

On Cultivating the Disciplined Habits of a Love Affair

Or on how to do theology on your knees

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Preface

I have previously argued that the state of 'theology' and 'religious studies' in most English Universities is such that one could hardly distinguish between the two disciplines, in their institutional presuppositions, their objectives and goals, and in their methodological procedures.¹ It just happens that the subject of one is Christianity, and that of the other, religions other than Christianity. Were a 'theology' department to be renamed 'religious studies' overnight everything could probably continue as it did before, although there would be understandable pressures to include more study of religions other than Christianity. Here, I would like to pursue one feature of a tradition-specific department, such as I canvassed, whereby theology could break free from the homogeneous secularisation of the discipline that currently predominates and offer students within the university an intellectually rigorous alternative. If I am told that I should teach in a Roman Catholic seminary—a frequent criticism—I suggest that one vocation of the Roman Catholic Church, and this may be true of other churches, requires the rigorous educating of lay faithful. Roman Catholic, Anglican and Jewish parents in many parts of the country have the opportunity to send their children to denominational specific schools, endorsed and supported by the government. If all enquiry is tradition-specific, and the legitimacy of enquiry within often highly reputable religious foundations is publicly accepted at primary and secondary level—why not take the argument to Higher Education level? This paper is devoted to keeping that question open.

You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature.
(Eph 4:23-24)

Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness,
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin...
Indeed you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom...

A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
Nor deprive me of your holy spirit.
(Psalm 51: 1-2, 6, 10-11)

Quoting biblical texts like this might irritate historical-critical biblical scholars for I have snatched verses out of historical context and stitched them together in an even odder chronological fashion. But this is not all. I might also offend those concerned with Jewish-Christian issues in suggesting an imperialist anti-Jewish hermeneutic, whereby the 'New' Testament interprets the 'Old'. And worst of all, some may wonder if this is a pious lecture, indistinguishable from a sermon!—although I admit that I'm not sure where one starts and the other ends.

Some will recognize, if they cultivate certain sectarian habits, that they have prayed these scriptures this morning (Friday 19th, September 1997) from *The Divine Office* (week 4, a 'morning' psalm). I have used the *Office* for personal reasons; any other forms of prayer could have been used. None, of course, exclude the cultivation of personal spontaneous prayer. The *Office* is also called the *Liturgy of the Hours* and originates within a monastic setting—sanctifying the different times of the day through prayer and meditation which were sung in Latin until 1963, when Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* allowed for the vernacular and for the first time encouraged lay participation in this cycle of prayers. The *Office* was fully revised in Latin by 1971, and the English authorised version that I use was completed in 1974. Besides the Proper of the Seasons (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter) and Special Solemnities (such as the Sacred Heart, the Trinity), there is a four week cycle of prayer and the optional and non-optional feast days of saints, sites and ceremonies; the permutations are almost endless.

However, those disposed towards the martyrs may have said a different set of prayers in their optional celebration of Saint Januarius whose feast day occurs today. Perhaps I should have celebrated him, for he was persecuted for not giving due honour to worldly authorities, but confronting the secular university could hardly be deemed analogous, especially as I continue to be paid by Bristol University and have not (as yet) suffered beheading—as was the fate of our saint. Of course, Januarius was only beheaded because the wild beasts 'could not be provoked' to devour him; the authority's first attempt to be rid of him—but reading papers to academics is hardly comparable.² Alternatively, I could have celebrated Emily de Rodat, whose feast day also falls today. She is the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Villefranche. This would have required an alternative Common. The use of either would

have raised different questions. I shall stick to week 4. So why cite prayers from this morning's *Divine Office* in an 'academic' lecture on 'what is theology?' Because, as I shall be arguing, theology, if it is to be done with full intellectual rigour, cannot be done outside the context of a love affair with God and God's community, the church. And one cultivated habit of most of the greatest lovers (and the best theologians) within the church is that of prayer. I shall be arguing that good intellectually rigorous theology within the university can only be done within the context of a praying community, not just nourished by prayer as if an optional and private extra, but also guided and judged by prayer.

As a lay Roman Catholic in a secular university, both these preconditions (a confessional starting point and prayer) are structurally problematic—which admittedly involves me in some odd anomalies: such that I could only do my job well if I suggested, which I cannot, that my students take prayer as seriously as their reading lists (although some might fare better with prayer than their reading lists!) Do not misunderstand me, I am *not* arguing for either a pietist or fideist theology department where intellectual rigour and accountability are surrendered, such that bad arguments or poorly researched materials can be acceptable because those who have produced them pray. Neither do I want to argue for some magical status for prayer, whereby the painful, laborious slog of research evaporates and the complex intellectual questions dealt with are miraculously answered. The opening lines of this morning's Psalm: 'Have mercy of me, God, in your kindness' indicates that prayer, if anything, should remind us of our creatureliness and our propensity to forget this. Rowan Williams translates this penitence in terms of warning against theological idolatry when he writes that a prayerful theology 'declines the attempt to take God's point of view (i.e. a 'total perspective').'³ Rather, I shall be arguing that prayer, as part of a disciplined relationship to God has profound epistemological and methodological consequences.

I hesitate to cite the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), but in an interesting (and contentious) document they address the role of the theologian. The title is telling, for it indicates the proper location of theology: *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*.⁴ What is especially startling in this document, or at least for those who inhabit secular university theology departments, are the claims made that other than absolutely vital and necessary academic skills (philology, geography, history, philosophy, etc), prayer and a commitment to virtue and holiness are equally necessary for the academic to be a theologian. Imagine the University of Utrecht, or Bristol putting into its theology prospectus: 'candidates are required to

have 3 A levels, usually 2 B's and a C, and need to be committed to prayer, virtue and holiness.' One might add: 'Frequenting the sacraments is encouraged, sinners are especially welcome—as is a sense of humour.'⁵

Let me return to the CDF document and cite a key paragraph:

Since the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, the theologian is called to deepen his own life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer. In this way, he will become more open to the "supernatural sense of faith" upon which he depends, and it will appear to him as a sure rule for guiding his reflections and helping him assess the correctness of his conclusions.⁶

There are three very specific claims being made here about prayer, all of which run counter to the institutional presuppositions of secular theology departments: first, that it facilitates cohabitation with the 'object' of study—the triune God; second, that it guides this study; and third, that it helps theologians assess the truthfulness of their study. In this lecture I briefly explore the first two claims. The CDF document attends to the third in considerable detail (paras.: 13–42), and some important questions regarding 'accountability' and 'authority' are raised which I cannot address here. The precise structural relations between a department of theology and the church are open to complex possibilities (compare the Catholic University of America and Boston College, Mass.)—especially were a department to be ecumenical. Again, these questions cannot be addressed here.

A pure heart and steadfast spirit are required for the wisdom (Ps. 51) that is theology. But in proposing this am I asking for Jerusalem in Bristol?

II

He showed me the holy city of Jerusalem and it had
all the radiant glory of God (Rev 21:10-11)

How blessed are those who love you!
They will rejoice in your peace.
Blessed are those who grieved
over all your afflictions, for they will rejoice
for you upon seeing all your glory,
and they will be made glad for ever.

(Tob 13:13-15)

(Part of the 'Old Testament Canticle', following the 'Morning' Psalm
from the Friday, week 4 *Office*.)

So to the first claim: cohabitation with God through prayer is a prerequisite for doing theology. Besides the vital technical skills required by the student of theology (languages, drama, art history, music, literary criticism, and so on), there is a need to know the 'object' of study via cohabitation and here, compared to any other discipline, the 'object' of study is unique. The formal 'objects' of all other disciplines are part of the created order. The formal 'object' of theology is finally the living God, creator of all things, dissimilar to and different from the entire created order, but who reveals himself in flesh and blood, time and place. Hence, in a very real sense faith is a prerequisite for theology, because without faith, as a gift, God cannot be known. Nevertheless, theology is not without analogy to other disciplines in two very important respects. I explore these analogies to point out that all forms of enquiry require different skills and disciplines and that theology should not conform itself or be defined by norms essentially alien to its nature.

First, other disciplines require the student to inhabit a tradition of enquiry which is a *living tradition* characterised by various *dogmas* and *practices* that facilitate a structured co-habitation with the object of study, appropriate to that object.⁷ This has been argued for in a variety of disciplines: Michael Polanyi (and in a different manner Thomas Kuhn) have both made out strong cases in science; Hans-Georg Gadamer in the liberal arts; and Alasdair MacIntyre, a most persuasive case in moral philosophy.⁸ There is no naive epoché here, but the recognition that living traditions of enquiry are just that: dynamic, and to this extent unpredictable while being part of a structured set of beliefs and practices. If the formal subject matter of theology is God, then appropriate cohabitation for the disciplined enquiry into the subject matter might well be prayer, especially if, as Rowan Williams puts it, 'if theology is the untangling of the real grammar of religious practice, its subject matter is, humanly and specifically, people who pray.'⁹

Prayer, according to the new (1992) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.'¹⁰ Communing in God's presence is precisely what constitutes an on-going love affair and our lover is also the loved one of Eve, Sarah, Mary, Martha, Hildegard, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa and my own mother, Lucy D'Costa. Little wonder that the preface to the section on prayer in the *Catechism* is given over to Thérèse of Lisieux: 'For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.'¹¹ Trial and joy echo the second canticle from this morning's *Office* where rejoicing and affliction are part of

bearing love's burden, the long, slow and difficult road to Jerusalem, and every academic knows the meaning of trial and joy, rejoicing and affliction, although few turn to it as a theological method—a point to which I will return.

My point of analogy here is that the living tradition of the church, with its brutality, patriarchy, often power hungry bureaucrats, and also its history of the search for holiness in structured and complex forms of life, many of them never officially recognized, nevertheless constitutes the appropriate site for intellectually rigorous theology. Praying the *Office* illustrates prayer's organic dependency on tradition, scripture and practices (saints, feasts, music, dogmas, places—are all celebrated) in praise of the living God. In joining this prayer, the theologian participates in and contributes to this on-going, unfinished tradition.¹²

The second point of analogy is that within scientific communities or indeed within other communities of enquiry, respect is often given to those skilled and highly able practitioners who have inhabited the living tradition of enquiry. They have cohabited the paradigm with both heart and intellect, such that they may be looked to as wise role models whose intuition, judgment, and learning are specially valued.¹³ It is not by chance that innovation within a tradition is usually brought about by those most schooled in it. Such skilled and highly able theological practitioners within the church are sometimes called saints—even if saints and heretics are sometimes difficult to distinguish! Heretics are usually seen as precipitating paradigm change, schism or apostasy, rather than inaugurating novel, yet faithful, innovation.¹⁴ This point of analogy explains why many of the greatest theologians have been called saints and doctors within the western church. 'Doctors' because the only role of the theologian is to truthfully minister to the ailing body of which he or she is a part; 'saints' because the criteria of excellence in theology is inseparable from the holiness of life—two virtues for the theologian, that are (or should be) inseparable. If the greatest practitioners of the discipline of theology enjoin the practice of prayer for the discipline, then it is surely appropriate to seriously entertain this claim.

I do not want to idealize theologian-saints. Some of them were probably insufferable. One of the greatest doctors of the western tradition, St Jerome, whose portrait adorns the front of the English translation of the *CDF Instruction*, was renowned for his intemperateness in controversy and savage invective. Some try to excuse this in terms of classical rhetorical models, but Pope Sixtus V was probably closer to the truth. He is reported as saying, when looking at a picture of Jerome beating his breast with a stone, 'You do well to use that stone: without it you would never have been numbered among

the saints.¹⁵ Furthermore, some great theologians were silenced or even persecuted by the church and only retrospectively acknowledged. And the process of saint selection is far from unproblematic. For example it has taken nearly two thousand years to officially proclaim women doctors of the Church. Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila were named by Pope Paul VI only in 1970, and Thérèse of Lisieux in 1997.

Nevertheless, tradition, when it is part of the daily prayer of the church, as it is within the *Divine Office*, and one should recall the yet uncovered or repressed traditions that might be part of tomorrow's *Office*, cannot be understood as a static deposit. Its use in daily prayer constantly invites re-readings and new readings, fresh practices and non-identical repetition, for there is never a single stable context of interpretation.¹⁶ Hence, after, for example, the life of a Saint Emily de Rodat, her theology and practice give further shape to the body of Christ, a form of beauty that freshly reflects the triune God, a facet of life not so well publicly celebrated prior to her. This kaleidoscopic canon allows for theological plurality in a quite extraordinary manner as well as for plurality in practice. This vital pluralism is often played down in criticisms of theologically tradition-specific forms of enquiry.

In conclusion regarding the second point of analogy, I have been arguing that prayer is an indispensable prerequisite to the study and practice of theology. It is one form of cultivated habitual practice that constitutes loving cohabitation with theology's proper object of study: the triune God. Theology can demand this from its students as justly and openly as geologists can demand attendance at field trips from theirs, or musicologists can demand competent practice of at least one musical instrument and attendance at various recitals from their students.¹⁷

I now want to push this point further, for prayer is finally and only worthwhile in so much as it gives glory to God: adoration for its own sake. But in this slow laborious process of learning to pray, learning to let go, learning to discern our constant use of prayer towards other ends, we learn to love—for prayer, as the Catechism puts it, 'is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.' If this sounds glib, which it might, then we should also recall that a major symbol of prayer is Jacob's wrestling with the strange and unnamed figure—who blesses him after putting his thigh out of joint! (Gen. 32: 22-32). I want to push the argument to claim that the disciplined habits of prayer can engender love—and *love is the lamp of knowledge* (as Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Rahner and von Balthasar affirm in different ways).

In the CDF *Instruction* it is noted that 'The theologian's work thus responds to the dynamism found in the faith itself.' (para. 6) This

dynamism is trinitarian love. In the next paragraph, the document continues:

Obedient to the impulse of truth which seeks to be communicated, theology also arises from love and love's dynamism. In the act of faith, man knows God's goodness and begins to love Him. Love, however, is ever desirous of a better knowledge of the beloved. From this double origin of theology, inscribed upon the interior life of the People of God and its missionary vocation, derives the method with which it ought to be pursued in order to satisfy the requirements of its nature. (para. 7)¹⁸

I shall shortly return to this startling comment that theology's *method* is dictated by love's dynamism, but here I want to focus on this 'double origin', this restless movement between love and knowledge—and I shall do so briefly via Aquinas.¹⁹ This does not presuppose that Aquinas' epistemological and ontological presuppositions are unproblematic, but I take him as a significant illustrative example. In the *Summa* 2a2ae. question 45, Aquinas discusses 'The gift of wisdom', which should for the purpose of our discussion be read with the *Summa* 1a.1,6 where he argues that theology is 'wisdom'. In 2a2ae, he makes two very important points. First, in article 2 he argues that theological wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit, precisely because it arises from cohabitation with the divine life which facilitates right judgement. Note, Aquinas' stress is on judgement; it is presupposed that the technical skills required of the theologian are gained by hard and painful slog. He writes:

So it is with divine things. A correct judgment made through rational investigation belongs to the wisdom which is an intellectual virtue. But to judge aright through a certain fellowship with them [divine things] belongs to that wisdom which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Dionysius [*De Divinis Nominibus* 2. PG 3, 648] says that Hierotheus is perfected in divine things for *he not only learns about them but suffers them as we*. Now this sympathy, or connaturality with divine things, results from charity which unites us to God [compassio sive connaturalitas ad res divinas fit per caritatem, quae quidem unit nos Deo]; *he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him*

[I Corinthians 6:17].²⁰

This connaturality with divine things, according to Aquinas, results from a life of love and contemplation, a life of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance which is both effected by and results in continuous participation with the life of God—a gift of the Holy Spirit. Clearly this is a slow and painful process that can, for Aquinas, be violently disrupted and derailed by mortal sin: a serious infidelity to

God whereby one prefers 'sin to the divine friendship'. (2a2ae. 24,12) In Thomas R Heath's commentary to question 45, he implicitly attends to what the *Instruction* calls the 'double origin' of theology. Heath argues that Aquinas' basic insight is this: 'knowledge of the goodness of an object causes us to love it; love then brings about a different and a better kind of knowledge; this new appreciation deepens the love which, in turn, intensifies the appreciation, and so on. In the life of grace the first kind of knowledge about God comes through faith; the love is charity; the second kind of knowledge comes through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.'²¹ The seriousness of Aquinas' contention that sound theological judgment is predicated upon the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' and requires 'sympathy, or connaturality with divine things' resulting from and leading to a life of contemplative love of God, entirely accords with and illuminates the CDF's focus on this 'double origin of theology'. And this indwelling within love means that the Holy Spirit is properly present, guiding and leading all believers, including theologians, into knowledge (faith) and love (charity) of God. Of course, this is never an assured or automatic process and one that is always mediated by sinful people—called the church. Invoking infallibility for any theologian would be disastrous. As Nicholas Lash puts it, 'To believe in the 'infallibility' of the Church is not to suppose that we are reliable, but that God is.'²²

Love thus plays this central part in Aquinas because of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. It is only love that endures, for in our final rest with God, faith and hope (which are always mediated in this life) are required no longer, whereas love endures and in our present state has no intermediary, for it is only through and with the love of God that we learn to love him and our neighbour properly. In another context Aquinas explains: 'we have to say that love, which is an act of an appetitive virtue, even in our present state tends first to God, and from him follows to other things: in this way charity loves God without any intermediary. The case is directly the opposite with knowledge, since it is through other things that we come to know God'.²³ Love's dynamism, its life, flexibility, and kenotic nature, is startlingly brought out in Thomas' lovely discussion of the four proximate effects of love: melting, pleasure, languor and fever. Of melting he writes:

The opposite of this is *freezing*, for frozen things are so tight-packed that they cannot easily let other things penetrate them. But with love, the orexis [appetitus] is quick to take into itself the object loved: this is how that object 'dwells' in the lover, as we have seen [referring to art. 2]. Coldness or hardness of heart is therefore a state incompatible with

love; whereas 'melting' or warmth suggests a certain softness which means that the heart will be quick to let the object loved enter into it.²⁴

Aquinas' metaphor of the transformation required by love, what he calls a 'certain softness', is echoed in the second reading from Tobit this morning: 'How blessed are those who love you. They will rejoice in your peace.'

It is, I hope, now clearer how the second and third claims might hang together: by nuptial cohabitation with God, through prayer, the theologian's enquiry may be *guided* by love, and the *correctness* of his or her conclusions is assessed by a traditioned and disciplined love—which starts and ends in prayer. This neither obscures the importance and integrity of the various critical tools and methods employed by the theologian; rather it suggests a discernment, a *judgement* that is required in their utilization. To flush out this abstraction, let me briefly explore the question of being guided by prayer as an appropriate theological method, on the understanding of theology as an offspring of a passionate love affair.

III

Come and I will show you the bride that the Lamb
has married

(Rev 21:9)

He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command.
He showers down snow white as wool,
he scatters hoar-frost like ashes.

He hurls down hailstones like crumbs.
The waters are frozen at his touch;
he sends forth his word and it melts them:
at the breath of his mouth the waters flow.

(Psalm 147: 15–18)

(Taken from a 'Psalm of Praise', following the previous two from the
Friday week 4 *Office*)

The marriage of the bride and the Lamb generates the momentum, the love affair, upon which theological method is based, a rhythm characterised by both joy and affliction (Tob 13), guilt and mercy (Ps 50) in which we pray that a 'pure heart' be created within us so that we can be taught 'wisdom' (Ps 50/51), but a wisdom that is attentive to the reality of God's action which cannot be controlled or predicted, such that he will choose to 'send forth his word' and melt the icy waters, and

thaw out our frozen hearts so that united with Christ our head, our blood may quicken. (Might this be part of the significance of the well attested liquefying of St. Januarius' blood, going back to 400? It is said that when St Januarius' dry blood, which is kept in an old glass vial, is brought into the presence of his head which is kept separately, the blood liquefies and is volatile! Christ as our head, gives us life, through his blood—without him we are lifeless.)²⁵

The bridal metaphor is important. In his *University Sermons*, Newman perceptively recognized that Mary is in fact a prime model for the theologian, for her life is a clue to theological method, something alluded to in the final paragraph of the *CDF Instruction*.²⁶ Newman writes, Mary:

is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit to reason, she reasons upon it; not indeed reasoning first, and believing afterwards, with Zachariah, yet believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing. And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also.²⁷

Newman beautifully encapsulates the theologian's organic dependency on the church, in both Mary's responsiveness to God and her co-creative activity with God, as church. This dynamic corresponds to the theologian's accountability (third claim) to a living tradition (which means music, art, pilgrimage, local customs, festivals, the bible and magisterium—and many other aspects); and the theologian's being guided (second claim) by the multiple impulses within this never fully explored tradition as it interacts with our contemporary culture.²⁸ Let me take two features of today's Divine Office to further my claim.

The first is that if theology's method is dictated by love's dynamism, that is that God's own trinitarian love should dictate the method by which it is known and loved, then theology requires to critically develop its shape from the liturgical life of the church. This does not mean that prayer in its different forms has any privileged ahistorical position, such that it is free from critical engagement, as is exemplified by the passionate debate on the liturgy after Vatican II. I only wish to gesture towards the site (the worshipping community) from which theology takes its bearings.

That theology's method be prayerfully mediated is a point often neglected in Anglo-Saxon academic circles.²⁹ Even some writers who stress the ecclesiological grounding of theology, sometimes neglect the

liturgical heart constituting the church. But unpacking what this means in engagement with current university practices remains a complex and constant task. Vatican II was instrumental in emphasising the role of liturgy in the study of theology, although within the two documents where this was treated, there is a neglect of the lay theological role within the church and university. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, it states:

The study of sacred liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies; in theological faculties it is to rank among the principal subjects. It is to be taught under its theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral, and juridical aspects. Moreover, other professors, while striving to expound the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation from the angle proper to each of their own subjects, must nevertheless do so in a way which will clearly bring out the connections between their subjects and the liturgy, as also the unity which underlies all priestly training.³⁰

Bringing out the connections between a discipline and the church's liturgy needs a lot more careful exploration and I shall pursue this here with one example: biblical studies.

An important aspect of praying the *Office* is its intriguing deployment of scripture—which has profound implications for biblical studies within the university. Consider two points. First, scripture is constantly mediated via tradition. For example, this morning, we have Ephesians (4:23–24) and Revelation (21:10–11 and 21:9) guiding our prayerful reading of the Psalms (50/51, 147) and the Old Testament Canticle (Tob.13), which in turn guides our reading of the New Testament passages. Had we instead used the Common of Pastors celebrating Saint Januarius, or the Common of Women Saints celebrating Saint Emily, we would not only have scriptural co-mediation, but also spiritual writers from varying moments within the tradition prefixing the psalmody: Hesychius today, but it could equally be Cassiodorus, Irenaeus, Augustine or Athanasius (to name a few—although, sadly and shamefully, always men). In the English translation, the poets Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Donne are also allowed to sing in this sublime, though all male, choir. Perhaps one day the *Office* will also contain art on which we may meditate and the writings of women within the tradition. Furthermore, the scriptures today are actually mediated via the life of St. Januarius or St. Emily, inviting us to both read his or her life in terms of the scriptures and the scriptures in terms of their lives. This is well reflected in the scripture reading for St. Januarius' Common today: 'Remember your leaders, who preached the

word of God to you, and as you reflect on the outcomes of their lives, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever. Do not let yourself be led astray by all sorts of strange doctrines' (Heb. 13:7–9a). Note the endless possibilities of non-identical repetition. Leaders, thank goodness, are never the same, nor are saints, yet they are all in some fashion imitations of Christ. The point I am making is that reading the scriptures aright is a profoundly ecclesial activity.

A further feature reiterating that we are not simply speaking of texts interpreting other texts (such that the church is like an interactive university library), but are engaged with living texts interpreting our lives and practice and vice versa—is the fact that the scripture in the *Office* is contextualized by 'Intercessions'. For example, one formal intercession for this morning reads: 'You continue to work in your faithful people: create through them a new world where injustice and destruction will give way to growth, freedom and hope.' *Response*: 'Lord Jesus, come to us today.' Each local church avoids saying its prayers seriously if in reading its scriptures it is not moved to the practice of justice and hope, even if it never fully knows what these terms mean apart from continuously engaging with scripture. Praying and reading the scripture is a profoundly practical activity as well as an intellectually complex and rigorous one as Augustine so well explains in Book 1 of *On Christian Doctrine*. And it takes a lifetime of schooling to learn how to live, pray and read.

The life of the church today is part of the continuing tradition that forms the many sided contexts of pluriform scriptural interpretation. This hermeneutical plurality also has the delightful consequence of meaning that the meanings of scripture are never exhausted, otherwise praying the Office would be like constantly reading and re-reading the telephone directory—rather than being washed in the cyclical rhythms of sacred time! Closure of meaning is precluded, for as long as the church continues to pray its scripture it expands the endless contexts of interpretation, and the complex, murky and moving love affair (called tradition) is fuelled, nourished, and critically questioned while remaining an unfinished story.

These features that I have been charting have profound implications for biblical study within university theology departments. I must acknowledge that my biblical studies as a student were shaped exclusively in the Germanic-Anglo-Saxon historical-critical tradition. In many respects this tradition still dominates England, though by no means uniformly and there are many hopeful signs. What I would suggest is that the dominance of historical-critical biblical studies is

radically called into question by a theology whose methodology is generated by prayer. This, for a number of reasons.

First, while philological and historical investigation into scriptural texts are absolutely necessary for an understanding of the text within the remit of such disciplines, to exalt this single way of reading as the way of reading the scripture is a form of hermeneutical fascism.³¹ Not only has the historical-positivist approach been challenged hermeneutically within the Humanities, the exaltation of this approach seriously marginalizes an open ecclesial tradition as the appropriate context of co-reading scripture. Keeping this allegedly hard-science reading strategy in place was part of theology's gaining respectability in the secular academy. Hence, strictly speaking, this was the hermeneutical strategy of secular positivism.

George Lindbeck argues this point forcefully in relation to North America:

If anything controls Scripture today, it is the exegetical establishment. The exegetical establishment in North America consists of the institutions which train the overwhelming majority of the people who teach Scripture in a vast array of colleges and universities—some church schools, some Catholic, some Protestant. But the majority of them are secular institutions. Most of the people who currently receive doctorates in biblical studies in this country end up teaching in institutions which are secular. The American Academy of Religion (A.A.R) is the establishment. This establishment is unified. That is to say, confessional boundaries make very little difference. One teaches in the prestigious graduate schools in such a way as to prepare people who will be viewed as reputable academic scholars everywhere. So, what one emphasizes has very little to do with personal faith.³²

Training students to imagine that the historical-critical method is *the* proper way to read the bible today, does not allow for the critical examination of the historical-critical method's own theological and philosophical presuppositions. In so doing, secular theology departments exalt one moment of the modern world as the unexamined Archimedean point from which to read all history.³³ I am not suggesting that interpretation can or should be premodern or avoid contemporary hermeneutical issues. This is not an option for theology. Rather contemporary hermeneutical strategies need also to be questioned by alternative and past strategies—and finally, by revelation itself—which is only accessible to us as mediated. The CDF Instruction notes that all the tools, concepts and disciplines adopted by theology are judged by revelation, 'which itself must furnish the criteria for the evaluation of these elements and conceptual tools and not vice versa.' (para. 10)

However, revelation is at times invoked in a rather positivist fashion, as if it were not itself subject to mediation. In another context, Cardinal Ratzinger argues against both a biblical fundamentalism (the bible interprets itself without mediation, or is seen in a purely positivist manner, not requiring ecclesial mediation) and an ecclesiological fundamentalism (the church owns and controls the meaning of the text). He writes:

Certainly texts must first of all be traced back to their historical origins and interpreted in their proper historical context. But then, in a second exegetical operation, one must look at them also in the light of the total movement of history and in light of history's central event, Jesus Christ. Only the combination of both these methods will yield understanding of the Bible. If the first exegetical operation by the Fathers and in the Middle Ages is found to be lacking, so too is the second, since it easily falls into arbitrariness.³⁴

Ratzinger's point is important for it rightly locates the ecclesial context of reading scripture, without suggesting closure as a result. In a rather nicely balanced fashion he expresses the dynamic between the church and the bible when he says: "The Bible interprets the church, and the church interprets the Bible. Again, this must be a mutual relationship. We cannot seek refuge in an ecclesiastical positivism. Finally, the last word belongs to the church, but the church must give the last word to the Bible."³⁵

Such considerations make it clear that within confessional Christian departments there may be radically different ways of construing biblical studies. Some Protestant departments may not give such a role to tradition, while most Roman Catholic and Orthodox departments would certainly wish to locate biblical studies *within* the engagement of traditioned readings.³⁶ But this latter option results in a dangerous and delicate destabilizing of existing traditional disciplinary boundaries, rather than shoring up any pious conservatism.

For instance, there should be no such discipline as biblical studies that is in any way isolated from patristic, medieval, reformation, structural and postmodern reading strategies (and so on). The biblical scholar, who cannot of course be an expert in all these areas, will nevertheless have to be sensitive and alert to these different forms of reading if they are to be competent readers themselves. But this blurring of disciplines does not stop here, for it also requires that the biblical scholar be a moral theologian, for if the bible has a moral sense, as Augustine, Aquinas and others have argued, but in a different manner from many feminists and liberation theologians, then biblical

scholarship must relate to practice. This near divorce between moral theology and biblical theology was noted in Vatican II: 'Special attention needs to be given to the development of moral theology. Its scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching.'³⁷ As a non-biblical specialist I can happily stipulate all these things and avoid the crushing impossibility of such a task. But I think these important questions, and on another occasion I would hope to explore the effects of this type of theology in relation to the study of other religions.

IV

I would like to conclude this lecture with yet another *Office* reading, which well expresses the burden and joy, the slow laborious process, the impossible possibility of creating a new heart within the bridal theologian and the structural environment within which he or she works. The poem, 'Holy Sonnets v' by John Donne, is included under the Lent and Easter section, but as theology is always a Lenten and Easter activity I shall presume to use it here.

Batter my heart, three-personed God,
for you As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end,
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captivated and proves weak or untrue.
Yet clearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy.
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste except you ravish me.

I am grateful to Professor Vincent Brummer for inviting me to give this paper to the Netherlands School for Advanced Study in Theology and Religion on Friday 19 September. I am also grateful for the many critical comments on that occasion. My thanks also to the following for their helpful comments and incisive criticisms on an earlier draft copy: Dr Kieran Flanagan, Mr Richard Johnson, Dr Gerard Loughlin, Dr Carolyn Musseig, and Br Thomas CR.

- 1 See 'The End of "Theology" and "Religious Studies"', *Theology*, 1996, pp.338-51; and before that 'The End of Systematic Theology', *Theology*, 1992, pp.324-34.
- 2 Rev. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, edited for daily use by Rev. Bernard Kelly, Virtue & Company Ltd, London, Vol 3, 1936, p.1123. On the Divine Office in the modern church see Vatican II's, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, ch. IV, paras. 83-101, and the helpful commentary and historical contextualization by Josef Andreas Jungmann, in ed. H Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol 1, Burns & Oates, London, 1967, esp. pp.57-69.
- 3 Rowan Williams, 'Theological Integrity', *New Blackfriars*, 72, 847, 1991, pp.140-51: p.143.
- 4 Catholic Truth Society, London/ Veritas Publications, Dublin, 1990—given in Rome on May 24, 1990. Also pertinent as a backcloth to this discussion are the Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, (1990) on the Catholic University, and the joint document from the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Council's for the Laity and for Culture: 'The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture' (1984)—in *Briefing*, 21 July 1994, pp.2-9.
- 5 I add the latter qualification in memory of the dead bodies that litter Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, and the danger of idolatry ever present in such a proposal as this. See also Karl Josef Kuschel, *Laughter*, SCM, London, pp.2-9
- 6 Instruction, para 8, my bracket; after the word prayer, there is a reference to John Paul II, 'Discorse in occasione della consegna del premio internazionale Paulo VI a Hans Urs von Balthasar', June 23, 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 (1984), 1911-1917. von Balthasar is the single modern theologian mentioned within this document. Others could have been mentioned, but he does suggest one significant role model of the ecclesial theologian, not least in terms of method and style.
- 7 See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 1. All references to the *Summa* use the Blackfriars translations published by Blackfriars/ Eyre & Spottiswoode, London/ McGraw-Hill Book Co. New York. Victor White OP and Thomas Gilby OP are coresponsible for the appendices to the first volume which have been of invaluable assistance to me, especially, appendix 10: Dialectic of Love in the *Summa* (pp.124-133) and appendix 6: Theology as Science (pp.67-88).
- 8 See Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, London, 1969 and *Personal Knowledge*, Harper & Row, New York, 1962; Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1970; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, 1975 (2nd German edn); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Duckworth, London, 1985 and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duckworth, London, 1988. See also Roy A Clouser's interesting argument that scientific theories cannot help but having religious presuppositions that control and regulate them—argued in relation to Mach, Einstein, Heisenberg. He also examines maths in relation to J S Mill, Russell and Dewey: *The Myth of Religious Neutrality. An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*, University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1991, esp. section III.
- 9 Williams, *ibid*, p.149.
- 10 Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994, para. 2565.
- 11 *ibid*. para. 2558, citing *Manuscripts autobiographiques C 25r*. See also *Autobiography of a Saint* (tr. Ronald Knox), Fontana Books, London, 1958, pp.105-110, 243-48.
- 12 Many genres and modes of life are included in the Office as is clear from the saint's days and feasts of the church, the inclusion of celebrating special buildings (eg. Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major—5 August) and sites (eg. Mount Carmel—July 16); the fact that the office is supposed to be sung, the poetry throughout the psalms and the explicit poems and hymns, and the *dramatis personae*

we inhabit in praying, for example, the Magnificat and Benedictus (the dramatic parts of Mary and Zachariah) which indicate that we only learn our parts through familiarity with the drama and then we must improvise, but learned improvisation characterises the virtuoso. Edith Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism. Revisioning Moral Philosophy* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990 is a rich and interesting non-churched turn towards the lives of saints as the source and method of moral philosophy. However, it still maintains a form of positivism (and therefore modernism) in failing to recognize that the accounts of the saints are tradition-mediated and not historically and conceptually self-present. See David Matzo's engaging critique of Wyschogrod in, 'Postmodernity, Saints and Scoundrels', *Modern Theology*, 9, 1993, pp.19-36.

- 13 The term 'Professor' used in many European Universities has religious roots going back to medieval times and indicates the learned wisdom of the religious. See OED.
- 14 However, Michel Foucault also reminds us of the power of tradition to persecute, tyrannize and marginalize—and this we should not forget. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1972. The CDF document is remarkably sensitive to this complex issue (paras. 32-41). Certain elements, especially within the feminist tradition have painfully struggled to negotiate these tensions between fidelity and critique. See for example, the work of Roman Catholic feminists such as Janet Martin Soskice, Anne Carr, Elizabeth Johnson and Catherine Mowry LaCugna—in the collection edited by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *Freeing Theology. The essentials of theology in a feminist perspective*, Harper, San Francisco, 1993 (pp.5-30, 115-38 and 83-114 respectively), and Tina Beattie, *Rediscovering Mary. Insights from the Gospels*, Burns & Oates, Kent, 1995. The recent convert Catholic novelist, Sara Maitland has also done this, quite brilliantly, in *Angel and Me. Short Stories*, Mowbray, London, 1995.
- 15 Donald Attwater, *Dictionary of Saints*, Penguin, 2nd ed., 1983, p.182.
- 16 See John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic', in ed. L. Gregory Jones & Stephen E. Fowl, *Rethinking Metaphysics*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, pp.119-61; and 'The name of Jesus: Incarnation, Atonement, Ecclesiology', *Modern Theology*, 7, 4, 1991, pp.311-33, although Milbank is in danger of playing down the problem of authority involved in such new practices. Joseph Ratzinger's insightful commentary on the dogmatic constitution on revelation in the Second Vatican Council criticises Pope Pius XII's *Humani generis* (1956) for advocating just such a regressive understanding of tradition whereby it is seen as a fixed unambiguous deposit. See his commentary in ed. H Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol 3, Herder & Herder, New York, 1969, esp. p.197. See also Karl Rahner's extremely helpful exploration of the theologian, magisterium and tradition in 'Magisterium and Theology', *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1984, pp.54-73.
- 17 The Divine Office in one sense presents an arbitrary particularity within the tradition. The eucharist presents itself as another obvious point from which to approach this question, as would the sacrament of confession, or indeed listening to music, going to films, enjoying sex, or walking in the countryside, which can all constitute paths to holiness. However, I have had to choose one of the many points of departure, none of which have foundational priority for they can all mediate, in different ways, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.
- 18 After the word 'beloved' the document cites St Bonaventure, *Proem. in I Sent.*, q.2, ad 6. I shall, however, follow Aquinas to illuminate this point.
- 19 One might equally use Augustine. His first book in *On Christian Doctrine* makes it clear that Christians are schooled within the church of love: Christian paideia, rather than by pagan education—and that love is both the prerequisite (within seven steps) which teaches us how to read the scripture as well as being the goal of scripture. See

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, The Liberal Arts Press, New York, 1958, esp. pp.7-34. See also Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery. An essay on the nature of theology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, ch. 4, esp. pp.76-84. I am deeply indebted to Louth's book, although his generous ecumenical approach sometimes obscures the importance of locating the tradition-specific starting point that he in fact argues for. Louth's own later denominational shift into the Orthodox church may be significant in accounting for such textual ambivalence. One might also use Augustine's *Confessions* to show his critique of secular paideia, one not dissimilar to the critique of modernity's paideia and its monstrous implication in the Holocaust in Zygmunt Bauman's, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991. I am also indebted to Lewis Ayres for letting me see a draft of his outstanding scholarly piece: 'The education of desire: the fundamental dynamics of Augustine's Trinitarian theology as a resource for modern theology', forthcoming in *Augustinian Studies*. This alerted me to both Augustine's (and Aquinas') significance for method in theology.

- 20 In ST Ia. 1, 6 Aquinas recognized well the significance of habit forming and its theological status—as a gift—within a community of love as essential to theology. He makes the distinction between two types of wisdom when a 'wise person' comes to a correct judgment, 'arrived at from a bent that way, as when a person who possesses the habit of a virtue rightly commits himself to what should be done in consonance with it, because he is already in sympathy with it; hence Aristotle remarks that the virtuous man himself sets the measure and standard for human acts. (*Ethics X*, 5. 11 76a17) Alternatively the judgment may be arrived at through a cognitive process, as when a person soundly instructed in moral science can appreciate the activity of virtues he does not himself possess.' Being in 'sympathy with' is precisely what is referred to in the CDF document as a 'supernatural sense of faith', for Aquinas is clear to point out that the first type of wisdom is classed among the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: 'The first way of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is classed among the Gifts of the Holy Ghost; so St Paul says, The spiritual man judges all things [1 Corinthians 2,15], and Dionysius speaks about Hierotheus being taught by the experience of undergoing divine things, not only by learning about them. [*De Divinis Nominibus* II, 9] The second way of judging is taken by sacred doctrine to the extent that it can be gained by study; even so the premises are held from revelation.' ST Ia. 1, 6, ad 3.
- 21 Vol. 34, p.200.
- 22 Nicholas Lash, 'The Difficulty of Making Sense', *New Blackfriars*, 70, 824, pp.74-84: p.74.
- 23 Summa 2a2ae. 27,4. See also 2a2ae. 26, 1 &2. See also, Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, pp.288-96.
- 24 ST Ia.2ae.28,5. See Vol. 19, p.105. For 'orexis' see page xxiv for Eric D'Arcy's notes on this term.
- 25 Interestingly this particular genre of miracle is a Southern Italian speciality—see Attwater, p.181, and Butler, p.1124.
- 26 para. 42; although an allusion is all that it remains. See also Hans urs von Balthasar, *Mary for Today*, St Pauls, Slough, 1977, pp.33-41. However, his Marian ecclesiology is not without problems in identifying the feminine as primarily passive, with all the problematic socio-political-sexual ramifications.
- 27 'Sermon XV: The Theory of Development' in Newman's *University Sermons. Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826-43*, SPCK, London, 1970, p.313.
- 28 It is vital that tradition be seen as 'living', for otherwise there would no resources to draw upon by which it develops and criticises itself. In regard to tradition, I would wish to qualify my indebtedness to Lindbeck in 'The End of "Theology" and

“Religious Studies”, in so much as his prioritizing the biblical world (his Lutheran emphasis) has the unintended consequence of giving the bible a structural theological priority over the living church which reads it, which is a traditioned church. For a slightly more Catholic appropriation of Lindbeck and Frei’s category of narrative, see Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story. Bible Church and narrative theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996. Reading the final chapter first, has a profound effect in narrating Loughlin’s narrative.

- 29 Some examples of exceptions are: Rowan Williams’ *The Wound of Knowledge*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1979; David Ford and Dan Hardy, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1984; Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship Doctrine and Life. A Systematic Theology*, London, Epworth, 1980; and Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991. Kieran Flanagan’s *The Enchantment of Sociology. A Study of Theology and Culture*, Macmillan, London, 1996, esp. chs. 3 and 6 offer a sociological argument for the liturgical importance of determining theology’s method. The fact that only the last two writers are Roman Catholic indicates both the specificity and shared sense of the task I am proposing.
- 30 para. 16. Josef Andreas Jungmann points out how this paragraph relates to *Deus Scientiarum* (1930) which placed Christian archaeology and patrology as compulsory principal subjects. See also Decree on Priestly Formation, ch.5, esp. para. 16.
- 31 I would characterise Ed Sanders’ type of approach to the bible as precisely the sort that I am criticising. See for example *Jesus*, SCM, London, 1986, and especially his criteria for establishing what counts as valid materials. However, his historical theses and reconstructions are not without importance.
- 32 ed. Richard John Neuhaus, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis. The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, William Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989, p.120. Lindbeck’s claim about the AAR is disputed by some. See pp.120-22. See also ed. C E Braaten & Robert Jenson, *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, Cambridge, Mass, 1995 which makes out a similar case from a broadly Lutheran perspective.
- 33 For some searching examinations into the philosophical presuppositions of historical criticism see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, ‘Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today’, in ed. Neuhaus, pp.1-23; John Coventry’s excellent critique of this method with specific reference to *The Myth of God Incarnate: ‘The Myth and the Method’*, *Theology*, 81, 682, 1978, pp.252-61; and Gerard Loughlin, *ibid*, pp.149-52. Regarding the reading of history see Robert Young, *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, 1990.
- 34 ed. Neuhaus, pp.20-21. Ratzinger never specifies carefully how the Fathers and Medievals were ‘lacking’ and some participants within the subsequent conference implicitly question this: e.g. p.117, 155-60. Avery Dulles, rather briefly, but very provocatively suggests the rehabilitation of the medieval threefold spiritual sense of scripture married to the three theological virtues: *ibid*. p.154. See also Louth’s defence of allegory over against the historical critical method—see Louth, *ibid*, esp. chs. 3 & 5. Ratzinger’s balance can be seen as developing Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, which suggests both the necessity of technical exegesis and its insufficiency and inadequacy apart from tradition—see para.12 and Ratzinger’s commentary, in ed. Vorgrimler, *op cit*. See also his criticisms of Pius XII in note 16 above. All citation of Vatican II documents are from ed. Walter M Abbott, SJ, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Guild Press, New York, 1966.
- 35 p.118.
- 36 Some Roman Catholic departments may require prompting from Orthodox departments to focus more rigorously on the significance of liturgy. I say this, as in

the conference from which I have been quoting, it took Thomas Hopko (from St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary) to remind Cardinal Ratzinger (what no doubt he already knew, but had not specified) that the 'hermeneutical key [to biblical exegesis] is liturgy' (p.118—ed. Neuhaus, *ibid*). As in the CDF document, there is a real (and necessary?) tension between liturgically generated method and the importance of apologetics—the latter causes Ratzinger to immediately qualify his agreement with Hopko—p.118.

- 37 Decree on Priestly Formation, para.16. Cardinal Ratzinger also makes the point well: 'I am against the reduction of orthodoxy to orthopraxy, but without concrete Christian action, biblical interpretation will be found wanting...' in ed. Neuhaus, p.188. I would suggest that the present pope's encyclicals are one possible model of this re-marriage between ethics and biblical scholarship, as also found in the work of John Howard Yoder.

Anchorite Aloft Polyphonically

A recluse who leads a varied
social life. Of interest. Given
opportunity. With work and money.

Not so much inviting people
home. Except impulsively.
Without formality. Except

of course people who do not
count: models, students
neighbours' children, servants'

families and friends. Preferring
café life, bars, meeting continued
from the street, something

to laugh, talk, drink, eat.
Facility of coming, interacting,
leaving. Casual beauty of feeling.

Michael Kelly