Friendship

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

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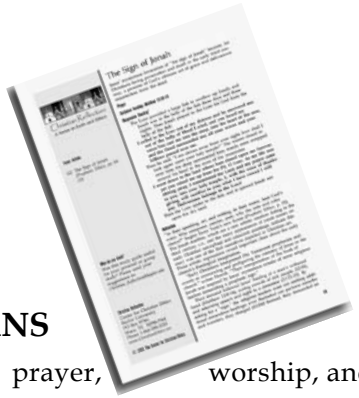

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Study Guides & Lesson Plans

These six study guides integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in the *Friendship* issue.

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Friendship is so much more than being friendly to one another. As friends are open to the workings of God's grace and share their lives according to certain demanding rules, their love links to the chain of God's love.

I Have Called You Friends

Jesus gave everything to his friends—his knowledge of God and his own life. Jesus is our model for friendship because he loved without limits, and he makes it possible for us to live a life of friendship because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us.

The Beloved Disciple

The Gospel of John contrasts the fates of Peter and the beloved disciple. For Peter, as for Jesus, the full extent of love meant the laying down of one's life. For the beloved disciple, the full extent of that love meant testifying with his whole life to the love of God in Jesus. Both ways of loving are acts of faithfulness; both make one Jesus' friend.

A School of Christian Love

Friends, Augustine famously taught, are gifts entrusted to us by God for providential purposes. If so, a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means.

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The best friendships are rooted in personal, even intimate, knowledge. From a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty; it must be based on insight into one's true self—rooted in God's intentions for one's life.

The Meaning of Mentorship

Mentors give themselves over entirely to engendering in their chosen pupils essential qualities of character or skills that are crucial to the continuance of a practice or way of life. In our Christian churches we must recapture this original meaning of mentorship if for no others, then for our children.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

Our most admirable and enviable human friendships can be a school of virtue, the source of solidarity in bearing life's burdens, and the avenue to love of neighbor and friendship with God.

Searching for adequate words to describe the incomparable bliss of our future life with God, the twelfth-century reformer Aelred of Rievaulx predicted "that extraordinary and great happiness which we await" will be a "true and eternal *friendship*." For in that Paradise, as in the Garden before our sin distorted our ability to love, there will be "no hiding of thoughts, no dissembling of affection." Indeed our best human friendships, Aelred believed, can be a school of virtue, the source of solidarity in bearing life's burdens, and the avenue to love of neighbor and friendship with God.

Yet such winsome intimate friendships, which were so valued by ancient sages and Christian saints alike, are increasingly difficult to realize in our culture, especially given the challenges posed by radical individualism, mobility, and political, racial, and religious division. Technologies like the Internet are changing how we view friendship: we are drawn more to Facebook encounters than face-to-face relationships. Our contributors explore the biblical narrative and ancient wisdom to retrieve the ideal of friendship and probe its promise for the moral life.

In the rough world of the late Roman Empire "what distinguished the early Christian view of friendship was its focus on God and its belief that this shared focus brought the friends together and indeed brought all Christians who were committed to God together," notes Carolinne White in *Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship* (p. 11). Beyond accepting the ancient wisdom that true friends must share their lives according to certain demanding rules, the fourth-century Christians realized that their acts of friendliness must be "open to God's grace" to be "transformed into a relationship of continuity, stability, and trust."

From the earliest days, believers guided by John's Gospel have seen Jesus as the model of a friend "because he loved without limits" and the empowering source of human friendship "because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us." In *I Have Called You Friends* (p. 20), Gail O'Day traces how the ancient ideal of friendship—especially its themes of speaking frankly to one's friends and giving one's life for them—shapes John's narrative. Heidi Hornik then examines how artists traditionally represent key scenes of friendship in the Fourth Gospel. In *Depicting Christ's Friends* (p. 48), she compares how John the Beloved, Peter, and Judas are portrayed in two works based on John's account of the Last Supper—a sixteenth-century Flemish sculpture and Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco in the monastery of San Marco in Florence. In *Near the Cross of Jesus* (p. 52), she describes Lorenzo Monaco's *The Crucified Christ between the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist* and Hendrick Terbrugghen's *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John*, which depict how, "as Jesus suffers in order to draw all humanity to God, he pauses to care for his mother and best friend's future together on earth." Hornik observes, "In this vignette, God's universal love is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete."

"In the Christian life the fundamental purpose of friendship is not to bring us satisfaction and success in the world, but to help us grow *together* in Christ in order that we might *together* enjoy friendship with God and the saints in heaven," Paul Wadell reminds us in *A School of Christian Love* (p. 28). As true friends draw us into their lives, teach us about ourselves, and challenge us to extend the boundaries of our love, we discover "a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God, but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means."

Terry York's new hymn, "Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine" (p. 37), with music by David Bolin, poignantly explores how our friendships with one another can be transformed by Christ's friendship with humanity. "These friends in God's employ," York writes, "love me still for who I am / when all I am shows through. / They see in me the spotless Lamb; / I see him in them too." Eric Mathis incorporates this text and others in his worship service (p. 40) to celebrate divine and human friendship. "The prayers [in the service] intentionally have an informal sound and feeling to them," Mathis explains, "for we are addressing God whose love for us in Jesus Christ is the ultimate act of friendship."

In *Love, Death, and Friendship in the Harry Potter Novels* (p. 59), John Killinger reflects on the image of Christ in J. K. Rowling's main character. "Love, friendship, sacrifice, and eventually life" are defining themes in the much-loved series, he writes. "For it is life that springs out of Harry's gift of himself: the life of self-sacrifice, the life that defeats death, the life of ongoing friendship."

Caroline Simon believes that "friends can help each other see themselves more clearly" through insight into one's welfare and destiny. "From

a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty," she says in *Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We are Known* (p. 67), "it must be based on insight into one's true self—the self rooted in God's intentions for one's life." This dynamic of deeper self-knowledge through friendship is evident in "The Neighborhood," a group of pastors who have supported one another in spiritual friendship for eighteen years. "Our health is connected with one another," Kyle Childress reports in *The Neighborhood: A Company of Friends* (p. 63), "and we sense that we are more ourselves when we are together than when we are separate."

Mentorship—that special form of friendship in which a master inculcates expertise and essential qualities of character in his or her pupils—is essential to continuing a practice or way of life. Nevertheless, true mentoring is increasingly rare in our egalitarian society, Vigen Guroian warns in *Literature and the Real Meaning of Mentorship* (p. 76). "One path to recovering the meaning of mentorship is through reflection upon great literature, and especially literature for children, in which the mentorial relationship and its value are portrayed," and so he reviews several engaging stories that can serve as guides to mentorship.

Christy Morr, in *Sacred Companions* (p. 84), examines three practical resources designed to foster spiritual friendships within congregations. Richard Lamb's *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends* draws inspiration and strategies from Jesus' example as depicted in the Gospels. The *Companions in Christ* curriculum employs inductive Bible study and reflection on material from a variety of Christian traditions to help group members envision the Christian life as a journey, meditate on Scripture, deepen prayer life, respond to God's personal call, and develop interpersonal relationships in discerning God's will for oneself and others. *Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity* presents practical ministry ideas for promoting relationships in a church context. Morr notes that "by showing how close friendships within congregations are important not just for personal fulfillment but also for spiritual transformation, these three books point us away from 'Jesus and me' individualism and toward 'Jesus and we' spiritual community."

In *The Practice of Christian Friendship* (p. 89), Ruth Groenhout commends four books that examine why friendship is one of the paradigm relationships that we use to depict a Christian life. Gilbert Meilaender's *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* and Caroline Simon's *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination* provide helpful analyses of friendship by comparing it with other forms of love, including neighbor love. Paul Wadell's *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* and Mother Mary Francis's *But I Have Called You Friends* examine friendship's crucial role in our formation within Christian communities. "Through Jesus' life and sacrifice we are made friends with God," Groenhout concludes. "That is a daunting thought for imperfect created beings like us."

Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship

BY CAROLINNE WHITE

In the rough world of the late Roman Empire, Christians knew friendship was more than superficial human solidarity. Open to the workings of God's grace, they shared their lives according to certain demanding rules. Only when we do the same can our loves link to the chain of God's love, which is so important when distrust and dissension threaten to dominate our lives.

Let's begin with "friendly." Most would readily agree that each of us aspires to behave in a friendly manner in our daily lives towards each person we meet, whether or not we know him or her. Such behavior would involve showing a degree of kindness, concern, and cheerfulness in our interactions with others—in short, making other people feel that we were pleased to have dealings with them, however fleetingly. Furthermore, I think most would agree that a friendly manner can lead to a more permanent relationship, if the friendliness is reciprocated and circumstances are right. Indeed, it may be a necessary element in the birth of friendships. But it is definitely not the same as friendship.

And if it is easy to agree on friendliness, can we also agree about the nature of friendship itself, a topic that has been the subject of discussion for thousands of years? No doubt each of us has his or her own vision of friendship, depending on personal experiences and personality, but we might all still agree that friendship is a relationship between two or a few people who appreciate something special and different in each other, who enjoy each other's company, and generally see eye-to-eye about a variety of matters.

If we are lucky we may make friends easily, sometimes at school or college, which leads me to another characteristic of friendship that we might all agree on: in general, friendship is a lasting relationship, whether for a particular period in our lives or for a lifetime.

Sometimes we may need to seek out friendship, in which case we might look for someone who shares the same interests and has a compatible personality: we may do so by joining a club or by searching on the Internet, using specialist agencies to discover someone suitable to be our friend. In the case of Internet agencies, friendship is often seen as the first step towards marriage. (Since marriage is often regarded as the most serious relationship, who would not wish to be friends with one's spouse?) But if we are fortunate enough to have a spouse whom we consider our best friend, most of us would also hope to have friends outside marriage, usually friends of the same sex as ourselves, though today it is increasingly the case that inter-gender friendships, often continuing out of college relationships or developing in the workplace, can be enjoyed alongside marriage.

And when we are separated from our friends, either temporarily or permanently, we may let the relationship fade or we may decide to make the effort to keep it going: if we cannot enjoy each other's company, we can at least keep up to date with our personal news in which we assume the other person, being a friend, will be interested. For this we may use the telephone or e-mail and digital photos or just good old-fashioned letters, in the hope that such communication will allow the friendship to continue.

All this may be uncontroversial—a description of friendship today that most of us would accept. But do we agree on what the point of friendship is? Does being a friend involve more than being available to make up a foursome for a game of bridge or having someone with whom one enjoys going to the football game? Do we think that friendship involves any duties, apart from the vague and relatively easy one of making an effort to continue the relationship by maintaining contact and showing that we value our friend?

EARLY CHRISTIANS' VIEWS OF FRIENDSHIP

In order to highlight our own thoughts, I would like to put forward some thoughts on friendship held by people in the fourth century.

But how, you may say, can people living sixteen hundred years ago teach us anything on this subject? Why the fourth century? This was a time when it seems that friendship was a very popular concept among Christians in the Roman Empire, popular on a personal level as well as on a social and theological level. We know a good deal about what some of them thought from their writings and letters, written in Latin and Greek. These Christians lived at a time when the Roman Empire was turning Christian at a fast rate after the Roman Emperor gave the go-ahead for Christianity to become an accepted and then the official religion. During a period of two or three generations there was a great excitement about being a Christian, about sharing

and supporting each other at this exhilarating, if difficult, time of new birth. These Christians, whose views we can know, had learned about the theories on friendship developed by the earlier Greeks and Romans in the pre-Christian period, and they put these ideas into the new context of their Christian beliefs. From this combination of pre-Christian and Christian came some interesting ideas which can inspire us to look at friendship with a sharper eye and help us to see its riches for us as Christians.

Consider first of all the pre-Christian sources. Much of what the Greeks and Romans wrote about friendship may seem familiar to us. Like us they valued the company of like-minded people and saw that friends could be helpful and useful to us: these, they agreed, were the most common characteristics of friendships and this is something to which each of us can relate as we think of our own daily lives. They often used such expressions as 'a friend is a second self' or 'friends share everything' or 'one soul in two bodies,' expressions that became proverbial. However, some of them, such as Aristotle,[1] went further, seeing that friendship could play an important part in our moral development and growth in happiness—and this is perhaps something that many of us may find surprising and challenging. Writers in antiquity came to view friendship as consisting of various kinds of relationship, usually seen as friendships based on pleasure, on usefulness, or on virtue (or, as we might say, a striving for goodness). What is more, they agreed that friendships based on virtue, though less common, were better and more likely to last than those based on pleasure or usefulness.

But what did it mean to them to base a friendship on virtue? It meant not only that there were certain duties attached to friendship which friends needed to perform in order to allow the friendship to continue in a healthy manner: duties such as proving your affection for your friend by your actions, remaining loyal, especially in times of difficulty, and sharing all you have with your friend. It also meant a shared commitment to moral improvement, usually by means of the friends' encouraging, advising, and even criticizing each other, if it is done for the other's good. According to some, such as Plato, the best kind of friendship also involved a devotion to an external good, or, something one believed was more perfect than oneself and which caused one to love the goodness in one's friend.[2] With the addition of this moral dimension, friends are no longer merely useful because they stand by us in difficulties or provide us with

In antiquity, the best friendships involved a shared commitment to moral improvement, usually by means of the friends' encouraging, advising, and even criticizing each other, if it is done for the other's good.

various external benefits; nor are they just loved for their own sake. They are also the means whereby we may be led to wisdom and truth. It is this search for truth and the concern for the other's moral well-being that unites the friends.

To move now from the pre-Christian to the Christian, we find that the early Christians saw the potential of this idea of a shared search for wisdom and truth. They transposed the idea into a Christian context so that the search became a focus on and a love of God, set against a conviction that true friendships are a gift from God. Christian friendship, they believed, differs from non-Christian friendship in that it is born as it were fully formed and perfect through grace and does not need time to develop, but on the other hand it does allow the friends to make progress towards spiritual perfection. Modern Christians may be familiar with the idea of friends sharing a commitment to a common purpose, but most often that goal is not God or spiritual perfection, but rather something like a fund-raising project, a book club, or a shared desire to try to lose weight. What really distinguished the early Christian view of friendship was its focus on God and the belief that such a shared focus brought the friends together and indeed brought all Christians who were committed to God together.

The implications of this are pretty radical, for it means that all those who love God are in a sense united as friends. So the circle of friends, which traditionally is quite a small one, extends outwards to include, at least in theory, a large number of people. You might object that this is rather an idealistic and impractical view of friendship: after all it is surely impossible to have the intimate relationship we have with our best friends with lots of people—there just is not enough time in the day. But the early Christians, notably St. Augustine, would have had an answer to your objection: they would have said that even if it was not realistic to be friends with all Christians, this was something that would be possible in the next life, when all are united in loving God and each other. Until then it is something that each of us should strive for as being the fulfillment of God's purpose for us. In this way one is imitating the lives of the first Christians at Jerusalem who are described in the Acts of the Apostles as having one heart and one soul and owning everything in common (Acts 4:32).

THEIR DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICE OF FRIENDSHIP

But if this was the ideal of friendship, an ideal which is as relevant for us today as it was to friends in the fourth century, what about the practicalities of friendship? The writers in antiquity had provided advice about the day-to-day practice of friendship—the need for loyalty, the advisability of limiting the number of friends you had, the need to demonstrate your affection in practical terms, the ways of telling a flatterer from a true friend, and so on. Did the early Christian writers add anything to this or did they speak only in theoretical terms?

In fact, what is perhaps the most practical advice for Christians comes from a source that may seem an unlikely one, namely from those who withdrew from society into remote areas, particularly into the desert of Egypt, to a life of solitude or partial solitude. This allowed them to focus their attention on God in a more concentrated manner than was possible amid the distractions of a secular, urban lifestyle. These people, mostly men but also some women, withdrew to a life of prayer, manual work, and (when they came into contact with others) obedience and humility.

We learn of the ideas of these desert dwellers from such sources as the letters of St. Antony, probably the first and certainly the most famous of those who went out into the desert from the mid-third century onwards, and from the accounts of the lives of desert monks by those who lived with them or visited them. These accounts were hugely popular at the time and had a great influence on the development of the monastic life in the next few centuries. And today they can provide us with a wonderful example of lives led in extreme humility, in a moving combination of innocence and wisdom.

So what rules and practices regarding friendship did they propose? There was, firstly, an understanding that the formation of close relationships was beneficial for spiritual development. Such relationships offered the opportunity to lay down one's life for one's friend in accordance with Christ's commandment (John 15:13). The desert dwellers seem to have interpreted this as implying the necessity for humility, obedience, and renunciation of one's own will. How far they took these challenges is exemplified by the story of the two men who shared the same cell and the few belongings they had. One day one of them suggested they should try having an argument as that is what other people do, but his friend admitted that he did not know how to have an argument. So the first one said, "Look, I'll put this brick between us and say, 'It's mine,' and you say, 'No, it's not yours, it's mine,' and in that way we will start an argument." But when they had put the brick down and the one said, "It's mine," and the other duly responded, "No, it's mine," the first one said, "Well, if it's yours, take it," and that was the end of their argument: their perfect humility and self-sacrifice had completely undermined the potential quarrel which would have led to dissension and ill-feeling.[3]

What distinguished the early Christian view of friendship was its focus on God and the belief that this shared focus brought friends together and indeed brought all Christians who were committed to God together.

One way the desert fathers differed in their advice about friendship from both non-Christians and other Christians was that they advised against criticizing your friend or making any judgment on his or her behavior. Whereas those who lived in any kind of community or society felt that criticism, if given in a gentle way, was a good thing and something one friend should gladly accept from another for his own good, the desert fathers believed strongly in the importance of humility which meant dwelling on one's own faults and sins. Whether or not one thinks that criticism is necessary in friendship, the desert fathers were surely right in seeing that if one is strongly aware of one's own faults, one is far less likely to criticize others, a view echoed in the words of Jesus: "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

While friendliness and love of neighbor are good things in their own right, there is also something good and special about intense friendship with only a few: did not Christ have special affection for John the disciple?

If we gain some idea of their understanding of friendship from the stories of the lives and sayings of many of the desert fathers, the most coherent account of the ideal of spiritual friendship between two persons is found in a work called *The Conferences* (meaning conversations or discussions) by John Cassian, written at the beginning of the fifth century. In Book 16 of this work one of the desert fathers, called Joseph, tells the young Cassian and his friend Germanus, who are spending some time in the desert visiting those who live there in order to learn from them, what he believes is necessary for the best kind of friendship to work. Joseph admits that there are different types of friendship—this is something that everyone seemed to agree on and it is perhaps something that might be helpful to us when we think about the different kinds of friendship we experience. If we can perceive the differences we may more easily recognize if any of our friendships are truly spiritual and therefore will be more likely to last but will also need more commitment and effort. While friendliness and love of neighbor are good things in their own right, there is also something good and special about intense friendship with only a few: after all, did not Christ have a special affection for John the disciple? The only friendship, says Joseph, that is likely to last (for he is realistic enough to admit that friendships do sometimes break down) is one that is not based on gratitude for favors received or on shared pleasure, but one in which both friends are equally matched in good-

ness and the striving for goodness. In order to progress in virtue, both friends must work hard at humility and selflessness, leading to a state of spiritual purification. Perfect friendship, it is believed, can only be experienced by a person who has attained the purity of heart necessary to reach the Kingdom of God.[4] This is a tough challenge in pursuit of a high ideal.

But Joseph does not just define the challenge and describe the reward. The desert fathers were men of great psychological perceptiveness and deep practical wisdom and Joseph is no exception, for he provides those who want to experience the best type of friendship with six rules to help them—rules that can in fact help us more generally in our relationships with others and indeed in dealing with many of the difficulties we confront in our lives.

The first step along the road is to reject all the things of this world and to give priority to our love for our friend. The second step is for the friends to restrain their own wills: neither friend must think that he knows better than the other. The third step is for them to become convinced that nothing—not even things that seem necessary and useful—is as valuable as love and peace. The fourth step is not to allow oneself to become angry. The fifth step is for the friend to try to get rid of any resentment he feels his friend is harboring against him. The final step is for the friends to live as if each day was their last, for such an attitude puts all transitory feelings and minor irritations into perspective.

Joseph insists that the main reasons for damage to friendships are anger and the inability to give up one's own wishes; these rules direct us to keep things in perspective and to bear in mind what is truly important, namely the love in which we are a part but which goes beyond our individual selves. If friends can maintain love by working hard at cultivating a spirit of humility, patience, and harmony of wills in all matters, by means of calm discussion and a shared desire for truth, they will show themselves obedient to St. Paul's words in Philippians 2:1-4: "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."

THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT OF FRIENDS

What we see from this is that to the early Christians friendship was not merely companionship, though this could be the starting point for something better. Nor was it something cozy or sentimental—the view of friendship that lies behind much of what we might find in modern gift shops, for example. For the greatest benefits to be derived from friendship they believed that one needed to follow certain rules, perform certain duties, all in a spirit of profound love for the other person and for God.

This would often involve frequent writing of letters, for many of these people were living far from the friends they had perhaps made while studying together in one of the academic centers such as Rome, Athens, or Carthage; their work or their spiritual goals might subsequently take them anywhere within the Roman empire. If this sounds not too different from the modern experience of work in far-flung places, and family members and friends separated by long distances, the comparison with the fourth-century experience should make us grateful for modern conveniences such as a postal service and e-mail. The early Christians, writing letters of encouragement and affection and theological discussion, would have to wait for someone who happened to be traveling to the area where the friend lived to carry the letter; and even when such a person was found, he might lose the letter on the way or change his travel plans, and the letter would arrive very late or even not at all. Augustine, living in North Africa, sent a letter to Jerome in Bethlehem, but the letter went via Rome and was read by others before a copy of it finally reached Bethlehem after several years. Jerome was furious, and it took several more years for him to calm down and write a friendly letter to Augustine.[5] But if we would not wish to communicate with our friends in similar circumstances, there is perhaps one feature of their communication that we might consider worth imitating and that is their desire to communicate something worthwhile—at least (if the messenger was leaving unexpectedly early and one only had time to scribble down a few lines as a message) a sincere expression of affection and encouragement, but at best something to help one's friend in his or her spiritual development.

What then is the difference between the friendly and friendship? Certainly friendliness, like friendship, is based on benevolence and necessitates the rejection of all that involves the denigration of others, or contempt for them, or violence against them.[6] But friendliness, if it does not develop into friendship, remains a superficial kind of human solidarity. If, however, friendliness is open to God's grace and does develop into friendship, it will be transformed into a relationship of continuity, stability, and trust. It will also be distinguished by the fact that it is a mutual relationship, and I suspect that this is a key feature of the special value of friendship, a feature that enriches the relationship immeasurably, miraculously.

But to reach that point it may be helpful for us to see that we must not only be open to the workings of God's grace but that we should try to live our lives according to certain demanding rules. We must be active in our concern for our friend: this does not mean being a busybody, but being constantly alert to one's friends' deepest needs. The success of the friendship will be proved by the happiness and love emanating from the friends and this will inevitably have a positive impact on the world around them. The friendship will add another link to the chain of love, the existence of which is so important for a world in which lack of trust, contempt, and dissension always threaten to dominate our lives and our societies. Such

a friendship will be seen to resemble the relationship described by Cassian fifteen hundred years ago: "This is the true and indissoluble love that grows by the combined perfection and virtue of the friends, linked by the most ardent companionship for the sake of Christ's love."[7]

NOTES

1 Paul J. Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 25.

2 Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 23. The idea of a third element uniting the friends is found also in Christian theology: one thinks of the opening of Aelred of Rievaulx's *Spiritual Friendship*, where Aelred addresses his friend, "Here we are, you and I, and I hope that between us Christ is a third."

3 *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, translated by Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 182.

4 John Cassian, *The Conferences*, translated by Boniface Ramsey (Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1997), 1.4.3.

5 *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo*, translated by Carolinne White (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

6 Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), 158.

7 Cassian, *The Conferences*, 16.3.2.

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I Have Called You Friends

BY GAIL R. O'DAY

Jesus gave everything to his friends—his knowledge of God and his own life. Jesus is our model for friendship—because he loved without limits—and he makes it possible for us to live a life of friendship—because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us.

> This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.
>
> *John 15:12-15*

Contemporary Christian piety tends to place words like "sin," "redemption," "atonement," "justification," "repentance," and "born again" at the center of conversations about what it means to live out the offer of salvation made available through the life and death of Jesus Christ. "Friendship" does not figure prominently in such a theological world, since friendship is normally relegated to the secular realm, as exemplified by the prominence of friends as the pivot of plots in television shows and movies. Yet as the quote from the Gospel of John shows, nothing could be farther from the truth. For Jesus, friendship is the ultimate relationship with God and one another.

One of the most common verbs for "love" in Greek is *phileō*; the Greek word for friend, *philos*, comes from this verb. In the New Testament a "friend" is immediately understood as "one who loves." This fundamental connection between love and friendship is an essential starting point for reclaiming friendship as a resource for faith and ethics for contemporary Christians.

FRIENDSHIP IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Friendship was an important topic in the Greek and Roman cultures in which the early Church took shape and the New Testament documents were written. For Aristotle and classical philosophers who followed him, friendship was a key social relationship. In the democratic ideal of the Athenian *polis*, or city-state, friendship exemplified the mutual social obligation on which the *polis* depended.

> But it is also true the virtuous man's conduct is often guided by the interests of his friends and of his country, and that he will if necessary *lay down his life in their behalf*.... And this is doubtless the case with those who give their lives for others; thus they choose great nobility for themselves.[1]

This quotation from Aristotle represents the classical ideal of friendship expressed by many writers. In the *Symposium*, Plato writes, "Only those who love wish to die for others." Lucian, a Hellenistic philosopher and storyteller, promises to tell his readers of "many deeds of blood and battles and deaths for the sake of friends."[2]

For modern readers, Jesus' definition of love and friendship in John 15:13—to lay down one's life for one's friend—is completely unprecedented. Most contemporary language about friendship does not speak in terms of life and death. We celebrate our friends, we eat and drink with friends, we take vacations with friends, we are there when a friend is in need; but the modern ideal of friendship is not someone who lays down his or her life on behalf of another. In the ancient world, however, Jesus' words articulated a well-known ideal for friendship, not a brand new idea. This does not mean that any more people laid down their lives for their friends in the ancient world than are inclined to do so today—but it does show that the ideal of doing so belonged to the ancient perspective on friendship.

An additional aspect of ancient friendship is important for understanding friendship in the Gospel of John. In the first-century world of the New Testament, discussions of friendship moved from a friendship ideal to focus on the more pragmatic realities of patron-client relationships and on the political expediency captured in expressions like "friend of the emperor" (see 19:12). One of the main distinguishing marks of a friend in this context was the use of "frank speech" (*parrēsia*). Philosophers counseled the patron to be on the lookout for whether "friends" were speaking honestly and openly or whether they were engaging in flattery to further their own ends:

> Frankness of speech, by common report and belief, is the language of friendship especially (as an animal has its peculiar cry), and on the other hand, that lack of frankness is unfriendly and ignoble....[3]

According to the Hellenistic philosophers, to be someone's friend was to speak frankly and honestly to them and to hold nothing back.

The New Testament writings were not created in a social vacuum. These two dimensions of friendship in the ancient world—*the gift of one's life for one's friends* and *the use of frank and open speech*—informed the way that the Gospel of John and its readers understood language about friendship.

John 15:12-15 is the key passage in John for a theology of friendship. Jesus enacts friendship throughout the Gospel, but these verses provide the words to describe and name who and what Jesus is as friend. In John, Jesus is both the model and the source of friendship. As the model of friendship, he calls the disciples to love as he has loved. As the source of friendship, he makes possible their own friendship through what he has given them.

JESUS AS THE MODEL OF FRIENDSHIP

As we have seen, Jesus' words in John 15:12-15 would have sounded somewhat familiar to his followers and to the Gospel's first readers. As a teaching, John 15:13 affirmed a common cultural ideal—to look to the interests of the other for the sake of the common good. What distinguished Jesus' words from this ideal was not their content, but the fact that Jesus did not merely talk about laying down his life for his friends. Jesus enacted the ancient ideal of friendship—he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus' whole life is an incarnation of the ideal of friendship. What Jesus teaches he is already living. The pattern of Jesus' own life and death moves the teaching of John 15:13 from philosophical ideal to an embodied promise and gift.

A quick review of some key passages from John will illustrate how Jesus' entire life and death is an act of friendship. The "Good Shepherd" discourse of John is a useful place to begin. John 10 begins with a parable about a sheepfold: he focuses first on the gate (10:1-2) and then on the shepherd (10:3-5). This parable gives a very realistic picture of sheep herding and of the role of the shepherd. Jesus interprets this parable by identifying himself with both the gate (10:7-10) and the shepherd (10:11-18). The good shepherd "lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11b) and so puts care of the sheep above all else. This is in striking contrast to the hireling who would put the sheep in jeopardy rather than risk his own life (10:12-13). The contrast between the shepherd and the hireling is like that between the true and the false friend—the false friend will not be around in a time of crisis, but the true friend will be. As one ancient storyteller writes, "Just so in calm weather a man cannot tell whether his sailing master is good; he will need a storm to determine that."[4]

But Jesus is not simply telling a story about shepherds and hirelings, about true and false friends. Jesus is talking about himself, about the love that animates everything he does. To make this clear, Jesus speaks directly, in first-person language: "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). He talks directly about his own life and death: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord" (10:17-18a). Jesus is not

speaking generally about the gift of one's life for others. Jesus is making a specific promise about his own life.

Jesus' arrest and death show that his promise here is true and reliable. The scene of the arrest in the garden in John 18:1-14 has interesting echoes of John 10. Jesus leads his disciples into an enclosed garden, recalling the shepherd and the sheepfold of John 10:1-5; there is a thief in the garden, Judas (18:2; cf. 12:6), like the thief in the sheepfold (10:1).[5] In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not wait for Judas to identify him with a kiss. Because Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, he goes forward to meet Judas and so deprives the "thief" of any access to the flock. Read in light of John 10, Jesus' act of stepping forward to meet those who come to arrest him (18:4-6) shows the truth of his announcement and promise in 10:17-18: he lays down his life of his own accord. At 18:11, Jesus states explicitly that he chooses the death that is before him ("the cup that the Father has given me," cf. 12:27). Jesus' life is not taken from him, but he willingly chooses the ultimate act of friendship.

Jesus' free offer of his life for his friends is also illustrated in many details of the crucifixion story in John. For example, unlike in the Synoptic Gospels where Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus' cross (for example, Luke 23:26), in John Jesus carries his own cross to Golgotha (19:17), symbolizing how he lays down his own life.

LIVING JESUS' LOVE

Yet for Jesus, his own act of life-giving friendship is not the end of the story. Jesus does not merely talk the language of friendship, he lives out his life and death as a friend and he commands that his followers do the same (John 15:12-14). The commandment to love as Jesus has loved may be the most radical words of the Gospel because it claims that the love that enabled Jesus to lay down his life for his friends is not unique to him. This love can be replicated and embodied over and over again by his followers. To keep Jesus' commandment is to enact his love in our own lives. Jesus affirms the significance of this commandment by stating that his followers become his friends to the extent that they keep his commandment.

Two dimensions of friendship in antiquity—the gift of one's life for one's friends and the use of frank and open speech—informed the way that the Gospel of John and its readers understood language about friendship.

Jesus' words here invite us to reexamine the sometimes casual way we refer to Jesus as our friend. The mark of friendship with Jesus is not what

Jesus does for us—listen to our sorrows, walk beside us, hear our prayers—but what we do for Jesus. One popular form of piety today is the WWJD bracelet. This question, "What would Jesus do?" is intended as a reminder to contemporary Christians that their ethical and moral decision making, about small and large things, should be guided by the model of Jesus. Yet John proposes a very radical answer to that question, an answer that essentially renders the question irrelevant. For John, there is no point to asking at each moment of decision, "what would Jesus do?" because for John, Jesus has already acted decisively in love. Jesus has been the ultimate friend—he gave his life in love for us. Now it is our turn to be Jesus' friend, which means that we love one another as he has loved us.

The Christian vocation is to give love freely and generously without counting the cost or wondering and worrying about who is on the receiving end of our limitless love.

Such an understanding of friendship and the life of faith means that the way Christians account for their piety and make decisions about what is ethical or moral behavior must be reassessed. If we take Jesus' commandment to love seriously, and if we long to be called "friend" by Jesus, then the Christian vocation is to give love freely and generously without counting the cost and without wondering and worrying about who is on the receiving end of our limitless love. Because this, too, is how Jesus loved. Jesus loved Judas, even though Jesus was well aware that Judas would betray him (John 6:64, 70-71). Jesus did not exclude Judas from the circle of his love, but loved him in the same ways that he loved all of his other followers. What counts most is the embodiment of God's love in the world, not the character of those who receive this love.

Not many of us will find ourselves in a situation where we are asked to lay down our lives as an expression of friendship and an act of love (although it is important to recognize that the stories of the saints and martyrs of the Church remember times and places where such an expression of love has been the case and so remind us that we can never know what will be asked of us and what we may be able to give in Jesus' name). But that does not mean that we are therefore exempt from Jesus' commandment to love as he loved. John 21 helps to illustrate this. In this chapter, the fates of Peter and the beloved disciple take center stage. Peter, after repeated questioning by Jesus, affirms that he loves Jesus and that he will feed Jesus' sheep (21:15-19). John 21:18-19 tells how Peter will live out Jesus' love—he will die a martyr's death. But the beloved disciple, the disciple who is closer to Jesus than any other disciple (see John 13:23-25; 19:26-27), will not die a martyr's death. Instead, he will live to be a very old man (John 21:22-23). He

will not love in the same way that Peter loved, but will enact Jesus' love in another way—by telling the stories on which this Gospel is based (21:24; see also 19:35). Both of these disciples are held up to the Gospel reader as true disciples, yet their enactments of love follow two completely different paths.

In the gift of his life in friendship, Jesus showed that true love is love that knows no limits. As the hour of Jesus' death approaches, John tells the reader that Jesus loved his own "to the end" (13:1). "To the end" (*eis to telos*) can mean simultaneously "to the end of time" and "to the full extent of love." To love to the full extent of love means that Jesus loves perfectly, that in Jesus' act of love one sees love perfected. For Jesus, and subsequently for Peter, the full extent of love meant the laying down of one's life. For the beloved disciple, the full extent of that love meant testifying with his whole life to the love of God in Jesus. John 21 suggests that both ways of loving are acts of faithfulness, that both ways of loving make one Jesus' friend.

JESUS AS THE SOURCE OF FRIENDSHIP

In John 15:14, friendship with Jesus is still conditional: "you are my friends *if* you do what I command you." But in John 15:15, that condition seems to be removed, because Jesus says, "I do not call you servants any longer…but I have called you friends." What accounts for the change? Not something that the disciples have done, because their enactment of Jesus' commandments still remains in the future. No, it is something that Jesus has done: "I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). Jesus, like the true friends about whom the Greek and Roman philosophers write, speaks plainly and honestly with his disciples and through this plain speaking, acknowledges them as his friends. The disciples are Jesus' friends because he has spoken to them openly; he has made known to them everything that he has heard from the Father.

The fourth-century theologian Ambrose eloquently captures this dimension of John 15:15:

> Let us reveal our bosom to [a friend], and let him reveal his to us. Therefore, he said, I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. Therefore a friend hides nothing, if he is true: he pours forth his mind, just as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of his Father.[6]

In sharing everything, Jesus "enables his disciples to participate in the intimacy and trust of the Father, by means of which they acquire that 'openness' (*parrēsia)* which is the privilege of a free man and a friend…."[7]

This intimacy can be seen most clearly in the foot-washing story of John 13. The foot washing is a sacrament of friendship. For example, the verb used to describe Jesus' removal of his outer robe at 13:4 is the same verb used in John 10 to describe Jesus' laying down his life (10:15, 17-18). Jesus' "laying down his robe" anticipates his "laying down his life" in friendship.

In the foot washing, Jesus offers himself completely to his disciples, assuming the social role of servant, in order to give a tangible shape to his love. Servants, not hosts or masters, wash the feet of guests, and in the foot washing, Jesus makes the ultimate act of hospitality and friendship. He stands neither on ceremony nor on precedent, but engages in an act that makes his love and grace visible. Peter's initial resistance (John 13:6-7) to Jesus' foot washing shows how radical an act the foot washing was. But Jesus will not let Peter's resistance govern the moment. Instead, he explains the foot washing to his disciples by saying, "Unless I wash you, you have no share in me" (13:8). Jesus' followers are asked to receive what Jesus gives and so participate in Jesus' act of love. A paraphrase of 13:8 in the language of friendship would be, "Unless I wash you, you are not my friend."

Jesus' plain and honest speaking, his full revelation of the God's love, has made human life more holy because his followers are full partners in his relationship with God.

In the foot washing, Jesus and the disciples move from being servants and master to being friends. Jesus will name this transformation for the disciples in John 15:15, but he has already enacted it for them in the foot washing. He has led them into the mysteries of God, in action and in word. In the foot washing, Jesus gives the disciples something—a share with him—and that share with Jesus is what makes any subsequent acts of service and friendship possible for the disciples. Jesus has transformed the community through his love, so that they can continue his acts of love. Love and service are defined by what Jesus has done, and what Jesus has done is share himself completely with the disciples through the symbolic act of foot washing.[8]

LIVING THE FRIENDSHIP THAT JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE

Plain and honest speaking may not seem to us as radical an act of friendship as the gift of one's life, but it is an essential characteristic of Jesus' friendship with us. Jesus' commandment to love as he has loved might feel unattainable were it not for the character of his friendship with us. Because Jesus, in his life and death, his words and deeds, showed and told his followers "everything" about God's love, his followers' relationship to the world and to one another was forever changed. Jesus' openness is a model of how we are to treat one another, but it also provides the wellspring that makes our acts of friendship possible. Jesus' plain and honest speaking, his full revelation of God's love, has made human life more holy because he has treated his followers as full partners in his relationship with God. His friendship is more than the model for human love and friendship; Jesus' friendship becomes the source of disciples' capacity for friendship.

We have been changed by Jesus' honest and plain speaking, and this transformation lies at the heart of Christian friendship. To speak as openly to others as Jesus did to his followers is a radical act because it is an act that assumes that everyone with whom we speak is our partner and companion. This kind of plain speaking is different from what we normally mean when we "tell people what they need to hear" or "speak one's mind." Those instances of plain speaking are the opposite of friendship because they are based on a master/servant or teacher/student model—the speaker positions himself or herself over against the listener. Jesus has replaced such models with a friendship model (John 15:15). Both speaker and listener are transformed by the plain speaking of friendship because in holding nothing back, the speaker acts in the intimacy and trust of transformative love. The speaker risks herself in the speaking; the listener risks himself in the hearing.

Jesus gave everything to his friends—his knowledge of God and his own life. Jesus is our model for friendship—because he loved without limits—and he makes it possible for us to live a life of friendship—because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us. Through friendship we come to know God and through friendship we enact the love of God. We can risk being friends because Jesus has been a friend to us.

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8 (1169a18–25), quoting from H. Rackham, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), *italics added.*

2 Plato, *Symposium* 179B, also 208D; Lucian, *Toxaris* 36. In the New Testament, Paul echoes this theme: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

3 Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 51.

4 For example, Lucian, *Toxaris*, 36.

5 For a discussion of the way motifs from John 10 echo throughout the Gospel, see Karoline Lewis, *Rereading the Shepherd Discourse Back into the Fourth Gospel* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2008).

6 Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Minister*, 3.22.135.

7 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Seabury, 1982), volume 3, 110.

8 See Gail R. O'Day, *John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, New Interpreters Bible, IX (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 727-728.

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A School of Christian Love

BY PAUL J. WADELL

Friends, Augustine famously taught, are gifts entrusted to us by God for providential purposes. If so, a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means.

My high school years were a little different. And I don't regret a minute of them. In the fall of 1965 I left my home in Louisville to join nearly two hundred other fellows at a high school seminary in a small Missouri town called Warrenton. It was a four-year adventure that changed my life. My cohorts on that journey gathered from across the country to navigate the dramas of adolescence as fledging members of a religious community called the Passionists. Some came from California, others from Chicago, Detroit, Birmingham, and St. Louis, and many more came along with me from Louisville. We were a ragtag bunch who clustered together in the most unlikely of settings to be initiated into a way of life designed to help us discover whether or not we ought to become Passionist priests. For four memorable years we studied and worked together, prayed and played together, and plotted some of the most imaginative and complicated practical jokes I have ever witnessed. Still, forty years later the most abiding recollection I have is that all of us who arrived in Warrenton as strangers left there as lifelong friends.

Although we did not realize it at the time, the pink stucco building that was our home for four years was a school of friendship; and friendship, at its best, is a school of Christian love. In a life ordered by prayer and worship, we learned there how turning our attention to God helped us to be more attentive to one another. In a place where none of us had very much, we learned how sharing and generosity build friendships, and why a life centered on Christ is the key to nurturing genuine friendship and intimacy

among ourselves. We did not choose each other, but we were given one another and entrusted with one another. Each of us was the "neighbor" all of us were called to love. And although we could not articulate it at the time, this meant helping one another grow in holiness by together moving closer to God. We did this by reaching out to one another and seeking each other's good. We did it by being present to one another, encouraging and supporting each other, but also by challenging each other. And since we lived together twenty-four hours a day for nine months of the year, we also did it by learning how to be patient with and forgive one another.[1]

It may be rare to spend one's high school years at a seminary, but it is not rare to have friends. Friendship is one of life's greatest gifts and blessings. We cherish our friends. Like Aristotle, we cannot imagine a good life without them. We know they have enriched our lives through the time they have invested in us and the care they have shown us. Being able to talk with them about the things that matter most to us is precious. And none would deny that our friends have shaped and changed our lives for the better.

Nonetheless, even though we know our lives would be terribly impoverished without friends, we may seldom consider the role of friendship in the Christian life. But cannot our friends teach us something about what it might mean to love God wholeheartedly, to follow in the way of Christ, and to radiate the goodness and holiness of God? Cannot friends help one another become "experts" at kindness, patience, mercy, compassion, and joy? Christians are called to re-represent the love and goodness of God in the world. But there have to be places where we can learn what this means, and one of those places is in the best and most enduring friendships of our lives. Friendships can be schools of Christian love. In fact, if Christians are to learn and to grow in the ways of Jesus, they need at least some of their friendships to be settings where friends can school one another in all the various practices of Christian love.

We are called to re-represent the love and goodness of God in the world. But there have to be places where we can learn what this means, and one of those places is in our best and most enduring friendships.

FRIENDSHIP AS A SANCTIFYING WAY OF LIFE

One of the best places to begin probing what it might mean to think of friendship as a school of Christian love is the writings of Augustine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine's stirring account of the first thirty-three years of his life, he makes no secret of the role friends had in his conversion. Looking back on how God worked through a variety of people to turn him from sin

to grace, Augustine concludes that it is best to think of friends not so much as the people we choose to bring into our lives, but as gifts entrusted to us by God. For Augustine, we do not initiate friendships, God does. Friends are gifts given to us by God for providential purposes. They are channels of God's grace because it is through them that God watches over us, blesses and provides for us, guides and supports us, and, most of all, loves us. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (4:7). Like Paul, Augustine came to see everything in his life as a gift, everything as a gracious manifestation of God's creative and redemptive love, but perhaps especially his friends. If we have such graced relationships in our lives, Augustine believed, it is solely because God has brought these people to us. Moreover, they are brought to us not only that we might know and experience God's love through them, but also that we might grow more deeply in that love with them.[2]

Augustine taught that Christians, remembering their baptisms, should think of friendships differently. In the Christian life the fundamental purpose of friendship is not to bring us satisfaction and success in the world, but to help us grow *together* in Christ in order that we might *together* enjoy friendship with God and the saints in heaven. But in order for this goal to be realized, friends must find ways in their life together to learn, be formed in, and witness the love of God.

We may wonder if our friendships ever reach such lofty heights, but perhaps Augustine's hope for friendship is not as far-fetched as we might initially think. Where else do we learn what it practically means to love our neighbor than in the most enduring friendships of our lives? Where else do we learn the fundamentals of charity, justice, fairness, generosity, and even sacrificial love than in the crucible of friendship, especially friendships that extend over time? Too, to speak of friendships as schools of Christian love is not to drain all joy from them by turning them into the kind of dreary relationships where all friends do is probe each other's progress in the Christian life. Rather, it is to recognize, as Augustine did, that God works not outside but within the ordinary settings of our lives, and that God works not apart from but through the people with whom we are most intimately connected. Augustine appreciated how a fundamental good such as friendship could be a setting in which people grow together in Christ. This is why he insisted that friends, in ways they may only later realize, cooperate with God in helping one another grow more resplendent in the love and goodness of God.

Like Augustine, the twelfth-century Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), also envisioned friendship as a school of Christian love. Not long after he was named abbot of Rievaulx, Aelred wrote *Spiritual Friendship*, a treatise that can aptly be described as a Christian reworking of the philosopher Cicero's classic work on friendship, *De Amicitia*. Aelred wrote *Spiritual Friendship* for his fellow monks at Rievaulx to show them

how the friendships that existed among them could aid their life together in Christ. At the same time, Aelred saw relationships among some of the monks that were not healthy. They were immature, manipulative, and self-serving relationships that might superficially appear to be friendships, but that could hardly bolster their life in Christ. Thus, Aelred begins by calling attention to two kinds of relationships that are counterfeit versions of friendship, not genuine expressions of it.[3]

The first he calls *carnal friendship*. One cannot accuse Aelred of being subtle! These are relationships in which each "friend" plays on the other's weaknesses and encourages him or her in behavior that is morally and spiritually harmful. True friendships are marked by a genuine love for the good and a heartfelt desire to seek what is best for the friend. True friendships always make us better because they appeal to what is best in us and challenge us to grow in goodness, truthfulness, and love. But what attracts people to a "carnal friendship" is the perception that they have found another who will not challenge them and with whom they can continue to pursue what is wrong and not be bothered. Carnal friendships foster the wrong kinds of attractions and desires. At their worst, they deaden our consciences and harden our hearts. They make us comfortable with doing wrong and accomplished in nothing but sinning. It is because carnal friendships are so morally and spiritually debilitating that they require massive self-deception to be sustained; indeed, the only way one could continue in such a corrupting relationship is by lying to oneself about its effects.

It is disquieting to think about such relationships, relationships that can best be described as partnerships in self-indulgence, dishonesty, and wickedness, and certainly not as settings for growing in the virtues. But Aelred helps us realize that not every relationship to which we give the name "friendship" really is one; and not every relationship in which we find ourselves will school us in the love and goodness of Christ. It is important for us to reflect on—and to be honest about—the various relationships of our lives and what they might be doing to us. Are they making us better persons? Are they helping us grow in goodness, sensitivity, and respect for others? Are they leading us closer to God? Or are they making it easier for us to gossip, to remain bitter and unforgiving, to be stingy and inconsiderate? If we took an inventory of the "friendships" of our lives, would we recall any

To speak of friendships as schools of Christian love is to recognize that God works not outside but within the ordinary settings of life, not apart from but through the people with whom we are most intimately connected.

that brought out the worst in us? Have we known relationships that made us more strangers to God than friends of God?[4]

A second relationship Aelred considers is *worldly friendships*. At first glance, they seem a step up from carnal friendships; however, in some respects they are more dangerous because their corrupting effects can be much harder to spot. For Aelred, worldly friendships are not motivated by a genuine desire to seek the good of another, which is a defining characteristic of any true friendship; rather, they are essentially self-serving relationships whose fundamental aim is the promotion and advancement of one's self. Instead of being focused on the needs of another, worldly friendships are "always full of deceit and intrigue"[5] because a person must disguise the fact that he or she has little genuine regard for the one claimed as friend. Perhaps these were the kinds of relationships Aelred saw around him in his earlier years when he served at the court of a king. But Aelred and his fellow monks at Rievaulx are hardly the only ones who are susceptible to such crafty and calculating alliances. Even though the language of "worldly friendship" may sound quaint to us today, isn't Aelred describing precisely the kinds of relationships that often thrive in business, in politics, in colleges and universities, and sometimes even in our churches? Aren't many of us at least occasionally tempted to seek out someone not because we really want a friendship with him or her, but because we suspect such an alliance might help us get ahead?

Spiritual friendships are an integral component to a life of discipleship. Spiritual friends, in mutual imitation of Christ, help one another become better friends of God.

It may be hard for us to take Aelred's concerns about these relationships seriously because we live in a society in which worldly friendships are not only taken for granted, but also often encouraged and admired. We are taught to esteem people who know how to "get ahead" and how to "make a name" for themselves, even if they have to be a little manipulative and self-serving in doing so. We live in a society that persistently teaches us to look after ourselves first, and so it is easy to dismiss Aelred as an overly scrupulous twelfth-century monk whose musings have little relevance for us today. But that would be a mistake. As he did with his community members at Rievaulx, Aelred asks us to consider the impact that different friendships of our lives have on our life with Christ. Are they strengthening us in our baptismal vocation or pulling us away from it? Are they serving our life with God or making us increasingly unmindful of God? Worldly friendships are detrimental to the Christian life because any relationship that asks noth-

ing more of us than that we think of ourselves first can hardly help us fulfill Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves.[6]

If certain relationships risk separating us from God, the third type of friendship Aelred discusses, *spiritual friendship*, will always draw us closer to God. By spiritual friendship, Aelred does not mean a relationship that pulls us out of our ordinary lives, but one that enables us to find Christ and to grow in Christ in our ordinary lives. Every friendship is formed around shared goods, and spiritual friendships are formed around a common love for Christ and a mutual desire to grow together in Christ. This does not mean that the friends must always be consciously aware of their devotion to Christ or that they only talk about spiritual things. But it does mean that they recognize their friendship as one that moves them along in the Christian life by forming them in the virtues and practices of the gospel. For Aelred, a spiritual friendship involves two or more people coming together to pursue a life of seeking God and of being conformed to the ways of God. Indeed, spiritual friendships begin in Christ, are lived in Christ, and are perfected in Christ. This is why they are an integral component to a life of discipleship. Spiritual friends, in their mutual imitation of Christ, help one another become better friends of God.

In this way, they are not only schools that teach us how to love our neighbor, but also schools that teach us how to love God properly. Love of neighbor and love of God are inextricably linked in spiritual friendships for Aelred because Christ, who is the perfect revelation of God and the perfect revelation of humanity, is an active partner in the friendship. In the opening lines of *Spiritual Friendship*, Aelred speaks with his fellow monk Ivo and says: "Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst."[7] Spiritual friendship never exists solely among the two earthly friends, but always includes a third, Christ, who is the gift of God's friendship to us in person. It is because Christ is actively present in the friendship that the friends learn not only how to love one another, but also how to love God for God's own sake. Such uncalculating love is not easily acquired. But it is something the friends grow into as they journey with Jesus and learn from him how to love God not out of fear or sheer obligation but from a genuine desire to seek the good of One who has always sought theirs.

THE GOOD THINGS GOOD FRIENDS DO FOR US

There are many ways we are indebted to our friends. We are grateful to them for standing by us during difficult times of our lives. We are grateful to them for being patient with us and not giving up on us. And we are surely grateful for their goodness, their steadfast encouragement and support, and the joy and grace they bring to our lives. But Christians hold a special indebtedness to their friends because it is in the company of friends that we live out the promise of our baptisms by growing in the goodness and love of God. There are many ways this can happen, but three seem most important.

First, friendships can be rightly described as schools of Christian love because every friendship draws us out of ourselves and teaches us how to care for others for their own sake. To love anyone is to be called out of ourselves to attend to the needs of another. It is to redirect our attention and our energy away from ourselves and towards the neighbors we are given to love. But none of us loves this way easily or naturally because of our deep inclination to look after ourselves first. Thus, we have to learn the hard work of love somewhere. We have to find ways to break through the fetters of self-absorption and self-concern in order to find joy in serving and caring about others. We have to learn lessons in sharing somewhere, just as we have to learn what it means to be generous and just, patient and forgiving, loyal and faithful. There is no doubt that such qualities are absolutely crucial for vocations such as marriage and parenting; but it is also true that one had better know something about generosity, justice, patience, forgiveness, loyalty, and faithfulness prior to getting married or becoming a parent. And friendships are good places to begin.

Friendships are morally significant relationships (Aristotle called them schools of virtue) because it is in company with good friends that we become good people. In other words, we do not become good and loving and just all on our own but by spending time with people who are good or who at least want to become good. None of us learns to love, to share, or to be kind and considerate single-handedly. We acquire these virtues in partnership with others who are seeking them with us. This is why good friendships not only make growing in goodness and love more pleasant for us; indeed, they make it possible. Friendships provide the form of life in which we acquire such indispensable virtues for the Christian life as patience, humility, courage, faithfulness, and perseverance.[8] In fact, we can even say that friends make one another good because friends appeal to what is best in us and give us ample opportunities to exercise the various manifestations of love that constitute the Christian life.

A second way that friendships contribute to our growth in love is that friends teach us about ourselves. Good friends not only know us better than most anyone else, but sometimes they can also know us better than we know ourselves. Aristotle captured this by saying that a good friend is like a mirror. Friends show us to ourselves. As they come to know us better they reveal certain aspects of our personality and character to us. We may learn from our friends that we have a gift for compassion or a gift for listening to others, perhaps especially the people in our midst who feel overlooked and forgotten. We may learn from our friends that our sense of humor brings people together and helps them feel at ease. Or we may learn from our friends that we too often insist on getting our way, that we are easily irritated, and that we sometimes take inappropriate joy at another's failure. Friends have insight about one another's character, for better or worse, simply because they have spent enough time together to come to know

one another well. If friendships are to be true schools in Christian love, friends must be able to challenge one another and be truthful with one another. Anybody can flatter me, but only a person who truly cares about me will be truthful with me. This is why if I want to be schooled in the discipline of Christian love I must allow my friends to call to my attention things I might rather conceal. I need my friends to challenge me to move beyond a hurt or to let go of a grudge. I need them to help me not take myself too seriously or to become excessively anxious about things I cannot control. And, in the Christian life, I need friends to help me stay centered on God.[9]

Finally, a third way friendships can school us in the rigors of Christian love is by continually challenging us to extend the boundaries of our world. Good friendships should always make our world bigger, not smaller, by calling us to expand the circle of love. A particular danger of friendships is that they can narrow our world by leaving us disposed to spend time, and to give attention to, only the people we enjoy being with and who make us feel good about ourselves. But Christians cannot afford friendships that become "clubby" or exclusive. We may not like all of our neighbors, but we are commanded to love them. Friends need to challenge each other to enlarge the scope of their love by reaching out to others, especially those we would rather avoid. Put differently, friendship is *preferential* love; but Jesus calls us to reach out in love not just to the people we prefer, but even to those we call our enemies.

When he was writing about charity, the Christian love of neighbor and God, the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas said charity calls us to love as neighbor everyone who is beloved and befriended by God.[10] But because God's befriending love has been extended to all—even to those we might not particularly like—if we are true "friends of God" we must work to love them too. Aquinas recognized that friendships become morally and spiritually dangerous when their effect is to leave us ignoring the diverse neighbors across the world that Jesus summons us to love. Friendships are true schools of Christian love only when they deepen our awareness of the connections that exist between us and every other person—indeed, all of creation—and heighten our sense of responsibility towards them. For Christians, a true test of friendship is whether it enables us to extend the circle of God's love and compassion to any neighbor who crosses our path.

If friendships are to be true schools in Christian love, friends must be able to challenge and be truthful with one another. Anybody can flatter me, but only a person who truly cares about me will be truthful with me.

CONCLUSION

Augustine was right. Friends are gifts entrusted to us by God for providential purposes. They can come into our lives at the most unlikely of places (like a high school seminary in Missouri), but wherever they appear we must be able to recognize and to respond to the grace. When we look back over our lives we realize what a precious gift certain friendships have been to us and how incomparably blessed we are because of them. Christians should especially prize friendships because they recognize in them the potential to be schools of love, settings in which we encounter Christ in one another and gradually learn from one another how to grow resplendent in the goodness and holiness of God. This may not be how we customarily think about friendships. But it is certainly a very promising and inviting way because it suggests that a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God, but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means. For Christians, this is the secret of friendship's great intimacy and the clearest explanation of its joy.

NOTES

1 For an extended analysis of the role of friendship in the moral life see my *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), especially 1-26.

2 For a superb description of Augustine's understanding of friendship's role in the Christian life, see Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 185-217.

3 Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 70-100.

4 These points are covered in more detail in my *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 97-103.

5 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, translated by Mary Eugenia Laker, S.S.N.D. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 1:42.

6 Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 103-107.

7 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 1:1.

8 Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 125-127.

9 Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 69-71.

10 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, translated by R. J. Batten, O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1975) II-II, Q. 25, a. 1.

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Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine

BY TERRY W. YORK

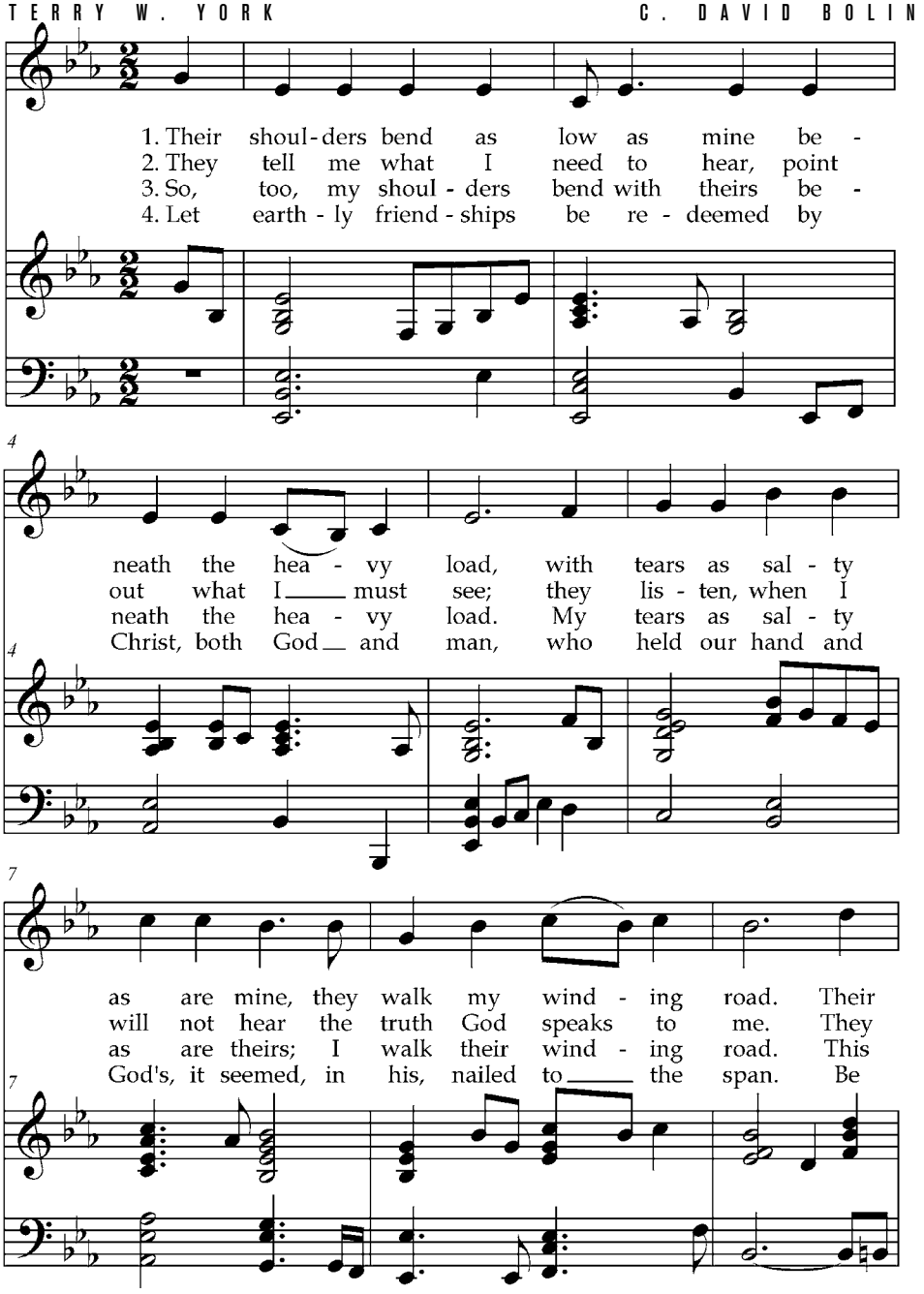
Their shoulders bend as low as mine
beneath my heavy load;
with tears as salty as are mine,
they walk my winding road.
Their hearts know all my guilt and greed,
know all my hopes and joy;
they know the help and strength I need,
these friends in God's employ.

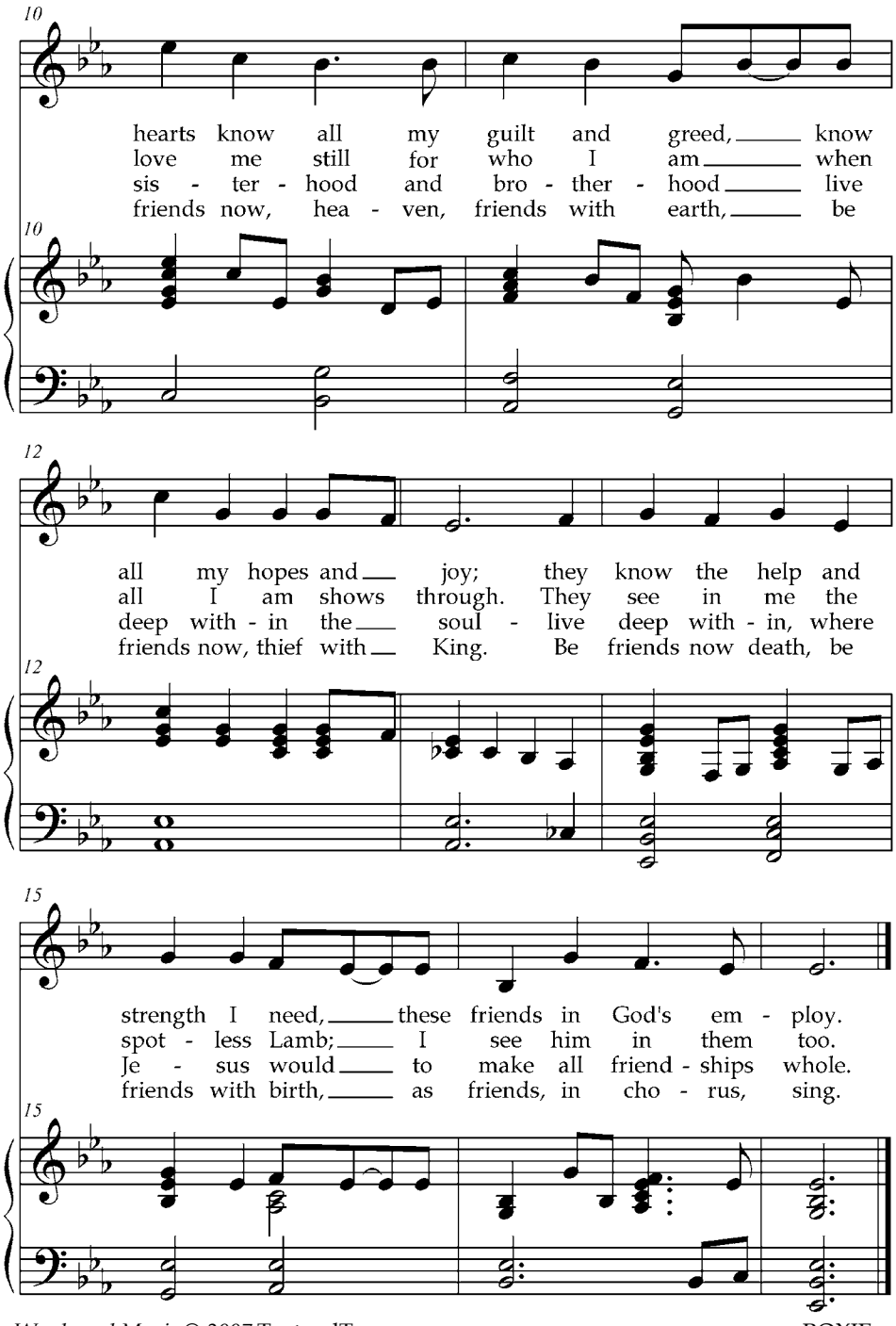
They tell me what I need to hear,
point out what I must see;
they listen, when I will not hear
the truth God speaks to me.
They love me still for who I am
when all I am shows through.
They see in me the spotless Lamb;
I see him in them too.

So, too, my shoulders bend with theirs
beneath their heavy load.
My tears as salty as are theirs;
I walk their winding road.
This sisterhood and brotherhood
live deep within the soul—
live deep within, where Jesus would,
to make all friendships whole.

Let earthly friendships be redeemed
by Christ, both God and man,
who held our hand and God's, it seemed,
in his, nailed to the span.
Be friends now, heaven, friends with earth,
be friends now, thief with King.
Be friends now death, be friends with birth,
as friends, in chorus, sing.

Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine





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Worship Service

BY ERIC MATHIS

Prelude

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 99)

The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!
Let us sing to God who has done great things.

The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let us sing to God who has done great things.

Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity;
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
Let us sing to God who has done great things.

Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool;
extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain.
Let us sing to God who has done great things.

Hymn of Praise

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus" (verses 1, 2, and 3)

Alleluia, sing to Jesus! His the scepter, his the throne,
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone.
Hark the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood:
"Jesus out of every nation has redeemed us by his blood."

Alleluia! Not as orphans are we left in sorrow now,
Alleluia! he is near us: faith believes nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received him when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his promise: "I am with you ever-more"?

Alleluia! Heavenly High Priest, here on earth our help, our stay,
Alleluia! hear the sinful cry to you from day to day.
Intercessor, Friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, hear our plea,
where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia, sing to Jesus! His the scepter, his the throne,
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone.
Hark the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood:
"Jesus out of every nation has redeemed us by his blood."

William C. Dix (1867)
Tune: ODE TO JOY

Prayer of Praise[1]

God, you have created us and redeemed us. You established the world and continue to rule over it with your mighty arm and powerful hand, and you consistently conquer the darkness in the world and in our lives.

You, God, have given us the gift of community with you and with others, and no matter how many times our fallen nature fails in these relationships, you still manage to sweep in and save us with your unfailing love.

Alleluia, sing to Jesus! Alleluia, worship Jesus! We praise you, O God, for you have done great things.

Hymn of Assurance[2]

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (verses 1, 2, and 3)

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you, you will find a solace there.

Joseph M. Scriven, 1855
Tune: ERIE

Silent Reflection[3]

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we call you our friend, but most of the time we are incapable of understanding what that really means. It is too complex to fathom that you—our creator and the one who governs the world—might also want to have an intimate relationship with us. It is too absurd to believe that you—the one whom we cannot see—might be our most loyal and faithful companion.

As a result, we forget (or claim to forget) that friendship with you is not always easy and requires much from us. It demands that we act on behalf of other people, and it is difficult for us to speak in defense of those people you would protect. Friendship with you requires that we expose our secrets, and it is easier for us to pretend that they are in the dark. If we call you friend, we should take risks for your Kingdom, but most of the time we settle into a lifestyle that is safe and comfortable.

All too often we want the benefits of friendship with you but not the work. We want you to be present when we need you without the commitment that we will answer when you call. We want you to answer our prayers and cries for help with no guarantee that we will acknowledge you when life is good.

In spite of our shortcomings, you were, are, and will be faithful to us. You became human to identify with the life we live, knowing that we will never fully understand you. You gave your life for us even though you knew we would not want to risk ours for your sake, and you continue to walk alongside us even though we often succumb to pressures calling us to walk the opposite direction.

Continue to be with us, Lord. Continue calling us to a more faithful relationship with you and the world you created. Grant us forgiveness and freedom from guilt. Amen.

Old Testament Reading: 1 Samuel 20:1-17

David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin against your father that he is trying to take my life?" He said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. My father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me; and why should my father hide this from me? Never!" But David also swore, "Your father knows well that you like me; and he thinks, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.' But truly, as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death." Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." David said to Jonathan, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me

go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.' If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant; but if he is angry, then know that evil has been determined by him. Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself; why should you bring me to your father?" Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! If I knew that it was decided by my father that evil should come upon you, would I not tell you?" Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" Jonathan replied to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field.

Jonathan said to David, "By the LORD, the God of Israel! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or on the third day, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But if my father intends to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan, and more also, if I do not disclose it to you, and send you away, so that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the faithful love of the LORD; but if I die, never cut off your faithful love from my house, even if the LORD were to cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD seek out the enemies of David." Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Hymn of Compassion

"Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine"

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2007)
Tune: ROXIE, *C. David Bolin* (2007)
Words and Music © 2007 *TextandTune.com*
(pp. 37-39 of this volume)

Children's Message

Prepare two teenagers in the congregation to portray David and Jonathan as guests visiting the children. Remind the children of the story in 1 Samuel 20:1-17, and ask the guests questions like these: "David, how did you feel knowing that Jonathan was willing to make his dad angry by protecting you?" "Jonathan, were you scared to talk with your dad about David?" "Jonathan,

what does it feel like to love someone else as much as you love your own life?" "David, what does it mean to you that Jonathan loved you so much?" Thank David and Jonathan for coming and then close with a simple prayer:

God, thank you for what we can learn about friends through the Bible. Thank you that David and Jonathan had a good friendship, and that Jonathan wanted to protect David from harm. Help us to love and protect our friends like Jonathan loved and protected David. Amen.

Song of Service (a cappella)

"I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me"

I'm gonna live so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna live so God can use me any time and anywhere.

I'm gonna work so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna work so God can use me any time and anywhere.

I'm gonna pray so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna pray so God can use me any time and anywhere.

African-American Spiritual
Tune: I'M GONNA LIVE

New Testament Reading: John 15:12-17

Jesus said to his disciples: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Song of Love

"How Deep the Father's Love for Us" [4]

How deep the Father's love for us,
how vast beyond all measure,
that he should give his only Son
to make a wretch his treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss—
the Father turns his face away,
as wounds which mar the chosen One,
bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
my sin upon his shoulders;
ashamed, I hear my mocking voice,
call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held him there
until it was accomplished;
his dying breath has brought me life—
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
no gifts, no power, no wisdom;
but I will boast in Jesus Christ,
his death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from his reward?
I cannot give an answer;
but this I know with all my heart—
his wounds have paid my ransom.

Stuart Townend

Sermon

Hymn of Response

"Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners"

Jesus! what a Friend for sinners!
Jesus! Lover of my soul;
friends may fail me, foes assail me,
he, my Savior, makes me whole.
Hallelujah! what a Savior!
Hallelujah! what a Friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
he is with me to the end.

Jesus! what a Strength in weakness!
Let me hide myself in him.
tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
he, my Strength, my victory wins.
Refrain

Jesus! what a Help in sorrow!
While the billows over me roll,
even when my heart is breaking,
he, my Comfort, helps my soul.
Refrain

Jesus! what a Guide and Keeper!
While the tempest still is high,
storms about me, night overtakes me,
he, my Pilot, hears my cry.
Refrain

Jesus! I do now receive him,
more than all in him I find.
He hath granted me forgiveness,
I am his, and he is mine.
Refrain

J. Wilbur Chapman (1910)
Tune: HYFRYDOL

The Giving of Tithes and Offerings

The Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host:
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Thomas Ken (1674)
Tune: OLD 100th

Benediction

May the Father, the one who gives every good and perfect gift,
Jesus Christ, the one who calls us all to serve,
and the Holy Spirit, the one who breathes love,
be with us all now and forevermore. Amen.

Hymn of Commitment

"We Are God's People" [5]

We are God's people, the chosen of the Lord,
born of his Spirit, established by his Word;
our cornerstone is Christ alone, and strong in him we stand:
O let us live transparently, and walk heart to heart and hand in hand.

We are God's loved ones, the Bride of Christ our Lord,
for we have known it, the love of God outpoured;
now let us learn how to return the gift of love once given:
O let us share each joy and care, and live with a zeal that pleases Heaven.

We are the Body of which the Lord is Head,
called to obey him, now risen from the dead;
he wills us be a family, diverse yet truly one:
O let us give our gifts to God, and so shall his work on earth be done.

We are a temple, the Spirit's dwelling place,
formed in great weakness, a cup to hold God's grace;
we die alone, for on its own each ember loses fire:
yet joined in one the flame burns on to give warmth and light,
and to inspire.

Bryan Jeffery Leech (1976)
Tune: SYMPHONY

Postlude

NOTES

1 The prayers intentionally have an informal sound and feeling to them, for we are addressing God whose love for us in Jesus Christ is the ultimate act of friendship. Admittedly, there is a great danger in naming God "friend." While hymns like "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" call us to an intimate relationship with God, the prayer of confession acknowledges our tendency to abuse that relationship. To highlight the diversity of friends who gather for worship, invite members who differ in age, gender, or ethnicity to lead these prayers. Two or more close friends within the congregation may share the praying or reading responsibilities.

2 "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" will benefit from a folk treatment with acoustic guitar, violin, cello, and djembe. Begin with a violin and cello ostinato on the hymn tune and gradually add other instruments (piano, guitar, djembe, and organ).

3 Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1974), 34.

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5 Words by Bryan Jeffery Leech. Music by Johannes Brahms; arr. by Fred Bock © copyright 1976 Fred Bock Music Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

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This photo is available in the print version of *Friendship*.

The many and varied depictions of the Last Supper in Christian art continue to attract us as viewers not only because of the sacramental importance of the event they represent, but also because they explore the friendships among Christ and the apostles.

Flemish School (Sixteenth Century), *The Last Supper*. *Painted Stone. Oudheidkundig Museum van de Bijloke, Ghent, Belgium. Photo © Held Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library. Used by permission.*

Depicting Christ's Friends

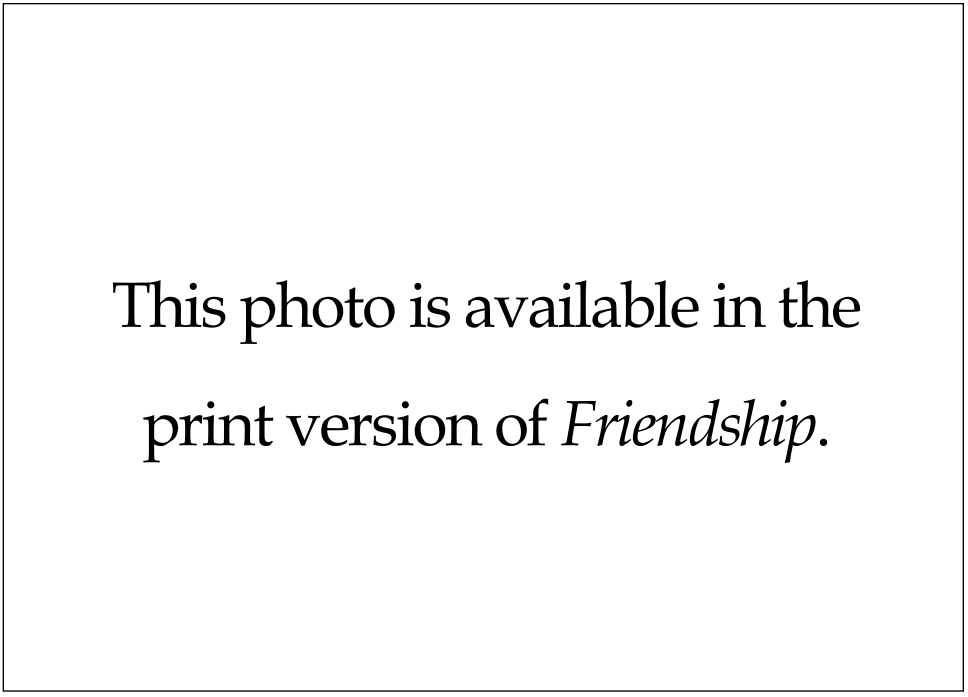
BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

The many and varied depictions of the Last Supper—surely it is one of the best-loved biblical stories depicted in visual art—continue to attract us as viewers not only because of the sacramental importance of the event they depict, but also because they explore the friendships among Christ and the apostles. These two examples allow us to compare the representation of the Last Supper in a Northern Renaissance sculpture from Flanders (on the cover and p. 48) and an Italian Renaissance painting from Florence (see p. 50). In each object we can easily identify, for example, the intimate friendship of Christ and John the Beloved, for the artists follow a visual type for the disciple "whom Jesus loved" based on the scriptural reference of his "lying on Jesus' breast" (John 13:23, 25, KJV).

Domenico Ghirlandaio painted his fresco, *The Last Supper*, in the refectory or dining area of the Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence. The monks would be reminded of the Lord's Supper while they too were at the table during mealtime.

The Ghirlandaio workshop, beginning in the fourteenth century and continuing through the sixteenth century, was well known for attracting the most talented artists and training them well in the techniques of the antique style, drawing from life, and fresco. The workshop made available pattern books of drawings that served as references for artists to study the personal relationships among the apostles through their gestures toward one another, position at the table of the Lord, hair and body types, and other iconographic details. The iconographic details for John the Beloved include being positioned close to Christ at the table, usually on his left, and allowing him to sleep with his head on the table. In both the painted and sculptural examples illustrated here, Christ embraces or lays his left hand over the shoulder and back of the sleeping disciple. Clearly this is a position of intimacy and caring between friends. John is also depicted as unbearded, and younger and more effeminate than the other apostles. We will note other characteristics of the iconographic type of John the Beloved in the Crucifixion scenes discussed in a companion article "Near the Cross of Jesus" (pp. 52-55).

We can identify other apostles and their relationships around the table as well as the precise moment in the narrative. Jesus has just informed his friends, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me" (John 13:21b),



Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448-1494), *The Last Supper* (c. 1482). *Fresco. Museo di S. Marco, Florence, Italy. Photo: Daniela Cammilli for Alinari, 1990. Photo: © Alinari / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

and they are wondering "Lord, who is it?" as they discuss this seemingly outrageous statement among themselves. For instance, the favored apostle in both objects is Peter who sits at Jesus' right hand; he has the most important position in a Renaissance composition, which is to the right of the central figure. The artists give this position of honor to Simon Peter because at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had honored his confession of Jesus' messianic identity by calling him "Peter" (or Rock) and saying "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18b-19). In church tradition Peter is said to be the first Bishop of Rome and the source of apostolic succession for the Roman Catholic papacy. Peter is depicted as older, wiser, and bearded; sometimes he has graying hair, as in the Ghirlandaio fresco. In the Flemish sculpture Peter moves his right hand towards his heart as he witnesses Judas's reaction to Jesus' words. The other apostles do not seem to notice yet what Peter and Christ see. This is a subtle difference from the Ghirlandaio where even Judas seems to be surprised: he literally "gets his back straightened up" but has not begun to leave his chair as in the sculpture.

The traditional position for Judas in Italian Last Supper paintings (until Leonardo's famous work in Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan) is alone on the other side of the table from the other apostles. Although the circular composition of the Flemish sculpture, as opposed to the rectangular painting, still places Judas on the opposite side from Jesus, his reaction is made more dramatic by our watching the chair about to fall over as Judas gets up quickly.

Visual artists utilize the language of gesture and the body position of figures to convey narrative and reveal details about characters' relationships. The iconographic traditions of Christian art once made it easier for artists to depict and comment on the friendships among Christ and his apostles. John the Beloved was represented as a younger friend who is allowed the very comfortable position of resting on the breast of Jesus, and he is the only apostle Jesus physically touches in the Last Supper scene. Peter was placed on the favored side of Jesus, and his strength to lead could be indicated through his awareness of Jesus' revelation. Judas, the one who isolates himself from his friends and betrays his Lord, was placed across the table from Christ, and often he is alone there.

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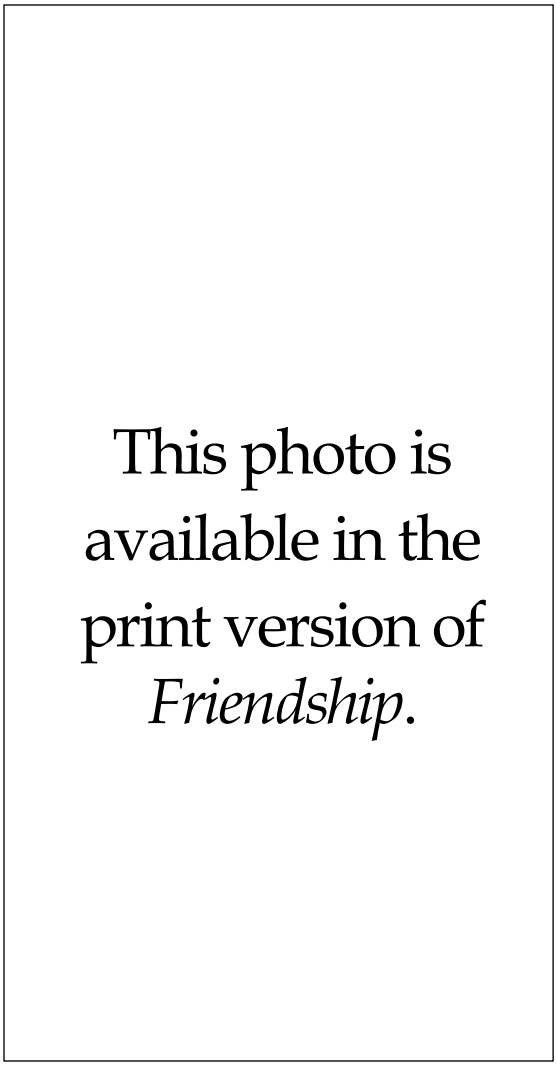


As Jesus suffers in order to draw all humanity to God, he pauses to care for his mother and best friend's future together on earth. In this vignette, God's universal love is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete.

Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1365/70-c. 1425). *The Crucified Christ between the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist* (c. 1406). *Tempera on wood, gold ground, overall, including gable, 33 5/8" x 14 ½". Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.67). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

Near the Cross of Jesus

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

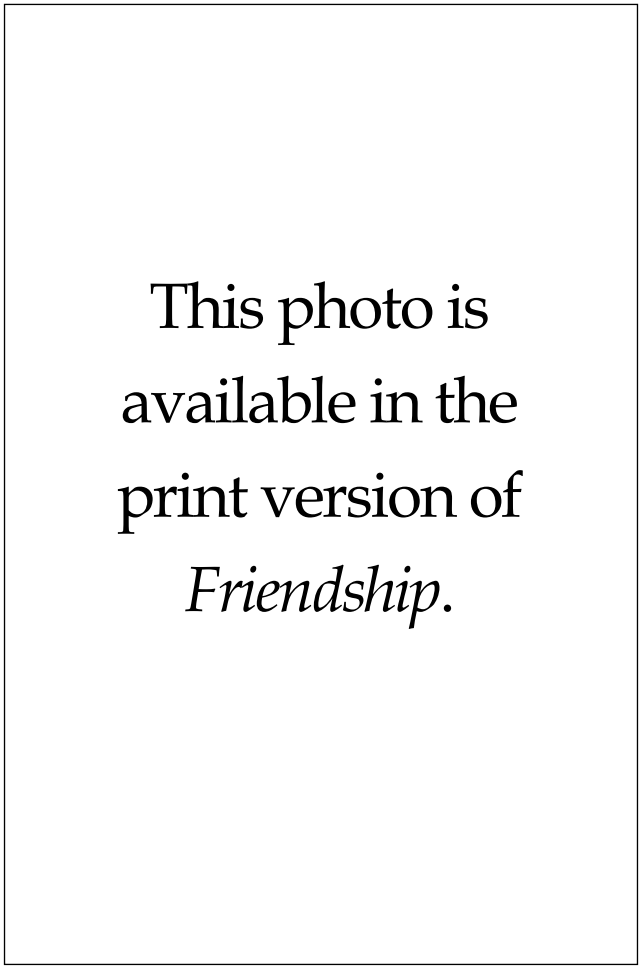
In the midst of describing the horrific public events of the Crucifixion, the Gospel of John pauses to render this marvelous scene of friendship at the foot of the cross:

> Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.
>
> *John 19:25b-27*

The other Gospel writers do not mention this intimate detail which has inspired so many great works of art. Indeed, only the Gospel of John records that Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple were present as he died. (Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:55-56 name Mary Magdalene and other women as "looking on from a distance.")

Both Lorenzo Monaco and Hendrik Terbrugghen simplify the Gospel scene to just three characters—Mary the mother of Jesus, John the beloved disciple, and Jesus—in order to focus on the theme of personal friendship in the narrative. (Other artists, as we might expect, have used John's story as the textual source for placing the other two Marys at the foot of the cross.) Even as Jesus is suffering in order to draw all humanity to God—he was "lifted up," John says, so that "whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15; cf. 8:28, 12:32-34)—Jesus pauses to care for his mother and his best friend's future life together on earth. In this vignette, God's universal love is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete.

Christ's sacrificial death is his ultimate expression of friendship toward his mother Mary and John. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," Jesus teaches his disciples in this Gospel. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). In entrusting Mary into his beloved friend John's care—so that they will "love one another as he has loved them"—Christ unites them in friendship with one another. This small scene in John's Gospel becomes a window into our salvation: in making us friends of God, Christ draws us toward true friendship and love with one another.



Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629). *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John* (c. 1625). *Oil on canvas, 61" x 40 ¼". Funds from various donors, 1956 (56.228). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

Though the artists Monaco and Terbrugghen share the theme of Christ's friendship, they are separated by two hundred years of history and quite different artistic styles—the Early Italian Renaissance and Dutch Baroque styles respectively. Lorenzo Monaco, born Piero di Giovanni, was a monk of the Camaldolese Order. He was trained in the Late Gothic style that is reflected in the gold background of the altar panel of the Crucifixion, *The Crucified Christ between the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist* (see p. 52). Around the time he was ordained as a deacon Monaco lived outside the monastery and opened his own painting workshop. His craftsmanship and

use of pure color are characteristic of artists transitioning from the fourteenth-century style of Giotto to the Early Renaissance style of Masaccio.

Hendrik Terbrugghen was one of the Utrecht Caravaggisti—a group of Dutch painters who were much influenced by the contemporary work of Caravaggio in the 1620s. For example, in *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John* (see p. 54) Terbrugghen applies Caravaggio's meticulous attention to realistic detail in the disheveled hair and pained face of John and the dirty feet of Mary. Yet in other ways this painting is less Caravaggesque than other works by Terbrugghen from this period. The low horizon, simple composition with emphasis on the scriptural narrative, and rendering of the body are often referred to as being influenced by Northern artists, or in these elements the artist may be trying to recall the great accomplishments of the fifteenth century.

Note the position of the cross in the two paintings; both are exceptional for their respective styles. Monaco's work is well known as an early presentation of the cross as if it were three-dimensional, sculptural, and emerging out of the picture. Terbrugghen achieves this same effect, for artistic perspective and modeling for three-dimensionality had been developed during the time between the two works. Instead of using the characteristic diagonal of the Baroque style, Terbrugghen maintains a more traditional Renaissance composition to further emphasize the presence of Jesus' mother Mary and devoted friend John the Beloved. The result, in both cases, is a balanced, harmonious, and symmetrical composition. In keeping with the visual tradition, both artists give Mary prominence by placing her on Christ's right side while they place the figure of John on his left.

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Other Voices

The word *friend* has such a range of meanings that one might wonder whether it has become vacuous. To give it some content we might need to speak of close friends, bridge friends, work friends, intimate friends, childhood friends, and casual friends. Most of us have probably received our share of bulk-mail pleas for contributions saluting us as "Dear Friend." I have participated in more than one congregation's "Ritual of Friendship," consisting of writing my name and address on a pad and passing it to the stranger next to me. Yet…in the jumble of relationships denoted by this elastic term *friend* there *are* relationships precious enough to elicit deep gratitude and reverence.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). If, therefore, you seek a true friend, seek Christ, who, when all others have deserted you, will not forsake you, neither in life, nor in death, nor in time, nor in eternity. To the contrary—always and everywhere he will draw near to you, and he will crown you with all good, all grace, and all glory. How wise was that soul who was able to say: *My mind is founded and strengthened in Christ!* Christ is a man of love precisely because he is a man of sorrow; for without sorrow nothing in love comes to fullness of life. *In peace*, which is to say, *in himself I will sleep and rest*.

CORNELIUS A LAPIDE (1567-1637), *Commentarii in Sacram Scripturam*

Christ did not lay down his life for us as enemies so that we should remain enemies, but so that he could make us friends.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274), *Lectures on the Gospel of John*

To speak of friendship with God can sound so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God; however, there is no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, because friends have expectations of each other, and because friends are said to be committed to the same things…. Any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. There may be grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost.

PAUL J. WADELL, *Becoming Friends*

Let us reveal our bosom to [a friend], and let him reveal his to us. Therefore, [Jesus] said, I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. Therefore a friend hides nothing, if he is true; he pours forth his mind, just as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of the Father.

AMBROSE OF MILAN (339-397), *On the Duties of Ministers*, 3.22.135

[Christ] demands from us what he himself offers. If he strips himself before our eyes, he claims that we should do the same. As our God he knows every fiber of the being which he has made; as our Savior he knows every instant in the past in which we have swerved from his obedience; but, as our friend, he waits for us to tell him.

It is tolerably true to say that the difference between our behavior, respectively, to an acquaintance and to a friend, is that in the first case we seek to conceal ourselves, to present an agreeable or a convenient image of our own character, to use language as a disguise, to use conversation as we might use counters; and in the second case that we put aside conventions and make-shifts, and seek to express ourselves as we are, and not as we would have our friend think us to be.

ROBERT HUGH BENSON (1871-1914), *The Friendship of Christ*

So this is what is so marvelous about friendship: it takes two persons to have this action and interaction. You don't have one person loving the other person and understanding her, but you have two persons accepting each other, loving each other, and growing in affection for each other, in mature affection that accepts elements that do not evoke affection.

MOTHER MARY FRANCIS, P.C.C., *But I Have Called You Friends*

Faithfulness to us in our faults is a certain sign of fidelity in a friend. You may depend upon that man who will tell you of your faults in a kind and considerate manner. Fawning hypocrites, insidious flatterers, are the sweepings and offal of friendship. They are but the parasites upon that noble tree. But true friends put enough trust in you to tell you openly of your faults. Give me for a friend the man who will speak honestly of me before my face; who will not first tell one neighbor, then another, but who will come straight to my house and say, "Sir, I feel there is such-and-such a thing I must tell you of." That man is a true friend; he has proved himself to be so.

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON (1834-1892), "A Faithful Friend"

There are no reliable rules or recipes to follow with regard to admonition and advice within friendship; that is why it requires good judgment…. Mature friendship both requires and produces growth in goodness, not as friendship's goal, but in order to equip us for befriending. Being a friend requires strength of character. As we strive to do what friendship calls for,

we will grow. Sharing our friends' sorrows will exercise our endurance and courage. There may be parts of our friends' unfolding stories to which we can give little direct help. In some cases we lack resources or expertise to aid our friends' particular cherished projects. In other cases they do not yet see what we think we see about God's intentions for them.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

Soul friendships emerge out of the fertile soil of knowing and being known. Soul friends can help us know ourselves better by mirroring to us the truth of who we are.... When a friendship is going beyond ordinary levels of intimacy and moving into more spiritual territory, two…areas become important to share with a soul friend: our areas of struggle and, even more specifically, our areas of wrongdoing. Soul friends share the joys of life as well as the struggles, and their ability to both divulge and respond to a confession opens the door to radical transformation.

MINDY CALIGUIRE, *Spiritual Friendship*

So that a human being might not be alone a system of friendship was created. Friendship begins with one's spouse and children, and from there moves on to strangers. But considering the fact that we all have the same father (Adam) and the same mother (Eve) who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being. Ask nature: is this man unknown? He is still a human being. Is this woman a friend? Let her remain a friend. Is this man an enemy? Let him become a friend.

AUGUSTINE (354-430), Sermon 229D, 1

Our choice of friends and our attachment to them may be exclusive without being exclusivistic.... To devote time, energy, and concern to one's friends is not active concern for all human beings, but it can be chosen and done in a way which remains open to all neighbors or in a way which does not. Only the latter is forbidden.

GILBERT C. MEILAENDER, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*

[A]ccording to the Christian story, at least on this side of eternity, neighbor love *is* something other than friendship. *Caritas* is the love based on an infinite hope that someday everyone will be God's friend; in the meantime, God, like everyone else, has fewer friends than neighbors.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

This is that extraordinary and great happiness which we await.... There one finds no hiding of thoughts, no dissembling of affection. This is true and eternal friendship, which begins in this life and is perfected in the next, which here belongs to the few where few are good, but there belongs to all where all are good.

AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1110-1167), *Spiritual Friendship*, 3.79-80

Love, Death, and Friendship in the Harry Potter Novels

BY JOHN KILLINGER

After thousands of pages of Harry Potter's story, it is clear now that this has been J. K. Rowling's theme from the beginning: love, friendship, sacrifice, and eventually life. For it is life that springs out of Harry's gift of himself: the life of self-sacrifice, the life that defeats death, the life of ongoing friendship.

Friends. Amigos. Chums. Companions. Mates. Buddies. Jesus did not say lightly to his disciples at the Last Supper, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends…. I do not call you servants any longer…but I have called you friends" (John 15:13, 15). Scholars think they were celebrating a Jewish friendship meal, one in which men pledged their love and fidelity to one another regardless of what might befall them. In view of what was about to happen, Jesus' words were extraordinarily charged with meaning and emotion.

J. K. Rowling, author of the popular Harry Potter novels, may have had that scene in mind when she began her seventh and final novel of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, for she set at its beginning an epigram from William Penn, founder of the Quakers: "This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal."[1] Then she wrote a story that in many ways parallels the death and resurrection of Jesus.

I had suspected from the first novel that Harry was actually a Christ-figure. He was marked in an early encounter with the evil Lord Voldemort by a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, and the name for God vouchsafed to Moses, *I Am Who I Am,* is believed by some to have been derived

from a primitive description of a lightning bolt. Harry's arrival at his Muggle (that is, nonwizarding) relatives' home was marked by strange phenomena in the natural world, like those that accompanied the birth of Jesus. Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall, who oversaw his arrival, looked suspiciously like God the Father and Sophia, his female counterpart. At Hogwarts, the wizarding school, Harry fell in with a coterie of very special close friends—Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Neville Longbottom—who often remind us of Jesus' inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John. (Ron is the stubborn, blustering Peter!)

If there was any doubt about Harry's being created in the image of Christ, it is surely dispelled in The Deathly Hallows volume, where he is repeatedly called "the Chosen One."

I suggested, therefore, in a book called *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter,* written after the fourth novel had appeared, that Harry would eventually die like Christ.[2] And indeed, in the final novel, he does. He dies voluntarily, as Christ did, literally presenting himself to Voldemort for execution. And then, as Christ did, he returns from death, this time to deal a mortal blow to the prince of darkness himself.

If there was any doubt about Harry's being created in the image of Christ, it is surely dispelled in *The Deathly Hallows* volume, where he is repeatedly called "the Chosen One." And there is that "This Is Your Life" moment when Harry and Hermione go back to Godric's Hollow, his birthplace, arriving on Christmas Eve as snow is falling in the square before the little church. Inside the church, worshipers are singing Christmas carols, and as Harry and Hermione cross the square she suddenly stops dead.

> "Harry, look!" she cries.
>
> She was pointing at the war memorial. As they had passed it, it had transformed. Instead of an obelisk covered in names, there was a statue of three people: a man with untidy hair and glasses, a woman with long hair and a kind, pretty face, and a baby boy sitting in his mother's arms. Snow lay upon all their heads, like fluffy white caps. (p. 324)

It is the Holy Family—Joseph, Mary, and Jesus—or, in this case, James, Lily, and Harry. Harry stands enraptured by it. It was strange, Rowling writes, "to see himself represented in stone, a happy baby without a scar on his forehead."

They move on toward the church, and as they go the statue becomes the war memorial again.

It is clearer than ever that Harry must die, that in the end he will walk into Voldemort's presence and lay down his life for his friends—for *all* his friends, not only Ron, Hermione, and Neville, but all the students at Hogwarts and all their families and all the wizards and Muggles in the world. He will die in order that others may live.

There is no vainglory in what he does, no posturing, no sense of histrionics. Dumbledore has told him often enough: he *loves*. It is the reason he can defeat the evil Lord Voldemort, who lacks the power to understand love and who laughs at Harry because he knows it motivates him. It is the reason Harry can walk calmly and deliberately into the maw of death and lay down his life.

Rowling understands the connection between friendship and love, the mystery at the heart of the gospel. She makes the statement through a fanciful ceiling in the home of Xenophilus Lovegood—the name is important—when Harry visits the Lovegood home and is captivated by the scene at the head of the stairs. Climbing the stairs, he examines the painting on the ceiling and sees his own portrait in it—his and Ron's and Hermione's and Neville's. In its beauty and grandeur, it is like a ceiling by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel.

"What appeared to be golden chains, " says Rowling, "wove around the pictures, linking them together, but after examining them for a minute or so, Harry realized that the chains were actually one word, repeated a thousand times in golden ink: friends. . . friends. . . friends…" (p. 417).

It is clear now, after thousands of pages of story and explication—in the seventh and final novel of the series—that this has been Rowling's theme from the beginning: love, friendship, sacrifice, and eventually *life.*

For it is life that springs out of Harry's gift of himself: the life of self-sacrifice, the life that defeats death, the life of ongoing friendship and relationship.

Which is why Rowling could not end her final novel without a postscript. It is called "Nineteen Years Later."

Harry has come back to life after his duels with Voldemort. He and his friend Ginny have married, and they have three little children, James, Albus, and Lily. Ron and Hermione have married too, and have two children, Rose and Hugo. They all run into one another at the famous track 9 ¾, where Rose, James, and Albus are catching the train to Hogwarts.

Draco Malfoy, the villainous young man in the novels who was mean and cowardly but not completely evil has also married, and he, his wife, and their son Scorpius are likewise waiting for the train. Sadly, Draco does not feel comfortable with his old acquaintances. When he sees them staring in his direction, he nods curtly and turns away. The reader cannot help feeling sorry for him. Like Voldemort, he simply does not know how to love.

"Don't forget to give Neville our love!" Ginny tells James as she hugs him goodbye.

"Mum!" he expostulates. "I can't give a professor *love*!"

"But you *know* Neville," she says.

James rolls his eyes.

"Outside, yeah," he says, "but at school he's Professor Longbottom, isn't he? I can't walk into Herbology and give him *love*…" (p. 757).

It's a dear little passage, very telling, and Rowling's last word on the subject. She must have hated giving up her sermon there, because it has been so important to her all along. It is, she realizes, the heart of the Christian faith and the secret of life itself.

"No one has greater love than this," said Jesus, "to lay down one's life for one's friends."

And then: "I have called you friends."

From Jesus to William Penn and now to J. K. Rowling, this is the truth that shines like a precious gem at the center of humanity's long struggle for meaning and justification. Love—genuine caring and involvement in the lives of others—is the key to our very existence!

NOTES

1 J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2007). Page citations will be in the text.

2 John Killinger, *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

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The Neighborhood: A Company of Friends

BY KYLE CHILDRESS

Our health is connected with one another, and we are more ourselves when we are together than when we are separate. Six pastors in "the Neighborhood" are discovering, through Sabbath and holy friendships, God's salvation now has a concreteness that previously was abstract for them.

Six of us have been getting together for eighteen years, twice a year. Looking back we can hardly believe how fast the time has passed. It all started when we found each other at "Baptist battles" and talked about how badly we needed some Sabbath time and how good it would be to take some of that time together. One of us knew of a small cabin available, so out came the calendars and we scheduled the first date. After a couple of meetings we called ourselves "the Neighborhood," named for Will Campbell's company of friends in *The Glad River*.

Twice a year for six years, I'd leave home early on a Thursday morning and drive four and a half hours to Austin to meet the others. We would shop for frozen pizza, Oreos, Diet Cokes, coffee, and cigars, then drive to the cabin and begin twelve hours of rapid-fire conversation. Eventually we would drop into our air mattresses, get up early the next morning, and jump back into the car for the drive home. We enjoyed being together, but it was no Sabbath. I came back more exhausted than when I left.

Because the frantic pace of the gathering was an extension of our frantic lives, we did not realize anything was wrong. When you are busy every day, your habit is to be busy. Not to be busy feels so abnormal that you keep filling up the time in order to never stop being busy. Learning to slow down took time and commitment.

First, we found new places to meet. Two of us had relatives who owned farm or ranch land with houses available for a couple of weeks each year (no more sleeping on the floor). The kitchens were well furnished, so we could have healthy meals, and each of the houses had porches where we could sit and talk.

Before the first retreat, we called and e-mailed each other to make sure each of us would follow through. None of us had ever taken this much time away from our congregations except for family vacations or perhaps continuing education events. To take four or five days twice a year to do nothing but be together was unheard of, but if any of us backed out because we were "too busy," the whole thing would come tumbling down.

We had to come to terms with leaving our congregations. Could we trust God and trust God's people to get along without us? Would they even let us go? After all, we would not return with Continuing Education Units to show for our time away. When I queried our deacons, their response surprised me. They reminded me that I was always quoting the Puritan phrase "Good Sabbaths make good Christians." I should put my time where my mouth was. "Go to the Neighborhood. We are the deacons. We will handle the pastoral care." So I did.

Nowadays we arrive at the farmhouse late on a Monday afternoon and eat supper in a small town café nearby. Our first day or two together still has a frantic edge to it, and it takes a couple days to detoxify from busy-ness. But by the end of the second day we begin to slow down, and by the third day we are finding a Sabbath rhythm of morning prayers and coffee followed by whatever we want to do or not do.

Often Nathan can be found in a hammock taking a nap while Ray is smoking his pipe on the porch and Larry is sifting his way through a stack of good books. A layperson at Charlie's church taught him how to do first-rate barbeque, so Charlie puts the brisket on in the morning for us to enjoy for supper (frozen pizza is out), although the older we get the more chicken and fish we eat. Joe, who cannot sit still, might chop wood for the smoker while I watch a herd of white-faced Hereford cows graze amidst live oak and mesquite trees and relish the fact that I do not have to organize them to accomplish a task.

It does not take a genius to watch a herd of cows and remember Jesus' words "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.… And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" And it does not take a saint to call the office and hear, "Everything's fine," then go for a leisurely walk across a pasture and think, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field…will he not much more clothe you? …Therefore do not worry" (Matthew 6:26-27, 30-31a). After a while we begin to get the message: "Perhaps I need to be a different kind of pastor." "Maybe I do need to trust God and God's people." And, "Why haven't I learned this before?"

After a couple of days we get past the frenetic banter and catching-up and move on to conversations that probe beneath the surface of our lives. For professional handlers-of-the-holy, talking about God as amateurs is not easy, and our crises and challenges are not always as apparent. It took a while for one of us to talk about the difficulty he was having with his teenage stepson. One of us confessed that his marriage was at risk. We talked and prayed with him and when we got home we checked on him to see if he was in counseling with his wife. We listen to one another's expressions of exhaustion, frustration, and loneliness, and we have learned to trust one another to talk about our ambition and sense of rivalry with other clergy, even our sense of rivalry with one another.

Our deeper conversations remind us that we are different kinds of pastors with different perspectives and approaches to our common vocation. Charlie is accustomed to preaching to two thousand people every Sunday morning while I preach to ninety. He has a strong CEO streak, while I approach the call like a farmer. We have a lot to learn from one another. I am learning that not all big-steeple pastors are ambitious religious capitalists; he is learning that small congregation pastors are not necessarily lazy underachievers. He's no Enron executive; I'm no Snuffy Smith.

Joe and Nathan also approach pastoral life differently. Nathan, in his Hawaiian shirt, is laid back and casual, while Joe's easygoing smile masks intensity. And we all learn from Ray and Nathan, who have been pastors longer than the rest of us.

My congregation knows that the Neighborhood is one of the most important events on my calendar. When we do annual planning someone always asks, "Now when are your Neighborhood gatherings?" The church plans around them on my behalf—they know that I come back refreshed and full of new ideas, and that I have changed over twelve years. They trace some of that change to time spent with the Neighborhood.

After a couple of days we get past the frenetic banter and move on to conversations that probe beneath the surface of our lives. For professional handlers-of-the-holy, talking about God as amateurs is not easy, and our crises are not always as apparent.

I have learned, for example, that good Sabbaths not only make good Christians, they make good pastors and good churches, too. Practicing Sabbath has allowed me to loosen my grip on running the church. It is not my church anyway. It is God's church, and God and God's people are perfectly capable of taking care of business. I am not called to attend every

committee meeting or to visit every single person in crisis. The people of God, the body of Christ, minister to the members. As I have learned to back off, the congregation has stepped forward. And when I speak about the need for Sabbath, I speak with an authority I once did not have. I practice more of what I preach, and the congregation listens.

"To be healthy is literally to be whole," Wendell Berry writes in his essay "Health is Membership." "Our sense of wholeness is not just the completeness in ourselves but is also the sense of belonging to others and to our place…. I believe that the community—in the fullest sense: a place and all its creatures—is the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms."†

Those of us in the Neighborhood hear Berry's words differently now than we did eighteen years ago. Our health is connected with one another, and we sense that we are more ourselves when we are together than when we are separate. Biblically, the concepts of salvation and shalom describe a condition of community wholeness in which each individual is in good health only when he or she is an integrated member of God's people.

Through Sabbath and holy friendships, God's salvation now has a concreteness that previously was abstract for us. Sabbath, friendship, and salvation are connected. We are like the paralyzed man carried by his four friends who lowered him through the roof to bring him to Jesus. Mark records (the italics are mine): "When Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the paralytic, '*your* sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5).

NOTE

† Wendell Berry, "Health is Membership," in *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), 87, 90.

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Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We Are Known

BY CAROLINE J. SIMON

The deep connections most central to admirable and enviable friendships are rooted in personal, even intimate, knowledge. From a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty; it must be based on insight into one's true self—the self rooted in God's intentions for one's life.

Knowledge is a crucial marker of friendship. "I have called you friends," says Jesus, "because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15b). Although obedience is a necessary condition of intimate knowledge of Jesus' own intimacy with God, those who follow Jesus' commands are more than servants. Friends share knowledge while servants do not know the "what" or "why" behind what is required of them.

What kind of knowledge is crucial to friendship? And why is that knowledge so central to the gifts that friendship confers within our lives?

C. S. Lewis, in his well-known discussion of friendship in *The Four Loves*, indicates that the kind of knowledge necessary to friendship has little to do with self-disclosure concerning personal information. Lewis claims that since friendships are based on some "common interest"—like cooking, or astronomy, or reading theology—friends characteristically take little interest in one another's personal lives. Friendships are formed,

according to Lewis, when we discover others who take delight in the subjects that most delight us. The knowledge of your friend which is necessary to friendship is focused tightly on whatever joint endeavor gives rise to this shared delight—the "What? You too?" experience of finding that you are not the only one who cares about your subject or sees it from a particular, rare point of view. Lewis goes so far as to call friendship a connection of "naked personalities" because details of one's friends' lives that are irrelevant to the pursuit of the subject at the core of the friendship are matters of indifference to the friends.[1]

Some Christian thinkers have been suspicious of friendship, at best grudgingly giving it a cautious endorsement. Over against the universality of agape or neighbor love, friendship can seem self-indulgent and exclusivist.

These observations from Lewis illustrate how autobiographical views of friendship can be. These claims about the impersonality of friendship are unsurprising views from a twentieth-century British don reflecting on the friendships that he cultivated in university common rooms and pubs—friendships that centered around discussing writing and books over sherry and pints of stout.

In contrast, many late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century writers on friendship would demure from Lewis's claims about friendship being a matter of naked personalities, instead seeing that the deep connections most central to admirable and enviable friendships are rooted in personal, even intimate, knowledge. I concur. In fact, what sets friendship apart from other sorts of human connections is knowing a person well enough to endorse his or her self-conception and aspirations.

SEEING A FRIEND'S TRUE SELF

Elsewhere I have claimed that friendship is a special relationship that involves endorsing a friend's own conception of who she is or at least aspires to be.[2] A friend believes in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assures you that he has the impression of you that you, at your best, hope to convey.[3] I take this phrase "you, at your best" very seriously. From a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty. True friendship must be based on insight into one's friend's true self. The judgment that the friend's self-concept is substantially accurate and fitting to his unfolding story must be based on knowledge of his character. In order to commit oneself to a friend's conception of the good life, one needs to know what her conception of the good life is. As a Christian, I believe that our

true selves (the selves that we are destined but not fated to become) are rooted in God's intentions for us. So friendship is based on knowledge in multiple ways and brings together knowledge of present realities and knowledge of ultimate ideals and destinies.

One of the great goods of friendship, then, is that it is rooted in and provides this kind of depth-perception. A true friend knows me well enough to see me as I am, warts and all, but also knows me well enough to see me as someone whose best self aspires to be much more. Friendship affirms that a friend's view of his unfolding life story is substantially correct. Friendship commits itself to helping a person attain his vision of himself. Friendship involves not just endorsing someone's self-concept, but caring deeply enough about her aspirations to go out of one's way to help her achieve them. A friend is someone who is on your side, someone who is willing to see the world from your point of view—but not the point of view of your prodigal self, the point of view of your best and truest self.

To further explore these ideas it will be useful to consider a particular example. Tony Hendra, in his spiritual memoir, *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul*, tells of his decades-long relationship with Dom Joseph Warrilow.[4] For years Hendra periodically visited Father Joe at his monastery, Quarr. To Hendra, Father Joe was not just a sounding board and Hendra saw him as much more than a spiritual director. A good part of Father Joe's redemptive effect on Hendra stemmed from his ability to make Hendra feel not just thoroughly understood, but deeply loved as a unique self (p. 269). Friendship involves acceptance based on intimate knowledge. The awareness of our friend's acceptance and admiration is one of the great gifts of friendship and is part of what makes friendship a source of strength.

Tony Hendra is a British-born and Cambridge-educated satirist and comedian who went on to edit the *National Lampoon*, do improvisational comedy, television writing and production, and contribute essays to *Harper's*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Vanity Fair,* and other magazines. His life zigzags from a felt-call to monasticism, to loss of faith, through drug and alcohol dependence and failed relationships, and back to faith. Through all this, the still center of his turning and tilting world is Father Joe.

FRIENDSHIP IN A CHRISTIAN LIFE

Some within the history of Father Joe's own religious tradition would see him as taking a risk here. If his befriending of others is too deep and enduring, and especially if it is preferential, it may compete with other commitments that he has as a monk passionately pursuing the love of God. Some Christian thinkers who have wanted to emphasize the contrast between Christian love and other sorts of love have been suspicious of friendship, at best grudgingly giving it a cautious endorsement. Over against the universality of agape or neighbor love, friendship can seem self-indulgent and exclusivist.

Though some within the Christian tradition have been suspicious of friendship, it has had its defenders as well. Aelred of Rievaulx, a twelfth-century monk and abbot, had a great deal to say about this topic in his book *Spiritual Friendship*.[5] In many ways *Spiritual Friendship* is a courageous work. Living in a time when monastics were suspicious of particular human affections, Aelred insisted on seeing true friendship as having both its source and fruition in the love of God. Living in a time when some were suspicious of pagan thinkers, Aelred baptized the wisdom of Cicero and wove it into a deeply Christian theology of human affection.

Cicero's eloquence enlivens the classical Greek conception of friendship that the Romans inherited from Aristotle. Aristotle had maintained there were two lesser forms of friendship—friendship based on mutual usefulness and friendships based on mutual pleasure. He saw these lesser forms as incomplete and immature. Complete friendships were those based on loving one's friend for his own sake because of his virtues. Complete friendship involves a shared commitment to grow in virtue and pursue the good.

Though indebted to Cicero (and through Cicero, to Aristotle), Aelred transforms Cicero's wisdom by giving it a distinctively Christian stamp. Classical thinkers on friendship like Aristotle and Cicero knew nothing of neighbor love or charity, the peculiar love that Christians are enjoined to have even toward their enemies. Nor were they in a position to see that true friendship has its goal and completion in something more than human excellence. For a Christian thinker like Aelred, both charity and spiritual friendship are rooted and perfected in Christ. These loves for our fellow human beings are, according to Aelred, stages toward the love and knowledge of God.[6]

The Bible also records striking examples of deep friendship that dovetail with characterizations of friendship in the classical Greek and Roman traditions. Aristotle characterized a complete friend as "another self" and the most significant friendships as "one soul in two bodies." The Bible describes the love that Jonathan had for David in similar terms, telling us, "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1b). Thomas Aquinas enriches Aristotle's notion of a friend as "another self" by explaining, "in the love of friendship, the lover is in the beloved, inasmuch as he reckons what is good or evil to his friend as being so to himself; and his friend's will as his own, so that it seems as though he felt the good or suffered the evil in the person of his friend."[7] In loving my friend, my self expands and is enriched by his accomplishments and delights. This expansion of self is not selfish; the expansion of self involved in friendship is also costly. Sorrows double, not just joys, for my friend's suffering becomes my own. The compassionate suffering that is part and parcel of friendship, costly and painful as it can be, deepens our humanity. Places in our hearts that did not previously exist are created by compassion for our friends and loved ones.

Models of close friendships in the biblical materials lend support to Aquinas' and Aelred's contention that friendship can be part of a well-lived Christian life. Many of these ruminations on friendship are incarnated to a large extent in Father Joe's befriending of Tony Hendra. Part of the redemptive efficacy of the friendship is Father Joe's ability to see past Tony's fleeting enthusiasms, excesses, doubts, cynicism, and foibles to the warmhearted idealist who wants ultimately to make a difference for good in the world. The endorsement of a friend's self-conception need not be a wholesale endorsement. Friends can help each other see themselves more clearly. Friends can correct each other's view of things, including each friend's self-conception; this is part of friendship's great good. That Father Joe does this so brilliantly for Tony is exactly why Tony thinks of Joe as his best friend.

EQUALITY AND MUTUALITY IN FRIENDSHIP

While the relationship between Tony Hendra and Father Joe illustrates some of the central aspects of friendship, it also contrasts in important ways from standard paradigms of friendship. Looking at these divergences can also help us in understanding friendship's nature and characteristic virtues.

Friendship is often, and for good reason, seen as characterized by reciprocity and (at least approximate) symmetry. But there are all sorts of asymmetries in the relationship between Hendra and Father Joe. Hendra is fourteen when the two first meet and Father Joe is at that time already in Hendra's young eyes an agelessly ancient adult. Of course, as Hendra matures, the age difference between the two becomes less significant, but the maturity gap is never really outgrown. Moreover, Father Joe is a father in Hendra's eyes in multiple ways. When Hendra's biological father dies his grief is in large part regret, mixed with guilt, because in many ways Father Joe has functioned more as a father to him than his own father did. Father Joe is, for Tony, the patient, waiting father who weathers Tony's prodigality and embraces him as he loops back from his eccentric orbits into worldliness. And although the connection between Hendra and Father Joe is, in fact, durable and deep, it involves far more giving on Father Joe's part than on Hendra's. The asymmetries of giving and receiving and of maturity within their connection make it seem less than a full-fledged friendship.

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Significant friendships ideally involve a *sense of equality* and *mutual* affir-

mation, *mutual* self-disclosure, caring and the sharing of activities and sorrows, along with *mutual* admonition and advice giving. Mutuality is not completely absent from the Hendra/Father Joe connection, but their shared activities are mainly conversational, with Hendra doing the self-disclosing and Father Joe functioning as the creatively receptive listener. Father Joe offers sage observations, along with gentle, sparing admonition and judicious advice. He balances the need to speak the truth in love with a concern to avoid intrusion into spheres best left to Tony's discretion.

That Father Joe performs these corrective functions for Tony is certainly compatible with friendship. We all engage in some degree of self-deception about ourselves. In some cases, one may think a friend has lost sight, for the present, of his better self. Cases in which we think our insight into our friends' unfolding life stories outstrips their own vision of themselves call for patience, humility, and prayer, lest the equality and mutuality essential to friendship dwindle. Knowing when to speak and how to speak as a friend demands wisdom and skill. How can we correct without unduly wounding or being paternalistic? One wants to give one's friend the benefit of the kind of insight only a friend can furnish, yet one wants the story that one's friend lives out to be his own. What gives one pause about calling the Hendra/Father Joe relationship a mature friendship is not that there is advice-giving and correcting going on, but that it is all in one direction, flowing from Father Joe to Hendra but not vice versa. This is not inappropriate paternalism in a relationship between a spiritual director and someone coming for direction, but as a longstanding feature of a friendship it marks it as a less than fully developed relationship of equality.

When Father Joe does talk in a self-disclosive way, what he intimates is his rich and vivid awareness of God, his robust enjoyment of nature and the gifts of creation, and his boundless understanding of the vagaries of the human heart. Hendra is never in a position to give Father Joe advice, not only because this monk seems not to need any advice that Hendra could give, but because Hendra seems to have only a dim conception of what Father Joe's life consists of beyond their conversations.

In the epilogue to *Father Joe*, Tony Hendra says that the last, posthumous, surprise that Dom Joseph Warrilow gave him was finding that "there were hundreds of other Tonys" in Father Joe's life. Hendra revisits Quarr after Joe's death and expresses surprise to one of the monks on having found himself among a vast circle of Joe's "old friends." The monk responds, "Ah yes—everyone thought they were Joe's best friend" (p. 269). It is precisely because Hendra knows little of what Father Joe's life is like outside their conversations that Hendra can be so shocked in finding that there are "hundreds of other Tony's" in Warrilow's life. Evidently Father Joe had such a gift for inviting intimacy from those whom he counseled that they felt that the intimacy was mutual even though central features of Father Joe's life remained beyond their ken.

TOWARD INTIMACY IN FRIENDSHIP

In a mature friendship, the mutual knowledge that friends have of one another is a form of intimacy. It is based both on the willingness of friends to disclose thoughts and feelings to one another that they would be unwilling to reveal to mere acquaintances as well as on nonverbal *intimation*. As Warren Wilner says, "Intimacy as a mode of communication refers…to a quality of being in which something is being conveyed, without explicitly describing what it is or how it is being transmitted. As that which is inmost …the whole of something or of oneself is conveyed as a whole without being broken down into its component parts, or being made part of a larger communication."[8] Friendships can be cemented by what is not said and (perhaps especially) by what need not be said. Because it is possible to experience another's wholeness, it is possible for friends to communicate truths which could not and need not be uttered between them.

This intimacy is normally a product of accumulated shared experiences. I can know my friends' unspoken thoughts because I have seen them react to diverse situations; I understand their character and know their values. One can reach such understanding through long and diverse stretches of shared activity or through verbal self-disclosure.

Whether knowledge of the other is gained verbally or through shared experience, knowledge is necessary for friendship. As philosopher Marilyn Friedman observes, "One's behavior toward the friend takes its appropriateness, at least in part, from *her* goals and aspirations, *her* needs, *her* character—all of which one feels…invited to acknowledge as worthwhile just because they are hers."[9] Some of my friend's plans and projects become my own, as my care for my friend leads me to love what she loves.

The mutual knowledge friends have of one another is based both on their willingness to disclose thoughts and feelings to one another that they would be unwilling to reveal to mere acquaintances as well as on nonverbal INTIMATION.

In a sense, Tony does take on Father Joe's central project. Tony comes to long for deeper intimacy with God by being drawn to that love through Father Joe's steadfast love for Tony, a love that continues to hold on to him throughout the vicissitudes of his life. In fact, Tony says that Father Joe *meant God* to him (p. 266). "So long as Joe was alive in the world, there was a gossamer-thin thread of connection to the possibility of God, but now…" (p. 265). Tony's grief at Joe's death is like a dark night of the soul.

However, Tony never knows enough of Father Joe's own spiritual journey, or of other more ancillary plans and projects that Joe may have, to come along side him to help. Part of the reason that knowledge of one another is necessary within friendship is that it forms the basis of the care that only friends can give. Mature friendship both requires and produces growth in goodness, not as friendship's goal, but in order to equip us for befriending. Being a friend requires strength of character. As we strive to do what friendship calls for, we will grow. Sharing our friend's sorrows will exercise our compassion; sharing our friend's hardships and dangers will exercise our endurance and courage.

Tony does reach the point where he asks himself what he can do for Joe rather than running to Joe for help in his last visit with Joe before his death. He goes to Quarr bringing his seven-year-old son, Sebastian, with him. This in itself is huge. He is not just showing up to talk about his life; he is bringing an important part of his life into his relationship with Father Joe. He finds that Joe is in dire health, suffering the late stages of cancer. He hears Joe, perhaps for the first time, talk of his fear—not a fear of punishment after death but a fear in the face of "the immensity of what lies beyond the door. A God of love—infinite and eternal" (p. 260). Joe tells Tony that he thinks that death makes nothing of us all, not because death is the end, but because death ushers us into God's perfection, which makes "failures of us all"—even as God loves us infinitely anyway. Tony now gets to be the compassionate listener. Sebastian contributes his own gift of childish banter. Mutuality has begun to transform spiritual direction into friendship and Tony knows deeper truths about this mentor who has spent so much of his time coming to know Tony and helping Tony come to know his true self.

Labeling and classification in the area of human relationships can seem a cold and theoretical exercise. At the practical and spiritual levels what matters is that Tony Hendra and Dom Joseph Warrilow had a rich and wonderful relationship that spanned decades and changed Hendra's life for the better. Surely, in the end, that is what mattered to both of them and is something for which we can all thank God.

NOTES

1 C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 96.

2 Caroline J. Simon, *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny and Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997).

3 This echoes language used by F. Scott Fitzgerald's character Nick Carraway to describe his first impression of Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner's, 1925; Scribner paperback/Simon & Schuster, 1995). See my discussion of the relationship between Nick and Gatsby in chapter four of *The Disciplined Heart*.

4 Tony Hendra, *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul* (New York: Random House, 2004). Page citations will be in the text.

5 Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, translated by Mary Eugenia Laker, S.S.N.D. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1974).

6 For two very good contemporary Christian treatments of friendship see Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989) and Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, First Complete American Edition*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: McGraw Hill, 1947), I-II, Question 28, article 2.

8 Warren Wilner, "Philosophical Approaches to Interpersonal Intimacy," in *Intimacy*, edited by Martin Fisher and George Stricker (New York: Plenum Press, 1982), 24.

9 Marilyn Friedman, "Friendship and Moral Growth," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 23 (1989): 4.

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Literature and the Real Meaning of Mentorship

BY VIGEN GUROIAN

Mentors engender in their chosen pupils essential qualities of character or skills that are crucial to the continuance of a practice or way of life. In our Christian churches we must recapture this original meaning of mentorship if for no others, then for our children.

Recently "mentor" has become a much-used word in the popular culture. Celebrities on radio and television urge us to join in community service by volunteering our time to be mentors to children who are in need of grown-up company and guidance. Businesses and schools institute mentoring programs in which experienced persons are assigned to instruct junior colleagues and coworkers in job skills.

"Mentor" has a long and venerable history with an ancient etymology. Our English word is a derivative of *menos*. The Greek means mind or spirit and connotes a strong sense of purposefulness and agency. In Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey,* Mentor is the guise and name that the goddess Athena assumes in order to counsel Odysseus's son Telemachus. Odysseus, king of Ithica, has been gone from home much longer than expected and is feared lost. Telemachus is confused, unsure, and despairing, while unscrupulous and ambitious suitors aggressively court his mother Penelope. Familial and civil order is jeopardized and Athena decides to act. In her disguise as Mentor, she fortifies Telemachus to oppose his mother's suitors and inspires him to search for his father. Significantly, her instruction also prepares the young man to succeed his father as a good and just ruler.

Homer's narrative and delineation of character introduce two essential characteristics of mentorship. First is the element of freedom and choice. The mentor initiates the mentorial relationship. He chooses the one whom

he will mentor for reasons that are his own. Second, as distinguished from ordinary friendship, the mentorial relationship is hierarchical. It is characterized by inequality of experience, knowledge, and skills. The mentor is the superior and the mentee willingly submits to his mentorial authority.

It is noteworthy that our contemporary usage ignores, even contradicts, these defining characteristics of mentorship. The institutionalized nature of mentoring programs in business and education disqualifies them as true mentorship. The relationships they establish are forced, rather than freely formed. In mentor programs for youth, the egalitarian bias of our democratic culture cuts against the characteristic of mentor as authority. Rather, the mentor is supposed to be a friend or buddy to the youth. It seems that everyone is a "guy" in our contemporary world.

The office of teacher is inherently suited to the role of mentor, but we have so democratized and bureaucratized it that genuine mentorial possibilities are nearly precluded. Genuine mentorship is scarce in our day. Not so surprisingly it still occurs in the performing arts, such as in dance or music. The market and a hyper-egalitarian ethos have chipped away at the master and student relationship, but not completely eliminated it. Most anyone with the financial resources can purchase ballet or violin lessons, but in the end the master still chooses the protégé for special attention and instruction. It is hard to imagine how these arts would survive if this could not occur.

The mentor's selection of the pupil is the crucial and defining act of the mentorial relationship. As I have suggested already, the relationship from the start is asymmetrical and discriminative. The mentor has a vital stake in choosing the right pupil. And she gives herself over entirely to engendering in the pupil essential qualities of character or skills that are not merely private or personal but ultimately crucial to the continuance of a practice, special art form, or way of life.

Our forgetfulness of the true meaning of "mentor" has a cost. True mentorship is vital to culture and the growth and flourishing of education and the arts, in particular. We need to recapture the pristine meaning of mentorship if for no others, then for our children. We do our children no favor by raising them in a milieu bereft of real *paideia* (or, development of intellectual and moral virtue) and genuine mentorial relationships. One path to recovering the meaning of mentorship is through reflection upon great literature, and especially literature for children, in which the mentorial relationship and its value are portrayed. Thus, I will turn in a moment to several great stories that can serve as guides to mentorship.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTOR AND FRIEND

In a society that is as egalitarian as ours, we lose sight of the important differences between mentorship and ordinary friendship. So I want to say something right at the start about that difference. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines friendship as preeminently a relationship between equals

who are drawn together by a common purpose or set of interests. He stresses the necessity that the parties who enter into a friendship are of equal status. Thus, under ordinary circumstances it would not be possible that master and slave could be friends. Aristotle, however, qualifies this judgment with an exception to the rule. "There is another kind of friendship," he writes, "that which involves an inequality between the parties, for example, that of the father to son and in general of elder to younger." In this kind of friendship, the love that the lesser party gives to the greater makes up for the difference. In other words, "when the love is in proportion to the [individual] merit of the parties, then in a real sense there arises equality which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship."[1] In this respect, the mentorial relationship may indeed assume important characteristics of friendship. E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* illustrate what Aristotle had in mind.

Charlotte and Wilbur. We are bound to say that Charlotte A. Cavatica knew much more, was far wiser, than young Wilbur the pig. She was the adult in his life; he was the child. She was the teacher; and he was her pupil. Charlotte was able to give to Wilbur far more than he could give to her, except for his love. Indeed, Charlotte devised a way to save Wilbur from the fate of most other barnyard pigs, slaughter for human consumption. Equally important as regards the difference between a mentorial relationship and pure friendship, Charlotte picked Wilbur out to befriend and unilaterally made the decision to play an exceptional role in his life.

Wilbur was not capable of teaching the teacher; nor was he able, given his limited experience, to share in Charlotte's mentorial perspective. Charlotte could envision the whole of the process, while Wilbur could not. Wilbur loved Charlotte by a measure greater than her affection and care for him, for there was so much more in her that he could love and admire. Wilbur's love for Charlotte was indeed proportional to her "greatness" or superiority, and nothing Wilbur could do would alter his fundamentally subordinate relationship to Charlotte. Indeed, his salvation depended upon it. Only when Wilbur grew up and cared for Charlotte's children and grandchildren was the playing field leveled, so to speak. Yet, by then Charlotte was long gone, though with the poignant irony that "none of the new spiders quite took her place in his heart."[2]

Mowgli and His Animal Mentors. In Rudyard's Kipling's *Jungle Books*, Mowgli, the "man's cub" raised by wolves, is the subject of our interest. Mowgli's wolf parents were not, however, the true mentors in his life. His real mentors were, rather, Baloo, the brown bear, Bagheera, the black panther, and Kaa, the rock python. As close as Mowgli was to these three wonderful characters, his relationship to them was never so intimate as with his wolf parents. And, although the bear, the panther, and the python were his nearly constant companions, Mowgli's relationship with them was as mentee, until the time for his return to human civilization neared.

In *The Jungle Books,* Baloo, Bagheera, and Kaa each have a special gift to give to Mowgli that helps him to survive and thrive in the jungle and make a successful return to the human world. Baloo teaches Mowgli the Law of the Jungle and "the Master Words of the Jungle" that would "protect him with the birds and the Snake-People, and all that hunt on four feet, except his own pack."[3] Bagheera was born and raised among human beings. Thus, he is familiar with their ways and passes this knowledge on to Mowgli. Kaa, whose age reaches back to days not counted, is the embodiment of the religious symbol of serpent as wisdom.

Obviously, we cannot cover all of this in detail. But let's look briefly at the story "The King's Ankus" in which Kaa and Bagheera collaborate to teach Mowgli important lessons about human psychology and behavior. We have learned from the stories that precede it that Mowgli's human powers are coming to blossom and that by now "the other Jungle People" universally regard him as "the Master of the Jungle." Even Kaa no longer "makes fun" of Mowgli as he did when he was a mere child (II, p. 235). Kaa, Bagheera, and Baloo were aware from the beginning when Mowgli first entered the jungle that he was inherently superior to them all. Nevertheless, these three act as his mentors right to the end, in order that the boy is ready to successfully return to his own kind when he makes up his mind that that is what he wants to do.

One afternoon as Mowgli is resting comfortably in the rings of Kaa's coils, as in an armchair, the wise old python questions Mowgli, "So the Jungle gives thee all that thou hast ever desired, Little Brother?" Mowgli answers that he still has unfilled desires. But these "desires" turn out to do with jungle life and hunting, and so Kaa persists. "Thou hast no other desire?" (II, p. 237). Mowgli is confused. So the old python tells him about the blind cobra of Cold Lairs who guards a long forgotten hidden treasure buried beneath the jungle and takes Mowgli to meet the ancient serpent in his lair.

In our egalitarian society we lose sight of the differences between mentorship and ordinary friendship. In a mentorial relationship, the love that the lesser party gives to the greater makes up for their difference in status.

An ankus is an elephant goad or prod used in India. Mowgli is attracted to the exceptional beauty of one bedecked with precious stones, which lies in the midst of the treasure store. In spite of the cobra's warnings that the objects he guards bring death to any man who lays claim to them, Mowgli takes the ankus with him to view in the sunlight. The cobra gives no explanation why the objects he protects bring death, but the wise Kaa sees into the heart of the matter. He

knows that "desire" is a powerful force within human beings, and growing from it are greed and avarice.

Mowgli seeks out Bagheera, who he is sure will know the identity of the ankus and what it is for. When Bagheera explains that the ankus is used to prod elephants and draws their blood, Mowgli is repulsed and throws the ankus into the jungle. Later, he returns to the spot to get one last look at the ankus, a reminder of Mowgli's human proclivities and the danger that he is in. But the ankus has disappeared. Bagheera tells Mowgli that "a man has taken it" (II, p. 247) and shows him the trail. Thus begins a round of jungle detective work, as Bagheera and Mowgli track several men whose dead bodies tell a grizzly tale of greed, deception, and murder. Mowgli and Bagheera eventually find the ankus near the bodies of three men poisoned by the man whom they themselves killed. Six men have died in all, and Mowgli wants to bury the ankus in order to make certain that there is no more death. But Bagheera interjects: "Little Brother, I tell thee it is not fault of the blood-drinker. The trouble is with the men" (II, p. 252).

No children's story that I know quite equals Felix Salten's "Bambi: A Life in the Woods" for its powerful portrayal of the mentorial relationship. It is evocative of the religious background of mentorship in human culture.

THE MENTOR AND THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT

Of all the children's stories with which I am familiar, none quite equals Felix Salten's *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* for its powerful portrayal of the mentorial relationship. Unlike the Disney version, there is not a shred of sentimentality in Salten's story. Bambi's relationship to the mysterious old stag is central to the narrative, not a romantic attraction to Faline, the young doe, as in the Disney film. The old stag selects Bambi to mentor and succeed him as guardian and protector of the deer herd, strictly according to his judgment that Bambi has the potential to fill that role. With a stoical objectivity and dispassion, he acts to repose in Bambi the knowledge and special skills necessary to continue the line of princes.

The deer call the stag the Old Prince. He is the complete embodiment of the wisdom, virtues, and practical skills that are needed in a leader to secure the deer's safety and prospering, especially in the face of their most dangerous enemy, Man. The old stag has perfected practices of attentiveness and watchfulness. He has learned the habits of Man. He has studied and put to memory the physical topography of the woods so as to avoid and escape the danger Man poses. "He uses trails none of the others ever use. He knows

the very depths of the forest. He does not know such a thing as danger."[4]

In the depths of the forest, the old stag introduces Bambi to an arcane discipline. The stag comes and goes at his own choosing and not according to Bambi's wishes. Yet he teaches Bambi all that he knows, and he engenders in the youngster the patience, vigilance, cunning, and courage that he must possess to watch over and protect the deer.

Salten's story is evocative of the religious background of mentorship in human culture. Homer's invention of Mentor as Athena's disguise is early testimony to this. At the close of the story, just before the old stag disappears forever into the forest and leaves Bambi to fulfill his own destiny, he leads his young charge to a poacher who has been shot and killed.

> "Do you see, Bambi," the old stag went on, "do you see how He's lying there dead, like one of us? Listen, Bambi. He isn't all powerful as they say. Everything that lives and grows doesn't come from Him. He isn't above us. He's just the same as we are. He has the same fears, the same needs, and suffers in the same way. He can be killed like us, and then he lies helpless on the ground like all the rest of us, as you see him now."
>
> There was silence.
>
> "Do you understand, Bambi?" asked the old stag.
>
> "I think so," Bambi said in a whisper.
>
> "Then speak," the old stag commanded.
>
> Bambi was inspired and said trembling, "There is Another who is over us all, over us and Him."
>
> "Now I can go," said the old stag. (pp. 187-188)

This is the final crowning lesson that the old stag instills in Bambi. It is a lesson about the order of Being in which all creatures participate, including Man. At one level, this knowledge—this wisdom, really—is the ground of the courage Bambi must draw upon. Yet even more than this, the old stag opens Bambi to a mystery that lends meaning and even transcendent purpose to his calling as a new prince.

SAM FATHERS: THE MENTOR-PRIEST

"The Old People" of William Faulkner's mythopoeic classic *Go Down, Moses* is a haunting tale that sets the stage for the famous novella that follows in this collection, "The Bear." It is about young Isaac Macaslin's tutelage under Sam Fathers, the old Indian chief (half Negro, half Chickasaw), in the art and ritual of the hunt.

The title of the story symbolizes something wholly different from geriatric science. "Old People" alludes to a numinous presence and participation in that reality. It is similar to the personification of wisdom in the Bible. Like the old stag of Salten's tale, Sam Fathers lives alone and practices an arcane discipline that he passes on to his pupils. His memory is of ancient lineage.

His knowledge of the woods is deeper than and surpasses even that of the most accomplished hunters of the white race, Walter Ewell, Major de Spain, and old General Compson. From Isaac's early childhood, Faulkner writes,

> He [Sam Fathers] taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward. Then he would talk to the boy, the two of them sitting beneath the close fierce stars on a summer hilltop while they waited for the hounds to bring the fox back within hearing, or beside a fire in the November or December woods…. The boy would never question him; Sam did not react to questions. The boy would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin talking about the old days and the People….
>
> And as he talked about these old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday, but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth that had not quitted. And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would come tomorrow…and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Father's voice the mouthpiece of the host.[5]

In this musical mystical passage, Faulkner captures the numinous and transcendental dimension of the mentoring process. Through the steady cadence and poetic pulse of his prose, Faulkner evokes the power of liturgy and eschatological time. He draws us into that transcendent moment in which the initiate realizes in reverence the eternal form of the art that he has learned. Mastery of the art is equivalent to participation in a mystery much greater than the self or of any one generation.

At the close of "The Old People," Sam Fathers leads Isaac, who has reached the symbolic age of twelve, to a secluded spot away from the rest of the hunters that are in pursuit of a buck. A shot rings out and the sound of Walter Ewell's horn signals a kill. Isaac is disappointed that he will not get his turn. But Sam commands Isaac to stand still and wait.

> Sam was looking over the boy's head and up the ridge toward the sound of the horn and the boy knew that Sam did not even see him; that Sam knew he was still there beside him but he did not see the boy. Then the boy saw the buck. It was coming down the ridge, as if it were walking out of the very sound of the horn which related its death….
>
> Then it saw them. And it still did not begin to run. It just stopped for an instant, taller than any man, looking at them…. And

> Sam standing beside the boy now, his right arm raised at full length, palm outward, speaking in that tongue which the boy had learned from listening to him [all his years]…while up on the ridge Walter Ewell's horn was still blowing them in to a dead buck.
>
> "Oleh, Chief," Sam said. "Grandfather." (pp. 183-184)

Though the hieratic gesture certainly is a clue, we are left to wonder: Is this the same buck that Walter Ewell supposedly killed or is it not? Is the buck verily present in the flesh or is this a vision of a mystery even more profound than death itself, the presence of the Old People?

The religious dimension of the mentorial relationship that both Salten and Faulkner depict defies the one-dimensional secularist view of reality that life is a flat screen. In this view, so pervasive in our culture, there is no going "further up and further in" as the noble, fallen defenders of Narnia in C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle* are beckoned to do when they pass through the stable door and enter the new Narnia. Perhaps there still exists in our Christian churches the belief that this world has sacral depth and sacramental meaning. If it does, then there is hope that in our religious education and community life the rich vision of mentorship found in the stories we have discussed might be restored.

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.7 (1058b 11-14, 27-28), quoting from Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1065-1066.

2 E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 184.

3 Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*, edited by W. W. Robson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), volume I, 23 (further page citations will be in the text).

4 Felix Salten, *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, translated by Whittaker Chambers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928; A Minstrel Book, 1988), 57 (further page citations will be in the text).

5 William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 170-171 (further page citations will be in the text).

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Sacred Companions

BY CHRISTY MORR

By showing how close friendships within congregations are important not just for personal fulfillment but also for spiritual transformation, these three books point us away from "Jesus and me" individualism and toward "Jesus and we" spiritual community.

Individual fulfillment and the value of self-reliance saturate the mindset of most North American Christians. Is it possible to move from a "Jesus and me" mentality to a "Jesus and we" value system? What will it take to see the importance of relationships, not just for one's personal fulfillment, but for one's spiritual growth? The three books reviewed below defend and clarify the need for friendship and community to bring about spiritual transformation in the lives of individuals.

FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE OF FRIENDSHIPS

One of the clearest and most convincing reasons for our pursuing close interpersonal relationships comes from studying the life of Jesus. Richard Lamb, in *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 240 pp., $15.00), draws on the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry to "look at Jesus, at his invitation into friendship and his strategy for making and hosting friendships, focused together around the pursuit of God" (p. 24). Weaving together his personal ministry experiences with his reflection on Jesus' movement towards various types of people, Lamb addresses vital topics related to the development of close friendships with others and with God.

Humans' pursuit of God is rightly couched in the presupposition that God is in the pursuit of friends. "The phrase 'God in the pursuit of friends' just doesn't seem right, does it? Yet this is what the Gospel writers tell us: Jesus of Nazareth, God-become-human, spent his early time with people in moves of friendship, initiating and even receiving initiatives from people in ways that would be familiar to us" (p. 24). While this may be a hard concept

to grasp mentally, emotionally, and theologically, it is a necessary beginning place for the reciprocity required between true friends.

On the vertical plane (God pursuing us), Jesus modeled the hospitality and healing of God as he pursued people to become his friends. Hospitality, in a variety of forms, is the oxygen that causes relational growth. Jesus modeled hospitality by creating physical space for relationships to happen, giving his time and emotional energy to hurting people, and developing a spiritual dimension to relationships. By recognizing God's pursuit of us, we can move out to others and welcome them into our lives with the hospitality we have received. When Jesus literally touched and healed a man suffering from leprosy, he brought the man out of alienation and back into community. Sometimes, though, we are dependent on our friends to bring us to the healing touch of God as was the case with the paralytic. These powerful Gospel stories, when interpreted in light of God's movement towards creating friendship and community, provide enriching insights for the journey of spiritual formation in the company of friends.

On the horizontal level (people pursuing friendships with one another), Lamb addresses issues of conflict, comparison and competition, listening, intimacy, and forgiveness that are inherently part of authentic relationships. In each of these discussions Lamb draws from Jesus' example as depicted in the Gospels. An interesting application that he makes of Jesus' itinerant ministry is our need for "road trips" today. "Road trips" include ways to get a group out of their routine and into each other's lives. This could involve going on a retreat or to a conference together, or even traveling to a foreign mission field to serve together. Lamb is not so naïve as to think that merely going on a retreat with others automatically builds close relationships. He wisely observes, "No small-group meeting is so long that we cannot, if we so choose, maintain decorum and composure in such a way that people never really get to know us" (p. 99). To develop close relationships that have the openness and authenticity that lead to a sense of community with others, we must be committed to live life together and follow Jesus' example.

The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends provides helpful frameworks and strategies for overcoming the barriers of individualism, privacy, and superficiality that pervade the North American Christian mindset. Lamb's winsome style makes accessible a variety of more heady sources from the realms of spiritual theology, philosophy, and social sciences. Reflection questions provide thoughtful ways to process each chapter for group discussion or self-enrichment. Reading this book would be an excellent way to cast vision and promote a countercultural value that embraces the importance of friendships for spiritual growth.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION

Companions in Christ is another excellent practical resource that guides groups toward the pursuit of God. The "Participant's Book" (Nashville, TN:

Upper Room Books, 2006, 320 pp., $20.00) provides daily exercises for personal spiritual growth, walking believers through the basics of the Christian faith. The "Leader's Book" (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2006, 246 pp., $17.00) is a worthwhile supplement to the participant's book, imparting training and direction for weekly small group meetings. Because these books are designed to help Christians grow experientially in relationship to Christ, the format, goals, mood, and dynamics of the small-group meetings are different from traditional Bible study and Sunday school settings. Both resources provide a comprehensive curriculum to pursue God in the company of friends during a twenty-eight week period. Members commit to individual reading and daily exercises (most often reflecting on Bible passages), a two-hour weekly meeting, and an ending retreat.

COMPANIONS IN CHRIST is a worthwhile endeavor to move us out of our heavy reliance on cognitive approaches and into deeper intimacy with Christ and others.

The "Leader's Book" clearly sets a vision for what an experience in a spiritual formation group can become through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit using time-tested wisdom of Christian traditions and disciplines. "*Companions in Christ* is designed to create a setting where you and other people in your church can respond to God's call to an ever deepening communion and wholeness in Christ—as individuals, as members of a small group, and as part of a congregation" (p. 13). In order to achieve this, the small-group time is intended to be a safe place where members can express with one another their worship, their experience of God during the past week while completing the daily exercises, and their desire for deeper intimacy with God through a spiritual formation element that is directed by the leader. Creative ideas and practical insights guide leaders to think outside the box and promote formative experiences in the life of Christ during the weekly small-group meetings.

The twenty-eight week *Companions in Christ* curriculum explores five large themes of the Christian spiritual life. It begins with envisioning the Christian life as a journey, then emphasizes ways to meditate on and pray through Scripture, proceeds to guide participants into a deepening prayer life, subsequently challenges individuals to respond to God's call, and finally, addresses the role of interpersonal relationships in discerning God's will for oneself and others. Each theme is subdivided into five or six topics for discussion during the weekly small-group meetings. The "Participant's Book" provides deeply engaging readings and daily exercises designed to help members develop "a life where Christ rather than our own self-image constitutes the center of who we are…. Empty of self importance and self-

interest, human life is free to be what God intended: holy, humble, joyfully obedient, radiating the power of love" ("Participant's Book," p. 25). The journey to this lofty vision is clearly marked by the road signs developed in this curriculum package.

These resources provide a wealth of material from a variety of Christian traditions. Sidebars contain poignant quotes from authors such as Teresa of Avila, Augustine, Calvin, and Thomas Merton. While some may be uncomfortable with the experiential and non-content-driven format of the small group experience, it is a worthwhile endeavor to move us out of our heavy reliance on cognitive approaches and into deeper intimacy with Christ and others. An additional word of caution may be necessary concerning the use and interpretation of Scripture. Reflective exercises based on a biblical passage are given no historical or literary context. The danger of eisogesis or reader response (reading into the text what the original author never intended) is high if participants have not been previously grounded in the basics of sound biblical interpretation.

DATA AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

How can local congregations invest their resources to emphasize friendships in the fabric of church activities? Group Publishing enlisted the Gallup Organization to conduct an observational study of current trends in church satisfaction, attendance, and relational variables of churchgoers. *Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2005, 94 pp., $14.00) provides the results of this survey and some practical suggestions for acting on the analysis of this data.

This workbook-style resource contains two main sections. The first contains the display and analysis of the most important research findings. The three chapters in this section address church satisfaction, why people are attracted to and stay at a church, and spiritual growth issues. For example, satisfaction with one's church is correlated to having a best friend at church, attending church weekly, sensing the care of spiritual leaders, and eating meals with other congregants. One of the key findings regarding spiritual growth is an association between having a best friend in one's church and how one's faith is lived out. "Seventy-four percent who worship with a best friend say their faith is involved in every aspect of their life; only fifty-four percent of those without a best friend at church say the same thing" (p. 39). While the statistical significance is not addressed by the display or the analysis, the data does indicate that satisfaction increases when positive relationship variables are present.

Ministry ideas to promote relationships in the local church among children, youth, and adults follow the analysis in each chapter. Ideas for children's ministry include planning informal gatherings such as swim parties and barbeques for children to make friendships outside of the church Sunday school hour. For youth, they suggest that leaders meet a teenager for a

meal and ask the individual to bring a childhood photo, one special object, and a prayer request, so that youth are connecting to adults at a deeper level. In adult ministry, getting people connected can be facilitated through movie nights, seminars for felt needs, and service opportunities.

The second section of the book offers a lesson plan for presenting the findings of the Gallup survey in a user-friendly way. The PowerPoint slide show included in this resource packet contains graphically appealing representations of the findings and some interactive questions and answers to stimulate discussion. The survey response data at the end of the book are helpfully sorted according to demographics and church relational patterns.

While the author who analyzed the data states that causal relationships cannot be supported from this type of survey, the written analysis tends to make strong correlations with cause-effect type assumptions driving conclusions. "Perhaps most important is the finding that spiritual development—long a priority of church leaders—is not dependent on a particular program or initiative. In fact, pastors and leaders may be surprised to learn that the key for helping parishioners deepen their faith is relatively simple: create a faith community that values relationships; spiritual transformation will follow" (p. 35). This is misleading for those who have never studied statistics or the fine art of social scientific research. To draw such strong conclusions is an irresponsible use of the data, which unfortunately happens throughout each chapter and in the training session. While there are strong associations among the variables under investigation, the conclusions cannot be supported by this observational design methodology. In addition, no attempt has been made to triangulate these findings or to explain the connection between the questions on the survey and the sweeping conclusions drawn in the conceptual analysis. This resource cannot be used as forcefully as portrayed in the training session, presenting the "silver bullet" of spiritual development as love and friendship (p. 35). Extreme caution needs to be taken in how to interpret and implement these research findings.

Together these three resources will be very useful in helping Christians move from individualism to community. Richard Lamb's book presents a rationale for why relationships are important, while *Companions in Christ* provides a guidebook for personal growth and development of relationships. *Friendship: Creating a Culture of Connectivity* presents some practical ministry ideas for promoting relationships in a church context.

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The Practice of Christian Friendship

BY RUTH E. GROENHOUT

Through Jesus' life and sacrifice we are made friends with God. That is a daunting thought for imperfect beings like us. The four books reviewed here help us to examine the nature of friendship and understand why it is one of the paradigm relationships used to depict a Christian life.

Ask three people to tell you about friendship and you may get three very different responses. One may tell you how meaningful a particular close friendship has been in his life as a source of spiritual and emotional support through difficult times. A second may talk about how friendship, generally, has offered resources for achieving her goals, and the way that she has learned to see God working in and through the various friends that she has been given. A third may talk about the potential dangers of friendship. Her teenager daughter has developed some friendships that are problematic, and she's worried that they may cause her daughter to make decisions that will result in long-term harm. Friendship, she says, is something one has to be careful about.

And, of course, all of these people would be saying something true. Friendship is a complex, variable relationship that can provide us with moral and spiritual support or set us on paths that are deeply destructive. The destructive potential of friendship is linked to its central importance in our lives; because friends are so significant, the wrong types of friendships have the power to do great harm. Yet the solution cannot be to give up on friendship, for it is too important for human life.

Friendship is an underlying theme of numerous stories in the Bible, whether we think of Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Jesus and his beloved disciple, or Paul and Timothy. Most centrally, through Jesus' life

and sacrifice we are made friends with God—which is a rather daunting thought for imperfect created beings like us. The following four books help us examine the nature of friendship and understand why it is one of the paradigm relationships used to depict a Christian life.

THE NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP

One central puzzle about the nature of friendship arises when we try to put together the love that seems appropriate for friends—a love that is aimed exclusively at particular individuals—and the love to which the gospel calls us, a love that loves friends and enemies equally, extends across boundaries of class and race, and appears completely universal and undifferentiating. Working out the relationship between these two very different pictures of love is Gilbert Meilaender's key project in *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 106 pp., $14.00). While Meilaender recognizes the vital importance of friendship in human life, or, perhaps better, *because* he recognizes the vital importance of friendship, he also sees the dangers it poses (p. 32). Friendship is a gift of God and it can school us in the love we need as a community of Christians. But following a long tradition in Christian philosophy, with notable proponents like Anders Nygren and Soren Kierkegaard, Meilaender cautions us about allowing earthly, particular loves to get in the way of the universal love to which we are called by God. He emphasizes throughout the book that "the tension between particular bonds and a more universally open love…cannot be eliminated" (p. 102). Nevertheless, he offers a cautious endorsement of friendship in its proper place.

In *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997, 200 pp., $22.00), Caroline Simon offers an analysis of love and friendship that draws much more heavily on narrative and creative fiction than Meilaender. Though she (like Meilaender) distinguishes false from true loves (p. 23), Simon focuses more than Meilaender on loves that do what they are supposed to do, that help us become who God created us to be (p. 106). Friendship has a central role to play, she thinks, in the life of contemporary Christians, and it is best understood in light of its connection to the notion of destiny. We are each of us, as created beings, made for a purpose. Various sorts of loves and friendships help us work out that purpose in different ways, and without friendships we cannot become who we were meant to be. Examining in turn neighbor love, friendship, marital love, and non-sexual love between men and women, Simon argues that each form of love contributes in valuable ways to the development of our lives. Mature friends, for example, see us both as we are and as we are capable of being, and they encourage us to become the better version of our selves (p. 105). Left alone, we tend to think we are already perfected; friends love us but still expect better of us, and so we need friends to become who we ought to be. This interdependence is an integral part of our created nature (p. 178).

Simon is less worried than Meilaender about the potential dangers of friendship; she is interested in the ways that friendships are vital for a life that responds to God's calling. I am tempted to attribute the different focus between these two to the difference between Meilaender's Lutheran two-worlds perspective that emphasizes the need to turn away from the world to follow God's call and Simon's Reformed perspective that emphasizes human interdependence and common grace.

In contrast to the two authors above, Paul Wadell does not offer a sustained philosophical analysis of the nature of friendship in *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002, 180 pp., $16.00). Instead, he starts from the assumption that as Christians we should strive for friendship with God and draws out the implications of that relationship for the structure of our communities and worship (p. 21). Being friends with God, he notes, is not something one does alone; it involves membership in the community of friends of God. We act as the friends of God by meeting together as the community of Christ and engaging in the liturgical practices that shape us into the sorts of friends of God who can act as we should in the world (p. 27). Wadell offers what we might consider a Catholic perspective on friendship, emphasizing how worship done rightly shapes us in ways that go far deeper than mere intellectual assent (p. 129). For example, worship transforms our vision through its use of images, symbols, and metaphors (p. 128). As our vision is transformed, we find ourselves able to see others through Christ's eyes, to see them through eyes shaped by compassion and love rather than arrogance and selfishness, and thus to see them as they more truly are (p. 126).

FRIENDSHIP AS A SCHOOL OF VIRTUE

I have emphasized how these three thinkers offer contrasting perspectives on friendship, but it is worthwhile noting the ways in which they concur as well. Within our culture friendship is too often portrayed as a facile, sitcom-like affair, where friends are simply any group of folks who hang out together for whatever reason. Meilaender, Simon, and Wadell offer a refreshing alternative; they explore the nature and purpose of deeper friendships and thus help us consider whether the friends we have in our lives are the types of friends we need to cultivate.

Three aspects of friendship stand out in these discussions, all connected with the authors' emphasis on friendship's status as a *practice*—a complex form of human interaction that we need to work at and that involves our following sets of (often unwritten) rules and guidelines. First, both Wadell and Simon emphasize that friendship is a practice with rules and structures that operate independently of our wishes and whims, and one that we can do rightly or wrongly (Simon, p. 189; Wadell, p. 124). Friendship, for example, requires a particular sort of loving attentiveness that sees the other both honestly and charitably, and if this is lacking, the friendship cannot be true.

Many thinkers argue that we become better people by participating in practices that require us to develop the virtues. We do not develop generosity, for example, by simply deciding at some point that we will be generous persons. Rather we become generous by working at it over and over, and friendship is a particularly good location for practicing this virtue. The virtues require more than just choice (though clearly choice is essential) because they are a matter of doing generous (or, courageous or honest) things over and over until generosity is ingrained into one's very soul. Practices are the context for this repetitive training. This point is particularly central to Wadell's discussion; he details the way that we become capable of acting as the body of Christ in the world through engaging in the practices of Christian friendship (p. 67).

While a friendship is properly valued for its own sake, its value is never absolute. When a friendship becomes an end in itself, it can go very wrong. It must be placed in the context of other common human goods.

So how, specifically, do the virtues needed for a good human life get developed in friendship? Friendships, importantly, require us to learn to displace our own desires and dislikes to some extent and substitute the friend's joys and sorrows. Simon defines good friendship as one in which each friend sees (to some degree) what God calls the other person to become and helps to facilitate that process. Wadell notes that for the Church to act as the community of friends of God it must be a community of folks dedicated to building up rather than attacking each other (p. 110). The day-to-day practice of such other-focused behaviors helps us become persons who exemplify the fruits of the Spirit: gentleness, kindness, and long-suffering.

A third feature highlighted in these texts is the connection between practices and communities. Rather obviously, one cannot be a friend in isolation; it requires at least two people, but usually more. It is in this context that Mother Mary Francis's *But I Have Called You Friends* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006, 109 pp., $9.95), a series of talks given to the novitiate sisters at the monastery where she served as abbess, really shines. The reflective essays in this book are not intended to be scholarly treatises; they are "conferences," or discussions, she led about how to live in a community as friends. While Wadell and Simon discuss what the nature of friendship is, Mother Mary Frances, P.C.C., focuses on the practical dimensions of developing and sustaining friendships in community. Her advice focuses on the lives of women living in intentional communities, but much of it is directly transferable to the less restrictive communities in which we live and work. While at times marked by somewhat dated gender assumptions (p. 31), her

advice offers insights for those whose work in churches includes facing intractable interpersonal conflicts. *But I Have Called You Friends* respects the complex multiplicities of friendship in close-knit communities where exclusivity can be destructive, but close friendships are vital. Other authors focus on dyadic friendships, ones that include only two people, but friendships involve numerous people, relationships, and personalities, and negotiating these layers of complexity is crucial to a healthy community (p. 20).

THE PURPOSE OF FRIENDSHIP

A final question about friendship is the question of its purpose or what its goal is. We might be tempted to assume that friendship exists simply for its own sake, but this would be a mistake. While a friendship is properly valued for its own sake, its value is never absolute. When a friendship becomes an absolute end in itself, it can go very wrong. At the very least, it needs to be placed in the context of other common human goods. Wadell makes the strong claim that friendship should ultimately be oriented toward justice (p. 141). In saying this he and Meilaender find themselves more at odds than at any other point in their analyses. Meilaender pictures friendship as an exclusive relationship that always represents a potential conflict with the impersonality that justice requires (p. 77). But Wadell argues that friendship does not conflict with justice, it constitutes a critically important ground of justice because "it is by learning how to seek the good of another in friendship that we gradually acquire the skill to act rightly toward every person with whom we come into contact, respecting their dignity, acknowledging their rights, and fulfilling our responsibilities toward them" (p. 153).

Because Wadell's paradigm of friendship is the friendship between God and humans, he brings friendship and justice together. To legitimately call ourselves friends of God, he argues, means that we need to embrace God's projects as our own, and this means that God's concerns for justice that sound over and over again in Scripture must shape our own concerns as well. Wadell thus continues the practical theme that Mother Mary Francis sounds: friendship must be located in community and not in individualistic accounts of human life. Without justice true community is not possible. Friendship and justice are thus mutually reliant in a vision of a complete shalom that offers wholeness to all people.

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