

on a path that makes it increasingly difficult for him to change his mind and turn around.

I identify with Tom's suspicious attitude toward remorse. I work with men who are not convinced of the healing powers of feeling sorry for what they have done. Sometimes, they feel justified in their actions. The other person would have killed them if they had not struck first.

Staff view an inmate's sign of regret or contriteness as an attempt to manipulate the system. Offenders are expressing remorse in order to get early parole. Staff find it difficult to tell the difference between being honest and being manipulative.

Rowling demonstrates the healing aspects of remorse through her other characters. Harry tells Dumbledore that he is sorry for having become distracted from the task of retrieving a memory from Professor Slughorn. Dumbledore accepts his apology and asks Harry to give the job a higher priority.⁷⁹

Dumbledore apologizes to Harry for keeping the details of Harry's life secret. He mistakenly thought that he could protect Harry by not telling him everything about Voldemort's plans to kill him. Dumbledore realizes that his withholding of information has led to the inadvertent death of Sirius Black, Harry's godfather. Dumbledore's humanity becomes painfully obvious in these exchanges.⁸⁰

Snape's humanity becomes clear when Harry retrieves his last memory as Snape is dying. The memory reveals that Snape is deeply sorry for causing Lily's death. Snape loved Lily. He is stricken with grief and anguish when Voldemort uses Snape's information to kill her along with James. Snape is in Dumbledore's debt for the rest of his life. He promises to protect Harry in spite of the fact that he cannot forgive James, Harry's father. James bullied Snape during their years at Hogwarts.⁸¹

Feelings of pain alongside expressions of remorse are evident in Harry's reaction to the death of his godfather, Sirius Black. Harry rails against Dumbledore and shouts that he "does not want to be human."⁸² Harry does not want to feel anymore because the loss of Sirius Black is too hard to bear. He trashes Dumbledore's office by throwing things in every direction.

Harry becomes angry when Dumbledore suggests that Sirius has to take responsibility for his decisions. Harry points his finger yet again at Snape and

⁷⁹ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, pp. 399-400.

⁸⁰ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), pp. 727, 730.

⁸¹ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 544-545.

⁸² J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, 726.

questions Dumbledore's trust in him. Dumbledore takes it all in stride and accepts the death of Sirius as his fault.

This exchange undergirds the reality of pain and suffering involved in showing remorse. Dumbledore is most vulnerable as he anguishes over his decision to distance himself from Harry. The death of Sirius and subsequent anger of Harry are all too real. Dumbledore is exhausted, sad, burdened with grief, and able to cry.⁸³ Rowling's prediction in the seventh book that remorse can be so painful that it can ruin a man appears to have come true.

These examples demonstrate that putting one's soul back together again by feeling remorse is possible. Dumbledore is patient and understanding of Harry's tantrums in spite of Harry's woeful ignorance of the larger picture. Snape's remorsefulness makes him loyal to Dumbledore. He is committed to the good in spite of the fact that this courage may get him killed. Healing one's soul does not ensure the future integrity of life and limb.

According to Rowling, Tom has a chance up to the very end to redeem himself. Harry gives him this option at the height of the last battle at Hogwarts. Voldemort is pointing the Elder wand at Harry and preparing to speak the death curse, "*Avada Kedavra!*" When Tom Riddle tells Harry that the wand of destiny is truly his, Harry agrees, and then adds:⁸⁴

"But before you try and kill me, I'd advise you to think about what you've done . . . think, and try for some remorse, Riddle . . . "

"What is this?"

Of all the things that Harry had said to him, beyond any revelation or taunt, nothing had shocked Voldemort like this. Harry saw the pupils contract to thin slits, saw the skin around his eyes whiten.

"It's your last chance," said Harry, "it's all you've got left . . . I've seen what you'll be otherwise . . . be a man . . . try . . . try for some remorse. . . "

"You dare -?" said Voldemort again.

"Yes, I dare," said Harry, "because Dumbledore's last plan hasn't backfired on me at all. It's backfired on you, Riddle."

J. K. Rowling's insertion of this discussion at the height of battle shows that she believes in choices, even when death is imminent. We have options even when the situation is desperate and the response predictable.

⁸³ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, 735, 744, cf. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 89.

⁸⁴ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 594.

Tom Riddle has a hard time listening to Harry because he believes his possession of the Elder wand seals Harry's fate. His cunning and insight have enabled him to gain a huge advantage over Harry. The problem, as Harry explains, is that the wand Voldemort is holding is not powerful because it does not accept Voldemort as its rightful owner.

Voldemort has once again seized power with an inadequate insight into the larger situation. He underestimated the power of love, honesty, and remorse. Tom Riddle is oblivious to the unconscious dynamic between magic and magician. The magician is only as powerful as the magic he wields.

Magic consists of the fact that Dumbledore, the second last owner of the Elder wand, was disarmed of it. The power of the wand passed from Dumbledore to Draco when Dumbledore forfeited it to keep Draco alive. Its power transferred from Draco to Harry when Harry disarmed Draco of his own wand during a fight at Malfoy Manor.⁸⁵

The ownership of the Elder wand is not dependent upon it being taken by force. The power of the wand transferred from Dumbledore to Draco to Harry in a peaceful and deferred manner.

Desire and passion do not have to end in murder in order for a person to obtain the object of one's aspirations.⁸⁶ Harry's use of Draco's wand in the last battle is more powerful than Voldemort's possession of the Elder wand because of Harry's proper use of magic. Voldemort missed his chance at power by grasping onto it.

The story may have ended differently if Voldemort had taken the opportunity to feel remorse and regret. Perhaps he would have died anyway at the hands of so many enemies around him. Many people felt justified in killing him in retaliation for the many deaths he had caused. Who knows what difference a tinge of regret would have gained him in terms of his soul?⁸⁷

Salvific Effects of Remorse

Harry, Dumbledore, Snape, and Regulus Black admitted they were wrong in some of their actions. Their mistakes cost the lives of others as well as their own. Rowling's inclusion of their humanness in the face of Tom Riddle's intractability shows the widening gulf among these protagonists. Rowling suggests that a

⁸⁵ Cross-reference the sequence of events and explanations provided in J. K. Rowling, *Harry and the Half-Blood Prince*, 545-450; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 383-388, 397-400, 505-510, 593-600.

⁸⁶ Note Harry's discussion with the wand maker about this point, J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 402.

⁸⁷ Wormtail's momentary lapse of concentration due to regret caused his iron hand to tighten against his throat in a death grip, J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 380-381.

vulnerable display of regret and change is, in fact, the way to go. There is victory in weakness that power can never achieve.

Tom is given so many chances to repent that the reader wonders if he is no longer eligible for salvation. He has blasphemed the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30). His willingness to kill an increasing number of people in the vain hope of hiding his own soul shows that Tom has become so self-centred that redemption is remote. He has gone beyond good and evil itself.

Is it possible for the men I work with to show remorse and thus be saved? Rowling accepts this possibility as real. She gives Tom an opportunity to show remorse at the very end of his life, six pages from the end of her seventh novel.

There is precedent for this possibility of salvation in the Bible. Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of them repented while the other mocked and ridiculed Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Listen to Jesus' reply to the one who asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus goes to his kingdom: "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

This response is hard to hear when one has been personally affected by the mayhem others have foisted upon oneself and other victims. It is hard to imagine Tom going to heaven if he had repented at the last moment. And yet, there it is. Rowling and God give the criminal a final chance to repent, even in the face of so much evil. Neither Tom nor the criminal on the cross could ever repay their wrongs. Neither of them had time to return good for evil. Neither of them could do anything to redeem themselves in the eyes of others.

The Bible nevertheless suggests that remorse and repentance alone are sufficient for salvation. The simple act of the will to admit one is wrong appears to be a large step in the right direction towards one's salvation. Some people only have time to repent, nothing more.

The repentant criminal on the cross is known in historical literature as Dismas.⁸⁸ His repentance shows how valid an act of contrition can be. At the very least, a human being can show their true regret at what they have done.

⁸⁸ Fellow chaplain Ronald George Labonte has written a wonderful short piece entitled "*Do You Know Who Dismas Is?*" He describes what it was like to work for seven years as a Catholic prison chaplain in Leclerc Institution. He uses Scriptural references such as Matthew 13:29 to reflect on the fact that society wants to separate the wheat from the chaff before the time of harvest; Luke 13:6-9 to implore society to wait another year to see if the fig tree will bear fruit; Mark 10: 46-52 to denote the fact that prisoners have to shout to be heard over the cries of "Do your time!"; Matthew 25:38 to speak about visiting inmates; and Luke 15:32 about rejoicing over the prodigal son who has come home. Ronald concludes his reflection with a comparison of Dismas (Luke 23:43) to today's prisoners: "He occupies little time and space in our prayers and devotions. He is thus the perfect analogy for prison ministry: obscure, yet what

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the possibilities of making right decisions in difficult circumstances. It has concluded that the human will has the capability of acting even when the situation is dire. Harry, Dumbledore, Snape, and Regatus Black admitted their mistakes and committed themselves to the good. Tom Riddle allowed his plight to overwhelm and influence his decisions. Tom Riddle Junior exacted revenge on his father for abandoning him. He went on to gain power and control at the expense of everyone around him. He continued to commit murder and mayhem in spite of the chances that people gave him to turn toward the good,

Tom's final chance came when Harry gave him the option to show remorse for what he had done. Harry suggests that Tom can at least heal his soul in the process. Tom chose damnation over that of regret.

J. K. Rowling shows through her other characters that this fateful choice is not inevitable. Snape and Regatus Black repented of their actions and worked for the rest of their lives in doing good. Remorse is the first step along this healing journey in spite of the possibility of death in the very next instance. God gave the thief on the cross a reprieve as well as eternal security because of his repentance and belief in Jesus.

This scenario of hope and healing within harrowing circumstances is of comfort to me as a prison chaplain. A window of opportunity opens up as I help the men come to terms with the harm they have committed. The willingness of the thief on the cross to find forgiveness even as he is dying is a symbol of hope for the men with whom I work.

riches and good news come from it! . . . 'Come, so that I may present Dismas to you.' He has need of you, and we have need of him."

Chapter Seven

My Conversion Experience

Introduction

Gordon T. Smith, in his book, *Beginning Well*,⁸⁹ challenges believers to construct a conversion narrative of their coming to the Christian faith. He suggests that a sustained written testimony helps to place one's conversion experience into a specific context.

I have constructed such a narrative to better understand why I have emphasized certain aspects of the gospel within a prison context. Religious conversions are endemic within prisons. They result from the fact that inmates are in crisis and in need of help. Conversion experiences become a way for them to cope with the many new realities that they face.

My experience with dozens of conversions in prison forced me to think about my own religious transformation. What was it about that experience that was so formative? Why have I been empathetic to inmate conversion experiences while remaining cognizant of the many pitfalls that inmates fall into as they move from a good beginning to an uncertain future? Why do so many conversions in prison go wrong? What is the role of an authentic religious experience in becoming integrated as a faithful believer of Jesus Christ?⁹⁰

I have divided my conversion experiences into ten-year segments. They begin at the age of six when I went to my first Conrad Brunk III revival meeting. At the age of sixteen, I received catechism with a group of my peers and was baptized into the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. At the age of twenty-six, I was called to pastoral ministry and attended Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana.

⁸⁹ Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 42.

⁹⁰ See Hank Dixon's autobiography, *A Lifer's Journey* (Winnipeg: Prairie Heart Press, 2021), 9-74, for a description of his conversion experience.

At the age of thirty-six, I was called to prison ministry in Quebec. I became a prison chaplain after completing a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Religious Studies from McGill University in 1991. Each ten-year period gives the reader an idea of how my conversion experiences shaped my life and ministry career.

The latter half of the paper analyses the effects of my evangelical upbringing and conversion experience upon my chaplaincy journey. The purpose of the paper is to set the influence of Pentecostalism and the use of a set Lutheran liturgy into a larger context called sacramentalism.

A. Brunk Revival Meetings at the Age of Six

My conversion experience began with the Brunk revival meetings that took place in southern Manitoba during the 1950s and 60s. I was only six years old when my parents took me to a weeklong evangelical service under a big tent near Plum Coulee, Manitoba. I was mesmerized by the experience. The saw dust trail ran down the centre aisle to cover the dust and mud that represented the floor of the pasture on which the tent had been pitched. 2" x 12" boards covered with brown tablecloth paper stapled to the bottom were placed on concrete blocks used to construct basement foundations. Tall wooden masts up to thirty feet held up the tent at twenty feet intervals. Many conversions occurred one night when a rainstorm pelted the tent and made the tall posts sway dangerously inside.

The service consisted of a lot of singing and preaching. After forty-five minutes of singing led by a song leader, the worship leader introduced the minister who was from either Virginia or Pennsylvania. They were powerful preachers. Unfortunately, I do not remember a word they said. After forty-five minutes, the preacher sat down, and I breathed a sigh of relief. It would soon be over. After singing for another twenty minutes, the worship leader stood up for what I assumed was a closing prayer.

The worship leader began by thanking the preacher. He commented on what a powerful message he had delivered. He thanked the audience for the wonderful singing. He then said, "I would now like to introduce the main speaker." That is the last sentence I remember for the rest of the week. The service each night lasted in an excess of three hours.

Figure 1: 1954 Picture of Brunk Revival Tent in Winkler, Manitoba⁹¹



I do not remember if there was an altar call at the end of each service. Revivalism in the Mennonite tradition consisted of less dramatic ways of announcing that a person had become a Christian. I know that I became a believer those evenings along with many others. I learned the value of Romans 10:10, which says that if I believed in my heart and confessed with my lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, I would be saved. Those evangelical services represented a turning point for many Mennonites in southern Manitoba. In danger of becoming a cultural entity, the German-Russian Mennonite people experienced a revival within their churches.

B. Being Baptized at the Age of Sixteen

Receiving catechism and being baptized into the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Altona represented a seamless continuity between my conversion experience and

⁹¹ Mennonite Archival Information Database, *Audience seated at the Brunk Revival Campaign in Winkler, Manitoba*, [Audience seated at Brunk Revival Campaign in Winkler, Manitoba - Mennonite Archival Information Database \(mhsc.ca\)](http://mhsc.ca) Retrieved 5 November 2020.

involvement in the church. I embraced Christianity and church for myself. It seemed natural for me to attend a Mennonite private school and become chairperson of the student Faith and Life Committee in grade ten. It seemed natural for me to be baptized upon my confession of faith and attend a Mennonite Bible College after high school. It was natural for me to immerse myself in Bible and Theology for the next three years of my young adult life.

Figure 2: Altona Ministerial Leadership at the time of my Baptism⁹²



Altona Lehrdienst, 1970 — Front row, l. to r.: Mrs. Abe Born, Mrs. G. A. Neufeld, Elder and Mrs. David Schulz, Deacon and Mrs. J. B. Braun, Mrs. Albert Schmidt, Mrs. D. J. Neudorf. Second row: Minister Abe Born, Mrs. Menno Funk, Mrs. H. J. Gerbrandt, Mrs. D. F. Friesen, Mrs. D. H. Loewen, Mrs. D. B. Friesen, Minister Albert Schmidt, Minister D. J. Neudorf. Third row: Minister G. A. Neufeld, Deacon Menno Funk, Ministers H. J. Gerbrandt and D. F. Friesen, Deacons D. H. Loewen and D. B. Friesen.

C. Enrolling in Seminary at the Age of Twenty-Six

That faith journey continued ten years later when I enrolled in our Mennonite Seminary south of the border in Elkhart, Indiana. After two years of study to obtain a Master of Divinity degree, I became a youth pastor in Calgary, Alberta. I embraced the wonderful aspects of ministering to youth, preaching, worshipping, and pastoral care. Not satisfied with these results, I enrolled in graduate studies at McGill University. Although conversion experiences, evangelism, and ministry were keys to life, higher education was also emphasized in my tradition. Many of my friends

⁹² Henry Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1970), 164.

went on to graduate studies and became professors at various seminaries and universities.

D. Called to Prison Chaplaincy at the Age of Thirty-Six

Being called to prison ministry at the age of thirty-six felt a little late for specialized ministry. I had assumed I would transition from being a pastor to becoming a university professor. I had assumed that academia was part of my future. During an interview for a university position halfway through my graduate program, I found out that I did not like teaching. Teaching information to students felt like I was simply regurgitating knowledge that they could learn on their own.

My involvement as a volunteer with prison ministry beckoned. I was invited to become a prison chaplain. I learned French and fell in love with the ministry. I learned more about ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue during the next ten years in prison than I had at the university. Academia paled beside the nitty gritty reality of prison life. I apparently needed something challenging to focus my life and ministry. I needed unique experiences to force me to think about what I really believed.

Conversion, Evangelism, and Sacraments

Gordon T. Smith has written another book entitled *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal*.⁹³ He considers how these three aspects of faith and church fit together. I was drawn to the book because it reflected my own experiences. I interviewed many offenders who had conversion experiences because of their incarceration. I worked for ten years with Pentecostal volunteers who came to prison to help me with worship services. I established a Lutheran order of service to provide structure to the inmates' chaotic experiences of faith. I incorporated evangelical, sacramental, and Pentecostal elements of faith and practice to ground faith in a solid worshipful and discipleship experience.

Application of my Conversion Experience to Prison Ministry

The time I spent in Quebec with Pentecostal volunteers resulted in the most integrated worship services that I had in thirty years of prison ministry. We had simultaneous translations of English sermons into French and Spanish. I listened to powerful Bible based messages and testimonies from volunteers. Black, white, and Hispanic inmates intermingled freely with each other and the volunteers.

⁹³ Gordon T. Smith, *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal* (Downer's Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2017).

Evangelicalism combined with the witness of Pentecostal volunteers provided heartfelt meaningful worship services.

I continued this evangelistic type of service intermingled with Pentecostal styles of worship for the next ten years. Each month, I would invite the Pentecostal volunteers to conduct a worship service that was complementary to what I offered through a more structured approach. Conversion testimonies by volunteers, a powerful sermon, wonderful singing, a laying on of hands at the end of the service, as well as a form of an altar call represented the format of the service. I felt comfortable with these aspects of ministry. I and the Pentecostal volunteers found common cause in our ministry.

Caveat Number One: Baptisms within Prison

I cite the above example to present a caveat to the above scenario. In the early 1980s, a Pentecostal chaplain at one of the Quebec prisons brought a bathtub into the prison and baptized former Catholics upon their confession of faith. He provided abjurement forms so that these inmates could renounce their Catholic faith and pledge adherence to the Protestant faith.⁹⁴ These services were conducted in French.

These actions took place ten years prior to my involvement at the prison. They caused no small amount of consternation on the part of the institutional Catholic chaplain along with the regional chaplain, who was an “old style Catholic.” I was asked to “solve this problem.”

I decided that conducting worship services in English was an easy way to avoid the thornier problem of what to do with the re-baptized Catholics. These French inmates faithfully attended my services while being unable to understand what was going on. While the conversion experiences had been real, the aftereffects were anything but easy.

This experience made me realize that evangelicalism and Pentecostalism can get complicated when applied to prison and the initiation rites of the Christian Church. While the inmates had embraced evangelicalism, the actions of the Pentecostal chaplain made it difficult to know how to proceed.

I together with several other chaplains have discouraged baptisms within prison because of their divisive nature. I have suggested that inmates wait until they are released to get baptized. My belief in the visible church means that I want former

⁹⁴ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 111-112.

inmates to attend a specific church before participating in an initiation rite of the church.

Communion within Prison

My experience with communion in prison has been quite different. Even though my church practiced communion infrequently and within a closed context, I felt called within the first year of ministry to offer communion to inmates. My encounter with devout inmates and practicing offenders made me realise that the Christian faith and the Christian church were alive and well within prison. Serving communion represented a natural sign and symbol of communicating that reality.

I remember the first time I conducted a communion service in prison.⁹⁵ In spite of the fact that believers of a variety of faiths were worshipping together, inmates instinctively knew what to do when it came time for communion. As I was blessing the elements, the Christian believers stepped forward in a semi-circle around the altar. The inmates who were Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish stepped back to show respect. They knew what it was like to participate fully within their own faith traditions. At the same time, they felt welcome in the service. We could pray and worship together while knowing full well that this was unique situation in which we could pay reverence and respect to the divine.

Inmates and volunteers have reacted in different ways to the communion services that I conduct. As I have mentioned numerous times, the only offenders who refuse communion are ones who know something about its meaning. The same Pentecostal volunteers who had participated in the baptisms of inmates in prison chastised me for offering communion to the fellowship of believers gathered there.

There was a time of about six months when I did not offer communion. Inmates were not cognizant enough nor practicing their faith. I decided to suspend the sacrament until there was some relationship between the objective action of God and the subjective reception of the Eucharist.

I have been recently chastised for this momentary suspension of communion. I was told that communion is primarily an action of God that should be offered. I beg to differ. The Mafia members who were muscling their way into the worship services were unrepentant for their criminal activities. While willing to publicly confess their sins, they were unwilling to go to private confession.⁹⁶ The latter action would have

⁹⁵ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 142.

⁹⁶ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 32.

meant that they were sorry for what they had done. I did not find it appropriate to give communion to them.

Sacramental Acts of Worship

The varied practice of offering two sacraments of the Christian Church within a prison setting has made me rethink the meaning of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. I continue to hold on to Romans 10:10, which says that anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in the resurrection will be saved. I continue to meet many saved inmates who do not participate in prison chapel services. My role is to help them nurture their faith while giving space to the ways in which they practice.

My experience of communing with fellow believers outside a normal worship setting has convinced me that there is a sacramental aspect to prison chaplaincy that goes beyond the physical rites. Being created in the image of God means that we can commune with each other on a fundamental level of faith and belief. There is something spiritual in all of us that grounds us.⁹⁷

This spiritual grounding places our participation with Being itself into a larger context. The divine is working through us and others in many different contexts.⁹⁸ At the same time, I am called as a Protestant chaplain to ground these deeply spiritual experiences into a church setting. While I can relate to people of all faiths, walk with them and nurture their faith, I am also called to help Christian believers understand how this is enacted within a Protestant context.

Working for ten years with Pentecostal volunteers represented a way of validating my evangelical experiences within a prison context. There nevertheless came a point when I no longer considered altar calls and laying on of hands as appropriate. Inmates became so caught up in the emotional side of things that they did not know how proceed once they had been “saved.” I as a chaplain could not follow up with all of the faith transformations that had occurred at the Sunday evening service. Justification had to be linked to sanctification in order for faith and practice to become one.⁹⁹

I introduced a Lutheran liturgical order of service into the prison to provide a better grounding to faith. Public confession as a prelude to worship, Scripture readings

⁹⁷ See Winnifred Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 173-191.

⁹⁸ See Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 85.

⁹⁹ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 4-10.

from a three-year lectionary, passing of the peace, prayers of response, and communion represented a wonderful way of channeling inmate conversion experiences and evangelical affirmations into a well-rounded worship service.

Inmates participated in these services through singing, praying, Scripture reading, and receiving communion. Songs led by an inmate band represented a wonderful complement to the spoken Word. I embraced this style of worship during the next twenty years of my ministry. Offenders grounded their faith in these expressions of worship.

Caveat Number Two: Theology and Sacramental Worship

I discovered at the end of these twenty years that a caveat regarding the efficacy of Lutheran liturgy within prison was as necessary as the caveat regarding my involvement with Pentecostal volunteers. Pentecostal enthusiasm and evangelical conversions in prisons were circumscribed by the fact that emotional highs and the sacramental rite of baptism could play havoc with inmates' newfound faith (and chaplains' commitment to ecumenism).

A similar effect occurred regarding the Lutheran liturgy. While the liturgy grounded inmates in a solid understanding of Christian worship and faith, its use in prison did not mean that offenders would become Lutherans when they were released.

I found this out the hard way when I thought that my use of the liturgy in prison meant that I could become a Lutheran pastor. Two months into my studies at a Lutheran seminary, I discovered that Lutheran theology, especially as it pertains to the goodness of creation and participation in Being, was a ways away from what I believed. I had adopted the liturgy for pragmatic reasons. While the liturgy grounded inmates' evangelical faith, it did not necessarily reflect the theologies espoused by the denominations -- Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran -- that used these liturgies.

This realisation during the latter part of my prison ministry was as hard to swallow as the fact that conversion experiences and Pentecostal styles of worship did not translate easily into ecclesiological expressions of faith.

Baptisms in prisons represented a stumbling block regarding church adherence in the same way that the Lutheran liturgy did. Liturgical forms of worship did not mean that believers could agree with the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Catechisms that were attached to these forms of worship.

Catechetical instruction was important insofar as individual inmates wanted to become part of a particular church. The same applied to the initiation rite of baptism. Roman Catholic believers could enroll in the Roman Catholic Initiation of Adults to see whether they agreed with the Catholic Catechism and could be confirmed or baptized.

Lessons Learned

The first lesson I learned from these two experiences is that prison chaplaincy is much more complicated than I thought. Mennonite experiences of conversion and evangelism, Pentecostal testimonies and altar calls, Lutheran lectionaries and liturgies, along with Roman Catholic Initiation of Adults all have their place within the proscribed atmosphere that is called prison life.

These expressions of faith can be brought to bear on the prison experience insofar as the adherent chaplain recognises that these faith expressions may or may not become part of the inmate's life upon release. The physical fences that keep offenders in prison also apply to the spiritual fences of faith that inmates inculcate for themselves while in prison. The chaplain's role is to nurture this faith through a variety of expressions while being respectful of all the visible paths of faith available.

The second lesson I learned was that my identity as a Mennonite pastor has been severely tested as a result of my ecumenical and inter-faith experiences as a chaplain. I cannot really say that I act as an ordained Mennonite pastor. The word "Mennonite" has little meaning within a prison setting. I identify with a pan evangelicalism that believes in conversion and change. I follow a liturgical tradition that is grounded in the mainline churches' expression of worship. I believe in a universal spirituality that participates in Being at a variety of levels. This universal spirituality is necessary to work effectively with believers of all faiths.

Respect is necessary in at least three areas: validation of an inmate's conversion experience, grounding in the historic Christian church's expressions of faith and practice, and empathetic accommodation of all inmates whose faith is different, even radically different, from one's own.

Chapter Eight

Confession and Absolution

Granting of forgiveness is a powerful therapeutic force in the context of remorse, repentance, affirmation of forgiveness, reception of grace, and absolution of guilt. I can speak to this experience as a chaplain who has heard many confessions.

I recently spoke to a friend of mine who had killed someone almost forty years ago. This person spent more than fifteen years in prison for his offence. He had accepted God's forgiveness for his crime. He had accepted some other people's forgiveness of him for having committed such an offence.

This person could not forgive himself. He regarded this last step as "entitlement." It was something that diminished regard for the victim who had died. I suggested to him that absolution of guilt in response to repentance was necessary. He could only come to peace if he forgave himself.

A more bracing example illustrates the limitations of absolution. Several Mafia members have come to me seeking absolution in the "realm beyond." These men could not admit their guilt nor detail their crimes in private confession. They sought absolution in the same way that genuinely remorseful participants did. I was always amazed at these requests.

The Mafia members, who were devout Catholics, believed that public confession and attendance at Mass would absolve them of the criminal behaviour in which they were still involved. These requests spoke to me of the deep hunger of many people seeking absolution, regardless of how this request was related to their intentionality and actualization of life itself.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 32.

Discussion of *Counselling and Confession*, by Walter Koehler

Walter Koehler has written a book about the role of private confession in the practices of the church. He begins by detailing the differences between pastoral counselling and hearing confession. He goes on to look at theological resources within the Lutheran tradition to help pastors hear confession and grant absolution.¹⁰¹

The first chapter outlines twentieth century trends in psychology that have shaped pastoral counselling. Carl Rogers was a therapist in the 1940s who introduced a client-centred therapy to his counselling sessions. Client-centred counselling meant that the “responsibility for the solutions to the problem and the control of the session rests with the counselee.” Rogers focussed on “the innate tendency toward growth and actualization. Given a healthy environment, man will throw off his negative reactions and develop into a healthy, full functioning person.”¹⁰²

This humanistic approach, steeped in a positive view of human beings, is reflective of what I have been about for the last twenty-five years. In *Glimpses of Grace*, I wrote that I “carefully listen to what the person has to say in order to understand the basis of his or her query.”¹⁰³ This subject-oriented approach echoes the work of Stephen Duguid, who has provided philosophical and therapeutic rationales for work with inmates.¹⁰⁴

I resonate with the work of other psychologists that Koehler mentions.¹⁰⁵ Freud’s discussion of the Oedipal complex, his understanding of the self as composed of an id, ego, and superego, and his sensitivity to the unconscious aspects of life have been invaluable in my work as a chaplain. I have used his theories to help offenders understand themselves better.¹⁰⁶

Koehler outlines William Glasser’s *Reality Therapy*.¹⁰⁷ It is more interested in behaviour modification than discovering the underlying reasons for a person’s actions. I have used this therapy to help offenders gain a realistic perspective of themselves. Offenders are notorious for deflecting blame, including the role of mental illness in their offences.

¹⁰¹ Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession* (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2011), 20-31, 45-59.

¹⁰² Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, 25.

¹⁰³ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Duguid, *Can Prisons Work?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, 24-37.

¹⁰⁶ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 91-100, 115-124, 125-132.

¹⁰⁷ Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, 28, William Glasser, *Reality Therapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

I often joke with the men. Are those people the only ones you can blame for your crime? I am sure you can find others to blame. I counsel them: “Share the blame as widely as possible so it does not reflect so badly on yourself.”¹⁰⁸

Koehler questions the role of these therapies because of their anthropocentric approach. He suggests that pastoral counselling is more interested in a theocentric approach.¹⁰⁹ I agree with Koehler that theology and faith can address inmates’ needs. A religious solution speaks to the issues of guilt and shame, dread and despair, loneliness and grief.

Acknowledgement of sin, repentance, grace, forgiveness, justification, assurance, and absolution occur on a deep level of faith. Inmates come to chaplains because they want to deal with the spiritual aspects of their lives. Chaplains address this situation through a combination of psychological wisdom and pastoral care. Psychology along with theology are invaluable in helping chaplains understand the reason for inmate behaviours.

The *Celebrate Recovery* program (CR) deals with the stages of repentance, surrender, confession, forgiveness, absolution, and assurance that Koehler speaks about at the end of his book.¹¹⁰ Confession and absolution are integral to restoration and reconciliation on a divine and human level.

One question that remains has to do with the confidante to whom the person confesses. Many inmates with whom I work trust very few people. Some of them have had bad experiences with pastors and churches. It takes time to build trust. I point them in the direction of AA or CR. When it comes to sharing their inventory and confessing their sins, they often choose a recognized sponsor who is a CR facilitator rather than myself.

Inmates feel more comfortable sharing with a volunteer who is anonymous as well as an “equal.” I have considered the importance of this egalitarian dynamic regarding *Celebrate Recovery* and confession in a chaplaincy manual.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ I note the difference in approaches between Freud and Glasser in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 305,fn2.

¹⁰⁹ Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, 34.

¹¹⁰ Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, 77-80; John Baker, *Celebrate Recovery Inside*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998; Celebrate Recovery, *What is Celebrate Recovery?* [Home - Celebrate Recovery®](https://www.celebraterecovery.com/) Retrieved 23 December 2022.

¹¹¹ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 138-140.

CR is an egalitarian driven program that has much to offer church and society. Pastors should make as much use of it as possible. Koehler's goal of having pastors becoming good pastoral counsellors, along with hearing confession and granting absolutions, is commendable. Collaboration with other groups and believers who are dedicated to something similar is to be encouraged.¹¹²

Conclusion

Public and private confession are an integral part of what the Gospel has to say about our need to be remorseful, repent, confess, receive forgiveness, and live by the grace which Christ has made real for us who are called by faith. The Augsburg Confession has retained public and private confession, along with absolution, for a reason.¹¹³

The success of such groups as *Celebrate Recovery* demonstrates the effectiveness of this process. This program includes private confession and private absolution as necessary aspects of the healing journey. Koehler's book is invaluable in showing how pastors can make use of the latest psychological therapies while bringing a much-needed theology of sin, confession, forgiveness, and grace to the discussion.

¹¹² The effectiveness of confession and absolution ultimately rests, as Koehler notes, on the trust and confidence that the participant has in the person to whom they are confessing, *Counselling and Confession*, 76-77. Confidentiality and professionalism of the pastor or CR facilitator are key.

¹¹³ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, translated by Charles Arand, et.al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), *The Book of Concord*, 45, 73-74.

Chapter Nine

Created in the Image of God

The Catholic Catechism asserts the fact that human beings have been *created in the image of God*.¹¹⁴ It affirms the freedom of human beings in their search for God.¹¹⁵ It acknowledges that human beings sometimes use their radical freedom to sin.¹¹⁶ This sin results in the loss of grace.

The Catechism makes a distinction between a tendency to sin, called *concupiscence*, and sin itself.¹¹⁷ All of us have an inclination to sin based on our selfish desires. We sin when we feed the flames of these proclivities to possess what we want. Placing one's covetous impulses within an ethic of care and respect enables a person to become whole, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. The Catechism acknowledges the inevitability of sinning while placing that original sin within the salvific perspective of the gospel. God forgives our sin, saves us from ourselves, and empowers us to live redeemed lives.

Concupiscence

The Catholic Catechism makes a distinction between original sin that Adam and Eve initiated, and concupiscence, which represents a “weakness of nature” and a “tendency to sin.” God removed original sin through atonement of Christ’s sacrifice. Believers confess that God has set them free from sin. Concupiscence nevertheless remains in believers.¹¹⁸ Concupiscence refers to “the tinder to sin.” It represents the

¹¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2019), 41, cf. 31-34. Please excuse the use throughout of the masculine pronoun in the Catechism. Pierre Allard, long term national director of chaplaincy in Canada (1988-2006) includes being created in the image of God as a key basis for prison ministry, *The Statement of the Correctional Service of Canada Values and a Biblical Perspective for the Role of Chaplain* Unpublished Doctor of Ministry Dissertation (Lombard, Ill.: North Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 82-91.

¹¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1730-1742.

¹¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1861-1864.

¹¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 28-34, 977-980, 1424-1426.

¹¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 977-980, 1424-1426.

kindling within human emotions that are easily incited and ignited with the slightest spark.¹¹⁹

The ninth and tenth biblical commandments provide a better understanding about what concupiscence is all about by speaking about covetousness.¹²⁰ The Catholic Catechism divides “any intense form of human desire” or “sensitive appetite” that goes contrary to the operation of human reason into two sections.¹²¹ The first aspect has to do with lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes for “one’s neighbour’s wife.” These desires can lead to (sexual) violence and injustice. “Coveting one’s neighbour’s goods,” the tenth commandment, can, in turn, lead to theft, robbery, and fraud.¹²²

Many of the offences committed by inmates fall under the general category of covetousness. A boyfriend beats up his girlfriend because of his possessiveness. He is jealous and afraid that she will fall in love with someone else. A husband commits adultery with another person because he is dissatisfied with his marriage relationship. A man rapes a woman because he does not know how to satisfy his sexual desires in an appropriate way.

Young men join gangs and steal because they cannot imagine earning enough money in a legitimate way to afford a Mercedes Benz car. The consumer society in which we live promises us that happiness lies in the purchasing of goods, in drinking alcohol, in gambling, and taking what one can get from someone else.

The Catholic Catechism does not consider covetousness as a sin in-and-of-itself. It “unsettles” human beings’ “moral faculties” and inclines human beings to sin “without being in itself an offence.”¹²³ This means that desiring goods and being attracted sexually to others is a natural part of human nature. That is the way that God has made us.

A problem starts when we give these feelings free rein, thinking that anything is permissible. Our insecurities tell us that we deserve more than we have, that we deserve to “interfere in other people’s lives” in an inappropriate manner. We allow our own unsettledness and lack of satisfied interiority to control our actions.

¹¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1264-1266

¹²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2514-2516. Exodus 20:17 reads as follows: “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house, you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” The Catholic Catechism divides these sayings into two commandments, while the Protestant church regards covetousness as one commandment. The Protestant church divides Exodus 20:4-6 into two commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me,” and “You shall not make for yourself a graven image.” The Catholic Catechism regards these two sentences as one command, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2051-2052.

¹²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2515.

¹²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2534-2536, 1865-1869.

¹²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2515.

The Catholic Catechism's distinction between concupiscence as a tendency to sin and sin itself is different from the way that some Protestant denominations view the situation. This is how the second Article of the Augsburg Confession on original sin translates the German text:¹²⁴

Since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination (the word "concupiscence" is used in the Latin text) and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin (brackets added).

Further on in the *Book of Concord*, the *Solid Declaration* remarks that human nature, after the fall:¹²⁵

is completely dead to the good – completely corrupted. . . there is no spark of spiritual power left or present with which human beings can prepare themselves for the grace of God.

Richard Snyder has shown how various Protestant theologians affirm a similar belief in total depravity. The problem does not have to do with:¹²⁶

acknowledging the connection between sin and redemption, but from understanding sin as destroying all capacity for the good, beauty and truth. In so doing we lose sight of the grace that is present in all creation.

The Catholic Catechism suggests that human beings can struggle against sin and emerge victorious. In speaking about the woundedness of human beings, the Catechism states:¹²⁷

Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back to God, but the consequences of nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

In another section, it states:¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, translated by Charles Arand, et.al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 39. Cf., Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, *The Catholic Confutation of the Augsburg Confession, Source and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 107-108.

¹²⁵ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 544.

¹²⁶ T. Richard Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 36-37.

¹²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 404-405.

¹²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1426.

The new life in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.

This distinction between concupiscence as “a tendency to sin” and “sin itself” is important for two reasons. First, the inmates that I worked with had not only watched pornography or thought of killing their neighbour. They did not only covet their neighbour’s wife and goods. They seized and claimed both.

These actions demonstrate that human desires are powerful factors in people’s lives. Feelings, emotions, and “sensitive appetites” can easily overflow into rage and revenge, violence, and injustice.

There are, indeed, differences between thinking and acting, desiring and seizing, coveting and claiming. Most people have thought, desired, and coveted many things. They have not acted on these impulses. They have been able, with the help and grace of God, to refrain from overt criminal and immoral acts while still being susceptible to sin and evil.

The second reason for making a distinction between a tendency to sin and sin itself is because some offenders find it hard to separate their sexual desires, negative feelings toward themselves and their spouses, desire for money, and hatred of their enemies -- from the criminal acts that they committed. They concluded -- based on their guilt and shame regarding their criminal acts -- that it was wrong to feel anger, express rage, or own their emotions to know what went wrong with their lives.

A person’s range of feelings is normal and has been created by God. These emotions are immensely useful in understanding how other people and things make us feel. Strong desires are part of how God has created us. God has created a balance between the irrational and the rational, between heart and mind, between emotions and rationality.

To say that concupiscence is not “in-and-of-itself” a sin brings a huge sigh of relief. Separating the act from the “tinder to sin” that ignites the blaze enables us to access the many unconscious and conscious reasons that we commit sin. We have sometimes nurtured concupiscence to the point that it became an unstoppable raging fire. We all have weaknesses within ourselves: insecurity, avarice, pride, power, lust,

envy, jealousy, anger, or rage. We have sometimes fed these desires to get what we want. Emotions are not necessarily sins in-and-of-themselves. They can lead to much bigger things if allowed to fester.

The Catholic Catechism's reticence to call concupiscence a direct sin allows us to own that part of ourselves that is less than good. Acknowledging weakness and sensitivity enables us to claim aspects of our lives that need work. Believers can struggle and claim victory rather than seeing faith primarily as a matter of "seeking forgiveness" for having these thoughts at all.¹²⁹

Passions

The Catechism continues its reflection on the emotional aspect of existence by looking at human passions. It affirms the fact that passions are "neither good nor evil. They are morally qualified only to the extent that they effectively engage reason and will."¹³⁰

The Catechism builds on this distinction by suggesting that love, "attracted to the good," represents the most fundamental passion.¹³¹ Love causes a desire for the absent good and the hope of attaining it. This movement finds completion in the "pleasure and joy of the good" possessed.

Offenders are hemmed in on every side by accusations and convictions that they have broken many taboos. Daytime programming emphasizes the negative aspect of this fact. Offenders are given tools to stop "stinking thinking," to consider the consequences of their actions, to learn what "not to do" in a situation.

Concentrating on taboos such as not stealing, not killing, not sexually assaulting, not harming, and not coveting is limited in effectiveness because of its deontological priority (emphasis on rules). Staff do not provide offenders with enough positive reinforcements, teleological goals, and reachable rewards to motivate them to change.¹³² This lacuna in programming is why the above statement about love and

¹²⁹ The limits of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology have to do with the fact that he had a tragic view of life. He believed that the love of God entered into history primarily as crucifixion and forgiveness, D. B. Robertson, editor, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1976), 269, 276. This negative view of salvation history makes it hard for inmates to affirm the possibility of change in their lives, cf. Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 159.

¹³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1767.

¹³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1765.

¹³² I have considered the difference that deontology and teleology, myth and fairy tale, make in motivating and providing positive solutions to inmates' problems, Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 12-14, 95-100.

its rewards is so important. To speak about the “pleasure and joy of the good possessed” represents a completion of life that is hard to put into words.

To give an example, *eros* finds its fulfillment in the mutual love of marriage. At the same time, forgiveness, forbearance, acceptance, and compromise represent an integral aspect of the covenantal nature of the relationship.

The same thing applies to one’s love for God. A beatific vision of God in which divine intimacy is experienced represents the wherewithal of faith. I can attest to this fact on an experiential level. When I transferred together with my family to another province four thousand kilometers away to continue my work as a chaplain, I had a powerful mystical experience. The move had been stressful; I had already worked for over ten years in the system. My family and I had a difficult time adjusting.

At the same time, I found myself refreshed in my work. My colleagues were immensely supportive. The work was fulfilling. I found a renewed sense of calling to chaplaincy. Part of this renewal involved an intense spiritual and religious experience. I found myself reflecting on an image of Madonna and child during the Advent and Christmas season. I developed a seven-step spiritual journey in conjunction with the use of a labyrinth. I wrote a manual for the spiritual retreats that I facilitated.¹³³

I referred to this experience as the intimate presence of God. Human intimacy and love are two attributes that are hard to find in a prison setting. Divine intimacy represents one means by which one can find one’s way back to the living. A beatific vision is one way of naming this experience.

Seeking good as an object is a way that passions become integrated into the life of faith. Possessiveness that can turn into ugly covetousness is reoriented to the goodness of Being of which I am a part. Desire and longing that wants to control is turned outward to envelop others through selfless love. A sense of belonging is gained as a person lets go of self. A sense of self, in other words, is regained through God’s and other people’s affirmations.

Getting to the bottom of this dialectic between the need to be selfish and the ability to be selfless represented the heart of my ministry. Inmates came to me because of their overriding guilt and shame about their crimes. They had grasped at love instead

¹³³ Donald Stoesz, *The Intimate Presence of God: A Seven Step Spiritual Journey* (Innisfail: Shtace Publishing, 2003), 81 pages.

of attaining it. They had controlled and harmed others because they thought that would in some perverse manner satisfy their needs.

I validated their need to stand up for themselves and for their wants to be fulfilled. I affirmed the God-given role of passions and desires in their lives. At the same time, I suggested that the attraction to the good that was basic to their soul represented the means by which love could be experienced and embraced.

The fact that the ship of blame and conviction is tilted so far in one direction within the prison system is the reason why I find the Catholic Catechism's affirmation of human nature, human freedom, passions, conscience, and the beatific vision so refreshing. In the midst of guilt and shame comes an affirmation that we have been created good. We retain the freedom to act in a gracious manner. God is "with us" as Being itself. Passions can find ultimate fulfillment within believers oriented toward the good.

This good can be referred to as love. Intimacy works in human and divine relationships.¹³⁴ This intimacy is an existential reality along with a teleological goal by which offenders can be healed and redeemed. Motivational interviewing has everything to do with hope and faith that love will win out in the end. The actual experience of love on a divine and human level reinforces this sense of hope and wish for freedom. The idea that we experience "pleasure and joy" in the good achieved, that we "sing for joy" at this divine experience represents an immediately achieved goal that motivates us again and again to move toward the good.

Moral Conscience

The Catechism goes on to speak about the role of conscience. Conviction of conscience has always been my most obvious starting point regarding interviews with offenders. Within the first five minutes, offenders are telling me how sorry they are that they committed their offences. They tell me that even though they knew it was wrong, they did it anyway. They are at a loss to know why they were willing to go against the dictates of their conscience. They became wilful and arrogant in the face of a great deal of stress, debilitating circumstances, and sheer inability to ask for help. They found their own criminal solutions to the problem.

¹³⁴ Biblically based courses such as *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2008), and *Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), start the discussion by affirming the fact that God is "seeking a loving relationship," *Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 155-157

Offenders' recognition of the fact that what they were doing was wrong has always been the most obvious way "into" all the reasons and actions and justifications for what they did. The fact that they have a law written in their hearts -- to which Ezekiel (18:1-4), Jeremiah (31:31-34), and Romans (1:20-21, 2:14-15) attest -- showed me that inmates have been created good. They are capable of making moral judgments. They are deeply sorry for what they have done.

These confessions and acknowledgements are the first step in a long road to recovery. Offenders suspended the voice of their conscience in favour of wilful actions and harmful decisions. It takes time to unravel what that means and the role that conscience plays in all of this.

Virtues

Mortal virtues are the last aspect of human emotions, human nature, and human will that the Catechism deals with before turning to the consequences of sin. Hope, faith, and love are regarded as three theological virtues that inform other ones: prudence, justice, fortitude, perserverance, and fruits of the Spirit.

Use of overriding theological virtues to guide specific principles and actions is what makes the Catechism "user friendly." Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of spirituality and belief that inmates know very well. They are forced in prison to either hope or die. They are forced to come to terms with what they believe. And they have to reflect on whether love, actualised as part of their past life, is again possible. Whether love of God or love of others or love of self is intended is less important than the very possibility of love within dire circumstances and tragic results.

The way in which these three theological virtues inform other ones is reflective of the Catechism's overall approach. It places the Ten Commandments within the context of the two greatest commandments: love of God and love of neighbour. Integration of the Old and New Testaments within a covenantal theology speaks volumes about how these Ten Commandments have already been written on the hearts of human beings.¹³⁵

Jesus fulfilled the Law and Ten Commandments by helping people see how this applied specifically to them. The Ten Commandments represent a big fish net that

¹³⁵ Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 37:26-28. The Catechism outlines a covenantal theology starting with Noah and continuing through Abraham, Moses, Israel, and Jesus Christ, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 56-73; cf. Wikipedia, *Covenant Theology*, [Covenant theology - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant_theology) Retrieved 29 December 2022.

captures the worst misdemeanours. Jesus is suggesting that the webbing in this fish net is indeed much smaller, so small in fact that it fits into our hearts.

The Catechism has a wonderful way of enunciating this truth:¹³⁶

It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination, or introspection.

The harmful consequences of offenders' actions make them numb and devoid of any feelings and emotions regarding their crime. They committed their crime by suspending, not only their conscience, but their empathy, humanity, morality, religiousity, spirituality, and solidarity with others as well. The sheer selfishness of their actions makes inmates particularly difficult to deal with in regard to their ability to be "present to themselves" in the form of *interiority*.

The challenge of this task is the reason that the Catechism places the Ten Commandments within the context of love of God and love of neighbour. The underlying purpose of the Ten Commandments' taboos is to undergird the positive. Sanctity of life is the reason not to kill. Belief in God is the reason not to have idols. Understanding internal authority is the reason one honours one's parents. Enjoyment of private property is the reason one does not steal others' goods. Blessing and joy in other people's relationships represent the flip side of envy and covetousness.

I have welcomed this wholistic approach because inmates are drawn so quickly into the condemnation that is front and centre in regard to taboos they have broken. My goal has been to complement the importance of keeping taboos with the positive reasons that these laws have been established in the first place.

¹³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1779.

Chapter Ten

Restoration to Original Righteousness

The Catholic Catechism affirms the fact that Adam and Eve were constituted in an original “state of holiness and justice.”¹³⁷ This grace of original holiness was to “share in the divine life.” Children represent a good example of what it means to dwell in this state of original righteousness. We remember the naiveté, childlike trust, kindness, compassion, love, care, hope, and faith that we had as pre-adolescents.

The Catechism affirms the fact that even though human beings were created good, they fell as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin.¹³⁸ This inevitability of sinning is known as original sin. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant that Adam and Eve had to leave paradise. They sowed fig leaves as clothing for themselves because they had lost their innocence.

We can all remember the time when we lost our naiveté. Perhaps we threw sand into our brother’s face because they took away our toy. Perhaps this loss of innocence had to do with guilt over sexual awareness. We can remember the time when we started disobeying our parents. Perhaps we stole a candy bar from the grocery store.

Inmates are very aware of the evil and sin that they have committed. They live with the consequences of the decisions they have made. This consciousness of sin make them despair and become depressed. They believe that they are fundamentally evil and not worthy of love and attention.

¹³⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 375.

¹³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 397.

I tell inmates to return to a second naivete¹³⁹ in order to find healing and hope. The innocence, love, and trust that one experienced as a child needs to be revisited and affirmed. This restoration is possible through the sacrificial love of Christ. Christ has restored us to original righteousness because of his selfless death on the cross.¹⁴⁰

Harville Hendrix is a marriage counselor who uses this restoration to original righteousness to good effect. He suggests to couples on the verge of separation that they revisit the reasons that they fell in love in the first place.¹⁴¹ They can reignite the initial spark of attraction, affection, and love that they had for each other. Retracing the steps of commitment they made at the beginning of their relationship breaks the power struggle occurring after years of marriage. Forgiveness, forbearance, and acts of love enable couples to move past issues of power and control.

The Celebrate Recovery program is similar. CR facilitators hand out a worksheet in lessons 9, 10, and 11 that asks participants to write down good qualities about themselves. Looking at positive characteristics balances the hurt and harm that one has been experienced and is being asked to name.¹⁴² Confessing what has gone wrong in Principle 4 gives way to forgiveness and absolution. Having been cleansing from the power of sin, offenders reaffirm aspects of themselves that have been left behind.

Affirming the fact that we were originally good and righteous shows us that love and faith and hope are possible. Good characteristics existed within our core being when we were young. These elements of trust, faith, hope, and love can be reclaimed.

¹³⁹ Paul Ricoeur elaborates on what this second naiveté entails in *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 352.

¹⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1987-2005.

¹⁴¹ Harville, Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 119-130.

¹⁴² John, Baker, Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory, Participants Guide 2, *Celebrate Recovery Inside* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 29.

Chapter Eleven

A Beatific Vision

The Catholic Catechism refers to a beatific vision as a mystical experience in which God opens up divine “mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him capacity for it.”¹⁴³ Images in the Scripture that point to this indescribable experience of the divine are “life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, and paradise.”

I can speak to this reality on an existential level. We as a family moved to Alberta twenty years ago so I could work at a prison nearby. I experienced what can be referred to as a beatific vision. Neither faith nor reason was an intricate aspect of the experience. It was a feeling, deep emotion, desire, and envelopment of my whole being within what I would describe as the intimacy of God.¹⁴⁴ It was a powerful experience of affection and love. God was present within my life to such a degree that I was inspired to continue to work as a prison chaplain for the next twenty years.

Part of the reason I had such a powerful experience was because prison is not a place that one really wants to enter. It is a place that I never dreamed of “living in.” I had been a pastor. I wanted to become a university professor. I was an academic. I came from a good family. I had a good family. I had any number of close friends. Why would I want to diminish those fulfilling realities by working in a prison?

Against my better judgement, I fell in love with the ministry. I was able to “speak into” a variety of situations that required my assistance. I learned more about

¹⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1026-1028. “This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise. . . . God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself open up his mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory ‘the beatific vision.’”

¹⁴⁴ I wrote a book entitled. *The Intimate Presence of God*, based on this experience.

ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue in Archambault and Leclerc and Cowansville and Federal Training Centre that I did in ten years studying religion and theology at McGill University.

There was a reality to prison life that I could not find in books or in pastoring. “Snap” decisions were required in innumerable situations. I had to trust my judgment to answer difficult requests. God was with me. I could not manage numerous situations in which I became involved.¹⁴⁵

This initial foray into prison life does not explain the need for a beatific vision. Any new job or career gives a person the energy to meet a new challenge and find work fulfilling. The same satisfaction is not as evident ten years down the road. The job has become routine, there are family and social concerns, children to raise, and new hobbies and sports to get involved in. A renewal is necessary in order for a career to continue to be meaningful.

This is especially true of prison chaplaincy. Prison life may appear infinitely boring and routine. Anyone living and working in that environment can attest to a broad range of pressures that slowly squeeze life out of a person. The sheer number of demands on a daily basis is exhausting.

The need for a beatific vision becomes evident. The prison is such a negative place to work that one is forced to contemplate how to survive and thrive in that environment. The beatific vision represented for me an ecstatic experience of divine intimacy because that was precisely what was missing in a place like prison.

Inmates are hungry for attention, for love, for acceptance, and for affirmation. They are hungry because all of those things have been taken away from them as a result of their offences. They invited and received vilification for what they had done.

Outside observers may say that offenders should not expect anything except judgment and punishment for what they have done. This statement is true at one level. It is another thing for a staff member to choose to work in that environment, to listen to inmates’ complaints and incessant badgering, to empathize at some level, and to intervene in so many other situations. Staff cannot escape the vilification directed at inmates. They are the ones who vicariously absorb the pain of it all.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Some examples are included in Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 18-19, 21-22, 57-58, 60-61, 63.

¹⁴⁶ The movie, *Monster’s Ball*, DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2001), depicts the oppression of such an environment. I comment on the movie in Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 66.

The beatific vision was a liberating experience for me because of the sheer oppressiveness of this cauldron of care. The vision had directly to do with what was missing. Knowledge of God was readily available while seeing God was not really possible. Experiencing the intimacy of God was real precisely because this sense of belonging within Being itself was missing in a prison environment.

I had been part of a loving family when I grew up. I was part of a loving family when I married and we had children. That love was not extended in the same way to the inmates with whom I worked. I could talk about the love that I had for them only in a tangential way. I was not there when they went to bed at night, when they had nightmares about their crimes and their losses, when they lived with dread and shame and guilt.

The intimacy of God was the only thing I had to offer. That affection was the only reality that could counteract the loves that they had lost. They could experience the intimacy of God in the same way that I had, through intense meditation on the sheer hell of it all. One was lifted from the oppression precisely at the point when it became the severest.¹⁴⁷ It was like the killing of the children at Christ's birth and Judas' betrayal of Christ at his arrest and crucifixion. The moment of greatest evil occurred when God shone most brightly. The sheer depression of the job forced me to experience real love and closeness to God.

Emotions and passions represent the roots of many crimes that offenders have committed. Emotions and feelings have to be owned and accepted and embraced in order for restoration to happen. Discovering the power of intimacy represented a way of channeling these desires. The intimacy of God was real. One owned what was lost in order to experience life in a divine way.

Courses like *Experiencing God* and *The Purpose Driven Life* are popular because they speak about a relationship with God.¹⁴⁸ They speak about the fact that God wants to have a "loving relationship" with us. God wants to be "our Friend," "our Comforter," and "our Lord." These courses talk about a loving relationship with God because so few offenders know what it is like to have a loving relationship with anyone else.

This way of talking about God can be extended to images of bride and bridegroom. Mark 2:19 speaks about the disciples feasting with the bridegroom while Jesus is

¹⁴⁷ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 149.

¹⁴⁸ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 155-157.

still with them. Matthew 25:10 talks about ten bridesmaids going to the wedding feast of the bridegroom. Ephesians 6:29-32 speaks about Christ loving the church in the same way that husbands love their wives. John refers to the church as a bride because of the fellowship, intimacy, and care experienced there (Revelation 19:7).

The Church represents a fellowship of believers that love each other. We experience God in a very personal sense in this womb of care. This love substitutes for the lack of concern and care and love that inmates experience within a prison context. I experienced a real level of fellowship with these men as part of the body of Christ.

A beatific vision is sometimes necessary for a person to be sustained in ministry. It represents a powerful antidote to the misery, bleakness, and despair that is experienced in a prison setting.

Chapter Twelve

Surrender to God¹⁴⁹

The twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous illustrates what dying to sin and rising to life through surrender is all about. In the first step, members of AA acknowledge their utter helplessness in the face of their addictions (Appendix A).¹⁵⁰ They affirm powerlessness over their attraction to drinking. While others are able to drink responsibly, AA members drink to the point of self-destruction. They are unable to stop drinking until they reach the end of their rope. At that point, they acknowledge they are addicted to alcohol and need help.

This acknowledgement of powerlessness is paradoxically the first step toward change. The very act of asking for help names the evil and enables alcoholics to move on with their lives. Their cry to a higher power places their self-destructive behaviour into a broader perspective. The God of the universe empowers them to move to the next step.

The twelve-step program is ingenious in its psychological understanding of the addictive personality. The first two steps speak only about admission of helplessness and belief in a higher power. An act of the will occurs in the third step when a person turns their life over to God. Writing an inventory of one's life represents the next step. An inventory enables a more profound understanding of how much harm one has caused others. The participant presents this inventory to another person.

During the sixth step, the alcoholic is encouraged to admit their need for God to intervene in their lives. This is followed by a seventh step in which the person asks God to "humbly remove our shortcomings." Naming and making direct amends to the people one has harmed occur during the eighth and ninth steps. The person becomes increasingly aware of what it means to turn one's will over to God.

¹⁴⁹ This chapter represents a modification of chapter three, Donald Stoesz, "Role of the Will in Effecting Salvation," *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, 47-62.

¹⁵⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955), 59.

The twelve-step program is effective because it takes an incremental approach to life. Many offenders do not know how to take a measured approach to life. The many predicaments into which they have gotten themselves paralyse them. They are frenetic in their haste to get on with their lives. It does not take long until all of life comes crashing down on them again. Offenders have a propensity to juggle as many balls as possible to see how far they can get. They have not yet learned that most of life's successes come from a lot of work at a few things.

The twelve-step program understands that one-step at a time is needed in terms of the human will. Admission, belief, decision, inventory, re-admission, removal, asking, willingness, making amends, re-inventory, seeking, and practice are twelve action words the alcoholic is encouraged to consider. Alcoholics know that they can at any point travel from the ninth step back to the first one. They have to admit all over again they are powerless over alcohol.

Relapse does not mean defeat. The alcoholic knows what a difference AA made when they began the program. They know that they are still welcome at an AA meeting, in spite of the fact that they may still be drunk. The open door is there for the alcoholic rather than the other way around. The twelve-step program holds out hope even as the person is descending into the pit of hell by starting to use alcohol again. Like God, the twelve-step program never gives up on a person.

The twelve-step program link of human nature to a higher power is different from enlightenment thinking that is optimistic about humans' reasoning abilities. It is also different from some theologies that are radically pessimistic about human possibilities. AA does not believe as the humanists do in the ability of human beings to succeed because of their own will power. They are pessimistic enough about the hold that drugs and alcohol have had over their lives. They understand an act of the will can create more harm than good. Acknowledgement of their self-destructive tendencies paradoxically diffuses the situation. Admission enables them to commit fully to their recovery.

The twelve-step program is voluntaristic in the sense that it believes enough in human will power to ask the alcoholic to show up to a meeting and admit their dependency. It goes beyond humanism in that this act of the will is only efficacious if one turns it over to the will of God. This spiritual affirmation places the AA program within the realm of faith while undermining the fatalism so prevalent within the Augustinian heritage of Christianity.¹⁵¹ The will of God joins with the will of human beings so that belief in a higher power disentangles self-paralysis and empowers the alcoholic to move forward.

¹⁵¹ Cross-reference Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 159.

The fundamental belief that we can move forward in spite of the baggage we are carrying is what I am affirming in this theology of prison ministry. God gives us a way out, not only to cope, but also to move ahead with success. This is something I repeat on a daily basis within my ministry. The men become overwhelmed so easily and so quickly that I have to constantly remind them God is the one who is “working all things out.” We are only along for the ride in the sense that God is the one who shows us the possibilities within the impossibilities. There are always options that we can cash in on, no matter the difficulties.

AA teaches us to take one-step at a time as we recover from our sinful nature. While the sinful tendencies hold us down, the redemptive possibilities God has granted as actual, enable us to move forward.

Rising from the Dead by Being Raised

The New Testament gives us a good example of the relation between the human and divine will. Hans Frei, in his book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*,¹⁵² makes the point that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. In his speech to the people of Jerusalem at Pentecost, Peter asserts “God raised him up, having freed him from death” (Acts 2:24). He repeats this statement in Acts 2:32: “God has raised this Jesus to life.” Peter refers to it again in his second sermon to the people at Solomon’s Portico: “God raised him from the dead” (Acts 3:15). He makes the same affirmation before the high priest of Jerusalem: “The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 5:30, cf. Matthew 28:6-7).

This assertion makes eminent sense from a human point of view. Dead people cannot raise themselves. Someone else needs to enact a resurrection. This is particularly true in Jesus’ case because it is theologically important to know that Jesus died before God raised him from the dead. Some early believers claimed Jesus was only pretending to be dead in order to make his escape from the grave later on. For theological reasons, they could not believe that Jesus as omnipotent God could suffer death. Jesus was too powerful a person to allow himself to be killed.

The need for God to raise Jesus from the dead is important for a number of reasons. It is important for addicts and prisoners alike to know that they are unable to manage their lives. They make promises and have illusions that they can “make it this time.” Prisoners, like all Christians, need to confess they are powerless over making history turn out right. They are completely dead in terms of their will power. God needs to save them from themselves.

¹⁵² (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 152-155.

The salvation story of death and resurrection is a useful one for all believers. God is sanctifying them. Paul refers repeatedly to dying and rising with Christ. This is the way that Christians can move on with their lives (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:19-21, Romans 6:5-11; 8:10-11). Paul himself went through a dramatic conversion experience (Acts 9). He knew what it was like to change from killing Christians to serving God with his heart and mind. Paul thought he was doing the right thing in the first place. He realized that his zealous persecution had more to do with what he wanted than with what God wanted. He came to realize the significance of death and resurrection in his own life. He referred to his own experience repeatedly to help other Christians.

This way of understanding the relation of the divine to human will is helpful. Christians need someone else to provide the spark that will get them going. They need to be unhooked from the burdens and guilt they feel in order to be empowered to move on. They need to acknowledge the extent to which they can do nothing without God. Humility, repentance, forgiveness, and grace provide the divine wherewithal to engage the human will. Christians thank God for raising them to new life.

Several Scripture passages fly in the face of this divine empowerment of human endeavours. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that no one has the power to take away his life. He has “the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again” (John 10:18). The Gospel of John emphasizes the power of Jesus to decide the time of his own death, as well as his power to “rise from the grave.” When Jesus confronts the officers who are going to arrest him, they all fall down to the ground (John 18:6). Jesus tells Pilate that he has no power over him except the power that has been given to Pilate by God (John 19:11).

The Gospel of Mark also refers to the fact that Jesus will rise from the dead. Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 8:31 that he will be killed and “after three days rise again.” He repeats this prediction in Mark 10:34, when he tells his disciples “he will rise again” after the Gentiles have killed him (cf. Luke 18:33; 24:34).

John along with Mark and Luke want to make the theological point that Jesus is equal to God. Jesus as God had the power within himself to rise from the grave, even though he was dead. This assertion of Jesus as having power over death is useful for us as an analogical symbol. It builds on the long theological discussion that the church has had about the relation of the human and divine will within Jesus.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ A theological formula of Jesus having two wills was drawn up in the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.); see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition, Volume I: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, translated by John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1965), 544. It reads in part: “. . . our Lord Jesus Christ is the one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same consisting of a

We sometimes feel, like Paul, that we are powerless to do good. Jesus gives us encouragement through assertion of his will power. Through the witness of the Gospel of John, Jesus is suggesting that we do not have to view his death and resurrection in a primarily passive sense. In spite of the fact that we are often helpless in the face of unforeseen and foreboding circumstances, we should not let that discourage us. Like Jesus, we need to embrace the will power God has given us through God's creation of human beings as good.

We are all prone to blaming others for the mistakes we have made and for the helplessness we feel. Offenders have a tendency to share the blame as widely as possible. Deflecting responsibility appears to be an innate feature within human beings. It is hard to stand up and take the blame for harm. The above passages suggest that we can take responsibility for ourselves. We should not only accept the mistakes we have made. We should also be willing to lay down our lives for others. Jesus assumes that we are able to act when he asks us to take up our crosses and follow him (Matthew 16:24).

Creation and Redemption

Two theological assertions help us understand that human beings are able to act responsibly and redemptively. First, God has created human beings in the image of God. They are capable of acting "like God." This humanistic emphasis on the innate goodness of human beings is a healthy corrective to Paul's pessimistic view of human nature. Jesus is saying by analogy to his own situation that human beings are able to "lay down their lives and take them up again." They are able to sacrifice their own interests in favour of the greater good. This type of affirmation and confidence in human beings is needed in the prison system today.

Creation is not the only reason God has gifted human beings to do the right thing. Human beings can figuratively raise themselves from the dead because of the grace they have received from Christ himself. Christ's death and resurrection enables us to be unhooked from the depths of despair to live, breathe, and succeed in him. The very grace we received through creation has been renewed and revived through re-creation in order to move from the tangle of original sin to the embrace of Christian fellowship.

This type of grace is especially evident in the book of Hebrews. The writer refers repeatedly to the fact that we are to approach the throne of grace with boldness (Hebrews 4:16). We are to have confidence to enter the sanctuary (Hebrews 10:19).

rational soul and a body *homoousios* with the Father as to his Godhead, and the Same *homoousios* with us as to his manhood . . . made known in two natures which exist without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each being preserved, and both concurring into one Person and one *hypostasis*."

We have full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22). We hold fast to our confession of hope (Hebrews 10:23).

These accolades reinforce the idea that transformation occurs as believers move from a state of sin to a state of grace. Believers move from an affirmation of justification to an embodiment of holiness through their willingness to follow Jesus. The way in which Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament requirement of sacrifice is the way that Christian believers can move to a fulfillment of their deepest desires. We enact the intentions for which God has created us. The grace that God bestows on us intersects with the freedom with which we embrace God's will.

Conclusion

Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series suggested to Harry and Ron that Voldemort could heal himself by feeling remorse (chapter six). Fiction writer Victor Hugo had Bishop Bienvenu in *Les Miserables* offer the last of his prized possessions to Jean Valjean so Jean would come to understand what graciousness and compassion were all about (chapter thirteen). Jean came to a realization of what sacrifice meant when he heard the prayers of the nuns of Petit Picpus lying prostrate before the altar of God. Jean came to know what love meant when he became the father of Cosette and raised her until she was of age.

These examples illustrate that change is possible when altruism becomes part of the equation. These human examples mimic the spiritual image represented by Jesus. Jesus' willingness to lay down his life along with his ability to take it up again move us to another level of understanding. I use the word "magic" to describe this dynamic. It is only through a mysterious transformation that change is enacted. By acknowledging that they are utterly helpless, alcoholics bring their will under God's control. By giving up his life, Jesus rises from the dead by being raised by God.

These contradictory statements and paradoxical realities find their resolution in the magical agency of the divine. Reconciliation is tied closely to the Eucharist. It is precisely here where death and life, hatred and love, human and divine will, rejection and inclusion, and alienation and belonging come together. Inmates understand the magical nature of this transaction only too well. They have been vilified and rejected. They have been narcissistic and self-destructive. Offenders come to realize these burdens can be overcome on a human plain by a supernatural result. No human explanation is adequate for these paradoxes of guilt and forgiveness, shame and conviction, and rejection and belonging. We search for answers on a magical, spiritual, and deeply religious level.

Chapter Thirteen

Ability to Love¹⁵⁴

I made the assumption in my first book, *Glimpses of Grace*, that the story of Jean Valjean, depicted by fiction writer Victor Hugo in the novel *Les Miserables*,¹⁵⁵ had primarily to do with his salvation.¹⁵⁶ Jean's journey of faith began with his justification as exemplified by the bishop's gracious gift of two silver candlesticks. Jean's profound remorse in response to this supreme act of compassion transformed itself into self-acceptance, forgiveness, and a commitment to change.

Jean's faith deepened in his sojourn at the convent of the Bernardine nuns of the Obedience of Martin Verga. The nuns' voluntary imprisonment within this cauldron of God's care made Jean realize that transformation was a life-long commitment. The end of the second section of the book, entitled *Colette*,¹⁵⁷ described this change:

Jean's soul subsided into silence like this cloister, into fragrance like these flowers, into peace like this garden, into simplicity like these women, and into joy like these children . . . His whole heart melted in gratitude.

The journey of sanctification in Jean's life was working its magic through the voluntary submission of these devout nuns.

Victor Hugo defines the purpose of his book as a journey from justification to sanctification. He appeals directly to the reader toward the end of the novel:¹⁵⁸

The book, which the reader now has before his eyes, is from one end to the other, . . . the march from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from the false

¹⁵⁴ This chapter represents a modification of chapter two, Donald Stoesz, "Ability to Love," *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, 31-47.

¹⁵⁵ Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, translated by Charles Wilbour (New York: Modern Library, n.d.).

¹⁵⁶ Donald Stoesz *Glimpses of Grace*, 3- 14.

¹⁵⁷ Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, 484-485.

¹⁵⁸ Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, 1042.

to the true, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from rottenness to life, from brutality to duty, from Hell to Heaven, from nothingness to God.

This emphasis is misguided and even self-centred if it fails to address the *telos* of this movement, namely the ability to love. One could even argue that the overarching theme of the book has more to do with love than with salvation. The four main characters, *Fantine*, *Cosette*, *Marius*, and *Jean Valjean*, form the major sections of the book. The central two figures, *Cosette* and *Marius* fall in love and marry at the end of the novel. The bookends of two protagonists, *Fantine* and *Jean*, frame this idyllic bliss. Their parental care and selfless sacrifice represent the basis of what true love is all about, placing other people ahead of one's own interests.

The priority of love becomes even more compelling when one realizes the background of these unlikely heroes. *Jean* is a convict who has been in prison for nineteen years. *Fantine* is a single mother abandoned at her pregnancy. She supports her young daughter financially. She gives *Cosette* away to avoid the stigma of being a parent before becoming a wife.

Her daughter *Cosette* becomes a labourer with a foster family at the age of five because there is no one to protect her. The fourth protagonist, *Marius*, is the son of a republican rejected by his rich, monarchist (grand) father. *Marius* cannot reconcile the opposing beliefs of his father and grandfather. He joins the French rebellion of 1833 and is nearly killed in the process.

An even greater, motley crew surrounds these disparate characters. Gavroche is a street urchin in Paris who takes his two younger brothers under his wing. Eponine is his sister who does her unscrupulous father's bidding in his attempts to fleece wealthy strangers. Javert is a police inspector who, having been born in prison, becomes punitive justice personified. Monsieur Gillenormand is the rich monarchist who tries to reclaim the affections of his grandson, *Marius*. Roman Empire lover Gillenormand disowned his republican son, Baron Pontmercy. Babet, Gueulemer, Claquesous, and Montparnasse are bandits who join Thenardier in his attempt to trap and kill *Jean Valjean*.

Then there are Monsieur and Madame Thenardiers, an inn-keeping couple whom Hugo describes as:¹⁵⁹

souls which, crablike, crawl continually toward darkness, going back in life instead of advancing in it, . . . becoming steeped more and more thoroughly in an intensifying darkness.

¹⁵⁹ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*. 129.

Hugo names the book after this family. Hugo suggests that this couple has reached the point “at which the unfortunate and the infamous are associated, and confounded in a single word, a fatal word, *Les Misérables*.”¹⁶⁰

Victor Hugo is not only asking whether God can save these people. This is an inherently, self-centred question that concerns one’s own destiny. The question of whether it is possible for people to love each other lies within these themes of justice and transformation of the good. Hugo has deliberately chosen characters that are unlovable to force the reader to come to terms with this issue.¹⁶¹ As every Bible reader knows, it is one thing to love those who love you.¹⁶² Familial love is a natural extension of biological loyalty and commitment to a progenitive future. Much more difficult is the prospect of loving someone thrown into one’s path.

Hugo explores this fated reality through the development of his characters. Jean Valjean did not realise how hard it would be to be accepted in society. Bishop Bienvenu could not fathom having to ask for forgiveness from the very compatriot who brought down his religious house.¹⁶³ Fantine did not realise that her first love would abandon her. The street urchin Gavroche had no idea that he would to be killed at the barricades. The young adult men of the ABC club did not comprehend the futility of their cause. The Thenardiens had no idea that they had come to represent the very pathos of society.

Hugo gives these characters choices along the way. Some of them, like the Thenardiens, appear incapable of choosing the good. They abandon three of their five children while using their two daughters for their own pathetic schemes. Others, such as Fantine, sacrifice everything to care for the ones they love, in this case, her daughter Cosette. In each of these situations, Hugo is asking the question whether it is possible to love and sacrifice oneself for the sake of another.

The bond established between an aging convict and an orphan girl represents one of his answers. Jean’s heart has melted and he has learned to love. He takes care of Cosette and raises her as his own. As she becomes a woman, it is only natural that she will fall in love with a man of her dreams, in this case Marius. Like Fantine, Jean has to give up the only love he has ever had for their daughter to be happy. He fades into the background so that mutual love can be consummated. It is possible to have a fairy tale ending. People can live happily ever after, even if this reality appears

¹⁶⁰ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 627.

¹⁶¹ Graham Robb refers to this contradictory reality in his book, *Victor Hugo: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 399.

¹⁶² See, for example, Matthew 10:37-42

¹⁶³ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 32-39.

remote and even impossible in the light of such disparate characters and difficult circumstances.

Relevance for Prison Chaplaincy

The reader may have guessed by now why I find Victor Hugo's novel so compelling. I meet every one of his characters on a weekly basis in the prison chapel. The unrepentant Mafia member bows religiously before me. The arrogant sexual predator vows never to be caught again. The young drug dealer comes to pull the wool over my eyes. The attention-deficit-disordered man wants to be left alone from the bullying he receives. The spiritually hungry, remorseful gentleman has no idea how he got here. Many others are drawn to the acceptance-prone gospel I get to preach each Sunday.

The question in each of these cases is not whether God has saved them. God promises that to them in the same way that he granted salvation to the repentant thief on the cross. The immediate question has to do with whether I can love each of these men. Is it possible for me to accept them in the same way God does, even after I have learned much more than I want to know about each one of these chapel participants?

My tendency is to become more like Javert and Marius than Bishop Bienvenu and Jean Valjean. The punitive voice of justice rises in me like a prophet as I feel the need to reinforce the punishment these men have already received. Marius cannot accept Jean Valjean until Jean has become Jesus a thousand times over. Jean Valjean has to prove his righteousness repeatedly in order to be accepted by another human being.

Marius together with his bride run over to the house where Jean is dying after learning that Jean saved him from death. A benediction with a cross in it appears in the last scene.¹⁶⁴ The severe costs of redemption are evident to all.

This last scene of pathos is why I love Victor Hugo's novel so much. The cost of redemption is high, to which any inmate can attest. Forgiveness, love, acceptance, and belonging come at a high cost. This cost represents the result of what offenders have taken away from the people they have harmed. Nothing can undo the damage they have done. A chaplain and volunteer and family member and victim have to decide whether they, each in their own way, can mete out forgiveness and love.

Victor Hugo, for one, thinks that such a scenario of living happily ever after is possible. It comes in the face of so much dying. And yet, the young couple is

¹⁶⁴ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 1218-1219.

presumed to outlast the pages of the novel. I, too, have had to come to terms with the question of whether forgiveness and love are possible.

People tend to forgive and love each other if they come from similar, broken destinies. Jean and Cosette were able to love each other because of their abandonment. The men I meet are attracted to men and women as severely wounded and punished as themselves. Misery loves company. There is a lot of both that can be found in prison.

The possibility of love shines in front of the black backdrop of pain and suffering and evil. I can only minister in prison if I am able to love. I am able on a daily basis to reach out a hand of acceptance. This gesture may or may not be reciprocated. As Hugo demonstrates so well, some people become increasingly worse¹⁶⁵ while others not only find redemption but love in their destiny as well.

Hugo's novel is primarily a love story. It is only "tangentially" – may I use that casual and cavalier word – about crime and punishment. To what extent can I emphasize the love and acceptance that happens within a prison chapel while choosing to ignore the setting in which it occurs? To what extent am I blissfully naïve? To what extent am I reinforcing illusory thinking by telling the inmates they are loved? Can I, like Victor Hugo, assert the power and triumph of love over and above the backdrop of evil and destruction that is so real?

More Precise Definition of Love

Marital love, filial love, mutual love, and divine love are all different ways of saying the same thing. I meet men who marry for love after they have put so much destruction behind them. I meet inmates who re-establish love for their parents and siblings and children after many years of rejection. I meet offenders who find camaraderie and establish solidarity with each other in order to know that love is still possible. I meet the God of grace in the chapel each week as I bow before the divine in abject submission and reverence. I offer the God of consolation and love to these men. The intimacy of God may be the only and last thing they will ever experience.

A chaplain's responsibility is to help these men understand the possibilities of these different types of love. Some men are able to marry. Others simply repeat the same mistake they made the first time around. A chaplain points out the fact that a man's true love may not be able to be faithful to him. The relationship may only be a fantasy of the man's imagination.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 20.

A more realistic scenario may mean re-establishing communication with one's family. An offender's consideration of bridges they have burned help them sense whether they can or want to build another one. The hurt of father and mother and brother and sister has to be revisited to assess the possibility of loving at all. Emotional capacity of vulnerability after so much pain and harm is the surest indication of whether healing is possible.

Solidarity with each other in prison is perhaps the most realistic possibility of love and faith within the foreseeable years to come. Emotional bonding is the most reliable indication of what is possible in the future. Openness to vulnerability, exposure, recriminations, and acceptance within a group of men is the surest way of knowing whether healing, redemption, love, and reintegration are possible. These men have faced similar punishments, committed similar offences, confessed their sins to God, and been open to counsel. While looking disjointed and appearing lopsided, this body of believers is the best manifestation of the body of Christ that is available.

There is – finally -- intimacy with God not replaced by human display. I have returned to this theme repeatedly as the men have shared with me their deep loneliness, despair, sense of hopelessness, and frustrations. The intimacy of God is something that can never be taken away from them. They may even profit from this devotional practice by getting to know what intimacy is all about.

Divine intimacy is such an effervescent reality that others may simply dismiss it as illusory. This may be true. Jesus asks that we believe without having seen. This belief is tested as we take the intimacy of God as a means of healing our wounds and understanding what true love is all about. Who is to say how divine love relates to the human love for which we pine?

Duration of Love

An aspect of love left undefined is its duration. Several of the men I have known fell in love with women while they were in prison. Perhaps surprisingly, I generally recommend that this friendship and love, or whatever it may be, be nurtured by both parties. I am happy to meet with the couple to discuss their relationship. They are often quite emotionally attached. While affirming the friendship, I suggest that their love may only last as long as the man is incarcerated. There is something about separation that makes the heart grow fonder. Men and women become more emotionally attached to each other when they do not have the daily encumbrances of living together.

I encourage the couples' emotional bonding while suggesting to them the possibility that they may not stay together when the man is released. There is something about

“knowing where your man is at all times” that makes women feel safer than when their boyfriends are released. The men are then free again to fall in love with whomever they may meet.

The above experiences bring up the question of the duration of love. While love is very real for two people while apart, actually living together, marrying, and having children is more daunting. I have concluded that love is possible within a particular circumstance, while not possible or even advisable from a longer-term perspective.

A similar issue arises in relation to chapel services. The handshake of peace among offenders may only be efficacious as long as we all remain in the chapel. Peace may dissipate once inmates who “have a beef” with each other exit the chapel doors. Once outside, a different set of rules comes into play, rules which stipulate that one should “beat the crap” out of the next person if one’s honour has been questioned.

The duration of redemption and love and forgiveness is a real issue in prison life. I preach about the eternal love of God. This message is received a little less sanguinely when applied to human relationships. Love has to be practiced on a minute, daily, weekly, yearly, and eternal basis in order to be efficacious. Jesus told his disciples to forgive the same person four hundred and ninety times because he knew that it would take that long for real forgiveness to sink in.

A similar attitude applies to love. Love needs to be defined, practiced, and lived. Fantasy, illusions, wishful thinking, false expectations, broken promises, and realistic possibilities need to be deciphered before an inmate can trust, believe, love, and care enough. The tragedy of the past has to be replaced by hope for the future.

Conclusion

I have suggested that Victor Hugo’s novel is principally about the possibility of love. The fact that Marius and Cosette live happily ever after in the face of large class differences, accentuated by the political and cultural mess left over by the French Revolution, speaks volumes about Hugo’s belief in love as the effect of salvation.

Hugo’s religious optimism is evident when he has Jean Valjean take down the crucifix on the wall beside his deathbed. He looks up in benediction at his silent benefactor, Bishop Bienvenu. The Bishop absolved him of all guilt and shame and prejudice. He gave him the wherewithal to love in the same way that Jesus did. Jean is clearly a Christ figure in his numerous sacrifices of love for Javert, Marius, Fantine, and Cosette. The Restoration of France after the Revolution clearly included faith and religion for Hugo. Hugo was exiled for nineteen years before making his triumphant return to his beloved country.

Faith and religion continue to be part of Correctional Service Canada because of their commitment to include these aspects of life as part of their service to the incarcerated men and women they hold in custody. There is much more than faith and religion going on in a prison chapel. Hope, faith, and love within the utopian pronouncements of the gospel ring out in spite of the fact that they can and are misinterpreted by all concerned. This is the reason I have continued to be a minister of the gospel within a prison setting for the last thirty years. Love is possible, perhaps even real.

Chapter Fourteen

Eros and Agape in Relationships

The genius of Andres Nygren's book, *Agape and Eros*,¹⁶⁶ has to do with his underpinning of divine agape as the basis of human selflessness. He assumes that to love one's neighbour or one's enemy goes against the grain. Human nature tends to say that one should only love those who love you, those who are biologically related to you, or those from whom you can gain some benefit. There appears no reason from a self-interested perspective to love one's neighbour or one's enemies.

Nygren uses human beings' tendency to look after themselves as a foil to underline the priority of God's love for us. Through God's supreme sacrifice of his Son, God saves and empowers us to love those who are unlovable. God enacts divine grace, forgiveness, compassion, and empathy through God's faithful subjects and believers.¹⁶⁷

One of the outcomes of Nygren's emphasis on *Agape* is that he rejects the idea of self-love, *Eros*, as Christian. "*Agape* . . . excludes all self-love. Christianity does not recognize self-love as a legitimate form of love."¹⁶⁸ Self-love is contrary to *Agape* because it compromises the divine initiative of selfless love that flows from God to humanity.

Any human love that flows "on its own accord" toward one's neighbour or toward God, according to Nygren, lessens the theological affirmation of salvation, grace, justification, and forgiveness that flows from God to human beings.¹⁶⁹ Jesus'

¹⁶⁶ Two volumes, translated by Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1932, 1939).

¹⁶⁷ Andres Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 61-159.

¹⁶⁸ Andres Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 217.

¹⁶⁹ Andres Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 95-100, 127-132, 551-558. Contrast this idea with the opening statement of the Catholic Catechism, "Man's faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal

command in Matthew 22:39 to “love your neighbour as yourself” is possible because of God’s selfless love for humanity.

I consider this logical conclusion of Nygren’s theocentric emphasis on *Agape* as unfortunate. One problem I encountered among offenders is that they do not love themselves. They do not believe that they should love themselves. Consequently, they have stayed in bad marriages and continued to be self-sacrificial to their spouses to the point of self-abuse. Self-love is the beginning of a long journey in which offenders learn how to balance their own needs with the needs of those whom they love.¹⁷⁰

The Problem

I worked with offenders who divorced their wives after they committed their crimes. These men believed during their time in the community that they could save the relationship if they gave more of themselves to their wives. They believed that they had to be a martyr to save their marriages. These distorted beliefs contributed to these men feeling trapped and alienated within their marriages. These men committed their offences partly because they did not know how else to deal with the situation.

Self-love was particularly hard for them to grasp. They quoted Scripture back to me: we are to love selflessly; God wants us to love our spouses unconditionally. I suggested that the dynamics of marriage are much more complicated than taking biblical statements such as “you should not divorce” or “you should love your spouse unconditionally” at face value.¹⁷¹

The secret to a successful, happy, and fulfilling marriage is no different from anything else in life. It takes two to tangle, two to love, two to work out differences, two to compromise, two to forgive, and two to become reconciled with each other. To use a simple example, one’s car is going to break down if one does not look after it, take it in for maintenance checks, and put money into it to keep it running well. Same with a marriage.

God. . . . The proofs of God’s existence . . . can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 25, 44-46, 50.

¹⁷⁰ I consider some of these themes in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, 91-100, 141-148.

¹⁷¹ See Matthew 5:31-32, 5:44-48.

The Solution

These offenders' attitudes motivated me to do research into the factors that contribute to a healthy marriage. Harville Hendrix's book, *Getting the Love You Want*,¹⁷² is particularly helpful. Hendrix starts with a simple premise cited in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." Marriage is one of the most wonderfully intimate, emotionally fulfilling, and spiritually profound experiences that one can have.

Hendrix suggests that couples are intuitively attracted to each other based on what he calls their "*imago*." One's *imago* is "a composite picture of the people who influenced you at an early age."¹⁷³ Couples who first meet each other often have an "ah ha!" experience. The person exhibits all of the emotional and social characteristics with which one is intimately familiar.

Let us take a stereotypical example. A young woman is attracted to a young man because he exhibits all the emotional characteristics of her alcoholic father. Unlike her father, this man is clean cut, well dressed, socially appropriate, and emotionally available. After these two people marry, the woman discovers to her horror and chagrin that her husband has similar addiction issues as her father.

She was attracted to this man because he had the same emotional needs as her father. She could handle her husband's alcoholism because she had learned to do that very well with her own father. She was attracted to her husband as much because she knew how to respond to his emotional needs as with the fact that they had "fallen in love."

The woman married this man was because she was looking for someone who could love her in a way that her father could not. Her father loved his daughter while remaining distant, aloof, and acting cruel in his self-absorbed alcoholic state. His daughter believed that her husband could fulfill all her needs.

Her husband had the same idea regarding his own needs. He married this woman because she understood so well his violent mood swings between being overly distant and overly loving. The husband believed that the marriage was too good to be true. Here was a woman who could address all of his unfulfilled needs. He was,

¹⁷² (New York: Saint Martin's Griffin, 1988, 2008).

¹⁷³ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 38.

after all, an alcoholic, with his only true friend being the contents of a bottle. Here was an intimate partner who could help him with his alcoholism.

Hendrix describes how couples experience the phenomenon of *recognition*, *timelessness*, *reunification*, and *necessity* in their intimate relationship with their partner. They cannot do without each other (*necessity*). They have known each other forever (*recognition*). This moment will last forever (*timelessness*). They are finally at peace because the other person has made them whole (*reunification*).¹⁷⁴

This delusional thinking ends abruptly when the partner realises that her lover is not the sum of all her wonderful relationships and influences from the past. Her lover is unique, different, and unable to heal all the wounds that she wants him to dress.

Couples move into a power struggle in their relationship. They begin demanding love from the other, hurting each other as necessary to get the love they want. They retrench into a deeply narcissistic phase because they do not know why their marriage has turned out so differently, from what they had imagined and projected.

A power struggle can end up in divorce because neither party believes it is worth giving of oneself anymore. It is better to move on and start with another person. The next person is willing to show love and attend to one's needs. Getting the love that one wants from one's current spouse is unattainable.

Hendrix suggests that these dysfunctional marriages can be saved. There is hope even for the couples mandated to come to his couples workshops as a last ditch effort to save their marriages.

Hendrix offers two solutions. First, it is necessary to re-romanticise the love and affection that the couple had for each other when they met. There is a profound reason why the couple fell in love and got married in the first place. Reliving the love that one used to have for the other person makes it possible to channel this *eros* in a positive direction of affection, love, and intimacy all over again.

This ingredient in Hendrix' advice represents the *eros* side of things. I tell the men who have left a broken marriage: they must learn to love themselves in order to love others. They need to reflect on those things that made their wives special, unique, and loveable. I go through a series of steps in which these men share why they loved this person in the first place. These men realise during the reliving of these memories that their marriages could have been saved. The men realised that there were

¹⁷⁴ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 50-52.

numerous things that they could have done to move from a martyr, self-pitying, self-absorbed stance to re-attracting their former spouses.

This sharing was often filled with many “ah ha!” experiences. After twenty years of staying in a bad marriage, the men had forgotten why they loved their wives. This re-imagining of the possibility of *erotic love*, within which is a deep acceptance and love of self, represented the only means by which these men would be able to love and have successful marriages in the future.

Hendrix’s second piece of advice has everything to do with the *agape* side of things. We have assumed up to this point that *erotic love* is all that is needed for two people to fall in love and get married. The truth of the matter is that unless *agape* becomes part of the equation, many marriages are bound to fail.

Agape has everything to do with the number of times that a couple has to forgive each other for what they have done, to compromise so the other person will feel accepted, to accept each other for who they are rather than what they wish each other to be. They are to love their partner unconditionally regardless of whether this love is returned.

Agape love that devolves into a (religious) obligation to stay in the marriage no matter what -- for the children, for God, for the martyrdom complex -- is dysfunctional. *Agape love* expressed in dialectical relationship with *erotic love* is the type of love that survives and flourishes.

The latter type of love has everything to do with what God did for humanity through Jesus Christ. God loved humanity regardless of whether human beings would reciprocate that love. Couples require this divine love to stay married. Forgiveness, forbearance, letting go, grieving, diminished expectations and fulfillment, total acceptance, and unconditional love are the only ways that couples can move beyond a power struggle. This is at least, what Hendrix recommends. *One gets what one wants when one gives love away*. What a wonderful way of summing up the intricate relationship between *eros* and *agape*.¹⁷⁵

Let us return to the woman who unknowingly married an alcoholic husband. While she was initially attracted to him because of the similarities of emotions that her father had, the woman may genuinely love him for his own sake. She has moved

¹⁷⁵ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 250. Hendrix quotes 1 Corinthians 13 at the end of his book: “love is patient, love is kind. . . . It is not self-seeking . . . it keeps no record of wrongs . . . It protects, trusts, and never fails.”

from a deep self-love to have her own needs met, to a selflessness in which she is able to show love to her husband.

The husband now has a decision to make. If he decides that his alcoholism is more important than his relationship with his wife, the marriage will probably come to an end. While his wife has been able to move to a mutual understanding of love, in which eros and agape interact dialectically, the man may continue to be so self-absorbed that it proves impossible for him to move out of his self-pity stage. If the husband remains unwilling to move past this stage, his wife has little choice but to move on.

The husband has allowed Eros to be defined principally in terms of what he can get out of the relationship, rather than in terms of a natural desire that moves him to love his wife unconditionally. I believe that there is within the seeds of Eros a natural inclination of people to love others for who they are. This natural inclination becomes supremely satisfying when Agape is added to the equation. Agape, in fact, becomes necessary in order for the marriage to last. Forgiveness, compromise, disappointment, and the ability to change are part of what it means to live at peace with oneself and others when things go sideways.

Chapter Fifteen

Discipleship¹⁷⁶

The impetus for change is real when the court convicts and sentences a person to a period of incarceration. The shame and guilt that comes with one's conviction are powerful factors that motivate a prisoner to take a serious look at their past life. Loss of freedom, loss of reputation, loss of relationships, and loss of livelihood are direct results of imprisonment. A person's offence often has long-lasting, ripple effects that takes many years for the offender as well as their victims and the larger community to deal with. A chaplain has to enter into a deeper consideration of these fundamental losses in order to help a prisoner grieve.

Saint Francis is helpful in this regard.¹⁷⁷ He willingly gave up three things that are integral to most people's lives: money, marriage, and independence. These sacrifices had profound effects on the people around Francis. His father was upset that his son valued neither his business nor his money. Clara was dismayed that the form of love Francis was offering was outside of the marital norm. The church was worried that the fanatical nature of Francis' actions was closer to heresy than orthodoxy.

Francis had to show his father that there was something more valuable than money. He had to demonstrate to Clara that the intimacy of spiritual love surpassed the type of earthly love that bound one person to another. He had to prove to the pope that his spirituality was directly reflective of what the church was trying to do in its celebration of the body of Christ in word, deed, Eucharist, and fellowship.

¹⁷⁶ This chapter represents a modification of chapter four, Donald Stoesz, "Significance of Saint Francis for Prison Ministry," *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, 63-76.

¹⁷⁷ The story of Saint Francis is told in various books and movies, Johannes Jorgensen, *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913); Julien Green, *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi*, translated by Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985); Michell Soavi, *Saint Francis*. DVD, 205 minutes. (2002 Media Trade: S.P.A. Ignatius Press, 2006); *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. DVD, 121 minutes (Paramount Pictures, 1973). *Francis of Assisi*. DVD, 105 minutes (Parseus Productions, N.Y., 2013, Twentieth Century Fox, 1961.)

Let us look at each spiritual discipline in turn. There is, first, the matter of money. The men that I work with have been willing to steal or sell drugs or commit fraud in order to become rich. Their need for excess and greed landed these men in a situation where they had nothing to show for their efforts. They ended up penniless and poor, at the opposite end of the spectrum of wealth and success for which they were hoping.

These offenders had to look more profoundly into the reasons for their preoccupation with money. The practice of interiority¹⁷⁸ is a spiritual discipline that places the pursuit of riches into a larger perspective. Jesus asked the rich man to give up his wealth because this is where the rich man needed to grow spiritually (Matthew 19:21). His willingness or unwillingness to face the value he placed on money determined his spiritual welfare.

A similar need for discipline is evident in the men who come to prison for sexual crimes. Their preoccupation with sex, along with their need to be promiscuous, have ended them up in a situation of enforced abstinence. Those of us who are not in prison can remain active sexually because we understand the place of sexuality within the larger framework of marriage, fidelity, commitment, and moderation.¹⁷⁹ The safeguarding of sexuality within a broad emotional, spiritual, and social framework allows us to be sexually active in a way that is not possible for those men who have few boundaries. Their need to abandon taboos has ended them up in a celibate state similar to that of Francis. This celibate state is prescribed rather than embraced as desirable.

Incarceration has also occurred for those men who have been unable, for whatever reason, to obey the law. Their anti-authoritarian behaviour became so bad that they are now under the thumb of severe taskmasters who tell them when they can get up, when they are to go to work, and when they are supposed to go to sleep. These men are in a worse situation than when they were adolescents. Their current lack of freedom makes them reconsider what it means to live peaceably and comfortably under authority.

The need for spirituality to address these issues is understandable. We live within the bounds of authority, sexuality, and salaries because we consider these things to be part of what it means to be fully human. We are willing to conform to the demands

¹⁷⁸*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1779. "It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination, or introspection."

¹⁷⁹ The practice of homosexuality in prison makes the issue of sexuality even more real. When propositioned by fellow inmates, offenders have to come to terms with their own sexual identity and the role of sexual relationships and actions in jail.

of our bosses because we want a paycheck at the end of two weeks. We are willing to engage in sex that is more moderate because we want to keep our spouses happy and our sexual appetite intact. We are willing to live on a reasonable amount of money because we know that riskier adventures in the stock market or frequent changes in jobs can result in a worse financial situation than before.

The result of this mediocre lifestyle is a mediocre spirituality. Our spirituality is not indicative of the underlying meaning of money, sexuality, and obedience because we have accepted the general norms of living within our financial means, enjoying sex within the bounds of faithfulness, and being obedient in our work and social situations. Our life experiences have not severely tested our spirituality. None of these three disciplines has become a problem.

The matter is quite different for the men with whom I work. Their obsession with sex, their insatiable need for money, and their inability to listen to anyone but themselves keeps bringing them face to face with the law. External bounds are necessary because no internal ones are adequate to rein them in. The intervention of external forces coerces these men into thinking about the meaning of life. Why do they need to be under such harsh sanctions when less severe ones will do for most of the rest of us?

The willingness of Saint Francis to be “abnormal” in relation to these three disciplines comes into view. It is hard for us to watch Francis disassemble himself from normality because it makes us question the normality under which we are living.¹⁸⁰ Whom does God call to such charisms of poverty, chastity, and obedience when less extremism will do?

Chaplains look these harsh realities in the face, in the same way that Francis embraced the very thing that he hated to do, touch lepers. We as chaplains journey along this road of harshness and privation because this is the only path available for spirituality to shine on the other side of the gauntlet of pain and suffering. We enter into the lives of these men as they face the facts that they have been richer, more promiscuous, and more disobedient than we have been in our staid, middle-class existence. These prisoners have to face the fact that they are now poorer, celibate, and more obedient than we need to be. No mean of mediocrity is available within this realm.

¹⁸⁰ I am reminded of *Into the Wild*, a DVD movie that came out several years ago, depicting an American graduate of a university who decided to forgo the normalcy of life for the abnormality of “roughing it in the bush” (Paramount Pictures Home Entertainment, 2017). He ended up dying in the wilderness of Alaska because he had not learned sufficient survival skills. The movie sat on my shelf for a year before I was able to watch it. It reminded me too much of what I was like and what I did as a youth, hitchhiking across Canada, camping in the bush for weeks on end, and reading Kafka.

The relevance of Saint Francis to the lives of incarcerated men is understandable. Francis forces me along with the men I work with to face the starkness of the spiritual life. It is only as we give up human intimacy that divine intimacy is possible. It is only as we surrender ourselves to human authority that we understand what acquiescence to God really means. It is only as we give up control of our money that satisfaction of heavenly desires is possible.

Penance of Jean Valjean

Another story reinforces the link between Saint Francis' voluntary penance and inmates' involuntary embrace of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean becomes transformed in the convent of the Bernardine nuns because he understands the amount of suffering the nuns undergo in their veneration of the holy sacrament.¹⁸¹ The fact that the nuns pummel their bodies to bring the temptations of riches, pleasures, and independence under control makes eminent sense to Jean Valjean. He has spent the last nineteen years fighting with authority, deprived of love, and in a destitute state. He felt compelled to steal the bishop's plates because it had been so long since he had seen anything of monetary value. The shining, gleaming, sparkling reflection of his face in the silver plates represented infinite value. Jean had lived so long in a squalid existence. Jean was willing to claim anything of value and hold onto it for dear life.

The nuns' self-imposed existence spoke directly to Jean Valjean. He knew what it was like for an imposed existence to be handed to him. His flash of recognition into the sisters' lives represented a mirror into which Jean could see what his life was really like.

Jean's sojourn with the sisters was even more effective than the grace given to him by the bishop. While the bishop's grace offered him new life and freedom, the imposed existence of the nuns' lives made him aware of how his newfound freedom could be channeled into real life and love. His sojourn with the nuns taught Jean how to be honest with other people as well as with himself. He learned to forgive as he himself had been forgiven. He learned how to pass on the love he himself had been given.

Replacement of Fear with Meaningful Work and Honesty

What do inmates have to do to redeem themselves? Saint Francis, along with Jean Valjean, serve as helpful examples in this regard. Francis set out to renovate churches. Jean became an owner of a factory that specialized in making jewelry. The

¹⁸¹ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 408-485.

first way in which Jean and Francis were able to redeem themselves was through meaningful work.

I find myself in a similar position concerning the men with whom I work. I started a crocheting program for two inmates who were senior citizens, had health problems, could not master the art of knitting, and had been reduced to minimum allowance because of their lack of employability.

These men were more than happy to do something useful. They learned how to crochet blankets, mittens, and toques for the needy. Their willingness to be gainfully employed was better than whiling away time in their rooms, being anti-social, feeling sorry for themselves, and becoming increasingly resentful against a system that “did not do anything for them.”

One man helped facilitate an *Experiencing God* course that I offered on an occasional basis. This man was a Christian who wanted to make a difference in terms of his witness to others. The Work Board approved this initiative as something useful, not only to the individual concerned, but to other men as well.

These men have reflected spiritually on their pilgrimage through jail. One of the men has opened up about his family, his children, and the reasons why he “felt compelled” to come to jail. One source of success breeds another: self-confidence, trust to share, and belief that his motivation to change will make a difference.

Honesty became a part of Jean Valjean’s life as he confessed to Marius, his son-in-law, that he had been a convict.¹⁸² Honesty goes a long way in naming the lengths to which offenders have been willing to go to come to jail. While not making things better, self-reflection has proven therapeutic.

The case of Francis is instructive. He was willing to go to Rome and risk rejection for his radical views. The documentaries show how the Pope and cardinals initially rejected him because of his impossible ideals.¹⁸³ It took time for Francis to articulate the reasons for his radical discipleship. It took time for listeners to have a better understanding of what he and his followers were all about. According to Johannes Jorgenson, Francis traveled several times to Rome to receive permission to preach, evangelize, and be accepted as orthodox.¹⁸⁴

My experience with inmates has been similar. Their willingness to be honest, trusting, and forthcoming comes as trust, rapport, and acceptance are established. I remember one man suspended several times while on parole and sent back to jail.

¹⁸² Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, 1162-1165.

¹⁸³ Michell Soavi, *Saint Francis*.

¹⁸⁴ Johannes Jorgensen, *Saint Francis*, 83-86.

This man was not yet ready to be honest with himself and others, seven years after his sentence began. The last time I heard from him was the first time he sounded sober and in his right mind, in the community, and trying to get on with his life.

Relationship Courses

Relationship and co-dependency courses are helpful because inmates have not found a replacement for the boundary-breaking pursuits in which they were involved. Most of the men have been in relationships before. They know how to live life through another person. They are fathers and grandfathers in addition to being (ex) husbands. Relationship courses help inmates deal with the next dating situation that comes along, the next co-dependent encounter that comes their way, and the next opportunity to be a saviour for someone more needy than themselves.

Offenders come to terms with a variety of emotions as they fall in love, become infatuated, and want to use drugs again because they cannot handle the mental stresses of life. It is better to deal with these emotions in prison, *sans* one's significant other, than to wait until it is too late.

Francis' commitment to celibacy and fellowship is instructive. Francis and Clara established a special bond, right up to the end of Francis' life. Their commitment to celibacy says a lot about the type of discipline and resolve necessary for two people to remain spiritually pure while emotionally bonded.

The fact that Francis practiced celibacy within the world showed his willingness to deal with temptations in a wide variety of social settings. Francis did not want his mission to be cloistered, to be dependent on property and walls to ensure that he and his men could remain poor. Total dependency on God meant begging in the streets.

Emotional bonding within a gender-specific fellowship is an effective and safe way of dealing with feelings as offenders encounter the opposite sex and are released into the community. The safety of sharing in relationship courses and recovery groups in prison is extended through Celebrate Recovery, Alcoholics Anonymous, and small groups in the community. The possibility of real friendship among offenders in prison is extended to their families, significant others, and children as they reintegrate into society.

Final Comment about Obedience

Obedience was a huge issue in Francis' case because he sounded and acted so much like a fool, an imbecile, and a lunatic. He had to clarify the fact that these actions were a result of a radical call of God instead of his own crazy, perhaps revolutionary and anarchistic ideas.

The need to be recognized as legitimate and worthy of building up the kingdom, already established by God, can be a huge mountain to climb. The need to be radical can end up with a person falling off the edge of life without having a place to stand. Respect for authority is one of the bigger challenges that offenders face. They would rather live in a tent in the woods in the middle of winter than having to obey their parole officer.

There is something inherently rebellious in all of us that needs to be recognized, owned, accepted, and rejected in favour of commitment to the greater good. No one is listening if you are standing in the middle of the woods, far from the maddening crowd. Your complaint that no one is listening to you is warranted in this instance.

I had to remind the author of this complaint that he needed to air feelings, resentments, and grievances in such a way that they could be heard. We are all subject to authority. Naming the particular instance in which this authority needs to be accepted is the point.

Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console,

To be understood, as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Chapter Sixteen

Ability to be Honest

Prison chaplaincy is unique in that conviction of sin represents a key component in pastoral care. Inmates have committed serious offences. Healing comes when the Holy Spirit convicts them of the evil and harm that they have committed. Conviction by the Holy Spirit is a difficult process because of the guilt and shame involved. Self-loathing is a common response to admission of guilt. Inmates have few resources to cope with this aspect of their lives.

I chose to concentrate on the fictional character of Jean Valjean in the thirteen and fifteen chapters because of his significant transformation in healing and wholeness. The unexpected grace granted to him by a Catholic priest represented the beginning of a long process in which Jean was convicted of sin, owned up to what he had done, accepted forgiveness from God and others, and went on to become a productive member of society.

Jean became the (step) father to Cosette and raised her as his own. He forgave the police officer Javert for pursuing him relentlessly for a breach of justice. He let go of his feelings of revenge and resentment at society for putting him in prison for nineteen years for stealing a loaf of bread. He learned to love and receive love.

One of the more significant aspects of the novel occurs when Jean Valjean reveals who he really is. He assumed the name of Monsieur Madeline when he became a factory owner and mayor of a town. He assumed the name of Fauchelevent when he lived in Paris together with his stepdaughter. He did so because he was scared of the consequences of revealing where he had been. The police were looking for him because Jean had stolen a forty-sou piece of money from a young lad that he met on his way. He knew that he would be punished if he revealed who he really was.

Jean's fears came true when he decided to testify in court that the man they were holding for trial was not actually Jean Valjean. He appeared in court to clear Champmathieu's name. The police arrested Jean and sent him as a slave to the galley ships.

Jean's fears came true again years later after escaping from the ship and presumed dead from drowning. He revealed to his new son-in-law that he was an ex-convict who had served nineteen years in prison. Jean felt that he needed to be honest in order to come clean about who he was. Marius subsequently restricted Jean to visiting his stepdaughter once a week in a basement room of Marius' house. Marius had a difficult time accepting the fact that his father-in-law had been a convict.

The point of this chapter is to show that forgiveness, confession, surrender, and love represent only the beginning of transformation. Becoming honest about who one (really) is, or was, can change people's perceptions about us. Chapel volunteers sometimes ask me whether they can ask an inmate why he is in jail. I tell them that that information is confidential which only an inmate can divulge. I warn the volunteers that finding out why a person is in jail can change their perceptions and attitudes toward the inmate. Finding out personal information about a person means that one has to take responsibility for the new knowledge that one has received. Some volunteers want nothing more to do with an inmate after they find out the offence that the offender has committed.

Jean Valjean had the same fears. He never told his stepdaughter Cosette that he had spent time in jail. She was horrified at the sight of a chain gang of convicts who went by them on the street. She did not consider them human. Jean decided at that point that he could not tell her that he had been one of those men.

Fear of rejection is one factor that inhibited Jean from revealing who he was. Marius could not accept the fact that his new father-in-law had been in prison. Marius banned Jean to visiting his stepdaughter in a basement room because Marius considered him less than human. Marius changed his mind when he realised that Jean had saved him from death at the barricades. He and Cosette rushed to visit Jean on his deathbed.

Jean worked at being honest with himself while letting other people find out about his past on a need-to-know basis. I take the same approach with the men in the community. Their previous incarceration is a private matter that only needs disclosure if there is an area of risk. Divulging information occurs in the context of a trusting relationship.

Even these parameters are not always enough. An inmate dating a girlfriend knows that at some point, he will need to reveal something about his past. He knows that the girlfriend may reject him once she finds out more about him. There is a point at which a person has to decide whether the risk is worth it.

I have counselled several couples who separated after the girlfriend realised that she could not forgive her boyfriend/husband for what he had done. In spite of her initial

forgiveness and acceptance, the girlfriend decided in the end to leave her boyfriend. These experiences taught me a valuable lesson. Our desire is to forgive, confess, accept, and surrender. Negative experiences of victimization sometimes interrupt and intercept that ability to offer grace.

Some of the girlfriends I have counselled were victims in the past. This past victimization both attracted and repelled these women to the men with whom they fell in love. These women had to sort out their own feelings about the matter before they could commit their lives to another person who had victimized someone else.

Chapter Seventeen

Hidden Consequences of Punishment

The Prodigal Son story in the Gospel of Luke (15:11-31) is primarily about forgiveness. The younger of the two sons asks his father for his inheritance, receives it, squanders it, and then returns home to ask forgiveness. The father forgives him by throwing a big party and celebrating the fact that his son has come home.

Forgiveness and acceptance are issues for the older brother. The older brother is resentful because he has stayed faithful and worked hard for his father while his younger brother was away. The older brother has to consider whether he can forgive and accept his younger brother, now that he has come home.

Both brothers have to let go and forgive in order to move on. The younger brother has to forgive himself for his rebellious attitude and wanton spending. The older brother has to forgive his younger brother for being so irresponsible. Self-righteousness is a sin with which the older brother has to deal. Self-loathing is a sin with which the younger brother has to come to terms.

Both of these types of sin are prevalent among the men with whom I work. Guilt and shame are part of many inmates' lives because of their addictions and irresponsible behaviour. Self-righteousness is prevalent because several inmates consider the crimes that other inmates have committed as worse than their own. They look down on other inmates in order to avoid looking at their own offences.

I have included the prodigal son story in this chapter because of the hidden costs of punishment. The role of punishment is real in spite of the fact that the father forgave the younger son along with the older brother. The fact of the matter remains that the younger son has no more inheritance to draw on. As he himself says on his way home, he will have to become a servant of his father in order to make a living. The younger son is dependent on his father and his older brother to find a place within his family.

Let us look at the situation from the viewpoint of the older brother. The inheritance that the older brother will receive is presumably the farm itself, once his father has died. The older brother reaps huge rewards for having stayed faithful and loyal to his father. There is only one inheritance left to give, namely the farm itself.

The younger son has to live with the fact that he is now co-dependent on his father and older brother to survive. He has to regain the trust and confidence of his family in order to be accepted. He has to show that he is competent to run the farm, get along with his brother, and work for the best interests of his family. The situation is no longer about himself. The younger brother has to look at the bigger picture.

Part of the larger picture has to do with the fact that the younger son has lost everything: reputation, money, status, competence, rapport, and acceptance. He has to work as hard at regaining his reputation as he did in his frivolity in losing everything. The cost of losing everything remains with him. He has no money. His friends know about his past life. He has to regain the trust and acceptance of his older brother. He has to prove his worth to his father.

This hidden aspect of punishment became apparent to me when I realised the number of losses that inmates experienced – after God had forgiven them. God's forgiveness enabled them to be psychologically and spiritually free of the burdens they carried.

Inmates' actions and crimes nevertheless have real consequences that stay with them for the rest of their lives. They cannot undo the hurt that they have caused. They cannot change the fact that they are now vilified for what they have done. They are rejected for various jobs for which they apply. They are unable to be trusted in various group settings. They live with the broken relationships that they have left behind. They literally have to start a new life.

The above realities are what I call the hidden consequences of punishment. It is hidden because it goes on long after the prison term is over. Inmates continue paying for their sins long after their prison sentences are over. They have committed actions that affect the rest of their and their victims' lives. They may now be divorced, unable to visit their children, or unable to find a job with the same salary scale that they had before. They may not be able to establish healthy relationships because of the dysfunctionality that they have lived with for so long.

People speak about recovery lasting a lifetime. The reason that this phrase is used is because so many habits are hard to break. Gambling, drugs, alcohol, obsessions, and immediate gratification may be so entrenched that inmates find themselves back at the same place they were before they came to jail.

Let us take the young son as an example. The fact that he squandered his inheritance means that he may not be trusted with his family's finances. He may have to work in an area on the farm that does not involve handling of money. The son may continue to be addicted to gambling and momentary relationships. He may use every paycheck that he gets to continue his bad habits. This may mean that he does not have enough money to pay monthly rent to his older brother for living expenses. He may not be able to cook for himself or take care of himself. His father or his older brother may have to step in order to support him.

I am using the illustration of the Prodigal Son story to show the reader that there are hidden costs of punishment. Inmates have "paid" for their actions with a prison term. At the same time, the behaviours that they exhibited before they came to jail may continue long after they have finished their jail term.

I know of lifers who came back to jail on a breach ten or twenty years after they were released. These men had not come to terms with the fact that their addictions or other bad habits were more entrenched than they realized. As soon as they thought they had conquered their addictions, they came roaring back. As soon as these ex-inmates faced a major crisis, they returned to their old coping habits to "solve the problem."¹⁸⁵

These experiences made me realise that old habits are much more prevalent than I first surmised. The younger son may continue to exhibit irresponsible behaviour because this is something with which he is very familiar. He may not be trusted with money for a long time to come because of his willingness to squander his inheritance in the first place.

This story has as much to do with the older brother as the younger son. The older brother's reaction to his father's forgiveness is what I experience in relation to society's response to inmates. Christians may accept the fact that God has forgiven inmates who have become believers. Society may accept the fact that offenders have paid for their evil actions through a prison term.

At the same time, Christians and society may still feel unsafe around these ex-inmates. They may question whether the inmate has dealt with the issues for which he was convicted and sentenced to prison.

Society and Christians have as much work to do in accepting inmates as offenders do in gaining the respect of others. The prodigal son story ends with the older brother remaining uncertain about whether he can truly forgive his younger brother. The years of faithfulness and loyalty to his father have inadvertently resulted in

¹⁸⁵ Cf. one story in Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, 92.

resentment at his younger brother's infidelity. The older son worked hard for his father as much to prove that he was self-righteous as he did because of his love of work and his father. The older brother has to decide whether he truly wants to inherit the farm. His resentment may get the better of him. He may decide to ask for his own inheritance from his father and leave the farm because he cannot stand being with his young brother.

Some people in society believe that inmates are incorrigible. Offenders are not capable of changing. They should stay in jail so that society can stay safe. I believe that some inmates should never be let out of jail. The reality of the matter remains that most inmates will be let out of jail at some point. Is it not better to try to reduce harm, and believe in change than simply give up?

Society is like the older brother. It cannot decide if inmates deserve a big party when they repent. It cannot decide whether inmates should be let out of jail. It cannot decide if inmates are employable once they have been let out of jail. Self-righteousness can cause people to stumble when considering the foibles of other people.

The Prodigal Son story touches the dilemmas of inmates and people in society. Inmates have to regain respect and establish rapport with others. Society has to decide how inmates can be kept safe while being given a chance to change. Christians have to do the same.

Conclusion

The point of this book has been to help us correct imbalances in our lives. While we are astute at naming our abilities and talents, we are less aware of the things that debilitate us, compromising situations that we are prone to get into and helpless to get out.

The introduction and first chapter gave illustrations of what these situations look like: oedipal complexes, co-dependent relationships, saviour mentalities, conflicted personalities, insecure identities, and impulsive behaviours.

The next three chapters showed how these imbalances in our lives could be overcome on the basis of various psychological theories. Illustrations from movies and metaphors of a department store were used to illustrate movement to maturity.

Chapters six to sixteen spoke directly to deeply spiritual needs in our lives. My work in the prison system was used to demonstrate how remorse, confession, restoration, surrender, and discipleship were effective in transformation. Inmates' experiences of faith and change illustrated our own journey in life. Our ability to love, be honest, and live integrated lives is predicated on our willingness to reveal the very humanness of our beings, a humanness that is enveloped by the reality of divine Being.

Appendix A: Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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