

The anchor is a Christian symbol for hope and steadfastness.

**"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."
(Hebrews 6:19)**

**Therefore, let's keep on keeping on
until we run out of time
so we can meet God. Face to face.**

Becoming Squared

Professor Monsignor Vladimir Felzmann

Becoming Squared



Professor Monsignor Vladimir Felzmann

Becoming Squared

Printed and bound by BELMONT PRESS, Northampton. Tel: 01604 596500

Cover design by John Moffett, Father Vlad's nephew

Chapter 1 Hope: life to the full

*“Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be blest”*

Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man” (1732)

*“Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery.
But today is a gift, and that is why it’s called the present.”*

The composer of this truth is unknown

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal:
it is the courage to continue that count.”*

Winston Churchill

*“I will do my best across my PIES,
and whatever will be will be – God’s plan for me.”*

Father Vlad (this quote underpins my life strategy)

1.1 Introduction

To live is to hope. To hope is to live. If hope departs, it leaves the door open for despair and its close (diabolical) collaborator, suicide, to enter. Hope can be:

- a noun: I have **a hope**. I anticipate, assume, crave, desire, expect, wish, yearn;
- an adjective: **hopeful**, confident, encouraging, an optimistic person or statement;
- an adverb: **hopefully** we shall arrive in time to be there at kick-off, expectantly.
- a verb: **I hope** you enjoy, and benefit from, reading this book.

Hope focuses on events and optimistically imagines a benign future. The events that make up ‘things’ can be creative rather than destructive.

Hope is all about imagining and reaching for a better future for ourselves. **Hope is both an emotion and a way of thinking.** We experience it in our brain, but it comes from somewhere or someone outside ourselves. Hope is crucial in times of uncertainty, and in dealing with adversity.

Writing this book is a journey of multiple hopes. It is helping me discover what I fully mean by the word ‘hope’; and I hope it will achieve the same aim for you, the reader, and thus carry on through to enrich your life too.

Pilgrimages are palpable, often rather costly, expressions of hope. Through, and on, them pilgrims hope to improve some (indeed, occasionally all) of their PIES of life. At times (and for well over a decade organising pilgrimages to Lourdes), there is clear evidence of their successes, even if miracles are rarely claimed.

Everyone’s journey, not just a pilgrimage, hopes to achieve something. Perhaps, as well as arriving at the destination, you will enjoy the journey, as I do when I travel by Eurostar to Paris to visit my sister Jarmila.

The whole of our life is a journey of hope, towards achievements in space-time, and, eventually, to reach our goal: the one we call God.

Secular hope is ‘to cherish a desire with expectation of fulfilment’. ‘I hope for my friend’s early recovery’. ‘I hope the horse I backed wins’.

In sacred art, the anchor is the symbol of hope: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” (Hebrews 6, 19)

The sunrise and a rainbow are traditional visual symbols of hope.

Traditionally, artistically, the colour of faith is white, of love it is red, of hope it is green. The Italian flag has all of these colours. A happy chance? Or was it on purpose? Judging by Google, no one seems to know.

Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope), the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, is one of the four constitutions resulting from the [Second Vatican Council](#) in 1966. It was the Council’s last and longest published document, and is the first constitution published by an [ecumenical council](#) to address the entire world.

Joy – a feeling of great pleasure or delight – is the child of hope. That feeling is produced when the neurotransmitters endorphin, dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and melatonin, released by peripheral neurons and some glandular cells (adrenal, enterochromaffin cells, mast cells), are diverted into the bloodstream.

Joy is ‘a feeling evoked by wellbeing or good fortune,’ whereas happiness is defined as a ‘state of wellbeing.’ This implies that joy occurs – is elated – for a brief, defined period of time, whereas happiness is a state of being that is, for the most part, ongoing.

Joy cannot go beyond the boundaries of its own existence. But delight comes from the soul’s region, from our relationship with the transcendental silence-height we know as God. As it descends, it gradually illuminates everything, even the gross physical. From the highest it comes to the lowest. When it enters from the highest plane, it goes first to the spirit’s arena, then to the psychic plane, the mental plane, the vital plane, and then finally to the physical plane. Delight has tremendous power, but it descends very slowly, very cautiously, steadily and unerringly.

Given the many conflicts around the world, from Russia–Ukraine, Hamas–Israel, Israel–Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar, African Francophone countries, and the tension between China and Taiwan (as well the state of the UK socially, financially and politically), many folk I have come across have lost hope. They are depressed. Some despair. Thus, in May 2024,

while, thanks to my beloved friends Brian and Toni Bentley, I was being driven from Banff back to their home in Saskatoon, Canada as part of the celebration of my 85th birthday, I felt urged to focus my attention on the virtue of hope, without which life is, indeed, grim.

Biblical characters like Abraham and Moses, people like St Paul and St Francis Xavier raced through my mind. Though the times they lived in were not easy, their lives were inspired by hope.

St Francis Xavier (1506–52) was a Basque Spaniard who co-founded the Society of Jesus. Influential in evangelization work, he led an extensive mission into Asia, mainly the Portuguese Empire in the East and, most notably, was also in early modern India. As representative of the king of Portugal, he was also the first major Christian missionary to venture into Borneo, the Maluku Islands, Japan, and other areas. In those areas, struggling to learn the local languages and in the face of opposition, he had less success than he had enjoyed in India. Xavier was about to extend his mission to Ming China when he died on Shang Chuan Island. What a man of hope! For my confirmation name I chose Francis Xavier.

I hope to please God – and I hope with impunity. Whatever the outcome, the journey has been inspiring, entertaining and has made a difference in bringing to fruition the Kingdom of God locally.

Thanks to the existence of time, we can hope and fear. Time enables movement and change, for the better and, of course, for the worse.

Delight entered my life when, aged 15, I climbed the little hill on the island of Eriskay. That delight is still there, within the memory in my heart, underpinning my identity and hopes.

My Eriskay experience

At St Peter's School in Mellow, I became friends with John Bowie, an orphan looked after by two maiden 'aunts', both doctors who happened to own a cottage on Eriskay, Outer Hebrides. As John lived in Dulwich Village, we had kept in touch. In the summer of 1954, we spent a couple of weeks on the island – on our own, travelling by coach to Glasgow, train to Oban, ship to Loch Boisdale on South Uist, and a rickety coach (which some people paid for with vegetables and eggs which the driver stored under his seat) to the south of the island, then a small motor boat to Eriskay, and finally, on foot to the cottage.

In those days there was no running water, no electricity, but, on the first night, vast silent swathes of bed bugs. Top priority next morning was to get rid of these with powder we obtained from our nearest neighbours, who were friends of John's aunts and owned a number of Scottish long-haired cows.

Watching these being milked taught me the trick. Allowed to milk them every day (obviously, there was no fridge) brought back memories of the fresh, untreated milk we used to drink at Nebřenice, in what is now The Czech Republic, or Czechia.

Lighting was provided by Tilley lamps. The toilet was a bucket with a seat on top, emptied almost every day into a newly dug hole out in the turf behind the cottage. Not all the flour we managed to get was self-raising; cooking scones was not always a success.

One day, when John was playing with his friends, I decided to climb the hill, the highest point on Eriskay, passing on my way the skull and horns of a deceased sheep. At the top, I sat down, looked west across the Atlantic Ocean when suddenly something utterly unexpected happened. The only way I can put it is 'I fell in love with infinity. It was my Pentecostal experience. I experienced God's presence throughout my body.

I never asked for it, I never expected it. However, that moment – I've no idea how long it was before I climbed down that Benin Scathing peak of 185m – has stayed undiminished and fresh, glowing, solid still within my heart. Gradually, as the years went by, I realised that that 'infinity' was, and is, the One we tend to call 'God'.

My Eriskay experience altered my life 180 degrees. Instead of trying to be naughty so as to be accepted as 'part of the gang', I started to study hard, to strive to be good, going to Mass every day before school. Ever since Eriskay, I have been blessed with living in hope.

Creation – space-time – is not static. It is constantly on the move, evolving. It lives in – and exists in – hope. Every part has its own speed of evolution. The human body, from its conception, is born and breathes after some nine months. The Alps, thanks to the movement of African and Eurasian tectonic plates, have taken tens of millions of years to get to their present state and structure.

My body, rather than being, is constantly becoming, as I breathe and my blood circulates, and my brain thinks. Every part of me is moving – living in time. I am a magnificently complex product of interactive events.

As soon as something scares you and you experience fear, **your amygdala (a small organ in the middle of your brain) goes to work, alerting your nervous system, which sets your body's fear response into motion.** Stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline are released.

In the sports landscape, courage – hope – perseveres through adversity. It is facing fear, staring down the potential for failure. It is refusing to be thwarted by pain, doubt or opposition.

When couples marry, most hope they will stay together for life, although the latest data we have shows that 42% of marriages end in divorce. In 2022 – the latest data I could find – the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce (the midpoint of all durations) was 12.9 years for opposite-sex couples and 7.5 and 6.3 years for male and female same-sex couples, respectively.

In sport, the hopes of all but the winner will end up being thwarted. So, if you are a competitor, why not minimise the pain you suffer by learning these five steps to dealing with disappointment.

Step 1: Accept what has happened

Be upset in the moment and fully experience the emotions you're feeling. Don't ignore or downplay this, as it is very important to deal with what you are feeling.

Step 2: Don't dwell on the past

Once you've dealt with the emotion and let it out, try to move on as soon as possible. Don't dwell on things in the past for too long. Remember, you can't change the past.

Step 3: Use setbacks as opportunities

Setbacks and disappointment are inevitable in anything that is worthwhile achieving, so expect them. We can use them as ways to learn, improve and, as a result, better ourselves. Often setbacks can give us extra motivation and drive to work harder and come back even stronger.

Step 4: Change your perspective

There are always at least two ways to view things, so try to take the positive out of every situation, no matter how bad it is. There is always a positive perspective in everything; sometimes you just have to look for it. For example, the closure of ASPC (and thus SPEC and LOFT) enabled me to ask Cardinal Vincent to appoint me Sports Chaplain for the 2012 London Games – and to stay in that role after the Games had ended

Step 5: Set future objectives

Remember that just because you've experienced a setback now, it doesn't mean you won't be successful in future, so don't ever give up at the first hurdle.

Those who keep getting up over and over again are the ones who succeed. To make this easier, you can set yourself new objectives and things to work towards that can drive you forward.

One of my motivational mantras is: 'If the door is slammed shut, knock a hole in the wall and build a new one.' (This is what I did when Cardinal Cormac removed me from working with young people and I set up John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport).

Hope transcends time. Like time, hope does not have a vector, a single trajectory. It lives in the past – 'I hope my exam answers yesterday were correct'; in the present – 'I hope I am at the right bus stop'; and in the Future – 'I hope tomorrow will be full of sunshine.'

Hope is a feeling that comes from a belief that all things will be okay, no matter what. If you believe in your heart that things will be okay, even if you can't see the outcome, that is hope. This feeling of being okay will be followed by the emotions of contentment, an expression of joy.

Research indicates that the pro-typical, high-hope person appears to exhibit optimism, perceptions of control over their life, perceived problem-solving ability, a preference for competition (but not winning itself), high self-esteem, and positive affectivity.

"Courage is one step ahead of fear," said US politician Coleman Young (1918–97), the first African-American mayor of Detroit, Michigan (1974–93). Imagining victory helps courage live on. To make this happen, I soon learned that in order to hope I would succeed in my endeavours, I had to be realistic. Rather than use a creative blunderbuss, I chose to select, focus, commit, work, endure and learn, and perhaps to alter my selection as time went by.

Hope has two children: anger and courage. Anger at the way things are. Courage to make them better.

1.2 What is hope. What it is not

In the textbooks, hope is ‘the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in his faithfulness’, or ‘a confident expectation and desire for future good, based on faith; a gift from God; looks to and waits for the future’. The word hope (*yachal*) appears 48 times in the Original Testament, and in the whole Bible, some 130 times (e.g. Isaiah 40, 31; Jeremiah 29, 11).

Faith, charity and hope are gifts, as are my brain, body, and place where I live.

For me, the theological virtues, in the order of causality, are faith, love and hope. Because I have been given the gift of faith, I know God loves me, and thus I live in – and with – hope.

The theological virtue of hope is the power by which we desire the Kingdom of Heaven as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises, and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will give us the graces we need for the journey to Heaven.

For me, in my heart, hope is like the drumbeat in Ravel’s *Bolero*. Constantly there. Thanks to God’s generosity, I am alive with resilient hope.

Hope is not identical to optimism. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, hope is: “something good that you want to happen in the future, or a confident feeling about what will happen in the future,” and optimism is “the quality of being full of hope and emphasizing the good parts of a situation, or a belief that something good will happen.”

In ‘*Distinguishing Hope from Optimism and Related Affective States*’,¹ Bruininks and Malle (2005) asked the study participants to define hope, optimism, and other related concepts, such as wanting, desire, wishing, and joy, and to write about a time when they’d experienced each of these states. Overall, the authors found that “hope is most closely related to wishing but distinct from it. Most important, hope is distinct from optimism by being an emotion, representing more important but less likely outcomes, and by affording less personal control.”

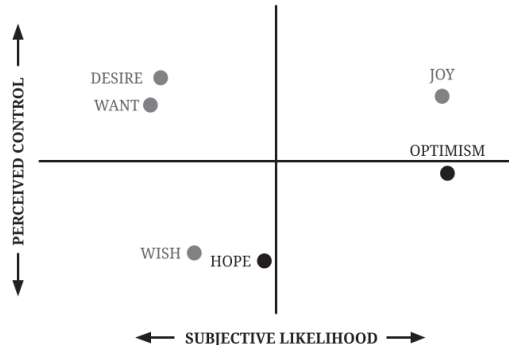
As I write, the Labour Party has just won the General Election (in July 2024) in the UK. Many – all those who voted for them – hope this will auger well for the future. Only time will tell if their hopes will be fulfilled.

By the time the Gospels were written, through His resurrection, Jesus had demonstrated his divinity, and thus, that he is alive in eternity at the centre of the theocentric wheel (see Appendix A). When he is reported to have said “on the third day I will rise again,” it was not a hope, but a fact as yet not experienced in the then current space-time.

Hope – a spiritual/psychological virtue – does not fade in the face of adversity; in fact, hope often endures despite poverty, war and famine. While no one is exempt from experiencing challenging life events, hope fosters an orientation to life that allows a grounded and optimistic outlook, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

¹ Bruininks, P. and Malle, B.F. (2005), “Distinguishing Hope from Optimism and Related Affective States” *Motivation and Emotion*, 29, 324–352.

As you can see from the graph (reproduced from Bruininks and Malle, 2005), hope and optimism are not that similar to each other. They are on a spectrum and vary greatly in terms of subjective *likelihood* (how certain we are that the event will happen), and perceived *control* (how much we think we can influence the outcome).



Source: Bruininks and Malle (2005).

Another study looked at football fans.² Bury et al. (2015) found that fans of poorly performing football teams were pessimistic, yet hopeful; whereas the fans of top-tier teams that kept on winning were more optimistic:

“Hope may be what individuals turn to when the prospect of obtaining their personally significant desire is unclear. As the invested participants became more confident of success, their hope scores aligned more with likelihood and followed a similar trajectory to that of optimism. It is at these high levels of likelihood that the more assured top-tier football team supported showed optimism to be indistinct from hope. This suggests that hope’s true and unique nature is in the realm of possibility, when individuals are dealing with greater uncertainty.”

Hope is not based on facts or reality – indeed, the only thing it is based on is a sense of optimism, but one that isn’t backed up by evidence. People also resort to hope when there is nothing to sustain them otherwise.

Expectation is based on facts and reality and is formed from knowing an initial set of conditions. It has nothing to do with optimism.

For example:

- regarding the future, if I’m writing on a Tuesday, I know tomorrow will be Wednesday. I expect to be alive and hope I will still be healthy;
- given the weather forecast, I expect it will indeed rain, though I hope it won’t.

Expectations can be harmful if they generate *entitlement*; for example: ‘I expect to be given a job’, rather than ‘given my qualifications and attitude, I hope to find a job.’

“England expects that every man will do his duty”, so said Horatio Nelson, Vice-Admiral of the Royal Navy, from his flagship HMS Victory, at the start of the Battle of Trafalgar on October 21st 1805. Did he mean/imply ‘demands’?

² Bury, S.M., Wenzel, M. and Woodyatt, L. (2016), “Giving hope a sporting chance: Hope as distinct from optimism when events are possible but not probable”, *Motivation and Emotion*, **40**, 588–601, available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11031-016-9560-z>.

Predicting, anticipating, foreseeing and forecasting are the products of intellectual activity. Awaiting is a decision to let time pass by.

In 1943, US planners were predicting that 13% of US troops on D-Day would die, 25% would become casualties in the initial fighting on the beaches and, thereafter, while 3% of US troops per week would become casualties in Normandy. The British 12th Army Group predicted 9,250 casualties among the 70,000 British and Canadian troops who landed on the Sword, Juno and Gold beaches – about 13% casualties. The first waves of casualties on Utah, Sword, Gold and Juno beaches were far lower than expected. Omaha Beach was different; about one-third of the first-wave assault troops became casualties.

In other words, hope is alive when you're uncertain what will happen, feel like you have little control, but still wish for a positive outcome. In the case of optimism, you have more perceived control, and believe more in a positive outcome.

I happily identify with sacred scripture's take on hope.

Though the Gospels state that Jesus hoped to rise to life after his death on the cross, with its excruciating pain, this conviction seems to have evaporated when he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me!" (Matthew 16, 46; Mark 15, 34)

Annas and Caiaphas hoped they'd got rid of the troublemaker Jesus of Nazareth. Big mistake.

Hope in the Original Testament

- "As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more." (Psalms 71, 14)
- "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me." (Micah 7, 7)
- "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40, 8)
- "Those who hope in The Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40, 31)

Hope in the New Testament

- "In his name the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12, 21). Jesus is quoting Isaiah 41,4.
- "You are Peter and, on this rock, I will build my church. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it." (Matthew 16, 18)
- "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28, 20).
- The Prodigal Son parable (Luke 15, 11–32) declares the beauty of repentance hope. Falling down is not as important as getting up. As Peter discovered by the Sea of Galilee, though he had betrayed Jesus (and now professed his love), he was still in command to look after the Church, the lambs and sheep of Jesus Christ. (John 21, 15–17)

- “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5, 2)
- “Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (Romans 5, 5)
- “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12, 12).

Then there are the following: "Jesus Christ our hope" (1 Timothy 1, 1); "that blessed hope." (Titus 2, 13); "I put all my hope in The Lord" (Psalms 40, 1). "God [...]has caused us to be born again to a living hope" (1 Peter 1,3); "whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14, 8)

Every prayer of petition, every bidding prayer at mass, whether directly to God, aimed at a saint, or addressed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an expression of hope. Anyone who has a need or a dream hopes that their prayer will enable them to achieve their target. After all, Jesus said “ask and you shall receive.” (Matthew 7, 7)

As I remind the congregation at the start of every mass I celebrate, I offer the mass for the TAPS: to Thank, Ask, Praise and Say sorry, to apologise to God. I thank God for what I have received to enable me to achieve my hopes. And I ask for what I, and those I love, need.

Unlike worldly hope, biblical (theological) hope is not based on your effort or desires; it is something received. The God of hope pours hope into you through the Holy Spirit: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15, 13) “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13, 13) “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10, 23).“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11, 1).

The virtue of faith enables us to believe in God and what the Church teaches us; the virtue of charity (love) enables us to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves; the virtue of hope enables us to **trust in God’s promise to share his life with us forever**. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1, 3).

Jesus predicted that his words would endure, that he would be betrayed; that Peter would deny him three times; that his disciples would desert him; that he would die; that He would rise; and that the Holy Spirit would come. However, I wonder what Jesus hoped to achieve? He preached, and yearned for the Kingdom of God to become a reality on earth. As I see it, given that a kingdom is a state and God is love, he wanted the world to live in and relate in love, and thus shalom, a holistic peace. John 10,10 sums it up; it will be “life to the full”.

Did he hope his followers would form a ‘Church’? Thanks to St Paul, they eventually did.

Jesus lived a humble lifestyle, living for others.

Could he, in his humanity, have imagined the Edict of Milan which, in 313ce, established religious tolerance for His followers, and then, in 380, could he have imagined that Emperor Theodosius would convert Christianity into the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Atheists hope there is no divine being – another big mistake, as they will find out at their birth into divine eternity, when they die.

I hope to be born into divine eternity – life with God – as soon as I die.

To make that possible, to pass through that narrow gate (Matthew 7, 13), I strive to live the Ten Commandments and the Eight Beatitudes, while making the world a better place now by celebrating the sacraments, writing, advising people, and currently caring for a 91-year old dementia patient.

I look forward to meeting *Yesh* face to face after my birth into divine eternity, and discovering His real answers to these questions.

Hope in Vatican 2 Council (1962–65)

Saint John XXIII, while launching Vatican 2, stated – he hoped – that there would be a “modernization of the Church after 20 centuries of life” by the Council. This freshening of the Church’s traditions is commonly referred to as in Italian *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date).

In December 1965, the Council concluded with the publishing of ‘*Gaudium et Spes*’ (G&S) (Joys and Hopes), the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world. The central theme of the document is the establishment of social conditions that can help safeguard three related values: (1) the dignity of the human person, (2) the common good, and (3) the unity of mankind.

The hopes for a more humane world expressed in the document cannot be fulfilled without Christ, without welcoming His grace, which works invisibly in the hearts of everyone of good will. (G&S, 22). This conviction guides and upholds the Church’s trajectory, particularly in 2024, marked as it is by shadows and uncertainties in The Holy Land, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, and all too many Francophone African countries.

G&S focuses on the role of the Church and its members in the world in areas from politics and peace, to the challenges of contemporary atheism and morality and service to the community. The document ultimately points to an authentic meaning of life that can be found only in Christ. While critiquing the major technological and social changes of the 20th century, G&S calls all people to a greater sense of authentic humanism; that is, to a sense of a role in the world based on a Christian humanism that preaches self-giving rather than self-promotion and which is firmly rooted in the Gospels.

G&S states clearly that one cannot hope to live up to or develop their potential except by relating to others. (G&S, 12) As the document itself notes: “The best way to fulfil one’s obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one’s means and the needs of others, even to the point of fostering and helping public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life.” (G&S, 30)

Waiting at airports – and more recently in the St Pancras Eurostar lounge – enables me to see, close up, the glorious variety of God’s human creatures. Their shapes, sizes, colours, jewellery, tattoos, clothing, hairstyles and facial expressions are mesmerising.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) on hope

“The miserable have no other medicine but only hope.” *Measure for Measure*

“Oft expectation fails, and most oft there where most it promises; and oft it hits where hope is coldest, and despair most fits. True hope is swift, and flies with swallow’s wings.”
Richard III

“God shall be my hope, my stay, my guide and lantern to my feet”
Henry VI Part Two

“Hope is a lover’s staff; walk hence with that and manage it against despairing thoughts.” *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) on Hope

“I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith, but the faith and the love are all in the waiting. Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: So, the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.”

“The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man.”

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” (Eliot encourages us to challenge ourselves beyond our perceived capabilities.)

Others on hope

After the chart success in 1963 by Gerry and the Pacemakers of a show tune from the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*, ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ gained popularity among Liverpool FC fans, and quickly became the football anthem of the club, which adopted ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ as its official motto on its coat of arms.

You’ll Never Walk Alone

When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don’t be afraid of the dark

At the end of a storm
There’s a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark

Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
For your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you’ll never walk alone

You’ll never walk alone

Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you’ll never walk alone

You’ll never walk alone.

I will end this section with words from Nelson Mandela (1918–2013): “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” His own life certainly did.

And with a poem.

The Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

R. S. Thomas (1913–2000)

1.3 Types of hope

As I see it, there are seven types of hope: i) the active, ii) the passive/patient and iii) the mixed active/passive, iv) the past, v) the present, vi) the future, and vii) the disappointed.

The proactive works with determination to achieve its aim. These hopes are included in ‘investment – or funded hopes’.

Just think how much money (and time and energy) people invest in researching cancer, Alzheimer’s, cardiovascular diseases, as well as dental and gastrointestinal diseases, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, as well as supporting the RSPCA, Sightsavers, and Brooke (formerly known as the Brooke Hospital for Animals). And the millions that people plough into US presidential candidate elections.

In WW2 the Japanese hoped their Kamikaze attacks would prevent the USA moving on to invade Japan. From October 1944 until the end of the war, 2,550 Kamikaze missions were flown, with (thank God) only 475 (or 18.6%) achieving a hit or a damaging near-miss. Warships of all types were damaged, including 12 aircraft carriers, 15 battleships, and 16 light and escort carriers. However, the Japanese hopes of victory ended in defeat.

I have learned that the passive has to be patient as, for example, having made the telephone call, it waits patiently, no use getting upset, for a night nurse to turn up and clear the blocked catheter of the 91-year old I am looking after.

The ‘mixed one’ (active/passive) hopes to be rescued and keeps sending up flares to attract attention to its plight. A hitchhiker hopefully keeps their thumb up in the air (or used to, when I hitchhiked some 65 years ago). Once inside the car, my passive hope hoped our conversation would be interesting.

Passive hope can be frustrating – and painful. In 2010 the waiting list for hospital treatment in England was 2.6 million. In 2024 it is now 7.6 million.

Passive/patient hope is not enough.

We can hope to have enough solar energy in the future if we build more solar panels now.

Countries with thin water supplies can hope to have enough water if they invest in technology, such as Hydrasyst filters, and thus can reuse, time and again, the water they have.

NATO countries can hope to avoid war with Russia by investing at least 2.5% of their national budget in defence.

- I can hope to stay fit by keeping up my exercises and not increasing my calorie intake.
- I can hope to stay hopeful by maintaining my prayer life.
- I can hope to keep my friends by acting as a friend to all of them.
- I can hope to avoid dementia by keeping up my intellectual endeavours, drinking lots of coffee, having a bit of olive oil every day, and making sure my diet includes enough vitamin D.
- Past: ‘I hope I passed the exam.’ ‘I had hoped you would come.’
- Present: ‘I hope – I like to think, to imagine – you are feeling better.’
- Future: ‘I wish, I hope you will forgive me.’ Or dream: ‘I hope to explore the countryside during my vacation’, or an expectation: ‘I hope to live to a healthy and sane – old age.’

As we get older, we accumulate disappointed hopes. Here’s just a couple of mine. Having experienced Cardinal Basil Hume close up, I had hoped his successors would perform like him. Currently supporting a Paraguayan political prisoner held without trial by the HM Prison Service for nine years (thus far), I had hoped British justice was fair.

How many football fans have to be disappointed every time a match is won by the opposition and lost by their own team? In those days when England still had factories, their disappointed hope was statistically palpable in the form of lower productivity the following week.

Hope straddles time:

- ‘I hope to see you tomorrow’
- ‘I hope I now have the correct address.’
- ‘I hope yesterday’s exam went well.’

Hope across the PIES dimensions of human life

The Physical

People who work to ameliorate the medical, nutritional and economic condition of humanity work with hope: determined to keep on making progress.

The Intellectual

Literacy and educational endeavours – apart for women in places like Afghanistan – hope to improve the lives of all, especially those currently marginalised.

The Emotional

Parents hope to teach their children how to live lovingly with their family and neighbours. Psychologists and psychiatrists hope to enable the damaged to develop and enhance their abilities to relate.

The Spiritual

The leaders and practitioners of every faith hope to improve the spiritual life – the relationship with the divine – of all within their reach.

With the PIES developed to their maximum, folk can delight in “life to the full.” (John 10, 10)

Hope can develop from a dream – Churchill’s uncertain hope to beat Hitler prior to the attack in 1941 of Pearl Harbor – to a conviction. He knew, he just had to wait, to be patient. It was bound to happen. Initially, he hoped – he dreamed and did his best to make it happen – that the USA would come to his help to vanquish Hitler and the Nazis. Then came Pearl Harbor, the pivotal event that changed everything. With the USA’s vastly superior manufacturing ability, it was clear that the Allies would win. Churchill’s hope turned to conviction that victory would arrive, sooner or later. His hope became adamant. He knew factories win wars.

After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese hoped they would **destroy the US carrier fleet in a victory so decisive that the US would negotiate for peace**. Their hopes were dashed, first at the Battle of Midway (1942) and then, utterly destroyed, at the Battle of the Philippine Sea (1944).

In my life something similar has happened – many times. Here’s just two examples. The first was in Rome, 1969. Having compiled my doctoral thesis: ‘The relationship between creation and redemption in Vatican Two’, I hoped to obtain my doctorate. After the moderator, Msgr Vladimir Boublik, suggested I alter its structure, which, initially reluctantly, I did. My hope grew in its certainty. Then, during the viva voce interview, once I made the examiners laugh, my hope turned to conviction-hope. I had been asked what the term. ‘Creation’ meant and, having said it meant production from nothing – and that is why cardinals are created rather than appointed, I knew I was there, *summa cum laude*.

The second was when ‘Uncle George’ (Cardinal Basil Hume) asked me to help young people find God in their lives, I hoped I could do that. Once SPEC was up and running, I knew I would. I was convinced I would.³

The tennis player Arthur Ashe (1943–93) stated his philosophy on hope in three very short sentences: “Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” It served him rather well. He won three Grand Slam titles in singles and two in doubles. Ashe was the first black player selected to the US Davis Cup team, and the only black man ever to win the singles titles at Wimbledon, the US Open, and the Australian Open.

³ See Volume 3 of *A Journey to Eternity*.

Explorers who travelled in hope

There are many, but some of the more well-known ones include the following.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), who hoped to discover a Western seaway to India, set out on his hope-fuelled transatlantic journey, to end up discovering just the West Indies. In 1493, he wrote a letter that would change the landscape of the modern world: “I sailed to the Indies with the fleet that the illustrious King and Queen, our sovereigns, gave me, where I discovered a great many islands, inhabited by numberless people.”

Vasco da Gama (1469–1524), a Portuguese explorer and the first European to reach India by sea. De Gama made a direct voyage to India, travelling around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, arriving in Calicut in 1498.

Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (1872–1928) was a key figure in the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. His Antarctic expedition of 1910–12 discovered the South Pole. In 1926, he led the first successful expedition to reach the North Pole. He also made the first voyage through the Northwest Passage.

Marco Polo (1254–1324), a Venetian traveller and explorer who made ground-breaking journeys to Asia and China. His journeys and writings helped to open up the Far East to Europe, inspiring Christopher Columbus and many other explorers.

John Cabot (1450–99), an Italian navigator and explorer. In 1497, he discovered parts of North America (later named Newfoundland) This is widely considered to be the first European discovery of North America since the Viking journeys of the 11th century.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618), an English explorer who made several journeys to the Americas and led expeditions in search of the legendary ‘El Dorado’. Raleigh was also granted a royal patent to explore Virginia in America.

James Cook (1728–79), a British explorer who made ground-breaking voyages to the Pacific Ocean. He made the first European contact with the Eastern coast of Australia and chartered the islands of the Pacific from New Zealand to Hawaii.

David Livingstone (1813–72), a popular Victorian missionary who explored the continent of Africa. He sought to find the source of the River Nile and spent years travelling through the inner heart of Africa. He was opposed to slavery and supported commercial trade with Africa.

Leif Eriksson (970–1020), a Norse explorer who made the first European journey to North America – 500 years before the more celebrated Christopher Columbus. It is believed he was born in Iceland.

Sir Francis Drake (1540–97), an English explorer who made the second successful circumnavigation of the world, in 1577–80. He also fought the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Hope in song

The British National Anthem is a hymn of hope. In its present form, it dates back to the 18th century. The words and tune are anonymous, and may date back to the 17th century.

‘God Save The King’ was a patriotic song first publicly performed in London in 1745, which came to be known as the National Anthem at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In September 1745 the ‘Young Pretender’ to the British Throne, Prince Charles

Edward Stuart, defeated the army of King George II at Prestonpans, near Edinburgh. In a fit of patriotic fervour after news of Prestonpans had reached London, the leader of the band at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, arranged 'God Save The King' for performance after a play. It was a tremendous success and was repeated nightly. This practice soon spread to other theatres, and the custom of greeting monarchs with the song as he or she entered a place of public entertainment was thus established.

There is no authorised version of the National Anthem as the words are a matter of tradition. Additional verses have been added down the years, but these are rarely used. The words used today are those sung in 1745, with 'Queen' swapped 'King' where appropriate over the years. On official occasions, only the first verse is usually sung.

The words of the National Anthem are as follows:

God save our gracious King!
Long live our noble King!
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us:
God save the King!

Thy choicest gifts in store,
On him be pleased to pour;
Long may he reign:
May he defend our laws,
And ever give us cause,
To sing with heart and voice,
God save the King!

A few historical characters moved by hope

Moses, who was born in Goshen, Lower Egypt and died at Mount Nebo, Moab. Most of what is known about Moses from the Bible comes from the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The majority of scholars consider the compilation of these books to go back to the Persian period, 538–332bce, but based on earlier written and oral traditions.

Moses had hope and unfailing confidence in God's promises, although he was just an ordinary man with an unusual start in life. While he made big mistakes due to his human weaknesses and emotions, he grew into his God-given calling to lead the Israelite people with courage and humility. His hopes were raised when the Jewish elders believed that God had sent him, just as God had promised. But his hopes were then dashed when Pharaoh rejected his requests and retaliated against the Jews, even though God had warned him that this would happen.

Moses led the Jews out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Holy Land that God had promised them.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) hoped to reform the Church; instead, he destroyed its unity.

Michelangelo's hope drove him to paint – and keep on painting – the Sistine Chapel. Commissioned by Pope Julius II in 1508, Michelangelo worked for four years from 1508 to 1512 to complete his masterpiece.

The first person to apply for a patent on a telescope was Hans Lippershey, a lens maker in the Netherlands, in 1608. After learning of the new device, the great Italian scientist Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), hoping to discover the facts about the visible universe, designed and built his own.

Marie Curie (1867–1934) who carried out pioneering research on radioactivity and discovered polonium and radium, all the while damaging her own health in her hope to push the boundaries of science to improve humanity's health.

Hope in civil engineering projects

Just two examples here: the vast transcontinental railroads in USA and in Canada.

Built between 1863 and 1869, America's first transcontinental railroad (known originally as the 'Pacific Railroad' and later as the 'Overland Route') was a 1,911-mile (3,075 km) continuous railroad line that connected the existing Eastern US rail network at Council Bluffs, Iowa with the Pacific coast at the Oakland Long Wharf on San Francisco Bay.

The rail line was built by three private companies over public lands provided by extensive US land grants. Building was financed by both state and US government subsidy bonds, as well as by company-issued mortgage bonds. The Western Pacific Railroad Company built 132 miles of track from the road's Western terminus at Alameda/Oakland to Sacramento, California. The Central Pacific Railroad Company of California (CPRR) constructed 690 miles east from Sacramento to Promontory Summit, Utah Territory. The Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) built 1,085 miles (1,746 km) from the road's Eastern terminus at the Missouri River settlements of Council Bluffs and Omaha, Nebraska, Westward to Promontory Summit.

The railroad opened for through-traffic between Sacramento and Omaha on May 10th 1869, when CPRR President, Leland Stanford, ceremonially tapped the gold 'Last Spike' (later often referred to as the 'Golden Spike') with a silver hammer at Promontory Summit. In the following six months, the last leg from Sacramento to San Francisco Bay was completed. The resulting coast-to-coast railroad connection revolutionised the settlement and economy of the American West. It brought the Western states and territories into alignment with the Northern Union states and made transporting passengers and goods coast-to-coast considerably quicker, safer and less expensive.

While Chinese workers dominated the railroad workforce in the West, most Eastern and Southern railroad companies relied on Black Americans to do the back-breaking construction work.

With the addition of British Columbia, Canada extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. To maintain that vast area and ensure its independence from the US, a railway to the West coast was needed. The railway was first built between Eastern Canada and British Columbia between 1881 and 1885 (connecting with the Ottawa Valley and Georgian Bay

area lines that had been built earlier), fulfilling a commitment extended to British Columbia when it entered Confederation in 1871; the CPR was Canada's first transcontinental railway

Hope in space

President J. F. Kennedy hoped to put humanity on the moon. The US space programme went full throttle in 1961 when Kennedy challenged the nation to claim a leadership role in space and land a man on the Moon before the end of the decade. On May 25th 1961, he stood before a joint session of Congress to deliver a special message on "urgent national needs". He asked for an additional \$7–\$9 billion over the next five years for the space programme, proclaiming: "this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out." And eventually, on July 20th 1969 – before the end of the decade – Apollo 11 landed on the moon.

Global hopes

In 2017, the UN was predicting that the world's population – about 8 billion today – would climb to 11.2 billion by 2100. It now predicts that the global population will peak at around 10.4 billion in 2080 and start declining thereafter. Some demographers project that this will happen decades earlier. This would be the first such decline in the global population since the Black Death in the Middle Ages.

There are those who hope this will happen – and not just that it will save the planet, but will also reduce the pressure on housing and increase job security. There are others who hope it will not occur. There are two main concerns: one is that people are having fewer children than they want (polls suggest that UK women on average want between two and three children); the second concern is the economic dimension. A shrinking population means that more jobs will go unfilled and economic dynamism will reduce. The most immediate fear is that welfare systems, which rely on people of working age to pay in and support the elderly, will be underfunded.

Today, the G7 richest economies have roughly three people of working age for everyone over 65; by 2050 they will have fewer than two. In South Korea, which has the world's lowest fertility rate (0.72), the national pension fund is expected to run out of cash by 2055.

1.4 The benefits of hope

Key virtues across the PIES are temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice.

Virtues vanquishing the seven capital sins are humility, generosity, chastity, peace, temperance, affectionate love, and diligence. We can hope to acquire and to live all these virtues, and thus successful lives.

If you were asked: 'Why aim to have hope?', remind your interlocutor that hope has three children: resilience, joy, and delight.

Resilience across the PIES. Falling down is not as important as getting up. Rather than dig in to sustain resilience, it is far better to hope to improve it – thanks to hope. I strive to emulate the resilience of my hero – and best friend – Jesus of Nazareth, *Yesh*.

Authentic hope is stronger than fear. Without hope, it is impossible to delight in life to the full. I am alive hopefully. Hope, I believe, is a powerful ingredient that keeps me looking younger than my physical age.

For many young people, a lack of hope stems from a sense of isolation, a sense that no one shares their values and that they are not cared for by others. Caring about people outside of one's own circle of friends and family presents a challenge in a world where such concern is not a common value. I remember a quote from a song that was a favourite of some of my student friends: 'Goodbye cruel world, I'm off to join the circus. I'm going to be a broken-hearted clown'.

Caring for youth and helping them develop the strength to face the challenges in their lives involves fostering hope and not promising the impossible. Optimism conveys the belief that things will turn out right. It is not the same as hope, which is an abiding, psychological, sociological, and political faith that our world can be better if only we do our best.

Hope promises nothing material but promotes dignity, self-respect, and a spirit of struggle.

Creating hope in oneself as a teacher and nourishing or rekindling it in one's students is the central issue that educators face these days.

George Eliot wrote in her novel, *Middlemarch*: "if youth is the season of hope, it is often so only in the sense that our elders are hopeful about us." This is a profound truth that caring adults must internalise and practice. We cannot teach hope unless we ourselves are hopeful, not merely in a general sense but in specific ways for individual children. Teaching hope involves focusing on strengths and cultivating a hopeful, learning community. One way to teach young people hope is to get them to realise (make real) their talents and strengths across their PIES.

Hope, and more specifically, particularised hope, has been shown to be an important part of the recovery process from illness; it has strong psychological benefits for patients, helping them to cope more effectively with their disease. For example, hope motivates people to pursue healthy behaviours for recovery, such as eating fruit and vegetables, quitting smoking, and engaging in regular physical activity. This not only helps to enhance people's recovery, but also helps prevent illness in the first place. Patients who maintain high levels of hope have an improved prognosis for life-threatening illness and an enhanced quality of life. Belief and expectation, key elements of hope, block pain in patients suffering from chronic illness by releasing endorphins and mimicking the effects of morphine.

Consequently, through this process, belief and expectation can set off a chain reaction in the body that can increase the likelihood that someone will recover from chronic illness. This chain reaction is especially evident in studies demonstrating the placebo effect, where hope is the only variable aiding these patients' recovery. Overall, studies have demonstrated that maintaining a sense of hope during a period of recovery from illness is beneficial. A sense of hopelessness during the recovery period has, in many instances, resulted in adverse health conditions for the patient (i.e. depression and anxiety following the recovery process).

Additionally, having a greater amount of hope before and during cognitive therapy has led, for example in war veterans, to fewer depression symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hope has also been found to be associated with more positive perceptions of subjective health. However, reviews of research literature have noted that the connections between hope and symptom severity in other mental health disorders are less clear, such as in cases of individuals with schizophrenia.

Hope is a powerful protector against chronic or life-threatening illnesses.

A person's hope (even when facing an illness that will likely end their life) can be helpful by releasing joy. It can be created and focused on achieving life goals, such as meeting grandchildren or attending a child's wedding. Hope can be an opportunity for us to process and go through events, that can be traumatic. When it becomes clear that I am soon to die, my hope of meeting *Yesh* just a bit sooner will, I hope, keep me cheerful and calm. Time will tell!

Many years ago, I was moved by the Christmas Carol:

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love

O morning stars together
Proclaim thy holy birth
And praises sing to God the King
And peace to men on earth

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

The words by Rector Phillips Brooks (1835–93) and music by church organist Lewis H. Redner (1831–1908) resonated with the dreams – the hopes – of stillness and peace in the aftermath of the American Civil War.

Thanks to Jesus's birth and life, and above all his resurrection, the fears evaporate and the hopes become adamant.

For Micah, an eighth-century prophet, you could say that hope was in short supply. The Neo-Assyrian army had conquered and deported most of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. It is thought that Micah himself had been an eyewitness to the destruction of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in 701bce, prompting him first to write oracles of doom. But after hearing God's judgment, above the deep and dreamless sleep, Micah also heard God's promise.

He wrote that out of the little town of Bethlehem, one of the smallest clans of Judah, a ruler whose origin was of old, would be born of a woman. The ruler would return the exiles and feed them on the strength of the Lord like a shepherd. Under the rule of the one of peace, they would dwell securely.

These hopes have not changed in almost three millennia. As it turned out, Micah was right about the fears and premature about the hopes of his time. Likewise, in the sixth century bce, exiles heard in Micah a word of hope spoken to them in Babylon – God's promise of a ruler hailing from the least of the clans of Judah. The exiles did return and were even permitted self-rule by the Persian Emperor Cyrus; but their hopes for one who would feed them in the strength of the Lord and secure their lives in peace were dashed by the corruption of their own politicians and priests. (Micah 5, 2)

However, some two thousand years ago, it was – according to Matthew and Luke – in Bethlehem that the source and summit of our hope appeared on earth. That hope I celebrate at every mass I take. Thank God.

My hope is rooted in my faith in God's love. All will, eventually, be well for me as, thanks to God's goodness and my efforts, I hope to end up in paradise.

To live in hope is to be in harmony with God's will for me.

I used to say, 'I'll see you.' Then 'I'll see you, DV.' Nowadays: 'it's in my diary.'

Much research within the sport psychology field shows how our minds can have a detrimental effect on our performance. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects – such as worry, pessimism and fear – positive psychology, such as hope and optimism, can have a positive impact on sporting performance. Those who are hopeful, rather than throwing in the towel, have the willpower and determination to overcome obstacles that may be blocking the pathway of their individual goal.

For a pessimist/cynic, hope is deemed negative. "Hope is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment", claimed Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), an atheist/nihilist who concluded that there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it. Penetrating the façades buttressing convictions, the nihilist 'discovers' that all values are baseless and that reason is impotent.

More uncertainty and less perceived control-hope sounds more akin to wishful thinking. Is it to say that hope is useless and harmful? While nihilists may agree, science shows that hope may indeed be helpful.

An interesting study looked at the impact of hope and optimism on social support.⁴ The research, conducted with about 100 people who had been injured in terrorist attacks and their spouses, found that the survivor's hope was negatively associated with the spouse's experience of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. But the spouse's optimism had a negative association with the survivor's trauma experiences. That is to say, the survivor's hope benefited their spouse, but the spouse's optimism benefited the survivor.

Why is that? "When spouses observe survivors as exhibiting hope, they may develop stronger faith in the ability of the survivors to deal with the consequences of the trauma, which in turn, may diminish their own symptoms. When survivors perceive their spouses as optimistic, the spouses may be conveying that things will eventually turn out well even if the current situation is extremely difficult." (Weinberg et al, 2016)

A hopeful survivor shows emotional strength despite the uncertainty and their lack of control over the situation, which is reassuring to the spouse. An optimistic spouse shows control and certainty in a better future, which is reassuring to the survivor. In contrast, a hopeful spouse would exhibit signs of uncertainty.

Hope is helpful in times of uncertainty. It is what can keep us going when we don't know what will happen and have little control over the outcome. But sometimes, hope can give us a false sense of reassurance and prevent us from taking matters into our own hands. When you feel hopeful – uncertain but hoping something good will happen – ask yourself: is there anything I could do to make that outcome more likely? Is there any way I can gain more control?

It's not always possible, and there are many matters where we are unfortunately powerless, just hoping for the best, but it is possible to convert your hope into optimism in some cases.

Thomas Aquinas defines hope as a "theological virtue by which man, relying on God's strength, seeks an arduous but possible good". In a fast-paced society aiming for immediate gratification, for all too many folk, appreciation of the arduous or difficult good has fallen by the wayside.

Hope prefers future greatness to immediate pleasure.

Hope is the belief that your future will be better than the present and that you have the ability to make it happen. It involves both optimism and a can-do attitude. According to the theory of positive psychologist, Charles Snyder, hopeful thinking is made up of three key elements:

goals – thinking in a goal-oriented way;

pathways – finding different ways to achieve your goals;

agency – believing you can instigate change.

Hope is our belief that we can change the future for the better, or reach a desired goal. It's what keeps us moving forward when the going gets tough, and it helps us to get back on the horse when we fall off.

⁴ Weinberg, M., Besser, A., Zeigler-Hill, V. and Neria, Y. (2016), "Bidirectional associations between hope, optimism and social support, and trauma-related symptoms among survivors of terrorism and their spouses", *Journal of Research in Personality*, 61, pp. 29–38.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), an American Reformed theologian, wrote the original version of the serenity prayer that reads: “O God and Heavenly Father, grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed, courage to change that which can be changed, and wisdom to know the one from the other through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” I would insert at the end of this: “so I can live in joyful hope and unrelenting drive, help God make this world a better place. Amen.”

“Once you choose hope, anything’s possible,” said Christopher Reeve, who starred in the film *Superman* and its three sequels. But in 1995 he fell from a horse at an equestrian competition, leaving him paralysed from the neck down. He was in a wheelchair and had to use a ventilator for the rest of his life. However, his hope enabled him to continue acting and directing, and he wrote two autobiographies. Nine years later, in 2004, following an infection, he died aged 52 after suffering a heart attack. For me, and many others, his life was a declaration of hope.

“Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us,” said Samuel Smiles (1812–1904), a British author and government reformer. Although he campaigned on a Chartist platform, he promoted the idea that more progress would come from new attitudes than from new laws. His primary work, *Self-Help* (1859), promoted thrift and claimed that poverty was caused largely by irresponsible habits, while also attacking materialism and laissez-faire government. It has been called ‘the bible of mid-Victorian liberalism’ and had lasting effects on British political thought.

“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage,” said **Laο Tzu** (c. 500bce), also known as Laozi or Lao-Tze, a Chinese philosopher credited with founding the philosophical system of Taoism.

Hope against Hope by Nadezhda Mandelstam is the most luminous account we have, or are likely to get, of the life of terror in the Soviet Union during the purges in the 1930s. An inspiring story that relates determination to keep both love and art alive in the most desperate circumstances.

Barack Obama’s 2006 book is called *The Audacity of Hope*. A fine title. After all, hope does give us the courage, not only to dream, but to commit ourselves to achieving that dream.

Our motivations are spread across a wide frontier, from ambition, curiosity – even vengeance and peace. The origin of the word ambition has given the concept negativity. It came into French and English in the late Middle Ages, from the Latin word *ambitio*, which came from *ambire*, a verb meaning ‘to go around’. Since this activity was caused by a desire for honour or power, the word eventually came to mean ‘the desire for honour or power’.

A person’s sense of ambition is likely to come from their natural personality traits, such as conscientiousness and extraversion, along with influences in their environment. Ambition can stem from individual goals, values, and aspirations – such as jealousy/envy (the desire for success fuelled by coveting others’ achievements); and emotional and intellectual needs) seeking accomplishment to satisfy emotional and intellectual desires).

If you’re feeling unmotivated, you can bolster your ambitious spirit by practising the seven characteristics found in highly ambitious people:

1. continuously planning and setting specific goals to promote focus;
2. staying motivated to achieve goals that help you self-actualise;
3. feeling satisfied only when you reach your ambitious goals;
4. competitively working alongside others, but for the sake of career growth and success;
5. willingly making changes in your life to better pursue your goals and purpose;
6. taking risks while maintaining critical thinking and emotional regulation;
7. remaining flexible and open-minded to strategically solve problems.

Ambition is a strong desire to do or achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work. Hope is a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen, typically something positive and doable. Hope underpins ambition and is its driving force, as in: 'My ambition is to win this tournament. I hope – I aim – I will.'

To achieve an ambition, you need to focus on your aims, where those aims are broad and general, while objectives are specific and focused. Aim is long-term and provides overall direction, while objectives are short-term and measurable. Aim focuses on the purpose and 'why' of a project, while objectives emphasise the actions and 'what' to accomplish.

Soon after my Eriskay experience, I started to think about what I would like to achieve with my life. Given that I was a BF (a bloody foreigner), I could not aim to do great things in politics or the army. So, I decided I would aim for sanctity, helping God make this world more like He would like it to be. Hence my application to Imperial College for a degree in Civil Engineering. My ambition was to live life to the full, thanks to working for God. Then Opus Dei entered my life and I was ordained into the priesthood in 1969. God brought into my life a new way of working for Him.

So far, now that I am aged 85, I can say the ambition is being fulfilled.

I never aimed to be enriched by so many friends. But they came into my life. They were not my ambition, but they came as a result of my aiming to help God. By them, my life has been enormously enriched. As Jesus said, "give and gifts will be yours". (Luke 6, 38)

My life has proved that helping God make this world more like He would like it to be has enriched me wonderfully.

Back in 1989, my aim – my ambition – was my hope: setting up SPEC . I hoped to have the means to attain my objectives, which included not just recruiting and training the team with its leadership, but bringing in the funds and equipment to enable it to fulfil its task: bringing young people closer to each other and to God, and developing their virtues to enable them to make a good fist of their lives. In *A Journey to Eternity*, volume 3, you can discover how my hopes were fulfilled.

Martin Luther King, Jr (born 1929), an American Christian minister, activist, and political philosopher, and one of the most prominent leaders in the civil rights movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968, reminded us that "we must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

"Hope is a waking dream," claimed Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322bce).

“Hope is a passion for the possible,” according to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), a Danish theologian, philosopher, poet, social critic, and religious author widely considered the first existentialist philosopher.

“Hope lives in those who believe in it.” “Stay hopeful; you never know what tomorrow will bring,” said Siddhartha Gautama, most commonly referred to as the Buddha, a wandering ascetic and religious teacher who lived in South Asia during the 6th or 5th century bce and founded Buddhism.

Despair is a light sleeper, easily awakened, and, as suicides show, can be lethal.

“Never give up. Have hope. Expect only the best from life and take action to get it,” encouraged Catherine Pulsifer (1946–2013), who was involved practically, reaching out to physically challenged kids in the USA, where she lived, to improve their lives.

The positive correlation between self-confidence and hope exists because self-confidence increases motivation levels and persistence. The better the evaluation that subjects make of themselves, the more they believe they can achieve the goals they desire.

Self-confidence does generate hope. When Frank Urban Zoeller Jnr (born 1951 and one of three golfers to have won the Masters Tournament in his first appearance in the event), facing an awesome chip from the rough onto the green, was warned there was a water obstacle ahead, he responded: “Only amateurs see the water.” And soon, onto the green, very close to the hole, his chip arrived safely.

Personally generated hope is more than wishful thinking; it’s a blend of positive thinking and willpower across our PIEs of life. It is rooted in our spiritual life, supported by our emotions and directed by our intellect. It has a goal and a journey. It can be positive, ‘heading for health’. And negative, ‘I hope the food I’m eating is not bad’.

Hope needs to be achievable rather than absurdly aspirational. Given my age and physique, it would be absurd for me to hope to win an Olympic medal.

Hope sees challenges, not difficulties and problems. It is a buffer against negative events or media expectations. Hope carries – it does not drag – its cross. “If you are going through hell, keep going,” said Churchill. Hoping you will eventually exit that hell.

Hope in my S, it heals me across my PIE.

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning,” taught Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the German-born theoretical physicist who is widely held to be one of the greatest and most influential scientists of all time.

“All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honour, duty, mercy, hope,” said Churchill.

Having set its goals, hope focuses on the present. It does not dwell on the past or worry about the future, but sets us free to do our best here and now.

Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes, both globally and personally. On the one hand, I hope there will be peace and no environmental cataclysm. My hope does not waste energy or time worrying about things over which I have no tangible influence. On the other hand, my personal hopes

have been commitments to achieving my goals. Personal, practical hope has three components: a goal, a pathway to that goal, and the energy (determination and willpower) to keep on keeping on until that goal is reached – hence my personal achievements of YAP, WDP, SPEC, my three-part biography and *Life Squared: a handbook for life in an accelerating world*,⁵ as well as my fortnightly pieces for *The Universe Catholic Weekly*. I hope these ongoing endeavours will minimise the risk of dementia as I age.

Hopeful people I have met, and there have been many, establish clear goals, imagine multiple workable pathways toward those goals, and persevere, even when obstacles get in their way.

Tactically, the opposite of hope is fear: ‘Given the traffic, I fear I will miss the train.’ Strategically, it’s despair: ‘I despair on how this government is tackling the immigration on small boats problem.’

Hope is a demanding virtue, not a sunny disposition. It accepts reality, acknowledges obstacles, and insists that “something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it and to work for it and to fight for it,” as Barack Obama put it in his 2008 Caucus Speech.

Hoping to lose weight is fine, but unless you reduce your calorie intake and/or increase your exercise, your hopes will be frustrated. To be great at your sport is admirable, but unless you put time and effort into training your hopes will not be fulfilled. As Arnold Palmer, one of the golf greats, responded (after a spectator exclaimed “You lucky bugger” when Palmer did a spectacular put): “the more I practise, the greater my luck.”

To hope is to see the bird in the egg, the butterfly in the caterpillar, and the saint within the sinner. Hope works to reveal to everyone the beauty within their hearts and to see their death as birth into divine eternity where they will meet the God, who on the cross, told the Repentant Thief: “today, you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23, 43)

Love hopes for the best for their beloved.

Hope is like the River Jordan, while it moves, it brings life; once it stops, as in the Dead Sea, it is inert, in which nothing survives. Hope does not just stand and stare; it helps anyone who trips up back onto their feet, and brushes them down.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

⁵ My book, which contains a full account of my philosophy and theology, can be purchased from my website: fathervlad.com.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr (1963)

Every morning when I wake,
Dear Lord, a little prayer I make,
O please do keep Thy lovely eye
On all poor creatures born to die
And every evening at sun-down
I ask a blessing on the town,
For whether we last the night or no
I'm sure is always touch-and-go.
We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
To see our best side, not our worst.

O let us see another day!
Bless us all this night, I pray,
And to the sun we all will bow
And say, good-bye – but just for now!

From Under Milk Wood, Dylan Thomas (1914–53)

1.5 Problems of hope

While insurance companies hope their predictions are accurate, as insurance company Lloyds found out in 1989–91, they can get these disastrously wrong. Huge asbestos and other pollution cranked up losses of over £8 billion for the insurance company. 100 syndicates were forced to close. Lloyds also hoped that the Titanic would sail safely for many years, but within 30 days of the ship's sinking in 1912 it paid out £1 million (some £148 million in today's currency).

Hope can be cruel. In autumn 1914, UK soldiers hoped they would be back home by Christmas.

Hitler and Goering, buoyed up by their Blitzkrieg successes as their tanks had swept through Holland, Belgium and France, hoped to crush the RAF and invade England. But in the UK (helped by 145 Poles, 88 Czechoslovaks, 29 Belgians, 13 Frenchmen and an Austrian pilot), the Battle of Britain turned out to be Hitler's first defeat in WW2.

Over-optimistic – unreasonable – hope can be dangerous, even lethal, as was proved by Adolf Hitler's hope to defeat Russia before winter set in. In June 1941, though warned about the impending Nazi invasion, Stalin hoped they were wrong and did not accept the information as true. After all, the German Army had not been obtaining fur coats and thus could not be attempting to invade the USSR with winter on its way.

Hope is typically considered a positive emotion, but new research provides evidence that it can have negative financial consequences. The findings, published in the *Journal of Behavioural Decision Making*, indicate that more hopeful individuals have a greater tendency to hold on to losing stocks.

Over my 54 years of priesthood, I have come across all too many people who spent too much of their income on lottery tickets – and other forms of gambling – in the hope of becoming seriously wealthy.

It is not easy to live with hope when you or your friends are diagnosed with Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's, cancer, or even an incurable stroke. The best one can do is to hope the problem will not be too painful, or last too long. Hoping for entry into heaven soon is not unethical.

Having hope isn't always easy. Today, we are bombarded with news and images of wars, violent crime, illness, natural disasters, and economic hardships. Some might say it is naive or impossible to find hope under these circumstances. Watching Wimbledon recently, I heard 'keeping hope alive' when, a couple of sets down, a player won two consecutive games; in the event, he lost, but kept fighting.

Hope does not mean everything is okay right now, but it makes things less difficult to face because, with hope, there is optimism and belief that things will be better.

One of the slogans underpinning my life's philosophy is: 'Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.' Murphy's law that 'anything that can go wrong will go wrong' is an oft-seen and well-known adage.

When I was a teacher, I encouraged pupils to revise the whole of the syllabus rather than hope that the questions will cover the fragment of the syllabus they revised.

Hope means taking an umbrella, which often seems to scare the rainclouds away. It means checking I have the keys I need when I go out. It means having the telephone number of the RAC when I am driving. It means looking at the sell-by date on potentially dangerous foods. A senior prelate, a friend of mine, ended up very sick in Lourdes after he'd cleared out his fridge the night before he left and eaten some rather aged mushrooms.

Jerusalem

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land.

William Blake (1757–1827)

1.6 Sustaining and developing hope

Living – being – in hope is fine, but it is more important to live – to act – in hope. I write this document hoping it will help a reader or three to live a more delightful life.

Courting couples hope their partner will say 'yes' when asked: 'Will you marry me?'

We cannot develop the virtue of hope merely by applying an abstract formula, listening to a lecture, or reading a book. We must learn, in part, through experience, by reflecting on times when hope empowered us to achieve a difficult good, or when presumption or despair prevented us from realising our goals.

Yonks ago, I read that, in order to increase your hope about the future, it is good to write down three positive things (no matter how small or great) that happened to you that day.

Self-confidence improves if you get enough sleep, watch your diet (cutting out recreational drugs and excessive alcohol), exercise, pray, meditate, and keep in close touch with positive-thinking friends and allies-in-life.

If you have lost a loved one, or your job, had a major illness or a financial crisis, your hope can be sapped. But your hope can grow if you take 90-second pauses, breathe mindfully, spend time in nature and with good friends, including God in prayer.

The Mass is the sublime expression of hope. It starts with: 'The Lord be with you'. And because He is, all will be well. You were sent to heal the contrite of heart. The broken-hearted will be saved. You came to call sinners, and thus we are invited to live with God.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us. With God on our side, we can – we should – live in hope. Christ, and The Lord have mercy.

In the Gloria, we say that Jesus Christ takes away the sins of the world. The Gospel – the good news – is our hope. The creed reminds us that Jesus came down on earth for our salvation, and, as long as we accept that initiative, we shall be saved and have eternal life once, at death, we are born into divine eternity. I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Our bread will become the bread of life, the wine our spiritual drink. Jesus Christ’s body and blood have been given up for us. By your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.

Seven times after the Lord’s Prayer, we are promised peace. Shalom, a peace containing joy and love. The Lamb of God takes away our sins and grants us that peace. I am not worthy, but my soul shall be healed. What uplifting hope! Alleluia! So, we can go in peace, glorifying the Lord with our lives.

If hope is like a cross-country all-weather vehicle, its drive comes from the rechargeable battery called determination. This can be, and needs to be, recharged regularly with prayer, sacraments, spiritual reading, and community support. Pride and a desire to leave a mark in space-time before my birth into divine eternity at death also helps us to keep on keeping on.

To entertain you, dear reader, I have replicated below a piece I wrote on determination:

Hilary Hinton ‘Zig’ Ziglar (1926–2012), an American author, salesman, and motivational speaker, made it clear that he | “believe[d] success is achieved by ordinary people with extraordinary determination and that you were born to win, but to be a winner you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.”

Determination calls for motivation, the drive behind the effort and accomplishments across those PIES (the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual dimensions of our life). Without the determination to improve, all the other mental factors (confidence, intensity, focus, and emotions) are meaningless. I don’t know about you, dear reader, but consciously I work on developing my virtues because I know that unconsciously they shape my life.

Douglas “Doug” Clayton Durdle, an English retired professional wrestler, said: “Never give up, never give in, and when the upper hand is ours, may we have the ability to handle the win with the dignity that we absorbed the loss.”

“Persistence can change failure into extraordinary achievement,” stated Matt Biondi (born 1965), an American swimmer and former world record holder in five events, who competed in the Summer Olympic Games in 1984, 1988 and 1992, winning a total of 11 medals.

Abby Wambach (born 1980), a six-time winner of the US Soccer Athlete of the Year award, and a regular in the US women’s national soccer team

from 2003 to 2015, reminded us that: “you must not only have competitiveness but ability, regardless of the circumstance you face, to never quit.”

I am happy to admit that, before taking my morning shower, I use the vices of pride and vanity to fend off temptations to sloth and cowardice from the lower Vlad who whispers: “Why bother with these 86 (I am 85 years breathing, plus nine months in my mother’s womb) push-ups or full-squats? You deserve a rest – and you’re getting older!” Like Churchill, a Tory, and Stalin, a communist, linked up against Hitler, my enemy’s enemy becomes my ally.

“Set your goals high, and don’t stop till you get there,” encouraged Vincent Edward “Bo” Jackson, American former professional baseball and football player, and the only professional athlete in history to be named an All-Star in both baseball and American football.

Thomas Charles Lasorda (currently aged 93), American former Major League Baseball pitcher, coach, and manager, best known for his two decades managing the Los Angeles Dodgers, made it clear that: “the difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a person’s determination.”

I keep working on the physical not only to show I appreciate God’s gift of my body, but also to stay fit, flexible, avoid obesity, and (hopefully/prayerfully) to avoid ending up in a wheelchair before it is time. How about you dear reader?

I used to work on my intellect to pass exams and accrue qualifications. Now I keep studying not only to kick dementia down the road, but to stay ahead of the accelerating curve of knowledge all around.

To sustain my Spirituality, with its motivational power, I strive to keep an eye on the divine presence in everything and silently discuss with Jesus what I see and hear. Ever since I passed those first fourscore years of life, this prayer–dialogue has replaced many of my needs of “saying prayers”.

From her own life experiences, Billie Jean King (born 1943), who won 39 Grand Slam titles (12 in singles, 16 in women’s doubles, and 11 in mixed doubles), could say: “champions keep playing until they get it right.”

Theodore “Ted” Samuel Williams (1918–2002), an American professional baseball player and manager who played his entire 19-year Major League Baseball career for the Boston Red Sox from 1939 to 1960 (his career was interrupted by military service during World War II and the Korean War) knew what he was talking about when he said: “just keep going. Everybody gets better if they keep at it.”

Alexandra “Alex” Morgan Carrasco (born 1989), American professional soccer player who co-captained the US team with Carli Lloyd and Megan Rapinoe from 2018 to 2020, encouraged folk to: “always work hard,

never give up, and fight until the end because it's never really over until the whistle blows."

Remember, you are captain of your ship. If you accept that your willpower is inadequate for the task, you might benefit from a personal trainer or Pilates classes (if you can afford them). If not, you might just need the help of a friend, a partner at your gym. To get my engineering degree, I teamed up with Doug. Mutually, we shamed each other into studying together the hours we had set ourselves. It worked.

Larry Joe Bird (born 1956), American former professional basketball player, coach and executive in the National Basketball Association, widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, encouraged us to: "Push yourself again and again. Don't give an inch until the final buzzer sounds."

Muhammad Ali, who needs no introduction, admitted: "I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'"

When at the offertory at mass I say, "fruit of the earth and work of human hands", though I accept I cannot change my DNA, I know it is up to me how I shape my life; how I respond to whatever life throws at me. When Covid came onto the UK scene, I was determined to put it to good use. 'Staying at home' not only 'saved lives', it gave me the opportunity to write, and finish, not only 'my masterpiece', *Life Squared*, but also the third part of my memoirs: *A Journey to Eternity* volume 3.

Joseph "Broadway Joe" William Namath (born 1943), a quarterback in the American Football League and National Football League during the 1960s and 1970s, posed a good question: "If you aren't going all the way, why go at all?"

If you have a competitive character, use it as a motivator. Compete, if not against your friends, against yourself. Aim to improve your personal best (PB) across your PIES.

James "Jimmy V" Thomas Anthony Valvano (1946–92), an American college basketball player, coach, and broadcaster, with an excellent coaching career with multiple schools, knew what he was talking about when he said: "Never give up! Failure and rejection are only the first step to succeeding."

Father Vlad, replicated from *The Universe Catholic Weekly*
July 5th 2024

What would you, dear reader, like to have on your headstone? In my will (though I plan to be cremated and the stone will be small and horizontal), I have asked to have placed below my name and dates just the words: 'He kept trying'. The targets of your determination need to be realistic. I don't know about you, but – until that stone is in its place – I am determined to age as gracefully as possible. I keep on keeping on.

Hope does not mean that everything is okay right now, but it makes things less difficult to face because, with hope, there is optimism and a belief that things will be better.

The 21-year-old Spanish tennis champion Carlos Alcaraz plays audaciously even under pressure, but admits that, before the Wimbledon final in 2023, he was shaking so much he had to lie down for half an hour “to calm myself and my muscles”. Once on court, hope turns to: “Go for it. If you miss it, you miss it. Don’t hold back. Don’t regret. Play positive. Go aggressively.” “If I hadn’t lost the matches I lost in 2022, I would never have achieved what I achieved. I learnt from every defeat. You have to learn from the moments you live.”

Following his win at the 2022 US Open, Alcaraz became the youngest man and the first male teenager in the Open Era to top the singles rankings, at 19 years, four months and six days old.

Gratitude to God and a positive mindset have given me my hope and resilience. (See Volumes 2 and 3 of *A Journey to Eternity*).

Hope will help you enjoy life and better handle stress, protecting you from depression, anxiety and despair.

Build strong and healthy relationships with friends, including family, and allies-in-life. Make every day positively meaningful. Never feel a victim. See challenges rather than problems. Look after yourself, with enough sleep, good nutrition and adequate exercise. Then you can adapt to misfortunes across your PIES and SON.

Resilience – especially when rooted in prayer and a close relationship with Jesus Christ – does not make challenges go away, but does help you enjoy life, and better handle stresses.

Hope needs to be realistic in its aims, objectives and means, including the gathering of allies-in-life. It needs an attitude of ‘never let the buggers grind you down.’ Fall down? Pick yourself up and move on. See the past as the rehearsal for, not a brake on, the now.

Jesus said “I tell you: ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and everyone who seeks, finds; and to everyone who knocks the door will be opened.” (Luke 11, 9–13)

Prayer of petition needs to be modulated: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 11, 9–13)

Hope and prayer are all well and good, but we have to help God make our dreams come true. A story I use is Janek, praying desperately: “Please God, to save my family, I need to win the National lottery!” God replies: “To give me a chance, please Janek, buy yourself a lottery ticket.”

All I can do is to do all I can. I try to do my best and then, relaxed, I leave the rest to God.

I have used the mythical story of a single-handed, transatlantic, fundamentalist Christian sailor to help folk see that hope needs to include the instruments God uses to help us.

Halfway across the Atlantic, one early morning, a sudden storm turns his boat over. He climbs up onto its keel. “No problem. God will save me.” Mid-morning, a liner approaches and slows down. “Can we help you sir?” comes a call from a loudspeaker. “Thank you. But no need. God will save me.” After noon, a super-tanker approaches, same conversation. At dusk, a frigate comes close, same conversation. At midnight, our friend dies of hypothermia. At the gates of heaven, he meets God: “You betrayed me. I believed in you.” “But, my dear,” replies God. “I sent you a liner, a super-tanker, and a frigate. What more could I have done?”

God is present in the presents he sends us, and these include our friends, family, and allies-in-life.

I hope to stay healthy – hence my daily exercise routine,⁶ which includes walking rather than taking short bus trips; climbing up to four flights of stairs rather than taking a lift; diet; adequate sleep; study and writing; and prayer. I hope to avoid accidents, so I drive carefully with a car in good shape.

I have found that my relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as my exercise routine and the lovely company of my friends, helps me to stay hopeful, and, indeed, to delight in the joy of life.

To God, I frequently express my gratitude for so many gifts I have received including, so far, a life free from serious health issues. Gratitude sustains and enhances hope! Remembering the goodness in the past makes it easier to dream about goodness in the future.

“Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow,” wrote Melody Beattie (born 1948), an American author of self-help books on co-dependent relationships.

Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–81), a Swiss moral philosopher, poet, and critic, made clear that: “Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.”

“Joy is the simplest form of gratitude,” declared Karl Barth (1886–1968), a Swiss reformed theologian.

Being hopeful makes you an optimist, someone who ‘anticipates positive outcomes, whether serendipitously or through perseverance and effort, and who is confident of attaining desired goals.’

We all exist somewhere on the spectrum of pessimist to optimist, and very few of us are full-on, forever glass-half-full people only. It is completely normal to have trouble being optimistic, even in the best of circumstances. But now it’s even more of a challenge. So why bother trying to be hopeful when things are so overwhelmingly bad?

Cultivating hope and resilience can be key to managing the symptoms of mental illnesses, such as depression or anxiety. A persistent feeling of hopelessness is often a defining symptom of depression. Fear is one of the driving factors of anxiety.

Putting in the work to be hopeful builds resilience.

⁶ Details on my website fathervlad.com.

Some people are just naturally optimistic, but resilience is something that's learned, first through our childhood experiences and then as we go through the inevitable challenges of life. For instance, if you lost your job but you're passionate about a certain cause (perhaps climate change), you might discover hope by donating time and effort to those issues while you figure out what your next job might be.

Try to keep some semblance of a self-care routine. Cultivating hope starts with being able to authentically identify how you're feeling in a particular moment, identifying how you would rather be feeling, and building or drawing on the tools in your life to help you start to feel that way.

I remember coming across the ABCDE model often used in cognitive behavioural therapy, where the A stands for *adversity*, naming the challenge or problem you're up against. The B draws your attention to the negative *belief* you have about the situation. The C focuses on the *consequences* that belief is having on your behaviour and how you feel about yourself. In D, you start to *dispute* those beliefs and offer alternative explanations to yourself. Finally, E stands for *energise*, a new way of thinking about the original event or challenge. This model has real research behind it, such as a 2019 study published in *Development and Psychopathology*. For the study, researchers randomly assigned 23 women to take part in a support group that met online (using videoconferencing) 12 times over a few months. The results showed that many of the participants found the sessions incredibly valuable for building authentic connections and dedicating time to focus on their emotional wellbeing, despite the groups being virtual.

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) was an English mathematician and philosopher, who created the philosophical school known as 'process philosophy', which has been applied in a wide variety of disciplines, including ecology, theology, education, physics, biology, economics, and psychology. He reminded us that: "No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945, killed in Flossenbürg concentration camp, Germany), a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident who was a key founding member of the Confessing Church, stated: "In ordinary life, we hardly realise that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich", and "I've had a remarkable life. I seem to be in such good places at the right time. You know, if you were to ask me to sum my life up in one word, gratitude."

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43bce), poet, philosopher, rhetorician, and humourist, taught us that: "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues but the parent of all others."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), an American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, abolitionist, and poet who led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century, warned us: "You cannot do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late."

Mary Davis (born 1954), Irish social entrepreneur, activist and long-term campaigner for the rights and inclusion of children and adults with intellectual disabilities, and CEO of Special Olympics International since May 2016, admitted: "The more grateful I am, the more beauty I see."

Rabbi Harold Kushner (1935–2023), American author, lecturer, and a member of the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism, reminded us that: “If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul.”

John F. Kennedy (1917–63), 35th and youngest-ever President of the United States (from 1961 until his assassination in 1963) made it clear that “as we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it,” said William Arthur Ward (1921–94), American motivational writer.

G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936) English author, philosopher, Christian apologist, and literary and art critic, admitted: “When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”

For Mark Zuckerberg (born 1984), Co-founder, Chairman and CEO of Meta Platforms (formerly Facebook, Inc.), and Co-founder and co-CEO of Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, life has taught him that ‘optimists tend to be successful and pessimists tend to be right.’

Before the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which established a new political order now known as ‘Westphalian sovereignty’, the European wars of religion during the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, fought after the Protestant Reformation began in 1517, disrupted the religious and political order in the Catholic countries of Europe.

By the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), which resulted in a death toll of approximately 8 million, many felt it impossible to maintain any sense of hope or optimism about the future. But with peace came prosperity and eventually hope returned.

When I look at the news and see how grim the world appears, I remind myself of how years ago, as a teacher and chaplain at the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, I took a minibus of boys to Snowdonia. Having climbed a peak, we could see our minibus down in the valley. Suddenly a cloud rolled in. We could not see further than our feet. As time was pressing and it was getting cold, we started down the path we could just see, towards the minibus that had disappeared. It had been there. It was still there. So, we got there. No problem. End of story.

When I was much younger, I hoped I could trust HMG, then came the Post Office conspiracy, contaminated blood from the USA, the Grenfell disaster with its ubiquitous dangerous cladding, and the way Downing Street reacted to Covid. I then turned my attention to things I could influence and these sustained my hope.

My life has had and still has its seasons: spring up to the age of 26; summer to the age of 56; autumn up to 76; and winter up to death and birth into divine eternity. Hope has its colour in each. Spring is bright and fresh with poppy reds and fresh greens. Summer is cool and soft, with icy blues and soft purples. Autumn colours are burnt oranges and rustic reds. And winter has deep jewel tones like sapphire, emerald, and ruby red.

- The Father gives me my being. I am. I believe – faith.
- The Son gives me knowing. I know I am beloved – charity.
- The Holy Spirit enables me to want. I hope – I have hope.

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973)

1.7 Luck, and gambling

Defined as ‘fortune good or bad, what happens to one by chance (conceived as being favourable or not); good luck, quality of having a tendency to receive desired or beneficial outcomes,’ not found in Old English, probably from early Middle Dutch *luc*, shortening of *gheluc* ‘happiness, good fortune,’ a word of unknown origin.’

If you say ‘good luck’ or ‘best of luck’ to someone, you are telling them that you hope they will be successful in something they are trying to do. Luck is something that happens by chance. Fortune is something that happens by choice. Being lucky means chance favoured you accidentally.

Being born to a rich family is lucky, because it happened by pure chance, you did nothing to make it happen, it just did. Of course, this is unless you believe in karma, which is a whole different story. A theme common to theories of karma is its principle of causality. The relationship between karma and causality is a central motif in all schools of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain thought. One of the earliest associations of karma to causality occurs in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (verses 4.4.5–6).

Now as a man is like this or like that,
according as he acts and according as he behaves, so will he be;
a man of good acts will become good, a man of bad acts, bad;
he becomes pure by pure deeds, bad by bad deeds;

And here they say that a person consists of desires,
and as is his desire, so is his will;
and as is his will, so is his deed;
and whatever deed he does, that he will reap.

In other words, good ethical behaviour generates grounds for hope, if not in space-time then, eventually, in divine eternity. Acting/behaving well does not guarantee a happy future. After all, though Jesus Christ behaved immaculately, he died a most gruesome death.

‘I’m feeling lucky’ is used metaphorically as an expression of sincere or superstitious confidence in the random outcomes of events. A form of the phrase is especially associated with Harry Callahan (played by actor Clint Eastwood) in the classic 1977 western *Dirty Harry*.

Feeling lucky enhances hope; it does not guarantee it. Reality is one thing; perception, and feelings about the future, are something else.

Napoleon often talked about luck. Knowing what it was all about, he responded to the critics: “Give me lucky generals”. Many times, he analysed his possible future collaborators, or even his enemies, asking: “I know he’s a good general, but is he lucky?”

Gambling can become a destructive obsession. It can also be fun, challenging, and, at times, dirty. When 15 Tory candidates and officials bet on the date of the upcoming election in July 2024, with the odds at 5:1, this was dirty, dishonest gambling, and, I believe, as insider trading, criminal behaviour. They knew the date had been fixed. There was no chance of them getting it wrong. In horse racing, one’s odds can be improved by studying the horse’s recent form, the state of the track, the name of the jockey, and by finding out how much the owners of the horse have bet.

Maybe you’re not a gambler, but you probably have a grasp of the concept of a ‘hot hand’ or a lucky streak. (Some gamblers have told me that they believe in the occasional lucky streak, during which they live with heightened hope.) I’ve wondered before – is this phenomenon real? My own experience suggests it could be, but one person’s anecdotes are just that.

Luckily, a new study of online betting, conducted by Juemin Xu and Nigel Harvey at University College London, shows that the concept of a hot hand is real, but perhaps not for the reasons you might expect.⁷ Examining the activities of 776 online gamblers in Europe and the US who placed 565,915 bets on sports such as horse racing and soccer, the study found that, when a person wins a bet, they become increasingly likely to succeed after each win. The converse is also true: once you lose a bet, you become progressively more likely to keep losing.

The study found that, all things being equal, you’re likely to win or lose 48% of the time (draws presumably account for the remaining 4%). After a single winning bid, the chance of winning a second goes up ever so slightly, to 49%. But here’s where things get interesting. After the second win, the chance of winning a third time increases to 57%. After that, 67%. Following a four-bet winning streak, the chances of scoring a fifth haul increase to 72%. The probability of a sixth win is then 75%, and, finally, after six wins, bettors had a 76% chance of notching up lucky no. 7.

What is going on here? What probably explains this pattern is that, after each win, people selected bets with better odds. Bettors appear to assume that, after each win, they were more likely to lose (to regress to the mean, as they say) and so they compensate by making safer bets.

“Winners worried their good luck was not going to continue, so they selected safer odds. By doing so, they became more likely to win.” (Xu and Harvey, 2014)

The study also found that losses can breed more losses. After losing twice, the chances of winning decreased to 40%. After four losses, the chance of winning was 27%. After six duds, you have only a 23% chance of winning. The explanation: after each loss, gamblers on average choose bets that are less likely to turn out, apparently assuming that they are

⁷ Xu, J. and Harvey, N. (2014), “Carry on winning: The gamblers’ fallacy creates hot hand effects in online gambling”, *Cognition*, 131: 2, 2014, pp. 173–80.

more likely to win than before, and perhaps to make up their losses (although, on average, people gamble less after each loss). As you probably know, bets with a lower chance of winning have higher pay-outs.

The idea that one is more likely to lose after winning, or more likely to win after losing, is known as the 'gambler's fallacy'. (In reality, all things being equal, one is just as likely to lose or win on any given bet, assuming one is betting on independent events that don't affect the outcomes of the other events, as is the case with the vast majority of sports bets.) This stands in contrast to the 'hot-hand fallacy', that one is more likely to win while on a hot streak. Bettors apparently don't generally believe this to be true, or at least their behaviour suggests they don't.

"The result is ironic: Winners worried their good luck was not going to continue, so they selected safer odds," the researchers wrote. "By doing so, they became more likely to win. The losers expected the luck to turn, so they took riskier odds. However, this made them even more likely to lose. The gamblers' fallacy created the hot hand." (Xu and Harvey, 2014)

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him

to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

Max Ehrmann (USA, 1872–1945)

1.8 Predicting the future?

Sixth sense: ‘an ability that some people believe they have that seems to give them information without using the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, or taste. Eg A sixth sense told me that the train was going to crash.’

On July 22nd 2024, in *The Metro* newspaper, I read the following.

“A psychic who predicted there would be an assassination attempt on Donald Trump has claimed he will win the US election.

Craig Hamilton-Parker, dubbed the ‘new Nostradamus’, says he can see into the future and has accurately predicted events like the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and Trump being elected president.

He’s also spoken to Metro.co.uk previously about his predictions for the year and some of these predictions have already come true.

Last weekend, Trump was shot by 20-year-old gunman Thomas Matthew Crooks at a rally at an outdoor venue in Pennsylvania. However, just two days before, the psychic had made the eerie prediction on his YouTube channel that there would be an attempt on Trump’s life.”

Astrology

In their quest, their hope, to predict the future, most human civilizations (in India, Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Rome, and Persia, among others) used complex systems of astrology, imagining that the cosmos influenced – indeed determined – events on earth. Astrological tradition contributed to the development of astronomy, as the study of the skies provided invaluable insights about celestial bodies. For instance, the Ptolemaic astrological tradition listed some of the planets in the solar system and their movements.

Astrology encompasses various approaches. Sidereal and tropical astrology represent different ways of mapping the zodiac against the backdrop of the stars from a geocentric perspective. Heliocentric astrology focuses on the Sun as the central point of reference, while psychological astrology delves into the intricate connections between celestial movements and the human psyche.

Across different cultures, astrology has taken on unique forms and interpretations. Chinese, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Tibetan, and Western astrology each offer distinct insights into the connection between the cosmos and human affairs.

To help you realise how much effort over so many centuries has been invested in this, I offer you an incomplete list of the traditions, types, systems, methods, applications, and branches of astrology.

By type

- Horoscopic astrology – astrology defined by the ascendant
- Natal astrology – a form of astrology based on time of birth
- Sun sign astrology – astrology focused on the Sun sign
- *By period and place*
- Babylonian astrology (c. 1800bce–c. 1200bce)
- Chinese astrology (c. 1050bce–present)
- Hellenistic astrology (2nd century bce–7th century ce)
- Hindu astrology (2nd century ce–present)
- Western astrology (2nd century ce–Jewish astrology (c. 350ce–present))
- Early Irish astrology (7th–11th centuries ce)
- Islamic astrology (7th century ce–?)
- Heliocentric astrology (c. 1640–present)
- Christian astrology – a book written in 1647 by the English astrologer William Lilly
- Psychological astrology – rooted in the work of psychologist-astrologer Carl Jung, beginning c. 1920

By function

- Electional astrology – a form of astrology used for planning events
- Agricultural astrology – electional astrology for horticulture
- Katarchic astrology – historical form of electional astrology
- Horary astrology – a form of astrology for answering questions posed
- Judicial astrology – a form of astrology for forecasting events
- Locational astrology – astrology that factors in locations on earth
- Medical astrology – astrology of the human physiology
- Meteorological astrology – using astrology for weather forecasting
- Mundane astrology – a branch of astrology dealing with politics, government, and law.

How people hope to predict the future in some cases is unpredictable.

Etc.

1. From the *Metro* newspaper, June 10th 2024.

“A fortune teller who uses asparagus to predict the future has given a prediction on how England will perform in the Euros.

Jemima Packington, 67, has revealed that England will end 58 years of hurt and WIN Euro 2024. She claims she can peer into the future by tossing asparagus spears into the air and then interpreting how they land on the ground.”

She is the world’s only ‘asparamancer’ (allegedly able to predict the future from asparagus) and previously correctly predicted Brexit, the Queen’s death, as well as Harry and Meghan quitting the Royal Family.

2. Divination, the practice of determining the hidden significance or cause of events, sometimes foretelling the future, by various natural, psychological, and other techniques.

Found in all civilizations, both ancient and modern, it is encountered most frequently in contemporary mass society in the form of horoscopes, astrology, crystal gazing, tarot cards, and the Ouija board.

Before the start of the Battle of Midway (June 4th 1942), the crew knew it was going to be a tough day because they were given steak and egg for breakfast – a reliable prediction of the quality of their hours ahead.

3. Mathematics can be used to make predictions about future events and phenomena, but the accuracy of these predictions depends on various factors, such as the quality of the data being used, the assumptions made in the mathematical model, and the complexity of the system being studied.

While mathematics as a tool can be used to make predictions about certain aspects of the future, it cannot predict the future with complete accuracy or certainty. For example, mathematical models can be used to predict future trends in areas such as finance, economics, and weather patterns.

Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo-doo
Here comes the sun, and I say
It’s alright
Little darlin’, it’s been a long, cold, lonely winter
Little darlin’, it feels like years since it’s been here
Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo-doo
Here comes the sun, and I say
It’s alright
Little darlin’, the smile’s returning to their faces
Little darlin’, it seems like years since it’s been here
Here comes the sun
Here comes the sun, and I say
It’s alright
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes
Sun, sun, sun, here it comes

Little darlin', I feel that ice is slowly melting
Little darlin', it seems like years since it's been clear

Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo-doo
Here comes the sun, and I say
It's alright

Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo-doo
Here comes the sun
It's alright

It's alright.

1969 song by The Beatles,
written by George Harrison (1943–2001)

1.9 Enabling our hope to shape reality

Many years ago, praying the Psalms helped my hope to grow.

Psalm 62:5-6

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from Him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

Psalm 33:19

Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,
on those who hope in His steadfast love...

Psalm 42:5-6a

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him,
my help and my God.

Psalm 71:1-6

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you...

To live in hope, it is vital to concentrate on the process in hand rather than worrying about the outcome – as Rory McIlroy showed all too clearly, and for him sadly.

It seems to me that a great golfer, like Rory McIlroy, has lost confidence since he won all those competitions: a four-time major champion, winning the 2011 US Open, 2012 PGA Championship, 2014 Open Championship, and 2014 PGA Championship. However, since then nowt. Thirteen years after winning his first US Open and maiden major at Congressional (and 3,599 days since winning the 2014 US PGA) McIlroy looked set to finally get back in the winner's circle when he led by two shots with five holes to play. But, suddenly, loss of self-confidence can lead to disaster. Muscle memory congeals.

In the US Open in 2024, McIlroy twice had a one-shot lead at Pinehurst No. 2 until he choked and closed with three bogeys on his last four holes, missing a 30-inch par putt on the 16th hole and a par putt from just inside 4 feet on the 18th hole. Commentators think McIlroy will be haunted for the rest of his life after choking a golden opportunity to end a major drought just as Bryson DeChambeau snuck in to win his second US Open title.

However, maybe McIlroy's support team will draw his attention to Jana Novotná who, playing Steffi Graf in the 1993 Wimbledon women's tennis final, was in a strong, and virtually unassailable, position (leading the match 6-7, 6-4, and with a game point at 4-1 in the third and final set). Despite this, suddenly, she lost her self-confidence, and lost as Graf won the final five games of the match and the Grand Slam title.

As the experts said, Novotná 'choked' during the final set. However, she learned from his experience. Her moment of Wimbledon success finally arrived in 1998. After defeating Venus Williams in a close quarter final, Novotná avenged the previous year's loss by ousting Martina Hingis in the semi-final in straight sets. She won the singles title by defeating veteran Nathalie Tauziat in the final in two sets, becoming the oldest first-time Grand Slam singles winner in the Open Era at the age of 29 years and nine months.

So, Rory may yet come back and return to his winning ways of long ago.

There are three men of hope I admire (apart from Jesus Christ, of course) and wanted to include in this book. They are Mohandas K Gandhi who, I read: "mounted a revolution on hope and love, hope and non-violence", and who died a martyr in 1948. He inspired Martin Luther King, who himself died a martyr in 1968. His approach to life was rooted in The Sermon on The Mount. The third is Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) who did his best to bring peace and harmony in South Africa and around the world, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 and the Presidential Medal of Honour in 2002.

In his 1994 biography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela wrote: "I am fundamentally an optimist. Part of being an optimist is keeping one's head pointed towards the sun, one's feet moving forward. There are many dark moments when my faith

in humanity is sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.”

People high in hope tend to focus on what’s in front of them. They don’t dwell on the past or worry about the future, though they do set goals for themselves. They stay focused on what’s happening right now. This allows them to stay positive and act.

While at Imperial College (1958–62) I took up rowing and thus learned that, while stroking an eight, I was moving backwards into the future. It reminded me that hope is like that. You trust the cox – who in my life is Jesus Christ – and who does see what lies ahead. We live without seeing where we are going. As in a boat, there is a cox in my life who does look forward; Yesh is the cox I trust. Thus, one of the sentences that underpins my life’s strategy is: I’ll do my best and leave the rest to God.

On March 17th 1942, General Douglas MacArthur made his famous declaration: “I shall return” (some say it was “I will return”), a promise and a hope fulfilled on October 20th 1944.⁸ He knew the USA potential, vastly greater than Japan’s. He knew that time would turn the tide.

In John 16, 20 and 22 we read that Jesus said he would return. I am confident I shall meet him, very soon after my death and birth into divine eternity. I am sure he kept his promise to the Good Thief: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Hopeful people find ways to improve their world. Hope fuels their positive mindset and their creativity. Hopeful people shine in negative situations because they can balance realistic thinking, the desire for a better future, the energy and will to act, and the responsibility to help create positive change.

In the Middle Ages many shrines to intercessory saints were built and extensively visited. To achieve their hopes, vast numbers of folk visited these chapels to pray for what they thought they needed, but on their own would not be able to achieve. Remember society (and mindsets) were feudal. Thus, the idea that an ordinary layperson could go to his or her squire who could go to his baron who could go to a higher aristocrat – a viscount, earl or duke – and through them reach the ear of Mary who had the ear of her Son and God.

Hoping that something works out is suggesting that you have no control over it, as if it is totally up to luck or chance. While there are certain scenarios that are out of our control, it’s not always the case. You got fired? You broke up with your lover? You failed a test? Did you have control over any of those outcomes? In most cases, I’d bet you did.

So, what can we do when we have control over the outcome? Let’s break down the word *hope* and create a new plan of action.

⁸ I suspect he used ‘shall’ as, traditionally, conventions dictate that ‘will’ when used in the first person, conveys an obligation, whereas ‘shall’ merely a future intention. Conversely, when used in the second or third person, ‘will’ conveys a future obligation, whilst ‘shall’ imports compulsion and obligation.

- H = Hatch an idea of what you want to achieve
- O = Obsess over it
- P = Plan on how to achieve it
- E = Endure all obstacles

I will use the example of setting up SPEC at All Saints Pastoral Centre. In January 1989, as soon as Father Basil returned to Archbishop's House from his Christmas break and I welcomed him with the usual banalities and jokes about his time away, he suddenly asked: "Have you a moment, Vlad?" "For you, of course." And I sat down next to his desk at his right-hand side.

The words he came up with etched themselves into my memory: "Vlad, we have to do something to help young people find God in their lives. I don't know what it is. But would you do it?"

Having been an Abbot, he knew how to butter people up to make sure he got his ways. So, he continued: "I can think of someone to run the Cathedral, the Seminary, the University Chaplaincy, but I can't think of anyone but you to do this specific task." So, of course, I said yes.

1 I 'Hatched' an idea.

I had spent a couple of years hunting around the diocese for a home for my dream of a centre for young people. To 'help young people find God in their lives', I wanted to set up a centre that would in some way replicate the YAP experiences at Lourdes (a residential peer-education centre where young people could learn how to acquire the virtues that they would need to make the best fist of their lives; to fulfil their God-given potential).

Then in 1991 Father Basil told me that the Volunteer Missionary Movement's lease on what had been an orphanage at All Saints, London Colney, was going to run out that summer; perhaps that building could do the trick. So, off I went to visit them. I could see the possibilities of St Raphael, originally built as an orphanage in 1908 by the Church of England All Saints Sisters of the Poor who had moved out from London in 1901. The Diocese acquired the site in 1973.

When I reported my positive view to Father Basil, he said 'fine' and appointed me 'Director of All Saints'. He added that he was sure I could sort out the problem with the management of All Saints. No longer needed to house-sit The Hermitage, I moved to All Saints Pastoral Centre (ASPC), with its 77 acres. It was a conference and retreat centre at London Colney on the southern outskirts of St Albans, Hertfordshire.

2 I 'Obsessed' over it

The peer-educational centre needed a name. Lying on my bed one morning in The Turner Suite (the best guest suite at the ASPC where I was lodged until my permanent accommodation became available), I stared at the large mirror there on the wall. "That's it! It will be The Mirror Centre. Young people will be able to look at themselves and reflect on their lives."

However, the *Mirror* is the name of a newspaper. Perhaps a Latin name? *Speculum Vitae* (remembering my Latin) it would be a mirror of and to life. Too long. Then, let's call it the SPEC – on spec, come to SPEC.

Ah, and it will be a:

Spiritual Peer Educational Centre.

Supporting Pre-evangelisation, Evangelisation and Catechises.

Cool!

SPEC needed a competent couple to run it. Here, Providence gave me a helping hand. In 1991, I had invited Sheila O'Donnell, a director of the Upper Room Community in St Albans, to give a keynote talk on our October YAP. The evening after her talk, having taken her to the bar at the local Hotel Méditerranée ('The Med') for a well-deserved drink, she asked me what I was up to. I said I was working on setting up a residential retreat centre for young people. What a wonderful surprise when she replied that her sister Sandra and her husband David Satchell had been talking of giving up working in the City to run a retreat centre for young people.

Having obtained their contacts from Sheila, on Monday late afternoon I drove to their Old Hatfield home. By Thursday of that week, they had signed a contract with the diocese.

3 I Planned how to achieve it

From the Diocesan archives I obtained copies of the architectural plans of St Raphael, the building that was to become SPEC. With David and Sandra, we started to work out how to bring the building up to spec. The draconian planning officer for St Albans, Andrew Robley, who had acquired – and as I discovered, rightly – a reputation of not allowing any changes to older buildings, blocked planning consent for an essential ground-floor toilet block at SPEC. However, I had befriended St Alban's Councillors Dreda Gordon, Chris Flynn and Malcolm Macmillan, showed them around SPEC and explained our predicament. Consequently, while attending our second appeal meeting, I heard Malcolm say something like: "as a rule we don't override the advice from our officers, but in this case, there's a serious pastoral need and so we will approve the planning petition." We got our toilet block.

To stay focused on the reality of peer education, I decided never to attend national or international youth conferences. I suspect I was nudged to make this choice when I was still at the Cathedral by hearing how an outstanding headmaster spent so much time lecturing around the world on how to make a school great, that, due to his frequent absences, his school (which shall remain nameless) went down the chute. Years earlier I had read somewhere that 'the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing'. To deliver on my commitment, I remained faithful while I was able to work with young people in our diocese.

4 I Endured all obstacles

The night before every pilgrimage (both YAP and Diocesan) I had nightmares, which gradually became firm friends. Each year, I could emulate the successes of the past. I'd be walking down corridors, around corners, up and down stairs without bannisters that ended in thin air, or a cul de sac. They may have been fortresses or castles and strange houses where corridors turned into tunnels, and I was forced to crawl along crumbling roofs and battlements until suddenly I awoke. Sweating.

Eventually, they became like horror movies I'd seen before. I realised they expressed the panic in my heart. It meant I would have enough adrenaline to do my job. It is only now that I am no longer responsible for the pilgrimages that I can calmly admit the facts.

Recalling the hall of mirrors in Prague, I obtained dozens of mirrors from hotels that were refurbishing. In the entrance to SPEC, I placed two ~~of these~~ of them almost parallel to each other. Placing their feet on the markers provided, guests, looking sideways, could see dozens of their heads, gradually fading round a bend. I placed them there to prod/nudge our guests into reflecting on how many complex characters there are within each one of us.

Ahead, there were two mirrors; one above the other, set slightly at an angle so that the body and arms seemed as though, cut and pasted, they'd slipped sideways. As our visitor walked on, the slippage shrunk until, right up close, it disappeared. With these visuals, there was my audio voice: "Here in SPEC, as you move forward, you can pull yourself together and become more as God would like you to be. Free."

In SPEC, I placed a copy of Hereford Cathedral's *Mappa Mundi* to challenge our young guests as to what was at the centre of their life. I placed a picture of the Rosetta Stone to help young people think about communication and understanding others. I hung large old maps of the world with the questions: "Are you as you thought you were? Or do you see yourself as you really are?"

In 1995, I launched Bright Lights, a residential long-weekend festival for young adults set in the fields around SPEC, with liturgies, music and much more, to which we invited super speakers such as David Alton, Anthony Towey, Sheila Cassidy and Malcolm McMahon. Thanks to my role as Chaplain to The Knights of St Columba (Province 29), I was able to recruit its members to help with security. After ASPC had been sold, Bright Lights was transferred to Aylesford Priory and, thanks to Sandra Satchell who is, still in 2020, responsible for Young People Provision in Birmingham Diocese, it is now hosted at Alton Castle.

SPEC was thriving. Occupancy high. However, there was a problem, especially at mealtimes. Primary school children did not sit well with sixth-formers. I needed to find a solution.

The loss of my sister in December 1995 and mother in February 1986 galvanised me to work on LOFT@SPEC – a centre for 9- to 15-year-olds.

There was a large loft in the main house above the kitchen. To convert that into accommodation, I had to work on obtaining planning consent. Though, as Andrew Robley was still smarting from his earlier defeat, this second consent was trickier than the first but we got there in the end.

Thanks to my membership of The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, I had befriended Gerald Murphy, an architect. Having shown him around and put him in the picture, I invited him to work out a scheme and a budget. We needed just the funding. At that time the National Lottery had funds allocated to young people. However, a bit of research showed that to obtain those funds, our application had to be spot-on, using the right vocabulary. That pointed me in the direction of a gentleman who'd worked at the Lottery and was now a consultant writing those applications – the best £150 I ever spent.

I applied and obtained a National Lottery Grant of just under £200,000. Thanks to money left to me in the will of a lady I'd been looking after for years, I added my own £50,000. To cut a long construction story short, I was able to invite Basil Hume to bless LOFT@SPEC in 1998.

On the door to the LOFT@SPEC chapel, there's a little photograph of a young boy cutting a ribbon as LOFT opened its doors and started to work with primary school aged children. I loved it. It reminded me of what it took to get to that point in my life. Whenever I saw it, I thanked God, my friends and lists. To achieve anything in life, I learned the value of both love and lists: commitment and competence.

The SPEC experience showed that whilst a head may be educated in a classroom, for the heart to be converted and committed to God – and thus the best there is in the world – a stay in a suitable place together with one's peer group with appropriate supervision could be immensely more effective.

Prevention is far better than cure. Rather than allowing the young to become trapped in the nightmare of personal despair – and its effects of drugs, alcohol abuse and wasted lives – SPEC, complementing the work of schools and other agencies, offered a way towards an authentic sense of identity, values and roles in society, helping the young to discover answers to their underlying questions of 'Who am I?' 'What am I?' 'What is anything worth?' 'Why am I here, to do what with myself?' In a word, a helping hand to self-sufficiency, even excellence.

By the time the diocese closed SPEC and Loft in 2011, they were interfacing with some 14,000 young people a year, with another 6,000 on school missions.

Hope with wartime guts

Just one example: Operation Pedestal, the 1942 convoy to Malta and its heroine, the American-built tanker Ohio, which, broken-backed, near awash, without propulsion, managed to reach the Grand Harbour and discharge her cargo of oil into the island's empty tanks.

The hope all involved had was magnificent, and took guts.

The Germans threw against the convoy some 100 aircraft: Junkers 87 dive-bombers, Junkers 88 bombers and Italian Savoia 79 torpedo aircraft, as well as submarines and E-boats. The Royal Navy kept on keeping on towards Malta, and managed to refuel with food and fuel so that it could carry on, eventually being awarded the George Cross for its bravery.

Currently, though officially retired, I continue living in hope that I can keep on helping God make this world a better place. How am I doing this? Look at my website (fathervlad.com).

In morse code, di di di dah – the start of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – is 'V', for victory, the outcome of realised hope.

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ (1844–89)

10. Holiness

Cardinal Basil Hume, Uncle George to his family, states in his book *Light in the World* (p. 150), that holy people have three qualities:

1. they discovered God's love and responded to it;
2. they have unbounded confidence in God and His providence;
3. they have a certain positive zest for life. They're never bored, never cynical, never unkind, never bigotedly critical.

In sum, they live in and by hope. They are Hope incarnate.

In sign language, there are two signs representing hope: secular hope is 'fingers crossed'; liturgical/theological hope is shown by catching the signer's breath as it comes out of her or his mouth. The breath is The Holy Spirit.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.
Who so beset him round with dismal stories
Do but themselves confound—his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might; though he with giants fight,
He will make good his right to be a pilgrim.

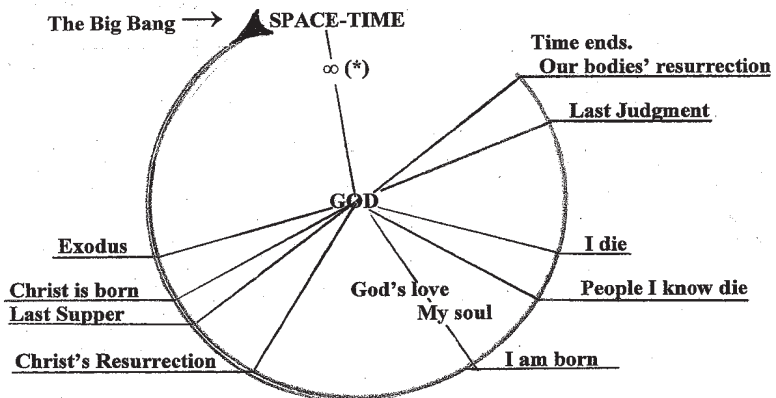
Since, Lord, Thou dost defend us with Thy Spirit,
We know we at the end, shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away! I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.

John Bunyan (1628–88)

Appendix A

Vlad's Theocentric Wheel [VTW] Whose centre is the spaceless and thus timeless "A & Ω": God

God creates



The VTW model helped me imagine how God, timeless in eternity at the spaceless hub, is also with us on the rim of our space-time wheel. As God is infinitely 'other', the diameter of VTW is infinite. As parallel lines meet at infinity, the wheel is actually a straight line. Rather than being cyclic, history – and space-time – have a vector.

Backed up by Einstein's Relativity Theorem and the Big Bang, and based on our experience that, when life is good, time seems to fly by, I see eternity more like an intuitive singularity than an endless rational 'for ever and ever' timeline.⁹

From that central singularity, God sees each one of us, DR, 360°, 24/7, 365 (every four years 366) days a year.

Somehow, some people tap into the centre of the wheel and, as I put it: 'know without knowing'. Some seem to be able to predict death, even their own, well before there is any scientific evidence.

Morning has broken,
Like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken
Like the first bird;
Praise for the singing,
Praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing
Fresh from the Word.

⁹ A spaceless point is infinite. Not finite.

Sweet the rain's new fall,
Sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dewfall
On the first grass;
Praise for the sweetness,
Of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness
Where His feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight,
Mine is the morning,
Born of the one light
Eden saw play;
Praise with elation,
Praise every morning,
God's re-creation
Of the new day.

Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965)

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there. I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.

Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905–2004)

The first verse of a poem by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–59) inspired me when, aged ten, I read it at St Peter's School, Merrow. I etched it into my memory, but changed the last line to 'and the glory of his God.'

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the gate:
'To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,

For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods,

'And for the tender mother
Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
His baby at her breast,
And for the holy maidens
Who feed the eternal flame,
To save them from false Sextus
That wrought the deed of shame?

'Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,
With all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play.
In yon strait path a thousand
May well be stopped by three.
Now who will stand on either hand,
And keep the bridge with me?

Then out spake Spurius Lartius;
A Ramnian proud was he:
'Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,
And keep the bridge with thee.'
And out spake strong Herminius;
Of Titian blood was he:
'I will abide on thy left side,
And keep the bridge with thee.'

'Horatius,' quoth the Consul,
'As thou sayest, so let it be.'
And straight against that great array
Forth went the dauntless Three.
For Romans in Rome's quarrel
Spared neither land nor gold,
Nor son nor wife, nor limb nor life,
In the brave days of old.

Then none was for a party;
Then all were for the state;
Then the great man helped the poor,
And the poor man loved the great:
Then lands were fairly portioned;
Then spoils were fairly sold:
The Romans were like brothers
In the brave days of old.

(The last stanza I left out as it is rather negative)

The feet on which my hope stands firm is the fact that God will never abandon me, no matter what, as set out in this fine poem:

The Hound of Heaven (1890), by Francis Thompson (1859–1907)

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'
I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
Trellised with intertwining charities;
(For, though I knew His love Who followèd,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest having Him, I must have naught beside).
But, if one little casement parted wide,
The gust of His approach would clash it to.
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.
Across the margent of the world I fled,
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars;
Fretted to dulcet jars
And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.
I said to Dawn: Be sudden—to Eve: Be soon;
With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover—
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,
In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.
To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.

But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
The long savannahs of the blue;
Or whether, Thunder-driven,
They clanged his chariot 'thwart a heaven,
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their
feet:—
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'

I sought no more that after which I strayed
In face of man or maid;
But still within the little children's eyes
Seems something, something that replies;
They at least are for me, surely for me!
I turned me to them very wistfully;
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
With dawning answers there,
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.
'Come then, ye other children, Nature's—share
With me' (said I) 'your delicate fellowship;
Let me greet you lip to lip,
Let me twine with you caresses,
Wantoning
With our Lady-Mother's vagrant tresses,
Banqueting
With her in her wind-walled palace,
Underneath her azured daïs,
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.'
So it was done:
I in their delicate fellowship was one—
Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.
I knew all the swift importings
On the wilful face of skies;
I knew how the clouds arise
Spumèd of the wild sea-snotings;
All that's born or dies
Rose and drooped with; made them shapers
Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine;
With them joyed and was bereaven.
I was heavy with the even,

When she lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day's dead sanctities.
I laughed in the morning's eyes.

I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together,
And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
I laid my own to beat,
And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's gray cheek.
For ah! we know not what each other says,
These things and I; in sound I speak—
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
The breasts o' her tenderness:
Never did any milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth.
Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
And past those noisèd Feet
A voice comes yet more fleet—
'Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st
not Me.'

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;
I am defenceless utterly.
I slept, methinks, and woke,
And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.
In the rash lustihead of my young powers,
I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years—
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.
Yea, faileth now even dream
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;
Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,
Are yielding; cords of all too weak account

For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.
Ah! is Thy love indeed
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?
Ah! must—
Designer infinite!—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn
with it?
My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;
And now my heart is as a broken fount,
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
From the dank thoughts that shiver
Upon the sighful branches of my mind.
Such is; what is to be?
The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?
I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity;
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.
But not ere him who summoneth
I first have seen, enwound
With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned;
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.
Whether man's heart or life it be which yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death?

Now of that long pursuit
Comes on at hand the bruit;
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
'And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!
Strange, piteous, futile thing!
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
Seeing none but I makes much of naught' (He said),
'And human love needs human meriting:
How hast thou merited—
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.

All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!
Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.'

This poem beautifully expresses how God is always seeking us, and waiting for a response from us, no matter what. God who is love, is truly the hound of heaven.

Chapter 2 Gratitude

Everything I have – across the PIES – is a gift from God. I own nothing, not even my own life. I am profoundly grateful to God for my existence and, so far, an entertaining and largely pain-free life.

Gratitude is an affirmation of goodness: there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we have received. It is a relationship-strengthening emotion. It reminds us that we are supported and affirmed by others, including, ultimately, God. To be genuine, gratitude needs to express itself in thanksgiving. A heart full of gratitude cannot remain silent.

Research has shown that gratitude is essential for happiness. However, modern times have regressed gratitude into a mere feeling instead of retaining its historical value: a virtue that leads to action.

I am hugely grateful and thank God that each human is even more complex than a fine cathedral such as Canterbury or Notre Dame in Paris. They clearly must have had architects – as a Beethoven Symphony must have had (and did have) a composer – so there must be a genius-designer creator-God. Thanks to my training as a civil engineer, that genius makes God mega loveable.

The immense varieties of flora and fauna – and the development as well as extinction of these over millions of years – forces me to admire their creator. God is like gravity; though unseen, everywhere. Though many intellectually smart people do not sense this, the enlightened do. Prejudice in the form of believing ‘there is no one greater than a human being’ can distort perception, blinding folk to the truth, to a genuine take on reality.

I am immensely grateful to God for Jesus Christ, who has taught me so much. I thank God for the beauty of creation, especially our human organs. The creative genius of God makes the Blessed Trinity easily loveable.

Thanks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the conviction that death is birth into divine eternity.

I thank God not just in prayers but by service to humanity, and thus God. (Matthew 25, 40) Caring for a 92-year old with severe dementia has enabled me to be very intimate with the body of Jesus Christ.

The older I get, the more I appreciate and am grateful for my education in my family, in the schools and universities I attended. Everything – including my friends, benefactors and everyone in my life – is a gift for which I thank God. I am grateful to God for enabling me to survive the war, be given asylum in the UK, as well as for my vocation to Opus Dei – and the way I was eventually treated by it as that pushed me out and enabled me to get to know and work with Cardinal Basil Hume.

I do not believe that there must be a creator God; I know there must be. After all, I spent four years studying at Imperial College. Those years helped my theology, for which I too am grateful.

My gratitude to God for my faith, hope – and love by God for me as experienced on Eriskay (see earlier) keeps my heart swelled – even now. To express my gratitude to God for my life, I do my best to look after my PIES.

The way I see it, the giver is in the gift and to treat a gift without respect is an insult to the giver. Given my 85 years on this planet, I do not want God to feel insulted when I meet the Blessed Trinity face to face.

I am grateful to God that I do not live in an area of conflict, such as Ukraine and Russia, the Middle East, the Sudan, and so many other places around Africa. Consequently, ‘Omnia in bonum’ (Romans 8, 28). I try, albeit sometimes it takes time, to realise that though “man – and women – proposes; God disposes.” In the confessional I often tell penitents that, thanks to admitting their weaknesses, they can grow more merciful with the weaknesses of others, and thus become more Christ-like: more forgiving.

Great philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca stated that gratitude is an action of returning a favour and is not just a sentiment. If gratitude is the queen of the virtues, ingratitude is the king of the vices. All too many nowadays believe that the universe, somewhat like the welfare state, owes them a living.

Perhaps the most famous instance of ingratitude is found in St Luke’s Gospel. Jesus heals ten lepers of their physical disease and thus their social stigma. Pronounced clean, they get their old lives back. Being brought back from near death, you’d think they’d be overwhelmingly grateful! Yet only one returned to express thanksgiving for being healed. Jesus asked: “‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ And then he said to them, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’” (Luke 17, 16–18) Many biblical scholars think that by “faith” what Jesus really meant was: “Your gratitude has made you well.”

This parable reminds us of just how common ingratitude is and how easy it is to take blessings for granted, and how gratitude is dependent upon unmerited favours.

Were the others ungrateful? Perhaps they were just forgetful. After all, given back their dignity, they were no doubt in a hurry to return to their families and old lives.

Contemporary research, though, paints a more complicated picture of ingratitude. People who are ungrateful tend to be characterised by an excessive sense of self-importance, arrogance, vanity, and an unquenchable need for admiration and approval. Narcissists reject the ties that bind people into relationships of reciprocity. They expect special favours and feel no need to say ‘thanks.’

Bearing this in mind has encouraged me to thank God that:

1. Physically I am quite fit.
2. Intellectually my mind is still quite clear, and I have acquired much wisdom over my years on this planet. Truth (accurate perception of reality), like physical training, can hurt but is also worthwhile as it sets me free.
3. Emotionally I have some very good friends, and 280 subscribers, 55–60% of whom open regularly my newsletter/visit my website. I thank God for music, especially Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Schubert and Glen Miller.

4. Spiritually, ever since my 1954 Eriskay experience, I delight in God's love. God is Emmanuel: always with me. I am never lonely. I, as Mary did, rejoice at the incarnation (Luke 1, 28).

Within me, there are two Vlads: the upper virtuous one, and the lower vicious one. I thank God for the lower one as I use my vices to fight themselves mutually: pride fights sloth, and helps the upper to keep working; vanity fights gluttony and keeps me from becoming fat. My moderate OCD keeps me from becoming big-headed and helps me understand others with the same sort of condition.

Every 'good for' is a 'good'. Happiness, joy, wonder – most events are 'good for' something and thus worthy of gratitude. Mistakes, pains and failures can teach great lessons in humility and compassion for others.

Every morning, not just at Mass, my prayer is eucharistic: a thanksgiving. To be genuine, gratitude needs to be expressed in thanksgiving. My morning prayer is in two short parts: "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you" and "Beloved Father, I offer you all my prayers, works, pleasures and pains, successes and failures in gratitude for my life today."

All too many people I have come across in my 86 years on this planet take for granted what they have and moan about what they would like to have. As a result, they do not enjoy life as much as they could.

"In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices." Elizabeth Gilbert, American journalist and author (born 1969), *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia*

"You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance." Khalil Gibran, Professor of History, Race, and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School and the Radcliffe (born 1972), *On Prayer*. As one of the best gratitude quotes, this is a great reminder that you need to be thankful even when life's good or when things are going your way.

"If having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans." James Herriot (1916–95), *All Creatures Great and Small*

"Gratitude looks to the Past and love to the Present; fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead." C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), *The Screwtape Letters*

"It's a funny thing about life, once you begin to take note of the things you are grateful for, you begin to lose sight of the things that you lack." Germany Kent, American journalist and broadcaster (born 1975)

"There are many ways to cultivate gratitude. One of the most accessible ways to do this is by starting a gratitude journal. Write down what you're thankful for each day. Hopefully, you'll start realizing how rich your life is.

In normal life we hardly realize how much more we receive than we give, and life cannot be rich without such gratitude. It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of others." Dietrich

Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident (1906–45), *Letters and Papers from Prison*

“Gratitude can transform common days into Thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.” William Arthur Ward, American motivational writer (1921–94)

“When you’re grateful, you’ll see the beauty in and appreciate even the most mundane things.

The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive.” Thích Nhất Hạnh, Buddhist monk, peace activist (1929–2022)

“The chief idea of my life is the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted.” G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936), *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton*

I find the two prayers attractive: The Benedictus and The Magnificat:

The Benedictus

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets he promised of old
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.
He promised to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath he swore to our father
Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.
You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

Amen

Chapter 3 Forgiving/apologising

In the Bible, the story of Joseph is told in Genesis (37–50). He was one of 12 sons of Jacob, who had wrestled with a mysterious stranger, a divine being, who changed his name to Israel (meaning 'let God prevail'). Jacob loved Joseph more than any of the others and gave him a resplendent coat of many colours. The brothers seized him and sold him to a party of Ishmaelites, or Midianites, who carry him to Egypt where eventually he became steward to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials.

Suffering poor harvests back home, his brothers came to Egypt in search of food. Joseph could have chosen to punish or ignore his brothers; he could have decided not to give them any grain and let them starve. But instead, he forgave them and they became a family again.

In a pivotal moment, he utters: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." (Genesis 50:20) Joseph's forgiveness produced a great harvest across the PIES: the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual dimensions of our lives.

Some 14 centuries later, St Paul would write that: 'all things work together for good to [those] who loved God.' (Romans 8,28)

In 1 Samuel 24, we read how David chose to forgive rather than to kill Saul. The Lord gave Saul to David and David had a chance to kill Saul but didn't. He forgave Saul and pleaded with Saul to stop listening to the lies.

David has three opportunities to take revenge on his enemies through stealth or force, but in each case he doesn't. At first, it's out of guilt, then because of Abigail's wise intervention, and finally in confidence that God will fight his battles – thus David forgave Saul.

On the evening of June 17th 2015, a mass shooter took the lives of nine African American people at a bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The massacre at a historic Black church deeply shook a nation already jaded by frequent gun violence and heralded a new chapter of violent white nationalism in America.

The forgiveness of these family members inspired citizens and politicians to take action and remove the Confederate flag, which is associated with the racist ideology of the perpetrator and the trauma of slavery.

Mark Stephens, 44, attacked Rita Stephens, 67, at their home in Pencoed on June 19th 2015 after a drinking session when she criticised the way he ran the family furniture firm. He told Swansea Crown Court that he 'snapped' after an argument over business debts. He was found guilty of murder and sentenced to a minimum of 20 years.

Martin Stephens forgave his twin brother who stabbed their mother to death after a drunken rage – and visited him in prison.

Nelson Mandela's name is synonymous with forgiveness. Mandela said that: "Forgiveness liberates the soul, it removes fear. That's why it's such a powerful weapon." His lifestyle of reconciliation, love and forgiveness is worth mentioning. Instead of revenge and retribution, he chose to forgive and make peace with his captors and jailors; those who engaged in terrible atrocities against the non-white population in South Africa. Mandela received numerous honours, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, for his impeccable forgiving lifestyle. His lifestyle of forgiveness is an example to the entire human race.

Pope John Paul II went to see his would-be assassin and forgave him. On 13 May 1981, in St Peter's Square in Vatican City, John Paul was shot and wounded by Mehmet Ali Ağca, a 25-year-old Turkish Muslim, while the Pope was entering the square. He was struck twice and suffered severe blood loss. Ağca was apprehended immediately and later sentenced to life in prison by an Italian court.

On December 29th 1983, Pope John Paul II and the gunman who gravely wounded him in 1981 sat in a prison cell for 20 minutes, alone, in quiet conversation. "What we said to each other is a secret between him and me," John Paul told reporters after the meeting. "I spoke to him as I would speak to a brother whom I have forgiven and who enjoys my confidence."

This visit to Ağca did not come as a surprise. It had been rumoured for at least two weeks that John Paul intended to see his attacker during a Christmas-season visit to the more than 2,000 inmates of Rebibbia, on the northeastern outskirts of Rome. A Vatican spokesman said that Ağca knelt and kissed John Paul's ring as the Pope rose to leave. Prison guards and papal officials observed the meeting from a corridor outside the open cell, but the two men spoke with such low intensity that they could not be heard.

The Pope publicly forgave his assailant, who was pardoned by Italian president Carlo Azeglio Ciampi at the Pope's request, and then deported to Turkey in June 2000. Ağca converted to Roman Catholicism in 2007.

The Pope hoped the meeting would be an example to the world of the healing powers of forgiveness. But the act of forgiveness is extraordinarily complex. It becomes especially intricate when the spirit of forgiveness is urged as a basis for public policy.

John Paul's gesture proclaimed a larger exemplary message to the world. Is forgiveness a purely personal transaction, or can it be applied in a political way to reconcile enemies?

The first complexity of forgiveness involves the question of justice. Personal or even divine magnanimity is not public justice, and it should not be permitted to override justice. For the ordering of society, there should still be justice. Restraint and punishment are necessary even for forgiveness.

In public realms, there is very often a tension between justice and forgiveness. Personal relations can be very spontaneous, almost oblivious to rules, to law and order, but society cannot be. That is the whole problem of Christian political ethics, how to translate the ultimate virtue of love into a social order that has stability, consistency.

Comedian Richard Pryor, in one of his routines, describes how he went to Arizona State Prison to make a 1980 movie called *Stir Crazy*. Before that experience, he had recited a standard liberal line about the injustice of prisons. But after he met some of the homicidal

brutes there and found out what crimes they had committed to earn their tuition, he said he was glad they had prisons with great big bars to hold people like that. In the real world, forgiveness sometimes makes sense as sentiment, but not as social policy.

That inconsistency can be resolved by assigning the two imperatives – justice and forgiveness – to different functional levels, to that of Caesar and that of God.

Justice is a social question, while forgiveness introduces a transcendent element: love. Weighing the injunction in the Sermon on the Mount to turn the other cheek, Martin Luther concluded that an individual ought to obey the command, but a government should not. There are two orders, that of the law and that of the Gospel. One forgives in one's heart, in the sight of God (as the Pope did), but the criminal still serves his or her time in Caesar's jail. And yet if one assumes that the claims of God and Caesar are parallel lines, and do not connect with each other, then it is futile, or merely sentimental, to talk about how a spirit of forgiveness might come into politics and international affairs.

In any case, experience teaches that forgiveness runs somewhat against human nature. The corollary of "To err is human, to forgive divine" is that to forgive is not human, not entirely so. To forget is human, and that eventual fading of a grievance from memory, not direct forgiveness, is quite often the solution.

Where ethnic identity remains strong and is fiercely perpetuated, the logic of the blood feud reigns, and it is infinitely harder to forgive or even think of forgiving. An old wrong, a kind of primal atrocity, sits in the tribal memory like a totem, an eternal reminder. For a man to forgive his enemy would mean betraying his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, dishonouring the sacrifices they had made. It is treason to forgive, inexcusable to forget.

So, between Armenians and Turks, Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants, between South Moluccans and Dutch, between Lebanese Maronites and Druze, between Hatfields and McCoys, between Montagues and Capulets, the ancient fury persists. The enemy is timeless. Their very existence is unforgivable, but also indispensable.

Not all enmities are unreasonable, either. Timing obviously has much to do with whether or not forgiveness makes any sense. The deed, the source of the grievance, must be some time in the past, and the threat of further injury removed. If someone had taken a shot at a man and then ducked into the woods, still carrying a loaded gun, it would not be reasonable for the man to call after his assailant, "That's OK. I forgive you!"

Moreover, in all but the saintliest circles, forgiveness may be a luxury that depends upon a certain surrounding stability. It's more difficult to forgive when there is no protection against a recurrence, when there are no doors or windows on the house and one is at the mercy of every zealot and loon who cares to crawl in with a knife in their teeth. That is the barbarous condition of Beirut at the moment, a place that forgiveness deserted long ago.

There are in Catholic theology 'the sins against the Holy Spirit'. These include such offences as despairing of salvation and obstinacy in sinning. As long as they persist, they are in some sense unforgivable. The doctrine raises interesting questions of unforgivability (if such a word should exist). If it had been 6 million Catholics who were exterminated in the Nazi death camps, would the Pope have forgiven Adolf Eichmann? Or would he have

had Eichmann hunted down, taken to Rome for trial and executed, as the Jews brought Eichmann to Jerusalem for judgment and hanging?

The Old Testament view of forgiveness was contained in a verb that dominates its penitential literature, the Hebrew word *shuv*, meaning to turn, to return. The doctrine implies that man has the power to turn from evil to good, to change, and the very act of turning will bring God's forgiveness.

Those who do not forgive are those who are least capable of changing the circumstances of their lives. In this sense, forgiveness is a shrewd and practical strategy for a person, or a nation, to pursue. It is the implacable, retributive tribes, like those of Northern Ireland or Lebanon, that find themselves backwatered, isolated, perishing from their own fury.

The psychological case for forgiveness is overwhelmingly persuasive. As Nelson Mandela made it clear, he was convinced that not to forgive is to be imprisoned by the past. Not to forgive is to yield oneself to another's control. If one does not forgive, then one is controlled by the other's initiatives and is locked into a sequence of act and response, of outrage and revenge, tit for tat, escalating always. The present is endlessly overwhelmed and devoured by the past. Forgiveness frees the forgiver. It extracts the forgiver from someone else's nightmare.

For 1,900 years, churches didn't apologise for the bad things they did. However, after World War II, especially following a declaration by Germany's Protestant churches that they failed to adequately oppose the Nazis, attitudes seem to have changed.

In the 1990s, church apologies increased as more attention was paid to human rights following the Cold War.

From July 24th to 29th 2022, Pope Francis visited Alberta, Quebec and Nunavut to apologise for abuses suffered by Indigenous people in Canada's state-funded residential Christian schools. (From the 1800s to the 1970s, the children of Indigenous families were forced to attend the schools where abuse was rampant.)

He flew from Rome to Edmonton, Alberta, where his welcoming party included Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mary May Simon, an Inuk and Canada's first Indigenous governor-general. Pope Francis had no official events scheduled on the Sunday, giving him time to rest before his meeting Monday with survivors near the site of a former residential school in Maskwacis, where he is expected to deliver an apology. Aboard the papal plane, Francis told reporters that it was a "penitential voyage" and urged people to pray – in particular for elderly people and grandparents.

Indigenous groups are seeking more than just words, though, as they press for access to church archives to learn the fate of children who never returned home from the residential schools. They also want justice for the abusers, financial reparations and the return of Indigenous artefacts held by the Vatican Museums. "This apology validates our experiences and creates an opportunity for the church to repair relationships with Indigenous peoples across the world," said Grand Chief George Arcand Jr., of the Confederacy of Treaty Six. But he stressed: "It doesn't end here – there is a lot to be done. It is a beginning."

Pope Francis' week-long trip culminated with a historic April 1st apology for the "deplorable" abuses committed by some Catholic missionaries in residential schools. The Canadian government has admitted that physical and sexual abuse were rampant in the state-funded Christian schools that operated from the 19th century to the 1970s. Some 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and forced to attend the schools, in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their homes, Native languages and cultures, and to assimilate them into Canada's Christian society.

The then Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology over the residential schools in 2008. As part of a lawsuit settlement involving the government, churches and approximately 90,000 surviving students, Canada paid reparations amounting to billions of dollars being transferred to Indigenous communities. Canada's Catholic Church says its dioceses and religious orders have provided more than \$50 million in cash and in-kind contributions, and hope to add \$30 million more over the next five years.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 had called for a papal apology to be delivered on Canadian soil, but it was only after the 2021 discovery of the possible remains of around 200 children at the former Kamloops residential school in British Columbia that the Vatican mobilised to comply with the request.

"I honestly believe that if it wasn't for the discovery [...] and all the spotlight that was placed on the Oblates or the Catholic Church as well, I don't think any of this would have happened," said Raymond Frogner, head archivist at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. He had just returned from Rome where he spent five days at the headquarters of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, which operated 48 of the 139 Christian-run residential schools, the most of any Catholic order. After the graves were discovered, the Oblates finally offered "complete transparency and accountability", Frogner said, and allowed him into its headquarters to research the names of alleged sex abusers from a single school in the western Canadian province of Saskatchewan. While there, he found 1,000 photos of schools and their students, with inscriptions on the back, that he said would be valuable to survivors and their families hoping to find traces of their loved ones. He said the Oblates agreed on a joint project to digitise the photographs and make them available online.

The Inuit community, for its part, is seeking Vatican assistance to extradite a single Oblate priest, the Reverend Joannes Rivoire, who ministered to Inuit communities until he left in the 1990s and returned to France. Canadian authorities issued an arrest warrant for him in 1998 on accusations of several counts of sexual abuse, but it has never been served. Inuit leader Natan Obed personally asked Pope Francis for the Vatican's help in extraditing Reverend Rivoire, telling The Associated Press that it was one specific thing the Vatican could do to bring healing to his many victims. Asked about the request, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said that he had no information on the case.

At a news conference in Edmonton, organizers said they would do all they could to enable school survivors to attend the papal events, particularly for the Maskwacis apology and the gathering at Lac Ste. Anne, long a popular pilgrimage site for Indigenous Catholics. Both are in rural areas, and organizers arranged shuttle transport, noting that many survivors were now elderly and frail and might need accessible vehicle transport, diabetic-friendly snacks and other services.

The Rev. Cristino Bouvette, national liturgical coordinator for the papal visit, and partly of Indigenous heritage, said that he hoped the visit would be healing for those who had “borne a wound, a cross that they have suffered with, in some cases for generations.”

Reverend Bouvette, a priest in the Diocese of Calgary, said the papal liturgical events would have strong Indigenous representation – including prominent roles for Indigenous clergy and the use of Native languages, music and motifs on liturgical vestments. He said he was doing the work in honour of his *kokum*, the Cree word for grandmother, who spent 12 years at a residential school in Edmonton. She “could have probably never imagined those many years later that her grandson would be involved in this work.”

The apology follows a similar one made in 2022 by Pope Francis in Rome to members of Canada’s First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities. The setting matters, said Fernie Marty, a member of the Papaschase, a Cree nation in Alberta. The 73-year-old is a survivor of a day school – part of a system that, like residential schools, aimed to assimilate Indigenous children. He appreciated the apology, but noted: “this is where all the atrocities happened,” Marty said. It’s “more meaningful coming on Canadian soil.”

Marty, an elder at Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples in Edmonton, a Catholic parish in Alberta’s capital oriented toward Indigenous people and culture, said the pope’s visit offers “a tremendous opportunity for my own personal healing.” But George Pipestem, 79, a member of the Montana First Nation and a survivor of the Ermineskin Indian Residential School, questioned the relevance of a papal apology, just as he questioned apologies by Canadian prime ministers for the government’s role in the schools. He said the abusers should be the ones apologising: “They’re all gone, though. This apologizing, it doesn’t matter to me. It’s like nothing. It’s only a word.”

It is not uncommon for a leader who was neither involved nor alive when a wrong was committed to deliver a church’s apology. Some took generations to say sorry.

St John Paul II made it clear that the present had a responsibility for the past, and left a legacy of papal apologies. None were more significant than his *mea culpas* issued as the Catholic Church opened its 2000 Jubilee and entered its third millennium. He apologised for Catholics’ sins through the ages, including against women, Jews and other religious minorities. In his most memorable act, on March 26th 2000 he tucked a prayer note into the Western Wall in Jerusalem asking God’s forgiveness for those who “have caused these children of yours to suffer.” Contrition and apologies, he hoped, would sow the seeds of forgiveness across an increasing area of the world.

The following year, when John Paul sent his first-ever email, it was an apology for colonial-era abuses of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and the Pacific, as well as for the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, also apologised for clerical abuse, most significantly in a 2010 letter to Irish faithful. He said he was “truly sorry” for the hurt, and blamed Irish bishops, though he was silent on Vatican responsibility.

Pope Francis has gone further, first apologising for his own errors in defending a Chilean bishop who covered up abuse by the country’s most notorious paedophile priest. That 2018 scandal was a turning point in Pope Francis’ understanding of abuse, and he continued to apologise for it.

Juan Carlos Cruz, who was abused by that priest, received both a church apology and a personal one from Pope Francis. It felt like finally the church recognised the harm he suffered, and he could start healing, Cruz said. It also motivated Cruz, now a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, to continue advocating for survivors. “Pope Francis had a sincerity that it was hard not to believe. And it’s not because you’re sitting in front of a pope [...] It’s because of his humility and sincerity,” Cruz said. “Trust me. I’ve received apologies from many people in the church that are as fake as you can imagine.”

Francis also apologised, in 2015 in Bolivia, for wrongs committed by the church against Indigenous peoples during the conquest of the Americas.

Few individuals in the history of the American civil rights movement cast as long a shadow as Representative John Lewis (1940–2020). John Lewis, a black man who was beaten and insulted in the civil rights movement, argued that George Wallace, the surly segregationist Alabama politician, deserved forgiveness. Born in rural Alabama as the son of sharecroppers, Lewis first gained fame (at least in his hometown newspaper) by preaching a sermon at his family church before even turning 16. He then embarked on an incredible life of “good trouble”: as a Freedom Rider, a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an organizer of the March on Washington, and a leader of the famed march in Selma, Alabama, which became known as ‘Bloody Sunday’. By the time he was 25, Lewis had done more than most accomplish in a lifetime, using speech and assembly as the powerful tools for change the Founders intended them to be. And, of course, he was only getting started; Lewis continued to serve as a powerful voice for racial justice and First Amendment freedoms in the halls of Congress for over 30 years.

Chapter 4 Generally, better together

4.1 Introduction

In 1979, to celebrate my ‘midlife crisis’ 40th birthday – deemed in Opus Dei as special – I was sent on my Annual Course to San Sebastian. There, with plenty of spare time, I started writing what 40 years later ended up as a compendium of my life’s philosophy: *Life Squared*.

To be able to teach the ‘A level’ Johannine corpus at the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School – and, since the 1973 event in Orme Court, suspicious of the instructions I had been receiving in Opus Dei – I needed to discover what I really meant by the words God, eternity, sin, salvation, love, humanity and life. What did I think – what was my own perception – of life’s SONG: my Self, Others, Nature and God?

Gradually, as I pondered and wrote, I realised that the Universe was not a machine but more like an organism constantly created by The Father, steered by The Son and enlivened – loved by – *Qedosh Ruah*, The Holy (feminine) Spirit.

Thanks to our Covid lockdowns in 2021, I was able to finish and publish *Life Squared*. As I wrote it, out of the shadows rumbled a train of thought that reached the end of the line: the conviction that, at their core, many of the world’s problems in philosophy, theology, politics, cultures and life itself are due to disjunctives. To heal the world, we need conjunctives: ‘and, both, also, as well as’. Better, together they enrich life. Disjunctives fragment. Conjunctives unify.

The motto of Clapham College, my *alma mater*, now no longer there, was *Concordia Res Parvae Crescunt* (in harmony, small things grow).

Many years ago, I discovered that you cannot tie a parcel with one hand.

“Better Together” was the principal campaign slogan for a ‘No’ vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, advocating Scotland’s continuation as part of the *United Kingdom*. It worked.

Unitate fortior (stronger by union) is the motto of the Army & Navy Club, London, and, of course, The Musketeers’ “All for one. One for all.”

The Roman Catholic religion is a faith of ‘and’. The Blessed Trinity is Father *and* Son *and* Holy Spirit. Jesus is God *and* man. Mary is Mother *and* Virgin. The Church is priests *and* laity; men *and* women.

Jesus Christ comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable.

In relationships it is good to use ears and mouth – in proportion to their quantity.

Relationships are emotional and intellectual.

Brexit has made it all too palpably clear that ‘going it alone’ has had – and will continue to have – a massive negative impact on the UK’s fiscal life and much else.

The PIES components of our human life, inseparable in reality, can be viewed and evaluated individually. In my role as a spiritual guide and monitoring character development, I have found this acronym structure useful.

Instead of the traditional body, mind and spirit, I prefer the PIES. Why? Because, on the one hand, we are made to the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 27) who, not having a mind, certainly has a magnificent intelligence, as can be seen in the remarkably directed evolution of the universe these past 13.7 billion years. And, on the other, I include the emotional because typically it is our emotions that motivate most of our decisions and actions, which we then justify with our intellect.

In this book, to give my trains of thought clear destinations, I have structured my ideas around the framework of these PIES. The structure is not perfect. Some couplets are from different compartments of PIES. For example:

1. Select a target (I) AND obtain motivation (E)

The tougher the goal, greater must be the motivation. The longer it takes to reach the objective, the more enduring must the motivation be.

2. Have ambition (I) AND yet be realistic (S).

Wise to cut one's coat according to one's cloth. Make plans and decisions that are based on what you have not what you would like. Given my height, it would have been foolish for me to aim to be an elite basketball player.

3. Tap into your potential or ability (PIES) AND develop and use your self-discipline (S).

Self-discipline is the ability to push yourself forward, stay motivated, and act, regardless of how you're feeling, physically or emotionally. Lacking self-discipline, all too many people end up with a great future behind them. You need effort and endurance to convert dreams into palpable reality.

4. Having enough work (P & I) AND enough time for family life (E), is vital for a healthy emotional balance.
5. When people and institutions have BOTH wealth and generosity, great things can be achieved. However, to avoid doing damage, they also need wisdom: tapping into the advice of experts who know the facts. (So much harm has been done by wishing well to well diggers in Africa; women, no longer needing to walk distances, had time and energy to swell the population, which ended up causing poverty, conflict or migration.)
6. A serious drive AND ability can convert dreams into reality, no matter how challenging these may be.

I am on earth alive in a body thanks to my spirit. Without my body, I would not be here. When God decides to take away my spirit, I will be dead on earth, alive in God beyond space-time. On earth, BOTH body AND spirit are essential for life.

To the title of this chapter, I added the adjective 'generally', as there are exceptions. I have heard (alas, all too often): "I married him/her for life. Not for the impossible."

Then, of course, being together can be one-sided, asymmetrical – as the Indian army in Flanders found out in 1915. Good for Britain, not so good for all those soldiers from her vast colony.

You will probably have come across the phrase ‘united we stand, divided we fall’, a saying attributed to the storyteller Aesop (620–564bce), both directly in his fable “The Four Oxen and the Lion”¹ and indirectly in “The Bundle of Sticks”. Its truth, as taught by Jesus is still valid: “if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3, 25) – hence this chapter.

In my later years, I try to be BOTH an optimist AND a realist. As Oscar Wilde would have put it: “we may all be in the gutter, but I am looking at the stars.” Rather than competing with more gifted folk, I prefer to aim to achieve the best I can with what I have: pushing my PB ever upwards.

Our individualistic, materialistic, secular culture is decadence vectoring itself to self-destruction. I hope this book, if read by teachers at any level, will help achieve a more united, peaceful and flourishing future for our planet.

4.2 Physical

Good buildings AND green spaces together work better for healthy communities. Green spaces improve air quality, reduce noise and enhance biodiversity. They also moderate temperatures during hot periods and provide cool and shaded areas, as well as play zones for children and dogs.

Local communities use green spaces for physical exercise (typically tennis) AS WELL AS social interactions and relaxation. Exposure to green spaces benefits health by reducing mortality and morbidity from chronic diseases, improving mental health, pregnancy outcomes and reducing obesity.

‘We’, as a team of individuals each expert in their field, is better than an ‘I’ trying to be a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. A team, of even just two, can often perform far better than a solitary individual can. Think carrying a ladder, hanging a picture, erecting scaffolding, etc.

Together with another human, life can be far more fun. Think hitting a tennis ball or kicking a football. Think enjoying a meal or drinking alcohol. A fellow cleric admitted to me that he had bought a dog so he would not have to take his inevitable night-time tipple alone. Better together, even with a dog.

Think looking AND listening when crossing a road.

We need sounds to hear AND silence to enable us to reflect on what is said or played.

With any medical problem, it is good to treat the symptoms AND ascertain the case (s).

People feeling depressed have low serotonin levels in their brains, which can be treated, with at least short-term improvements in moods with serotonin supplements. However, the causes of their depression will be a mix of bad biological, psychological and social experiences. Perhaps a lack of sunlight, grief – emotions associated with loss of someone (even ‘just’ a pet) beloved. Some depressions stem from memories of childhood traumas, and can often be subconscious. These may have been physical, emotional or sexual abuse – or maybe a mix of these.

The aetiology of grief (the emotion associated with loss) can be caused by any loss of what has for us value. In addition to childhood trauma and grief, depression and anxiety

can be caused by the loss of job, status, finance, values, looks, fitness, job satisfaction, meaning, control and love, and, of course, by loneliness.

When my role as Diocesan Chaplain to Young People (anyone up to the age of 25) was taken away, I felt depressed. However, thanks to prayer (and I suspect my wartime 'never let the buggers get you down' temperament), I soon saw it as an opportunity. A door had opened. I could get involved with sport.

Sure enough, soon the Cardinal appointed me Chaplain to Sport – the first ever in the UK. As a result, I became involved with the London 2012 Games, which I enjoyed enormously. Thanks to my energies dedicated to sport, I was awarded the honour of being appointed Visiting Professor at St Mary's University, Twickenham. As we know, flowers blossom well in deep manure. So, if you find yourself in some of that, see what seeds you can sow. Remember, the Resurrection came as a result of the Crucifixion.

In WW2 the US bombers flew together in tight formation as this gave them enhanced defence against the Nazi fighters. Whenever possible, fighters tended to fly with a wingman for the same reason. On the Eastern Front, it was better to have the inexhaustible source of Russian soldiers and the vast quantity of trucks, jeeps, tanks and much more supplied by the US. TOGETHER these vanquished the Nazi Wehrmacht (meaning 'defence power' – given its hideous aggression, a grim oxymoronic title for that army.)

The Battle of Waterloo (June 18th 1815) was won by the armies of the Duke of Wellington who prayed "give me night or give me Blücher" AND his Prussian ally General Gebhard Blücher. The arrival of the Prussians and their attack on the right changed everything.

The Supermarine Spitfire, which first flew in March 1935, a heroic icon of WW2, needed BOTH the inventor of the airframe, Reginald J Mitchell (1895–1937) AND the brilliant Rolls Royce, water-cooled Merlin engine, to perform as well as it did. (In case you wondered, the Spitfire was named after Ann, the daughter of the manufacturer's chairman, Sir Robert McLean, who called her "the little spitfire".)

In WW2, it was Churchill AND Stalin AND the USA TOGETHER that beat Hitler. The UK AND USA AND Canada succeeded on D Day.

Currently – October 2022 – it is Ukrainian courage AND USA and UK supplied arms that are forcing Russia to retreat. Who knows, what will happen when Trump is running the USA.

To produce a top racehorse, its owners need BOTH a top stud AND a top trainer. To win top races, they then need that horse AND a top jockey. For safe driving, a car needs an accelerator AND a brake.

Think Schizophrenia, a mental disorder involving a fragmentation of the relationships between thought, emotion, and behaviour. Working TOGETHER, these are fine. Disconnected, fragmented, they are grim.

Erotic desire is both good, even sacramental, AND dangerous, with its ability to damage and even destroy individuals and families.

We need wakefulness full of creativity AND sleep to help our brains recover and minimise the risk of dementia. Harvard researchers found that individuals who slept fewer

than five hours per night were twice as likely to develop dementia, and twice as likely to die early, compared to those who slept six to eight hours per night. This study controlled for demographic characteristics including age, marital status, race, education, health conditions, and body weight.

Researchers in Europe (including France, the UK, the Netherlands and Finland), examining data from almost 8,000 participants from a different study, found that consistently sleeping six hours or fewer at the age of 50, 60, and 70 was associated with a 30% increase in dementia risk compared to a normal sleep duration of seven hours.

It is good to drink BOTH coffee AND tea in appropriate quantities. Coffee is a potent source of healthful antioxidants. It provides a short-term memory boost and, together with vitamin D, exercise and plenty of sleep, helps protect against dementia. It's also healthy for your heart and may help curb certain cancers, as well as lessen your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Coffee consumption has been linked to a lower incidence of cirrhosis, especially alcoholic cirrhosis. It also guards against gout. It curbs depression. Coffee is cool.

However, there are a few cons of coffee drinking. For some, coffee in high doses can cause irritability, nervousness or anxiety, and it can also impact sleep quality and cause insomnia. In people with hypertension, coffee consumption does transiently raise their blood pressure, although for no more than several hours, but no correlation has been found between coffee drinking and long-term increases in blood pressure or the incidence of cardiovascular disease in patients with pre-existing hypertension.

It takes about six hours for the effects of caffeine to wear off, so limit coffee drinking to early in the day.

On the other hand, tea also has its benefits.

- Tea contains antioxidants that prevent the body's version of rust and thus help to keep us young and protect us from damage from pollution.
- Tea contains less caffeine than coffee. Herbal tea blends have no caffeine and traditional teas have less than 50% of what typically is found in coffee.
- Tea may reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke; it may help with weight loss and protect your bones.
- Tea may keep your smile bright. Japanese researchers have found that tea can decrease tooth loss because it changes the pH in your mouth when you drink it and that may be what prevents cavities. Tea does not appear to erode tooth enamel.
- Tea may boost the immune system and help battle cancer.
- Herbal tea may soothe the digestive system.
- Pure tea is calorie-free.

So, enjoy that cuppa, but remember experts recommend you drink four cups of tea a day to be of optimal benefit to your health.

The title of the February 2023 International Casinos Exhibition was "Stronger Together". Folk with gambling problems need support from their peers. Gambling

Anonymous, like Alcoholics Anonymous, knows that what people alone cannot achieve, together with others, they can. And do.

Depending on how we observe it, energy (light) has a dual nature. It seems to act as both a particle AND a wave.

Nature and nurture are ubiquitous. The cosmos, whose nature, conceived at the Big Bang (some 13.7 billion years ago), has needed the divine nurture (directed evolution) to arrive where we now are.

Farming in most of its forms benefits from having plenty of sunshine AND rain, plenty of winter AND spring rain, and plenty of sunshine in summer AND autumn.

Fitness is a result of not just proper training BUT ALSO correct diet AND a positive mindset. Sporting success is a child of both ambition AND humility – some would call that realism.

There are able-bodied sports AND there are parasports (played by people with a disability, including physical and intellectual disabilities). Experience has shown how able-bodied AND sportspeople with disabilities find each other mutually enriching.

Paralympic history began in 1948 at a hospital for war veterans in Stoke Mandeville, located 60 kilometres north of London. German neurologist Sir Ludwig Guttmann (a Jewish doctor who fled Nazi Germany just before the start of the Second World War) had been looking for a way to help his paraplegic patients, all WWII veterans, rehabilitate more quickly. In parallel with the London Olympics 1948, he gave birth to The Stoke Mandeville Games. In 1960 in Rome, these became the Paralympic Games, featuring 400 athletes from 23 countries. Since then, in tandem with the Olympics, they have taken place every four years. [In August 2024 at the Paris Paralympics, 4,463 athletes from 170 nations took part in 549 events across 22 sports.](#)

Able-bodied athletes are now taking part in parasports, which is helping the able-bodied athlete to find out what it means to live with a disability.

Now there is both male AND female professional elite footy on TV. Women's association football is played at the professional level in multiple countries throughout the world and 187 national teams participate internationally.

Although the 'first golden age' of women's football occurred in the UK in the 1920s, with one match attracting over 50,000 spectators, The Football Association initiated a ban in 1921 in England that disallowed women's football games from taking place on grounds used by its member clubs. That ban remained in effect until July 1971.

In 1972, the first official women's international in Britain was played at Greenock. England beat Scotland 3-2.

Until 1933, collaboration was a clean word. (A bit like my father's name when in 1909 he was baptised Adolf). Once again, for the younger generations, it is no longer a dirty word, although, in the context of WWII, the term 'collaborators' applied to those who aided the Nazi.

The prefix *col-* is a variant of *com-*, meaning ‘together.’ At the heart of the word is *labour*, meaning ‘work.’ Competitors in any sport need not be enemies if they return to the origin of that word, ‘*com- petito*’, to strive together.

Many clubs – in all sorts of sports – are exploring ways to collaborate with organisations, communities, and local clubs to develop and facilitate inclusive health and wellbeing opportunities. TOGETHER they can make their communities better.

Liverpool FC currently provides a range of youth sessions every week from a young ambassador programme, IT workshops, yoga, to supporting local organisations such as Army Cadets and the Jamie Carragher Academy.

Arsenal Football Club has always had community at its heart and celebrated 100 years in the Borough of Islington during 2013/14.

As well as its charitable endeavours, the Arsenal Foundation supports an array of good causes in the community, providing practical and financial support to a number of initiatives in the local boroughs of Islington, Camden, Westminster and Hackney.

Head of Arsenal in the Community, Freddie Hudson, is one of two loyal Arsenal staff members to be named a Premier League Community Captain in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the local area.

Queens Park Rangers (QPR) has a vision: “To create a stronger, healthier, more active community where everyone can thrive”. Its mission? “To address local needs and make a difference to individuals and our communities.” Its core values? “Driven by local needs by partners, funders and stakeholders. To be positive role models promoting positive change.” QPR Football Club and QPR Trust care about the local community. They are empathetic, supportive, professional and passionate.

On earth, time is not only a threat – we might die any minute – BUT ALSO an opportunity to develop and grow.

I am both mortal AND immortal. My body is due to die. However, I am alive in eternity now AND will be there, with God, after my body has died.

My death will, I suspect, be BOTH negative (for my friends), AND excellent for me, enabling me finally to be born into divine eternity and see the face of God.

4.3 Intellectual

Though it is fair to say that reality may be one, perceptions – understanding any part of that reality – are contingent on the standpoint, education, culture and intelligence of the observer.

To get a handle on reality we need to look AND see, to listen AND to hear. Yesterday, this was brought home to me as I visited a family. Seeing the lady of the house sorting out her daughter’s laundry, I joked: “Typical, getting her mum to do the work.” “Actually, she is clearing up after last’s night’s party at the parish hall.” I had made my comment before I’d got the full picture. Easily done. In this case, without causing harm or pain. I am never too old to learn.

‘2 + 2?’ ‘Are we buying or selling?’

Remember that we each have three brains. The 'head' or cephalic brain, the heart (cardiac) AND a gut (enteric) brain. With age, I have learned that to get the best possible take on reality, it is wise to listen to all of our three brains: the head, the heart, and the gut.

The cephalic brain has two hemispheres; one of which tends to be dominant, though BOTH TOGETHER do a better job. The right brain is creative, intuitive, artistic, non-verbal, emotional, musical, and imaginative AND the left brain is logical, analytical, linear, factual, verbal, and sequential.

Our second brain is located not in our head but in our tummy, or, to be more specific, in our digestive system which operates independently of our head brain. As they say: "trust your gut feeling!"

The third is in our heart. Being aware of, and listening to all three, is wise.

To excel, we need to use BOTH of our brain hemispheres. The two hemispheres are – like the right and left ventricles of the heart – equally important. Left-brain people tend to be more organised and systematic. Right-brain people are more creative and intuitive.

The functions of the left side of the brain are analytical, logic, and computation skills. The right side of your brain is in charge of visual awareness, imagination, emotions, spatial abilities, face recognition, music awareness, 3D forms, interpreting social cues, and left-hand control.

Left-brain functions are deemed to include understanding the sum of any situation – getting 'the big picture', large-muscle movements like walking, sensing where one's body is in space, balance, non-verbal communication, emotional functioning, sensing smells, sounds and taste, as well as regulating avoidance behaviours.

According to neuroscience research, the left side of the brain is positively stimulated by new experiences. It controls the immune system and is responsible for the involuntary bodily functions, like breathing, heart rate, and digestion.

Left-brain and right-brain psychology further describes left-brain functions as including the ability to pay attention to details, fine motor movement skills, and the ability to convert sounds to language and translate their meaning. Left-brain networks also are thought to control analytical/logical thinking, including a person's mathematics ability and problem-solving skills.

The right brain hemisphere is thought to allow young children to understand concepts of more versus less, but the understanding of specific number values involves the left hemisphere.

Other cognitive activities that tend to be governed by the right hemisphere of the brain include attention to, and processing of, the overall visual shape of items, understanding verbal ambiguity, and emotional and implied meanings.

In terms of brain development, neuroscience research indicates that until about the age of 3, the right brain hemisphere tends to have the primary, dominant, role in brain function.

Together the left AND right – though they cannot prove much – can present evidence for discussions and debates.

The right hemisphere reads atmospheres, moods and situation, with their ambiguity, irony, metaphor, nuance and subtlety.

The left hemisphere is great for rational intelligence.

However, our minds are plastic. Children who have lost an entire hemisphere are able to lead – only slightly impaired – normal lives.

The Chinese philosophical concept of yin AND yang ('dark-light', 'negative-positive') describes how obviously opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. Yin is the receptive and yang the active principle, seen in all forms of change and difference, such as the annual cycle (winter and summer), the landscape (north-facing shade and south-facing brightness), sexual coupling (female and male), the formation of both men and women as characters, and socio-political history (disorder and order).

Yin is a symbol of earth, femaleness, darkness, passivity, and absorption. It is present in even numbers, in valleys and streams, and is represented by the tiger, the colour orange, and a broken line. Yang is conceived of as heaven, maleness, light, activity, and penetration. It is present in odd numbers, in mountains, and is represented by the dragon, the colour azure, and an unbroken line. In harmony, the two are depicted as the light and dark halves of a circle.

The term 'dualistic-monism' or dialectical monism has been coined in an attempt to express this fruitful paradox of simultaneous unity AND duality. Yin and yang can be thought of as complementary – not opposing – forces that interact to form a dynamic system in which the whole is greater than its parts.

According to this philosophy, everything has both yin AND yang aspects (for instance, shadow cannot exist without light). Either of the two major aspects may manifest more strongly in a particular object, depending on the criterion of the observation. The yin yang symbol shows a balance between two opposites with a portion of the opposite element in each section.



When making a choice or deciding how to act now, it is wise to consider both the past AND the future, to remember the consequences of past actions and avoid making the same mistakes again.

In 1959, while working in Argyll on a civil engineering project, a ganger fell ill. I suggested to the manager that Bill, who had been working for the company the past 32 years, could take over. He answered: "Oh no. Bill does not have 32 years' experience. He has had one year's experience 32 times." I realised Bill had learned nothing and kept making the same mistakes each year. That conversation has stayed with me ever since.

Natural to see the world in terms of 'us' and 'them'. For millennia, tribes were welded into unity by fighting the enemy, the other. No wonder races see other races as threatening. Deep down in our reptilian brain we are racists. Good to admit and compensate for that centrifugal, xenophobic instinct.

In his Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10, 29–37), Jesus made patently clear that in the Kingdom of God there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ but a global ‘we’. We are all in it together, in one divine family. Not easy, but so life-enriching when we manage to see and embrace this reality.

For me, men and women – both made to the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 27) – are radically equal and clearly different. Thank God; otherwise how would there be the next generation?

In the Kingdom of God, which Jesus Christ came to inaugurate, teach and live, there is equality of all. St Paul caught this clearly in his letter to the Galatians (3, 28), “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

To make sense of life we need BOTH to consider the present AND to remember the past.

To make sense of what is said, or written, we need words AND we need to take care of punctuation. Compare:

A woman without her man, is a savage.

With

A woman, without her, man is a savage.

Top people are both serious thinkers AND have a sense of humour. Laughter is a personal serious medicine AND a powerful communal glue. It is also a non-violent weapon of resistance to tyranny, sustaining hope.

Science AND faith, like yin and yang, are complementary. Science studies the parts to see how they work. Faith unites the parts to see what together they mean. The left-side brain, being analytical and linear, deals with science: investigating and explaining what and how things are. The right side – holistic and integrative – is interested in relationships, meaning: the why. Moreover, by whom? God.

If reality is like a tube, science looks at it laterally, sideways – and sees a rectangle with its what? How? When? Faith looks at it longitudinally, frontally – and sees a circle with its why? By whom? The rectangle and circle do not clash. They enable us to perceive reality – call it ‘truth’ – more accurately, more completely.

To understand life, we need both faith AND science. In fact, science needs perception-faith to accept the existence of the unseen cause of a palpable fact. Things fall. Scientists accept there must be gravity.

Though molecules were always there, that fact was discovered only in 1926, by the French physicist Jean Perrin, who received the Nobel Prize in physics for proving, conclusively, the existence of molecules.

Dark matter AND dark energy are names for phenomena we cannot see yet believe must be there because there is more gravitation than our theories predict. The first real evidence for dark matter came in 1933. Scientists became convinced – they believed – that there must be a source of gravitation we cannot see. The only source of gravitation we know is matter. What we cannot see appears dark to us; therefore, we call it dark matter.

The universe is expanding faster than our theories predict. Thus, scientists believe that there must be an invisible force which does that. The only source of force we know is energy. Discovered in 1998, we don't know what dark energy is and therefore we call it 'dark' energy.

Many years ago, as I studied the human brain, and then much later DNA, I realised (and became convinced) there must be a magnificent intelligence shaping that brain which had been evolving for billions. There had to be a creator God.

It is good to have a strong personal faith AND respect the faiths of others. Reality is one. Perceptions are personal and affected by intelligence, education and culture. Belonging shapes believing, with its values, and that in turn influences our behaviour, with its virtues and, alas, vices.

Intellectual intelligence (II) AND emotional intelligence (EI) AND spiritual intelligence (SI) are better together. Mensa measures II and a person's IQ. EI is the ability to control your own emotions and understand those of others. SI is the ability to access deeper meanings, values, purposes and your own unconscious; maybe even that of others.

It seems to me that there are many 'conceptual disjunctives' which can become conjunctives, shaping a sharper, more truthful take on reality. For example, Boris Johnson is BOTH (alas!) a great Brexiteer AND a disastrous human being. Brexit may have produced a greater political freedom BUT it ALSO caused massive damage to our economy.

A group – a team of folk with different priorities and from different backgrounds, genders and birth dates – is likely to make sounder political and fiscal decisions than a solitary person working alone.

Recall 'The blind men AND an elephant' parable? A group of blind men hear that an elephant has been brought to the town, but none of them is aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they say: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable." Therefore, they seek it out. The first person, whose hand lands on the trunk, says, "This being is like a thick snake." For another one whose hand reaches its ear, it seems like a kind of fan. Another, whose hand falls upon its leg, says that the elephant is a pillar like a tree trunk. The one who places his hand upon its side thinks the elephant "is a wall". Another who feels its tail describes it as a rope. The last feels its tusk, and says the elephant is like a spear. In some versions, the blind men then discover their disagreements, suspect the others not to be telling the truth and come to blows.

The moral of the story is that humans tend to claim absolute truth based on their limited, subjective experience, and to ignore other people's limited, subjective experiences that may be equally true.

My education has enabled me to enjoy life AND others to enjoy my company, or so it seems.

Everyone can teach me something. Life has taught me that, like stopped clocks, even fools can be sometimes right.

"I see nobody on the road," said Alice. "I only wish that I had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!" (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*)

Open dialogue, even polylogue, where all those involved are open to the ideas of others, is intellectually mutually enriching. This type of dialogue is a communication tool that allows people to understand other viewpoints without pitting themselves against different perspectives. In this dialogue, there is no defending of opinions, and no counterpoints. Instead, you let someone talk and present their viewpoint. Dialogue and polylogue – as in the Three Faiths Forum or Canary Wharf Multi-Faith Chaplaincy.

Though beliefs are myriad, the behaviour of people of different faiths, at their best, can be very similar. Though for Shintoists, mainly some five million, in Japan, there are many gods or spirits, the main values of Shinto are similar to those of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus Christ: purity, harmony, respect for nature, family respect, and subordination of the individual before the group. Shinto emphasises duty as its main motivator. Jesus emphasises love.

God is God (Exodus 3, 14). Jews, Christians and Muslims can dialogue – even triologue – their own take on this one creator God.

Dialogue and triologue

1. **Build trust.** Without this vital ingredient, teams don't work, leaders lack traction, and projects fail. The quickest way to build trust is by being willing to talk about what matters most and encouraging others to do the same.
2. **Inspire new ideas.** People share their best thinking, work hardest and come up with their freshest ideas when they are engaged. The wealth of untapped intelligence in organisations can be best accessed by listening to people and helping them listen to each other.
3. **Cultivate collaboration.** Without good dialogue, problems remain unresolved and 'siloed working' sets in. Good communication is at the heart of productive teamwork, successful projects and effective leadership. People who talk together create together.
4. **Improve relationships.** We deepen our connections with people by talking openly and honestly. When we look beyond our own self-interested perspective and try to see others' points of view, we build bridges with them.
5. **Resolve conflict.** Difficult feelings – resentment, frustration or disappointment – often fester if we don't communicate them. A good conversation helps to clear the air and make space for something new, whether it's a restored relationship, a gracious goodbye or an agreement to disagree.
6. **Encourage creativity.** To produce quality goods and services, we need the spark of new ideas which often emerge from the creative tension between different points of view. In a team, everyone holds a piece of the puzzle. The only way to complete the jigsaw is by finding a way to talk together.
7. **Increase wellbeing.** Research shows that people who have substantive conversations are happier than those who just do small talk. When we have time to reflect with each other, we feel more fulfilled in our work and wider lives.
8. **Create more meaning.** Younger people entering the workforce don't just want to make money; they want high-impact work and to feel they can shape their destiny.

Employees who are inspired by meaningful dialogue are more likely to stay with their organisation than move on.

9. **Open doors.** Finding the courage to speak out creates new opportunities. A conversation could lead to a pay rise, a promotion or an unexpected perk. Sometimes the next chapter doesn't start until the threshold of talking together is crossed.
10. **Expand flexibility.** Being skilful at dialogue makes us more agile. We are better able to understand others, see the bigger picture and come up with solutions that we might never have reached by working alone.

When planning any activity, it is wise to consider BOTH now AND then. Consequences of our actions should help shape our morality AND strategy. If Hitler had thought of the condition in which he would find the Baku oilfields (which had fuelled his 1939 Blitzkrieg) AND the Russian winter temperatures, he would not have launched Operation Barbarossa on Sunday June 22nd 1941. He imagined it would be over before the Russian winter set in.

Had Hitler imagined Stalin's ruthless use of his vast Soviet population as cannon fodder AND remembered how the Russian winter had decimated Napoleon's troops, he would have desisted from attacking Stalingrad, just to humiliate its eponym.

History shows that to progress, humanity needs to continue not only to look and discover BUT ALSO to think, imagine and invent. An inventor AND a business brain – working together – are more likely to succeed than a brilliant inventor on their own ever will.

To succeed as an entrepreneur, you need not only invention but also production. Inventor Samuel Colt needed Eli Whitney Jr., an engineer-businessman, to set up The Colt Armoury in 1855 at Hartford, Connecticut, the world's first mass-production assembly line factory – a model picked up and developed by that friend of Hitler's, Henry Ford.

For success, F1 and indeed F2 and F3 cars need BOTH a great car AND a great driver AS WELL AS an intelligent, experienced and committed management team.

For great humour, we needed a Morecombe AND a Wise; a Laurel AND a Hardy.

To thrive, a half-decent country needs BOTH independent legislative, juridical and executive branches of government, AND ALSO a free press.

In a country, there is the state AND there is its civil society, with its families, communities, charities, philanthropic associations, religious congregations, neighbourhood groups and the like. When discussing politics, it is wise to bear BOTH in mind.

In law it is better to have BOTH legal AND restorative justice. When I was looking after St Patrick's parish, Wapping (2014–15), a young man who had been arrested for stealing a car, burst into tears when its owner told him that her three-year-old son had not slept for weeks because in that car he had lost his teddy bear.

A man who had been a burglar for 20 years suddenly stopped. He learnt a very tight restorative lesson. His own home had been burgled and, until then, he had never realised how painful that crime felt to the victim.

In September 2022, when visiting the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, I was introduced to Restorative Youth Sports: An Applied Model for Resolving Conflicts and

Building Positive Relationships, in the Department of Kinesiology. Concentrating on helping young people become better, it resonates with the programmes of John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport, with its aim to help young people be better by acquiring virtues through sport – now embedded within SWIFT at St Mary’s University, Twickenham.

There is legality AND there is morality; they are not the same. What may be legal may not be moral. What may be moral, like professing your faith, may not – in a tyranny or dictatorship – be legal. In a liberal culture, abortion may be legal but, to my Christian mind, it is not moral. For me – and I hope for you, dear reader – morality trumps legality.

There is an inner-directed society AND another-directed one. The inner is steered by its belief; the outer by what others are doing. Whatever the cultural weather, remember you are captain of your ship whose destination should be eternal life with God.

If social conformity were to become your only standard, concepts such as duty, honour, obligation and responsibility could easily become irrelevant. Antique.

To be born, a great opera needs BOTH a great composer AND a great librettist. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was blessed with meeting Lorenzo Da Ponte, a Roman Catholic priest, who wrote the libretti of three of Mozart’s most celebrated operas: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*.

To discover meaning, it is essential to see AND to talk. If you see three people eating the same salad at a restaurant, you might wonder whether they are vegetarians, trying to lose weight, or perhaps they are sticking to their religious dietary laws. Ask AND they might tell you.

Unless you ask questions AND hear answers, you can only guess what is going on in anyone’s mind and heart.

Looking, seeing, talking AND hearing are vital for community cohesion. Hearing is simply the physical process of perceiving sound. Listening involves understanding what is being said. That may take time. It certainly calls for thought.

I accept that I am learned AND ignorant. I do not know what, both in quality and quantity, I do not know. The more I read and talk, the more I realise my ignorance. I know so little about nature with its trees, shrubs, flowers, butterflies, and so much more.

In any human head there are both reason AND intuition. We have BOTH a mind thinking AND a heart AND gut feelings. Good to use them all.

Hitler and the Japanese leadership in 1930-45 imagined, taught AND based their military strategy on the belief that their race was superior to that of the enemy. The error of these prejudices bloodied their face, in Russia at Stalingrad and Kursk, and in the Pacific at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. On December 7th 1941, at Pearl Harbour, the USA discovered that their low opinion of the Japanese (“Slitty-eyed, buck-tooth, little people”) was somewhat inaccurate.

The Church of England has shown that women are as capable as men are in their hierarchical roles. Church of England-convert married clergy has evidenced that as Roman Catholic priests they are no less committed than their celibate confreres. Why not have both celibate AND married men ordained? *Viri probati* – with years of experience working as laymen, could resonate with the Pauline description of priesthood. (1 Timothy 3, 1–7)

When making choices, the wise – the enlightened – bear in mind life both before AND after death, birth into, and then berth in, divine eternity.

The English language is both relatively rich AND at times, for a foreigner, confusing. An advert that claims the product is “great on quality AND great on price” uses the word ‘great’ to mean on the one hand ‘high’ AND on the other hand ‘low’.

Both Hebrew AND Greek philosophies have shaped Christianity’s belief system.

In the Original Testament, people talk to, not about, God. Knowledge (in Hebrew *da’at*) is not so much about cognition as experience of another’s intimacy: “David knew Bathsheba” (2 Samuel 11, 4).

In the New Testament (Acts 17, 18) we read about St Paul’s discussions with Epicurean AND Stoic philosophers.

Christian assimilation of Hellenistic philosophy was anticipated by Philo (born 25bce, in Alexandria, Egypt) AND other Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews. Philo’s blend of Judaism, Platonism, and Stoicism strongly influenced Christian Alexandrian writers, such as Origen (born 185ce) and Clement of Alexandria (born 150ce, in Athens—died between 211 and 215). Their views soon seeped into the Latin world.

According to the rationalist stream of Judaism articulated by Maimonides, which later came to dominate much of official traditional Jewish thought, God is understood as “the absolute one”, an indivisible and incomparable being who is the ultimate cause of all existence.

It was not until the fusion of Platonic and Aristotelian theology with Christianity that the concepts of strict omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence became commonplace. God was the infinite, unmoved mover. Since God was perfect, any change would make Him less than perfect, so they asserted that God was unchanging, or immutable.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033/4–1109), a priest, monk, and philosopher, defined God as the “Being than which no greater can be conceived.” Almost 200 years later, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (article 3) wrote succinctly: “by ‘God’, however, we mean some infinite good.”

Thanks to Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020) and his *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, I discovered that, unbeknown to the author of Genesis, the Son’s presence as director of evolution was and is there, at the end of the final sentence of Genesis (1:1, 2–3). Jonathan writes:

“[The Hebrew text] is precisely structured around the number seven, in ways not apparent in translation. The narrative speaks of creation in seven days. However, the text itself is precisely patterned on this number. Therefore, the word ‘good’ appears seven times. The word ‘God’ appears thirty-five times.

The words ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ each appear twenty-one times. The word ‘light’ and ‘day’ occur seven times in the first paragraph. The first verse contains seven words, the second fourteen words. The paragraph describing the seventh day contains thirty-five words, and so on. The passage as a whole contains 67x7 words. The entire passage is constructed

like a fractal, so that the sevenfold motif of the text as a whole is mirrored at lower levels of magnitude.

When a text is written in this way, apparently superfluous words become highly conspicuous. There is one obvious superfluous word: the last of the entire passage. The verse says, 'God sanctified the seventh day for on it he rested from all the work he had created' (2:3). The sentence should finish there. In fact, though, there is one extra word in the Hebrew, *la'asot*, which means 'to do, to make, to function'.

Two classic commentators, Ibn Ezra and Abrabanel, interpret it to mean ' (he has created it) in such a way that it would continue to create itself.'

Without stretching the text too far, we might say that *la'asot* means, quite simply, 'to evolve'."

To my engineer-trained mind, that evolution clearly has a director: the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Scene: flat, open terrain. In the distance a dark spot is moving towards us. As it comes close, it is clearly a row of more than one person. As they pass by, they are three. A man, a child and a mother. That is how I image the Blessed Trinity.

- Father, *actus essendi*, Abba, creating
- Son, *actus docendi*, The Word, Yeshua, teaching.
- And then The Mother, Ruach, *actus amandi*, motivating.

The one God is a family, a community, inviting us to be like it is, diversity in a united life, each with their own role.

A weak, but my best, take on a mystery way beyond our ken.

In my trade as priest, I need to constantly repent, so as to change myself, AND I need to work on helping others to turn their own lives round.

For a successful surgical operation, we need a competent surgeon AND anaesthetists AND nurses, as well as an efficient cleaning/sanitising team.

A film or play needs a director AND a cast AND producers, AS WELL AS that long list of people whose names appear on the credits.

4.4 Emotional

Antonio Damasio, a Portuguese-American neuroscientist, currently the David Dornsife Chair in Neuroscience, as well as Professor of Psychology, Philosophy, and Neurology, at the University of Southern California, said in his book *Descartes' Error*, that you can't make good decisions without consulting your emotions. "Our feelings are often decisive in what we want and what we do, whether it is devising a scientific programme, buying a home or choosing a partner."

Recall that the left brain is dominant for thinking, and the right brain for emotion.

I need BOTH friends (which include my family) AND allies-in-life (my colleagues and associates).

A strong and healthy relationship of love, generated by a harmony of values, is built on the three As: Attention, Appreciation and Affection AND 3Cs: Communication, Compromise and Commitment. When backed up by equality, fidelity, gratitude and honesty – and each living to make the other’s life a joy – marriage can indeed be mutually, enduringly, life-enhancing.

Remember, both joy AND sorrow shared, unite. Bereaved? Cry AND get over it. Life is too short to waste it on moping. At times, life is BOTH beautiful AND sad. *C’est la vie*.

Sport spectators suffer (or enjoy?) BOTH excitement AND nervousness. To be honest, and perhaps pathetic, I admit I feel nervous rather than excited when watching England play football – unless they are at least two goals ahead!

In love there has to be a lover AND a beloved: the ‘I’ AND the ‘you’ generating a ‘we’, as in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I am inclined to believe that the Roman Church was right to insert ‘*filioque*’ (father and son) into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Holy Spirit is the outcome of the Father’s AND the Son’s mutual love. Their ‘I’ and ‘You’ generating the Holy Spirit, the ‘we’.

As the song says “You’re nobody unless somebody loves you.” To live life to the full, we all need someone who does love us. Underpinning love are two virtues. As water (whether it is a river, ocean, steam or ice) is always a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, so love (whatever its intensity and texture) is underpinned by appreciation AND respect. ‘I love you; I need you – as you are – not as I might wish you to be.

We need to aim for respect AND appreciation for self AND others AND nature if we claim to appreciate AND respect the giver of it all, the One we call God.

We need to develop both sympathy AND empathy if we want to become an attractive human being. Empathy is shown in how much compassion AND understanding we can give to another. Sympathy is more of a feeling of pity for another. Empathy is our ability to understand how someone feels.

At work, as indeed in any part of society, there should be equality AND diversity AS WELL AS inclusion. At its core, equality means fairness: we must ensure that individuals, or groups of individuals, are not treated less favourably because of their characteristics.

Equality also means equality of opportunity. We must ensure that those who may be disadvantaged can get the tools they need to access the same, fair opportunities as their peers.

Diversity is recognising, respecting and celebrating each other’s differences. A diverse environment is one with a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets, which allows for an empowered culture of creativity AND innovation.

Inclusion allows a mix of people to come to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves, and work in a way that suits them and delivers what that business needs. Inclusion ensures that everyone feels valued, listened to and appreciated as adding value, value that is recognised by the organisation.

Love, like the heart and lungs, needs both to receive AND to give. My vocation to serve others, nature and God was born when, aged 15, I experienced God’s love on Eriskay.

Altruism, like a reciprocating engine, realises the joy that, the more you give across your PIES, the more you receive, at least in your E and S.

Love is BOTH a noun: You are my love

AND a verb: I love you.

I need to love myself as I am, AS WELL AS aiming to improve my PB, transcending my current state by becoming the best version of myself across my PIES.

The various expressions of love, each with its own balance of respect AND appreciation. Traditionally, these forms of love have been identified in seven ways.

1. *Agapē* – the unconditional and enduring love of God for humans, as well as our reciprocal love for God – is the highest form of love and is contrasted with *eros* (erotic love) and *philia* (brotherly love). A sub-section of this is at times referred to as *Pragma*, a love built on commitment, understanding and long-term interests, like building a family.
2. *Storge* – love of parents for children. It is often described as the most natural of loves.
3. *Philia* – love without romantic attraction (commonly referred to as ‘brotherly love’), which occurs between friends or family members. It occurs when both people share the same values and respect each other. Colleagues can become allies-in-life and, if they share your values, interests and objectives, some may end up as authentic friends: ‘alter egos’.
4. *Ludus* (‘game’ or ‘school’ in Latin) is a light-hearted, flirtatious love where people want to have fun with each other, to tease, and play harmless pranks on each other. *Ludus* is child-like and commonly found in the early stages of a relationship.
5. *Eros* is erotic, sexual, or passionate love. It is often all about need and it is more about the person who is feeling sexually aroused than it is about the person who is the focus of that love – with a high ‘A’ (appreciation) rating and a low ‘R’ (respect).
6. *Philautia* is self-love. Though all too often sneered at for being egocentric, it is vital if we are to “love our neighbour as our self” (Matthew 22, 39) and live the universally approved Golden Rule expressed in the Gospel as: “Treat others as you would like them to treat you.” (Matthew 7, 12)
7. *Mania* is an obsessive love style likely to do something crazy, such as stalking. The movie *Fatal Attraction* focused on this type of love.

I am both God’s lover AND His beloved. Lover because beloved. Therefore, alive in my right brain, I move into action through the left. I know I am here to help God heal the world.

In 1982, Harvard’s Carol Gilligan set out in her book *In a Different Voice* her convictions that men and women use different styles of moral reasoning. Women, she said, found their identity by attachment; men by separation. Women are more likely to feel threatened by isolation, men by intimacy. Hence, in long-lasting relationships problems of emotional claustrophobia and agoraphobia raise their heads. Faced with a moral dilemma, men are more likely to analyse situations in terms of rights; women in terms of responsibilities.

In real life, some people (I include myself in this cohort) are hybrids, accepting BOTH rights AND responsibilities.

Music, which directly affects the way we feel, is like love – both sound AND silence.

It is good to feel BOTH love of the good AND anger at the bad. Anger, as Jesus showed when symbolically clearing out the Temple (Matthew 21, 12–17; John 2, 13–22), was a powerful motivator. Interesting, that in the Gospels, the only object Jesus is described as making was a whip (John 2, 15).

Maybe it is due to my early years under the Nazis that I hate bullies. I cannot stand bullying, as some tough lads, even sixth formers, found out while I was Head of Religious Education and Chaplain at Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School (1973–85). Whenever I became aware of a touch of bullying, I would approach the bully and offer to shake hands. Thanks to my rowing (and lots of DIY) my grip would tighten until the bully's knees started to buckle. "Don't ever do that again. You're worth much more than a bully." No violence. No child-protection issues. "Your honour, I was just shaking hands." No bones were ever broken. Though the numbness wore off, the memories, it seemed, endured.

Emotions have very broad spectrums on temperature, intensity AND depth. Beyond their infra-red area lurk passion and lust, capable of anaesthetising the intellectual and even knocking out ambition in the spiritual so as to delight in sex.

To avoid that self-destruction, we need a positive and attractive motive AS WELL AS self-discipline.

As long as we know which is which, fact AND fiction TOGETHER enrich lives. Myths have the power to inspire and motivate. I remember how moved I was by films such as *High Noon*, *Casablanca*, *The Cruel Sea*, and *Lawrence of Arabia*.

4.5 Spiritual

God is love and thus respects AND appreciates everything AND everyone. That appreciation guides evolution. Respect prevents God tinkering with creation and thus God has to allow what we call natural disasters AS WELL AS the evil deeds of mankind.

To hear what God is saying to us, we need Sacred Scripture AND tradition. To fulfil our vocation, we need prayer, planning AND providence.

It is good to be BOTH grateful for what we have AND to ask for help with what we need.

It is best to say both sorry for past mistakes AND to repent, to use them as a rehearsal for the future.

Not surprisingly, over the more than my eight decades on this planet, my notion of God, the reality at which this word points, has evolved, and is still evolving.

Having no boundaries, God is not a concept. The word 'God' refers to a notion, an energy like gravity – holding physical reality together.

'God', being love (1 John 4, 16) is a noun AND a verb (Exodus 3, 14). Grammatically, God is a noun. We speak about God both apophatically – saying what God is not: God is uncreated, infinite – AND cataphatically, what God is: creator, spirit, love. Like beauty, God is hard to define. Experience goes beyond the reach of words. "Come and see." (John 1, 39)

However, ontologically, God is ALSO a verb – well, three verbs. God is *isness* – the *actus essendi* that sustains everything and answers the questions: “Why and who is behind it all?” God is wisdom – the *actus dirigendi* – directing evolution these past 13.7 billion years – as well as conscience right now. God is compassion – the *actus amandi* – as demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ: God in our human vernacular.

Applying that notion to space-time, there would be no creation without God. Without creation, there would be no Creator God in space-time. BOTH are necessary for both to be there.

Eternal, God was ‘there’ “brooding over the waters” (Genesis 1, 2) before the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago. As the UK is in London, yet also outside London, so God transcends creation. Though within all, God is ALSO beyond space-time.

“It is in God that we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17, 28) “God who is over all, through all and within all.” (Ephesians 4, 6) God is within everything, sustaining, directing evolution and energising the whole of space-time. As gravity is in everything, yet none of these things is gravity; to say that God is ‘in all’ does not imply pantheism.

Just as gravity, dark matter and dark energy generate unity throughout the universe, God is there in our planet earth AS WELL AS in all the myriad galaxies that constitute the cosmos.

Like gravity, God is ubiquitous, unseen and, even when ignored, always there.

Thanks to Jesus Christ’s Paschal resurrection which declared his divinity, AND then 50 days later the palpable effects at Pentecost (Acts 2, 1–4), we know that God is relational. After all, in order to love, you have to relate.

Whenever I am reading the Gospels, I try to imagine how people saw Jesus while he walked on earth. As a runner becomes the victor only once they have crossed the finishing line first, Jesus was seen as divine only after his death and resurrection. During his life on earth, I do not believe he ever felt ‘divine’. He merely tried to bring the Kingdom of God down to earth.

We read in Genesis (1, 27) that we are made “to the image of God”. We are male AND female, so, coming to the word God from that perspective, in God there is Father, Son and *Ruach*, the feminine (in Hebrew) Spirit. Like God, we give, know, and love.

In Genesis (2, 18–24) we read:

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Solitary confinement is a punishment, all too frequently ending in suicide. Research has shown that social isolation and loneliness can increase mortality by up to 30%.

Not surprisingly, life has taught me that living by giving is the best way of living.

Living by loving (Deuteronomy 6, 5; Leviticus 19, 18) is more than doing God’s will; it is living, however imperfectly, God’s incarnate life: love. “No one can come to the Father except through me.” (John 14, 6)

The end indicates the means. After more than eight decades on earth and now living in the Kingdom of God, I can divide my prayer life into three parts: at Mass, rather than starting with ‘calling to mind our sins’, I begin by reminding the congregation that I celebrate mass to TAPS (Thank, Ask, Praise and Sorry); then there is *Lectio divina*; and thirdly, and mostly, there is my walking together with God in silence, holding hands. This I always find calming, encouraging and motivating.

Lectio divina enables me to reflect on The Word that became flesh, so that we could not only read words but experience divine life translated into our human vernacular. Jesus Christ, the tip on the divine iceberg, showed, in our human vernacular, the quality, character and personality of the divine creator. Jesus is man and thus sexual, AS WELL AS God. His resurrection showed he was divine.

I am here to live AND to learn AND to love, or even (as I like to put it) to live to learn to love, in all six sequences of these three verbs.

I know my life is shaped by both intentions (the steering wheel) AND motivations (the driving wheels of my life).

To make a success of our stay in space-time – to live in the Kingdom of God – we need both a moral accelerator AND a moral brake.

Our identity is generated by not only our name AND family, BUT ALSO our nationality, culture, track record, language and values. “It is no longer I who live; it is Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2, 20)

When aged around four, I dropped my sweet wrapper on a Prague pavement, my father taught me that: “We Felzmanns don’t do that.” My identity ruled my ethics. My father God sees what I am doing. I have tried not to drop sweet wrappers as I have grown up. When I fail and do drop them, there is an act of contrition, or even the sacrament of confession, to pick them up.

As priest and social entrepreneur, I am a leader AND, as someone trying to do God’s will, I know I am led. As priest, I act out of duty AND love (Matthew 25, 40). It is often duty that gets me out of bed in the morning and love that keeps me keeping on fulfilling my roles.

Being human, I admit that, though I am tough, I am ALSO vulnerable.

Thanks to Brexit, I have both a Czech AND a British passport; at home in the UK, I am welcome on the European mainland.

I am both a priest and thus set apart and considered 'holy' ("Father, your prayers have a direct link to God") AS WELL AS human, with humanity's needs.

Thanks to what the Japanese call 'bio-rhythms', I have good days AS WELL AS bad days, which are more challenging but help me understand the weaknesses of others.

We are made to the image AND likeness of God. (Genesis 1, 26) As image (*ikon*), we are (at our best should be) *a window to the divine. Our likeness (omoiosis or omoousios)* makes us like God; we have a human AND a divine life in the Kingdom of God on earth.

Human life is both serious and humorous, comic and tragic, individual and communitarian; with jokes and a sense of humour welding people together.

Consider appearances, including accents, AND values, AS WELL AS actions, before assessing anyone.

Christianity needed both Jesus AND Paul to start spreading worldwide.

Thank God for science AND technology; religion AND spirituality; science AND religion; technology AND spirituality.

The reckless needs to bring in a cautionary character; the optimist needs a pessimistic court jester warning him or her of dangers overlooked. I am an optimist, who carries an umbrella. We need to be as little children (Matthew 18, 1–5), innocent as doves AND as wise as serpents (Matthew 10, 16).

Life, for me, is both a pilgrimage AND a sport.

Jesus Christ is human AND divine: a sacrament of the divine in our human vernacular.

We have freedom AND responsibility. As a child of God *noblesse oblige*.

Virtues make values visible.

To live life to the full – a life of wellbeing – we need all four cardinal virtues:

- temperance – on the P;
- prudence – on the I;
- fortitude – on the E;
- justice – on the S.

Thanks to God's generosity, I know I have the embryos of the three theological virtues: faith, love and hope.

My life needs laughter and gravity; love of the good and hatred of evil. "The only thing necessary for the *triumph of evil* is for *good* men to *do nothing*." (This is erroneously attributed to Edmund Burke, but more likely to be a précis of philosopher John Stuart Mill's 1867 inaugural address at the University of St Andrews.)

I am – we all are – shaped by both nature AND nurture.

In great societies, there are both justice AND mercy. Justice is rendered when people receive their due, according to the law, be it God's or man's law. An act of justice is typically an act of law, and might be an act of vengeance and force originating in the left brain. Mercy, on the other hand, means exercising forbearance, originating in the right brain, the home of God. An act of mercy is an act of grace and compassion. Laws, applying justice, are universal. Sympathy and empathy incline us to show mercy. Logic sees justice.

Love knows it needs to be merciful. While a judge administers justice, parents hope society will show mercy to their child.

Having an 'I' and a 'you' in love generates a new identity, a 'we' and an 'us'. Trying to understand the Trinitarian mystery of God, I asked myself: "Which comes first, a parent or a child?" The answer appeared. "Neither. BOTH." Without a child there is no parent; without parents there is no child. (Think handclap. Which hand claps the first?)

Of course, God is far more than all this, but, for me at least, the Trinitarian God is not irrational. Words, as I suspect you know, are symbols of reality. Words about God, like fingers pointing at the stars, are like icons, which we must avoid turning into idols. Once we accept the reality of God and commit ourselves to that creator-lover, we are home and dry. It hurts me to see so many of my friends refusing to accept there must be a creator God. It hurts to see their lives so impoverished – especially as they approach the end of their existence of earth.

Thanks to my Eriskay inspiration and Imperial College education, I have an unshakeable conviction of the reality that is the magnificent mystery we call God.

We need satisfying answers not to only our identity, BUT ALSO to our value and role: who we are, what we are worth AND why we are here. The purpose of our existence. I am here to embody, as well as I can, the Kingdom of God. Christ.

The answers that more than just satisfy me are: I am a child of God; I am worth the infinity of God's love; and I am here to help God improve creation. Through that endeavour, I live to learn to love so as to become *capax Dei*, capable of life with God once I am, at death, born into divine eternity, currently a total mystery. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor 2, 9)

I need to bear in mind the message of BOTH Ash Wednesday (I am just dust) AND Good Friday (I am worth the life of God incarnate in our human vernacular).

We, well I do, need BOTH victory AND defeat, to strive AND to fail, so as to become more Christlike: compassionate, understanding and forgiving the failures of others. As Churchill put it: "Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."

People keen to improve their spiritual lives know that they improve, and sustain their progress, when helped by a spiritual guide. When I was far younger, they used to be called 'Spiritual Directors'.

I see the universe as an organic unity and our global city (never a village with its homogeneous culture) as an inter-related organism in which, as in our bodies, what benefits an organ is good for the whole body.

While entropy rules the micro-mechanical, it does not control my life nor the life of the universe, which is expanding ever since it burst into life some 13.7 billion years ago.

John Donne (1572–1631) put it rather beautifully in this poem:

No Man is an Island

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.

Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.

As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.

Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

“One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other,” said Jane Austen, in *Emma*. If the two halves got together, and shared their views, both might find greater delight in life.

Like God, I am an optimist. For humanity's tomorrow, I have given my today. Joyfully.

It is impossible to deny that humanity today is experiencing one of the worst crises in history. In a world of absolute relativism, shallow materialism and moral degeneracy, idealistic young people are looking for rules, certainties, hierarchy, moral law, and infallibility, all of which can be found in the Catholic Church. And more people than ever, both Catholic and non-Catholic, see the crisis in religious terms.

Tradition AND renewal, together, can carry the Church forward into a shape that will enhance the world.

Dogma remains constant, maybe slightly refined. It is morality – which actions are deemed creative and salutary – that, in a substantial part, needs to change.

As Christianity's truth – its perception of reality – evolved, slavery, torture and usury had to go. Respect for, and thus coexistence with, science and its discoveries, for democracy, freedom of speech and gender equality gradually appeared.

I suspect and hope that eventually there will be BOTH celibate and married, AS WELL AS male and female clergy in the Church (though it will be after I have been born into divine eternity).

Chapter 5 Friendship

5.1 Description

Friendship is a state of mutual trust and support between people, a two-way street. It is a bond, a magical connection between people who care about each other. Friends are the ones who laugh with you when you're happy and stand by you when you're sad. They're the special people who make life's journey a lot more fun – like superheroes without capes.

A true friend cares, shares, and is always honest. Friendship is one bond that never ceases and lives on even if people are not physically close to each other. From sharing happy moments to sad ones, friends are the life support that helps one get through the most enjoyable and difficult circumstances.

Friendships leapfrog time. Months, even years, may pass yet when they meet, it was like yesterday they said 'farewell', 'goodbye' or 'ciao'.

I never use 'family and friends', as though these two categories are mutually exclusive. I use 'Friends – which should include your family.'

You choose your friends, and they choose you; as God chose me on Eriskay.

Sometimes we need someone to have fun with. But now and again we need a friend to support us through a tough time. Friends should never put you down; should not make fun of you, your religion, sexuality or culture, and should never put you in danger or make you feel unsafe.

There are two homosexual physical friendships that I know well. They are as good as any heterosexual marriage I have come across. There is my nephew-Godson Rob and Alex his spouse, and there is a wonderful couple, Roger and Ron, in Croydon who have been together for decades, well before their relationship ceased to be criminal.

NB: online friends are not real friends.

In Cicero's (106–43bce) *De Amicitia* we are told that:

Friendship is nothing else than entire fellow-feeling as to all things, human and divine, with mutual good-will and affection.

It is virtue itself that produces and sustains friendship, nor without virtue can friendship by any possibility exist.

Friendships are 'Unions of mutual benefit.'

in friendship there is nothing feigned, nothing pretended, and whatever there is in it is both genuine and spontaneous.

Friendships are eternal.

Friends neither ask of a friend what is wrong, nor do what is wrong at a friend's request.

We demand of friends only what is right, and that we do for the sake of friends only what is right.

In unsure fortune a sure friend is seen.

Friendship puts a man on an equality with his inferior.

It belongs to friendship both to admonish and to be admonished, and to do the former freely, yet not harshly,

5.2 Symbols

St John the Evangelist, the patron saint of love, loyalty, friendships – and authors – is often depicted in art as an eagle, symbolising: “the height he rose to in his Gospel.”

Yellow roses are the quintessential friendship flower.

Traditionally, the olive tree is a symbol of peace and friendship. This association began in ancient Greece, as early as the fifth century bce.

To set the mood, here are some statements on friendship I have come across.

“My best friend is the man who in wishing me well wishes it for my sake.”

Aristotle (384–322bce)

“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship.”

Thomas Aquinas (1225–74)

“The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82)

“Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget.”

George Wythe *Randolph* (1818 – 67)

“A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you.”

Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915)

“My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me.”

Henry Ford (1863–1947)

“Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.”

Marcel Proust (1871–1922)

“Don’t make friends who are comfortable to be with. Make friends who will force you to lever yourself up.”

Thomas J. Watson (1874–1956)

“The most beautiful discovery true friends make is that they can grow separately without growing apart.”

Elisabeth Brennan, born Foley (1887–1967)

“A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.”

Walter Winchell (1897–1972)

“It’s the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.”

Marlene Dietrich (1901–92)

“Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.”

Anais Nin (1903–77)

“Life is partly what we make it, and partly what it is made by the friends we choose.”

Tennessee Williams (1911–83)

“For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; and for poise, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone.”

Audrey Hepburn (1929–93)

“There’s not a word yet for old friends who’ve just met.”

Jim Henson (1936–90)

“Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.”

Muhammad Ali (1942–2016)

“A friend can tell you things you don’t want to tell yourself.”

Frances Ward Weller (1987)

“A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you just the way you are.”

(Unknown)

“True friends aren’t the ones who make your problems disappear. They are the ones who won’t disappear when you’re facing problems.”

(Unknown)

““Everyone hears what you say. Friends listen to what you say. Best friends listen to what you don’t say.”

(Unknown)

Dear reader, do you agree with all of these? If not, which ones leave you cold?

Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–67) defines friendship as an “agreement on all things sacred and profane, accompanied by good will and love”, a definition he borrowed from Cicero. Ideally, friendship becomes a form of charity when it meets with a reciprocal response, so it is based on mutuality. Aelred develops this theme by classifying three kinds of friendship: the carnal, the worldly, and the spiritual. “The carnal is created by a conspiracy in vice, the worldly is enkindled by hope of gain, and the spiritual is cemented among the righteous by a likeness of lifestyles and interests.”

At each level, friendship is nurtured by a common love, and as the object of love increases in worth (from base things to divine things), so the quality of friendship is raised. The highest kind of friendship is a selfless communion of hearts: “Now the spiritual, which we call true friendship, is desired [...] for its own natural worth and for the affections of the human heart, so that its fruit and reward is nothing but itself.”

Friendship is thus an excellent description of the Christian life. Ultimately, we are called to become “friends of God”. Abraham was a “friend of God” (James 2, 23); Jesus called his disciples his friends (John 15, 15); and in this vein Luke the Evangelist addressed his two books (*Luke–Acts*) to a Theophilus (a ‘friend of God’).

Aristotle observed that friendship is possible only between equals, and so Dominicans like Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart have drawn the conclusion that Jesus’s friendship with us draws us, astonishingly, into a relationship of a certain equality with God.

As God the Son humbly took on our lowly human nature, so he invites us into a relationship of glorious and divine love with him. This divine love is often labelled in Greek as *agape* (*caritas* in Latin), but St Thomas boldly employs the term for friendship, *philia* (*amicitia* in Latin).

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), in his “*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*” wrote:

“The First [Friend] is the alter ego, the man who first reveals to you that you are not alone in the world by turning out (beyond hope) to share all your most secret delights. There is nothing to be overcome in making him your friend; he and you join like raindrops on a window. But the Second Friend is the man who disagrees with you about everything. He is not so much the alter ego as the anti-self.

Of course, he shares your interests; otherwise he would not become your friend at all. But he has approached them all at a different angle. He has read all the right books but has got the wrong thing out of every one. It is as if he spoke your language but mispronounced it. How can he be so nearly right and yet, invariably, just not right? He is as fascinating (and infuriating) as a woman.

When you set out to correct his heresies, you will find that he forsooth to correct yours! And then you go at it, hammer and tongs, far into the night, night after night, or walking through fine country that neither gives a glance to, each learning the weight of the other’s punches, and often more like mutually respectful enemies than friends. Actually (though it never seems so at the time) you modify one another’s thought; out of this perpetual dogfight a community of mind and a deep affection emerge.”

And in his *The Four Loves*, he wrote: “we picture lovers face to face but friends side by side; their eyes look ahead.”

Antoine St-Exupéry (1900–44) made it clear that: “Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.”

5.3 Music

“Ode to Joy” (German: *An die Freude*) is an ode written in summer 1785 by German poet, playwright, and historian Friedrich Schiller. It is best known for its use by Ludwig van Beethoven in the final (fourth) movement of his Ninth Symphony, completed in 1824.

An die Freude

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Wem der große Wurf gelungen
Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
Wer ein holdes Weib errungen
Mische seinen Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

Freude trinken alle Wesen
An den Brüsten der Natur;
Alle Guten, alle Bösen
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,
Einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben
und der Cherub steht vor Gott.

Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen
Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan
Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,
Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
Muß ein lieber Vater wohnen.
Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muß er wohnen!

Ode to Joy

Joy, thou shining spark of God,
Daughter of Elysium,
With fiery rapture, goddess,
We approach thy shrine!
Your magic reunites those
Whom stern custom has parted;
All men will become brothers
Under your protective wing.

Let the man who has had the fortune
To be a helper to his friend,
And the man who has won a noble
woman,
Join in our chorus of jubilation!
Yes, even if he holds but one soul
As his own in all the world!
But let the man who knows nothing of this
Steal away alone and in sorrow.

All the world's creatures draw
Draughts of joy from nature;
Both the just and the unjust
Follow in her gentle footsteps.
She gave us kisses and wine
And a friend loyal unto death;
She gave the joy of life to the lowliest,
And to the angels who dwell with God.

Joyous, as His suns speed
Through the glorious order of Heaven,
Hasten, brothers, on your way
Exultant as a knight victorious.

Be embraced, all ye millions!
With a kiss for all the world!
Brothers, beyond the stars
Surely dwells a loving Father.
Do you kneel before Him, oh millions?
Do you feel the Creator's presence?
Seek Him beyond the stars!
He must dwell beyond the stars.

“In My Life”, The Beatles

There are places I'll remember
All my life, though some have changed
Some forever, not for better
Some have gone and some remain

All these places had their moments
With lovers and friends, I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life, I've loved them all

But all these friends and lovers
There is no one compares with you
And these memories lose their meaning
When I think of love as something new

Though I know I'll never lose affection
For people and things that went before
I know I'll often stop and think about them
In my life, I love you more.

“God Only Knows,” The Beach Boys

I may not always love you
But long as there are stars above you
You never need to doubt it
I'll make you so sure about it
God only knows what I'd be without you

If you should ever leave me
Well, life would still go on, believe me
The world could show nothing to me
So what good would living do me?
God only knows what I'd be without you

Ooh, ooh
Do, do, do, do, do, do, do
Bow, buh-bow, buh-bow, buh-bow (Do, do, do, do)
Buh-bow, buh-bow, buh-bow (Do, do, do, do, do, do)
Buh-bow, buh-bow, buh-bow, buh-bow (Do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do)
God only knows what I'd be without you

“Super Trouper”, ABBA

Super trouper beams are gonna blind me
But I won't feel blue
Like I always do
'Cause somewhere in the crowd there's you

I was sick and tired of everything
When I called you last night from Glasgow
All I do is eat and sleep and sing
Wishing every show was the last show (wishing every show was the last show)
So imagine I was glad to hear you're coming (glad to hear you're coming)
Suddenly I feel all right (and suddenly it's gonna be)
And it's gonna be so different when I'm on the stage tonight

Tonight the super trouper lights are gonna find me
Shining like the sun (super trouper)
Smiling, having fun (super trouper)
Feeling like a number one

Tonight the super trouper beams are gonna blind me (super trouper)
But I won't feel blue (super trouper)
Like I always do (super trouper)
'Cause somewhere in the crowd there's you

Facing twenty-thousand of your friends
How can anyone be so lonely?
Part of a success that never ends
Still I'm thinking about you only (still I'm thinking about you only)
There are moments when I think I'm going crazy (think I'm going crazy)
But it's gonna be alright (you'll soon be changing everything)
Everything will be so different when I'm on the stage tonight

Tonight the super trouper lights are gonna find me (super trouper)
Shining like the sun (super trouper)
Smiling, having fun (super trouper)
Feeling like a number one

Tonight the super trouper beams are gonna blind me (super trouper)
But I won't feel blue (super trouper)
Like I always do (super trouper)
'Cause somewhere in the crowd there's you

So I'll be there when you arrive
The sight of you will prove to me I'm still alive
And when you take me in your arms and hold me tight
I know it's gonna mean so much tonight

Tonight the super trouper lights are gonna find me (super trouper)
Shining like the sun (super trouper)

Smiling, having fun (super trouper)

Feeling like a number one

Tonight the super trouper beams are gonna blind me (super trouper)

But I won't feel blue (super trouper)

Like I always do (super trouper)

'Cause somewhere in the crowd there's you

Super trouper lights are gonna find me

Shining like the sun (super trouper)

Smiling, having fun (super trouper)

Feeling like a number one

Tonight the super trouper beams are gonna blind me (super trouper)

But I won't feel blue (super trouper)

Like I always do (super trouper)

When people say they feel unworthy of being close to Jesus in their heart, I remind them of three events:

1. John the Baptist felt unworthy to baptise Jesus (Matthew 3, 13–15);
2. the Roman centurion felt unworthy to have Jesus visit his home (Matthew 8, 8);
3. Simon Peter feels unworthy just to be in Jesus's presence (Luke 5, 8).

However, Jesus, who would call everyone "friend" (John 15,15) dismisses their objections. This is why the early Christians used "the friends" as a synonym for the Church (3 John 1, 15).

A few famous friendships — the first four are Platonic, which can be very close friendships, characterised by mutual care, support, and enjoyment of each other's company but without a romantic or sexual component.

1. St Paul and St Timothy

St Paul's friendship with St Luke clearly seems to have been important to both of them. Their relationship appears in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles, and it emerges in a subtle way. Luke, the author of Acts, simply begins to use the first-person plural pronoun 'we' in his narration, because now he's travelling with Paul. It's subtle, but stunning in its subtlety. It is the clear marker of the beginning of a friendship.

Paul, for his part, mentions Luke often. Perhaps the earliest mention, chronologically, is in the Apostle's Letter to Philemon, which ends with a name-drop of Luke among Paul's "fellow workers". In his Letter to the Colossians Paul takes it up a notch, referring to Luke as his "dear friend" and "doctor." In the second of Paul's letters to Timothy, after naming those who have deserted him, he says poignantly, "Luke alone is with me" (2 Timothy 4, 11). Paul's relationship with Luke was unique. He refers to Timothy and Titus as sons (1 Timothy 1, 18; Titus 1, 4). But Luke is a friend, beloved and loyal. He is the other half of 'we'. He alone remains.

Together they accomplished what no man could do alone. Luke wrote the two longest books in the New Testament, the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Paul wrote more New Testament books than anyone else – 13 or 14, depending on how you count.

Luke's Gospel weighs in at 19,482 words, and Acts at 18,451 words, for a total of 37,933 words. Paul's 13 letters total 32,407 words. Thus, together, Paul and Luke wrote at least 70,340 out of the 138,020 words in the New Testament, more than half of the book that the Church has designated to be inspired by God. And we should never doubt that theirs was a true collaboration. Since the early Church, readers have referred to Luke's Gospel as "Paul's" because the narrative so perfectly enacts the theology we find in his letters.

The friendship of Luke and Paul was the dynamo that powered the Church's growth in its first generation. That was God's providential purpose in bringing them together: because Paul and Luke together accomplished what they could never have done separately.

This is the power of friendship in God's plan.

Paul first met his best friend during his second missionary journey, which began in late Autumn 49ce. After visiting and preaching the Gospel in Tarsus and Derbe with fellow evangelist Silas, Paul met Timothy in Lystra where he likely discovered his father was a Greek (a Gentile) but his mother was a Jewess (2 Timothy 1, 5). Both her (Eunice) and her mother (Lois) had converted to Christianity. Timothy joined Paul on his journeys, and their relationship grew to the point where Paul called Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1, 2).

His relationship with Paul was close and Paul entrusted him with missions of great importance. Timothy's name appears as the co-author on 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Paul wrote to the Philippians about Timothy: "I have no one like him" (Philippians 2, 19–23).

"I am a Jew [...] brought up here in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel. I persecuted to the death the people who followed this Way (the teachings of Jesus Christ). I arrested men and women and threw them into prison [...]" (Acts 22, 3–4).

Saul (Paul), even after becoming a Christian, still retained a personality that was polarising and intense, which made being his friend a bit difficult. It would take time for the apostle to mellow out a bit in order for a closer relationship between him and Timothy to form.

Just a few months before Paul's martyrdom while he was a prisoner in Rome, he wrote his last epistle. In this personal letter, dedicated to his friend Timothy, he expressed his respect and love for his fellow evangelist and travel companion.

"I thank him (God) as I remember you always in my prayers night and day. I remember your tears, and I want to see you very much, so that I may be filled with joy. I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also." (2 Timothy, 1, 3–5)

Paul died through beheading around May of 68ce. Tradition states his good friend Timothy died a martyr, 29 years later, in 97ce.

2. St Francis (1181/2–1226) and St Clare (1194–1253) of Assisi

While Francis guided his growing order of Little Brothers, he assigned Clare as the leader of the Poor Ladies. When Francis felt most alone in the world, most persecuted and misunderstood, it was Clare he would turn to for clarity, wisdom, and a love stripped of sentimentality.

Francis and Clare's founding charism was characterised by non-violence and peace, which for them was a way of life, and expressed in their relationships. They were peace-givers and peace-makers. The spirit behind their passionate and single-hearted following of Christ is expressed well in the following:

“Francis and Clare’s founding charism was characterised by: their deep relationship with God-Creator, with the crucified Christ, and with the Spirit; a relationship in freedom and equality, with all the brothers and sisters, without distinction. Clare’s Rule and writings are a powerful witness to her sisterly love and concern for all her sisters, and ‘to build up a bond of unity among them’. Francis’ relationship with creation was truly one of brotherhood and sisterhood, and has marked history.”

“Francis and Clare’s founding charism was characterised by their option for ‘Lady Poverty’ which was expressed in their identification with the poor Christ, and for Francis, with the poor: the marginalised, the outcast in his society, especially the lepers. Their minority stance had social implications, for they moved away from the ‘centre’ to the periphery. Francis, by being inserted among the poor, challenged openly the political, social and economic power structures.

Francis and Clare’s founding charism was characterised by non-violence and peace, which for them was a way of life, and expressed in their relationships. They were peace-givers and peace-makers. Francis’ greeting to all peoples was: ‘Pace e Bene.’ This greeting of peace and goodness was a wish and an invitation. He sincerely wanted all those whom he met to have peace in their hearts and to experience only goodness....It is said of Clare that she reflected peace through all that she said and did in her community at San Damiano.”

**Excerpts from Living Justice – As Artisans of Peace,
a Franciscans International publication**

3. St Teresa of Avila (1515–82) and St John of the Cross (1542–91)

Despite an age gap of 27 years, different personalities, and different societal backgrounds, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross were united by a common desire to live out their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the fullest and to inspire others to do the same.

After whirlwind adolescent years, Teresa joined the Carmelite Order. To her great dismay, this rule of life was not as she expected. She struggled immensely with the lack of amount of time for personal, silent prayer. Fellow Carmelite St John of the Cross, her confessor and spiritual director, was also troubled by the order’s laxity. Encouraging each other in the spiritual life, they grew to be great friends.

St Teresa of Avila would teasingly call St John of the Cross “half-a-friar” because he stood barely five feet tall. They relied on each other and, of course, on God. Both were mystics and authored impactful Catholic works: St Teresa’s *The Interior Castle* and St John’s *The Dark Night of the Soul*. What mostly bound them together in friendship, though, was a shared desire to transform the Carmelite Order by recovering the original austere rule of life that had been abandoned.

Reforming a religious order came with a great deal of difficulty, and both saints suffered immensely as a result. St John of the Cross was even imprisoned for nine months and regularly beaten! But they did not despair. Confiding in each other and in their radical faith, they created a new branch of the Carmelite Order: the Order of the Discalced Carmelites (ODC) and together established more than ODC convents and monasteries! As St Teresa of Avila once described their friendship: “What a wonderful thing it is for two souls to understand each other, for they neither lack something to say, nor grow tired.”

4. St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and St Francis Xavier (1506–52)

Francis Xavier first met Ignatius of Loyola when they were roommates at the University of Paris. Like Ignatius, Francis was a Spanish nobleman. At first Francis was not particularly enamoured of Ignatius, being rather jealous of the newcomer’s popularity. However, they soon became best friends. Their friendship ultimately led to Francis, in 1534, becoming one of the first seven Jesuits.

It must have been heartbreaking to part ways when St Francis Xavier was missioned to India. “Francis, leave this place and set the world on fire!” These were the last words St Ignatius of Loyola spoke to St Francis Xavier, who then travelled to India, Indonesia, Japan and China where he lived, worked and died as a missionary.

5. Queen Victoria (1837–1901) and Abdul Karim – The Munshi (1863–1909)

Victoria appointed Abdul Karim to be her Indian Secretary, showered him with honours, and obtained a land grant for him in India. The close platonic relationship between Karim and the Queen led to friction within the royal household, the other members of which felt themselves to be superior to Karim.

6. Mark Twain (real name Samuel Langhorne Clemens; 1835–1910) and Helen Keller (1880–1968)

The American author and the educator who was blind and deaf formed a very close and lasting friendship that may have been one of the most important relationships in either figure’s lives.

7. Winston Churchill (1874–1965) and Clementine Churchill (née Hozier; 1885–1977)

Clementine was the ideal wife for Winston. As a child, she too had experienced a difficult family life and straitened circumstances (as she would in her marriage), and had the resilience to see the couple through their difficult (at times, harrowing) family crises and ever-present financial anxieties. That they loved each other deeply, however, was rarely in doubt. On one occasion after Clementine had swept off in a fury, Churchill mischievously declared himself “the most unhappy of men”, only for the staff who had witnessed the incident to burst out laughing.

8. Frank Sinatra (1915–98) and J.F. Kennedy (1917–63)

One was on his way to the White House; the other was the king of Hollywood – a match made in heaven.

In early February 1960, Massachusetts Senator and presidential candidate John F. Kennedy checked in to the Sands Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas to catch one of the legendary performances of Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack. Amid the show, Sinatra stepped forward to point out Kennedy, seated next to the stage, and introduced him as the “next president of the United States”. It marked a public intersection of politics and entertainment that was rare for the time and highlighted a bond between the two luminaries that reached its peak over a wild campaign season.

The crooner and the candidate had already been friends for a few years. It’s unclear when they first met, but they shared a connection through the marriage of JFK’s sister Pat to actor and Rat Packer Peter Lawford, and by the end of the 1950s they were well acquainted.

9. Ravi Shankar (1920–2012) and George Harrison (1943–2001)

Ravi Shankar’s unexpected friendship with Beatles guitarist George Harrison brought Indian classical music to the world and changed global music forever. It all started with a sitar. The ten-year-old Ravi Shankar discovered his love for the instrument in 1930. Older than Harrison by 23 years, Shankar described their relationship as, variously, that of father and son (with each one adopting either role); close friends and brothers; and teacher and student.

5.4 In a marriage

Get to know each other well before tying the knot (though I know occasionally there can be love at first sight – as in the case of Rita and Robert Benson, from Robert’s side).

While doing military service in Germany, Robert’s commanding officer sent him to the local ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) barracks to find some girls for their Christmas party. There, as soon as he clapped eyes on Rita, he said he knew she was the one he would marry. And they stayed deeply in love right up to the death of Rita.

Notes I use when preaching a wedding homily

A marriage is a sacrament in which God – who is love – becomes an outward sign of an inward grace or gift.

Love – to be real – has to be there across the PIES

The Physical includes tidying things up. (This includes the laundry basket “Darling, there are no clean shirts in the cupboard.” “That’s because there were no dirty ones in the linen basket.”)

The Intellectual should always be ACE: affirming, consoling and encouraging.

As Father, Son, Holy Spirit, so husband, wife and family.

Equality! It’s a merger NOT an acquisition.

Appreciate AND respect the other.

Mutual gift of husband and wife. (Which hand clapped first?)

I – you – become a ‘we’.

Wed to make the other happy, joyful.

Forgive: wash white, not whitewash. NEVER “That was 15 years ago” “Yes, but you did it.”

Problem? Seek solution in prayer and with genuine, positive, friends!

Rely on community (friends’) cohesive support.

Imperfect? Of course. You are human. “Better together than apart.”

Resilience. “Falling down is not as important as getting up.” Growing wiser.

Gentle with the other’s dreams.

Humour – vital adhesive.

“Darling, if you ever left me, could I come with you?”

Share dreams. Mutually complement skills. Agree to a fair share of the chores and responsibilities around the home and garden. Change as fitness changes with age or accident.

5.5 Friendship breakdowns

Sometimes friends fall out. Usually they make up again soon, but arguments can sometimes be more serious.

What to do with friends who turn out to be dishonest?

Favouritism, promoting friends above more deserving members of your team.

Grooming? Cannot trust someone with secrets.

5.6 Marriage fractures

A relationship breakdown is not an overnight event but rather a gradual erosion of the mutual respect, understanding, and love that once characterised the partnership. The significance of understanding a relationship breakdown lies in its widespread impact, affecting the couple and their families, children, and social networks. The emotional toll can be profound, leading to stress, depression, and a decrease in overall life satisfaction for those involved.

In today’s fast-paced and often stressful society, relationships are under constant pressure, making them vulnerable to breakdown. The immediate need to recognise the signs of such a decline and implement coping strategies cannot be overstated. Early intervention can help couples navigate through difficulties, resolve underlying conflicts, and, where possible, restore the strength and vitality of their relationship.

To minimise the risk of relationship breakdowns, it is healthy to have in place boundaries; such as not drinking in the evening alone with another of the opposite sex.

Moreover, for those relationships that may not survive, understanding the dynamics of breakdowns can provide invaluable insights for managing the separation process more amicably and preparing for healthier relationships in the future.

In my life, two married women became – through no known fault of mine – too emotionally close to me that it was wise for me to cease to see them. Their marriages survived.

There is no single reason why a relationship begins to break down, but once it does, a predictable sequence of events tends to occur. Highly regarded psychologist and researcher John Gottman, PhD, suggests there are four stages to this sequence, which he labels “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”. 1) Criticism of values and hopes. 2) Contempt for behaviour, such as remembering to put the toilet seat down after use, alcohol overuse, drugs, smoking even – which, even though not expressed openly, rots the foundation of a relationship. 3) Defensiveness. 4) Stonewalling, as the partners start avoiding one another to reduce their conflicts.

To de-escalate conflicts, try the following.

Active listening: One of the most effective techniques in resolving conflicts is practicing active listening. This involves fully concentrating on what your partner is saying, understanding their message, responding thoughtfully, and remembering their points. It’s about making your partner feel heard and validated, even if you disagree with their perspective.

- **Using ‘I’ statements:** express your feelings and needs using ‘I’ statements rather than ‘you’ statements to avoid placing blame or making your partner feel defensive. For example, say, “I feel upset when...” instead of “You make me upset by...”

In preparing couples for marriage, I suggest they might include in their timetables a monthly meeting (typically the last Saturday morning of the month) in which each can say what upset them that month. (By the way, it works!)

- **Taking time out:** If emotions start to escalate, taking a time-out can be beneficial. Agreeing with your partner in advance about this strategy allows both parties to cool down.
- **Seeking to understand before being understood:** make a genuine effort to understand your partner’s point of view and concerns before pushing your own. This shift in focus can lead to empathy and compromise.
- **Focusing on the issue, not the person:** target the specific behaviour or situation causing the conflict instead of criticising the person. Discussing how a particular action made you feel rather than attacking your partner’s character keeps the conversation productive.

There was a marriage that broke down because it was too perfect. Over a long walk and conversation, the husband said the road to his death was too straight and thus frightening. He needed, he insisted, twists and turns to distract him from being able to see the end. Weird? Yes. But true.

Research has shown that a happy marriage brings joy and fulfilment but also has significant benefits for your health. Studies have found that individuals in happy marriages tend to have better overall health compared to those who are single. They often live longer, have a lower risk for depression, and have fewer strokes and heart attacks. Furthermore, they have a higher chance to survive a major surgical procedure.

The context in which you address conflicts is almost as important as how you communicate during the conflict. The right timing and setting can significantly influence the outcome of a disagreement.

Divorce in the US (I do not have access to stats for the UK)

A national survey in 2005 remains the most recent large-scale report about the leading causes of divorce in the nation. The survey found that the 12 top reasons for divorce, from most to least common, are:

1. lack of commitment (73.2%);
2. constant arguing or conflict (55%);
3. infidelity (54.6%). This leads to feelings of betrayal, anger, and resentment, which can destroy a relationship. Effects of infidelity may include anxiety, depression, trauma, trust challenges, shame, guilt, and social withdrawal;
4. marrying too young (45.7%);
5. unrealistic expectations about partner or marriage (45.3%), including unrealistic expectations about how the household will run, where you will live, and how you will be treated as a spouse, and assuming that things will be better after you're married may be a warning sign of unrealistic expectations placed on the marriage;
6. inequality between partners (43.7%)
7. inadequate preparation for marriage (41.1%)
8. domestic violence (29.1%)
9. financial problems (28.4%). Having a hard time making ends meet or having a partner who overextends spending may cause stress in a marriage.
10. conflict about domestic work (21.6%)
11. lack of family support (18.7%). If your family doesn't agree with your marriage or your partner, the rift you feel may contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as well as a sense of grief for the lost connections;
12. religious differences – (13.2%). Lack of respect for a spouse's faith can, in the long term, be lethal to a relationship.

A smaller-scale study, 'Trusted Source' in 2013 revealed that lack of commitment, infidelity, and conflict and arguing were indeed the leading causes of divorce in the US.

Fewer couples are marrying as so many marriages fail, and fewer take their Christian faith seriously.

In the UK, the proportion of adults who have never married or been in a civil partnership has increased every decade, from 26.3% in 1991 to 37.9% in 2021, whereas the proportion of adults who are married or in a civil partnership (including separated) has fallen from 58.4% in 1991 to 46.9% in 2021.

5.7 Benefits of friendships

Made to the image and likeness of God (who is Trinitarian), our lives are god-like and thus at their possible best when we live with friends.

When we are born, we get associated with mother and hopefully a whole family. We connect very quickly with people with whom our interests match. Infants are playful by nature. They always look for the company with whom they can play and explore their curious nature. Hence, when they meet any other infant of their age they connect easily over their common interest of playing.

In school, we make friends over our common PIES interests. For example, students who like playing sports such as football or cricket connect quickly and become friends. Friends meet and discuss their common interests and nurture their these together. Friends in school help each other in understanding the class activities, and homework. They often exchange notes and reference materials among themselves. Close friends may even pray together and share their love of God and the saints.

Common interests can be nefarious, however, as in the case of Hitler and Goering, who became close friends thanks to their common fascism.

During our college life, we gain independence as we start to take many decisions on our own. Also, many live in a hostel and are hence away from their family. Studying together, staying together, nurturing interests together, adjusting to conflicts with each other, helping each other, all these makes the bond of us stronger.

A friend highlights mistakes and guides us in many ways. They also motivate us to realise our full potential. Also, we can easily discuss and share such issues and thoughts with our friends which we cannot share with our parents.

In our professional life also, friends also help us handle failure positively and multiply our joy of success. During midlife, we have huge responsibilities for family, job, etc. Discussing professional and personal stress with our friends makes us feel relaxed. They are our mental support and, when we are in crisis, a good friend joins hands with us and helps in solving the problem.

Because of the nuclear family structure of the current society, in old age people mostly stay alone. Friends hang out and travel together to explore various places and enjoy several hobbies together. Friends thus eliminate boredom and loneliness from life. They add colour to life. They become a big support for any help needed.

A friend is a person who helps and supports us. They help us come out of distress and grow in life.

Friendship is not only between two people. We become friends with animals around us. Hence, we tend to keep pets. Pets eliminate boredom and stress from our life. Spending time with pets give us immense joy.

In our lifetime we choose our own friends. The journey of life becomes memorable because of friends. Friendship is a lovely relationship without which life seems dull. It is the relationship with our friends that teaches us to share, love, care and, most importantly, helps us to fight odds and be successful. Having true friends acts as a boon. Friends increase the sense of belongingness and generate a feel-good factor. We all thrive

and look for at least one friend who at times criticises and appreciates too. Emotional and psychological attachments are important and can only be experienced with friends.

Friendship is one of the greatest bonds anyone can ever wish for. Lucky are those who have friends they can trust. Friendship is a devoted relationship between two individuals. They both feel immense care and love for each other. Usually, a friendship is shared by two people who have similar interests and feelings.

You meet many along the way of life but only some stay with you forever. Those are your real friends who are by your side through thick and thin. Friendship is the most beautiful gift you can present to anyone. It is one that stays with a person forever.

A person is acquainted with many others in their life. There are colleagues, allies-in-life and acquaintances, which enrich our life. However, the closest ones become our friends. You may have a large friend circle in school or college, but you know you can only count on one or two people with whom you share true friendship.

When I was a teacher, and school chaplain, and I heard a lad boast that he had hundreds of friends, I used to say: "No, you don't. You may have met hundreds of people, but there's no way you can really know more than a handful of people. You'd be lucky if you had three or four real friends."

As real friends take time, it is not possible to have too many of these. Acquaintances and colleagues may be many. Real friends are always few.

We all have a 'circle of friends', a group with whom we play golf, attend church, go to dinner, or share a common interest, like fishing or football. Often, however, these are there for the good times.

Years ago, I came close to a wealthy man who, to discover who his real friends were, pretended he had gone bankrupt. He soon discovered that in fact, apart from me, he had five friends.

"Wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor person deserts them." (Proverbs 19, 4).

When things go sour and you really feel lousy, do you have a friend you can tell? Do you have a friend you can express any honest thought to without fear of appearing foolish? Do you have a friend who will let you talk through a problem without giving you advice? Someone who will just be a sounding board? Will your friend risk your disapproval to suggest you may be getting off track in your priorities? If you had a moral failure, do you know your friend would stand with you?

Is there a friend with whom you feel you are facing life together? A friend to talk over the struggles of life that are unique to men? Do you have a friend you believe you can trust, that if you share confidential thoughts they will stay confidential? When you are vulnerable and transparent with your friend, are you convinced they will not think less of you? Do you meet with a friend weekly or fortnightly for fellowship and prayer, and possibly for accountability?

We sincerely want to have close friends, yet sometimes we fear letting someone get too close. We worry that if someone really got to know us, they wouldn't like us. As someone starts to get too close, we find ourselves withdrawing; we change the subject, or figure out how to say goodbye.

We need approval, to be accepted by another person, but we fear the opposite – that we will be rejected. So, we keep our distance. If we don't become vulnerable with someone, then we safely avoid the risk of rejection.

Few types of emotional pain cut as deeply or wound as savagely as that of betrayal by a friend. The consequences may not be catastrophic, but the trust level may be difficult to repair. Everyone, it seems, has at least one confidant – one other person they feel comfortable telling their secret to. Benjamin Franklin captured this when he said: "Three people can keep a secret, as long as two of them are dead."

Friends are mutually attracted across the PIES. When there are mutual benefits – such as mutual support with complementary qualities.

If you are finding things difficult, talking things through with a friend can help you understand how you are feeling and what support you might need. It might even be that they just sit and listen. A friend can be there for you by listening to how you are feeling and can keep you company to remind you that you are not alone.

Give practical support. For example, if you are nervous about going to a party, friends can help you by going to the party with you, messaging you to see how you are getting on, or helping you find a quiet space.

Friends can take your mind off what might be making you feel low or stressed. Friends that know you well might recognise if you are struggling or not feeling your best and can check in to see if you need support.

Chapter 6 An art of ageing gracefully

“Age is something that doesn’t matter unless you are a cheese.”

Luis Buñuel, Spanish filmmaker

“Anyone can get old. All you have to do is live long enough.”

Groucho Marx

*“To help God make this world a better place,
I aim to die young at an old age.”*

Father Vlad

If you know me, you will not be surprised that I have structured this work around the PIES: the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of our life. “Made to the image and likeness of God “ (Genesis 1, 27), I use ‘I: Intellectual’ because God certainly has an intellect though not a mind or brain.

- P diet, exercise, lifestyle, enough sleep.
- I concentrating on the white squares of life’s chessboard, and know I am here to help God.
- E live by giving, caring, loving, realising God’s presence in all (Matthew 25, 40).
- S aware I am never alone but alive with God, who has made my life complete and I love them, the Trinity, so. As we shall see, it is God who is the radical source of my purpose in life: my long-term strategy and daily tactical tasks.

The original title of this chapter was ‘*The art of ageing gracefully*’. However, as soon as I started to put down in writing the experiences of my life, the lives of my congregations, allies-in-life, colleagues and friends, it became obvious that this is just one art, among many. You, dear reader, might have your own, perhaps even better, ways of tackling the autumn years of your life.

If you have not as yet worked on your art, I would encourage you to start ASAP. Some damages to your Physical, Intellectual and even Emotional dimension of your life may be irreversible.

‘Gracefully’ is a word with two meanings; as an adverb, it means acting in an attractively elegant way, with dignity, panache; as an adjective, it states that I accept, even embrace, the fact that all I have are gifts, graces from God, which I celebrate as I take care of the PIES of my life. The two meanings are linked; it is because I see all I have is a gift from God that I strive to look after all I have, and am. Not to do so would show disrespect for the donor and, as I approach my face-to-face meeting with God, that would not be a good idea.

I have avoided the egregious error of thinking that I am controlled by events. I am free enough to be responsible for my choices. To live a human life is to make choices. To decide how you will be; how you choose to see the world. I have made mine. So here I am – as I am – for better and for worse.

Frustrations accelerate the ageing process. To slow this down, I have been using a SWOT analysis over the past 20 years (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats).

Strengths and weaknesses are internal to my operation —things over which I have some control. Opportunities and threats are external—things that are going on outside my control. I took advantage of opportunities and protected myself against threats, such as my Ordinary and his policies.

SMART is an acronym that I used to guide my goal-setting as I was taken away from working with young people and, as the 2012 London Games were on the horizon, chose to focus on sport, setting up the John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport charity.

- **S**pecific (simple, sensible, significant).
- **M**easurable (meaningful, motivating).
- **A**chievable (agreed, attainable).
- **R**elevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **T**ime-bound (time-based, time-limited, time-/cost-limited, timely, time-sensitive).

It worked.

How to use SMART goals

1. Specific

Your goal should be clear and specific; otherwise you won’t be able to focus your efforts or feel truly motivated to achieve it.

When drafting your goal, try to answer the five ‘W’ questions:

- **What** do I want to accomplish?
- **Why** is this goal important?
- **Who** is involved?
- **Where** is it located?
- **Which** resources or limits are involved?

2. Measurable

It's important to have measurable goals, so that you can track your progress and stay motivated. Assessing progress helps you to stay focused, meet your deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving your goal.

A measurable goal should address questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

3. Achievable

Your goal also needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch your abilities but still remain possible. When you set an achievable goal, you may be able to identify previously overlooked opportunities or resources that can bring you closer to it.

An achievable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How can I accomplish this goal?
- How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors?

4. Relevant

This step is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. We all need support and assistance in achieving our goals, but it's important to retain control over them. So, make sure your plans drive everyone forward, but that you're still responsible for achieving your own goal.

A relevant goal can answer 'yes' to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match my other efforts/needs when working in a team?
- Am I the right person to reach this goal?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?

5. Time-bound

Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work towards. This part of the SMART goal criteria helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals.

- A time-bound goal will usually answer these questions:
- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

As the years of my journey to eternity have grown, I have shaped my aim to “die young at an old age”. How I have tackled this you will see if you have the stamina to read this chapter.

When asked how I manage to look younger than my age would indicate, I say it is a mixture of diet, exercise, lifestyle and prayer – as well as, obviously, my DNA. “Which earth has given, human hands have made.” (Ecclesiastes 3, 13–14)

A bright spot, however, is that what’s also become clear in recent years is that genetics is only half of the discussion. Our lifestyles, as doctors are keen on telling us, are important in increasing or reducing our risk of various diseases. Research in the new field of epigenetics is finding that our lifestyle choices – the foods we put in our bodies, the chemicals we are exposed to, how active we opt to be, even our social environments -- can actually alter our health *at the level of the gene*. These choices can have big effects on our risk of disease, even if our genes seem to be working against us. So before throwing your hands up and saying, “What can I do? It’s all up to my genes”, improve your lifestyle.

Positive lifestyle choices we make – most notably, eating right and exercising – may have just as powerful an effect on our genetic make-up, and as negative ones, such as smoking, certainly do have. Two recent studies illustrate this point. One found that eating well can turn off the genes that put one at higher risk for heart problems; the other showed that exercise can persuade stem cells to become bone and blood cells rather than fat cells. Each helps us see how lifestyle variables work at the genetic level to modify our risk.

Keep stretching – avoiding breaking – yourself across the PIES.

There is an increasing area of your life in which you can do sometimes what at other times are beyond your ability. Biorhythms, in my experience, are a fact of life. Accepting this, and working with the SWOT and SMART programmes, lessened my frustrations and thus slowed down my ageing. When all are simultaneously at their peak, I can perform far more effectively than when all three are simultaneously at the lowest. In fact, I have heard, that in many Japanese companies – where biorhythms are taken seriously – anyone with the lowest simultaneous three is banned from coming to work.

Carpe dies: seize the days (not just *diem* or one day), for the optimal biorhythm days last a few dozen hours.

Accept that, as you age, you will have diminishing speed, stamina, and strength, as well as memory. Take notes. Use a diary.

I know it is important to look after our PIES. As Brendan Behan put it: “I only take drink on two occasions: when I’m thirsty and when I’m not.”

6.1 Physical

Julie Burchill (born 1959) began as a staff writer at the *New Musical Express* at the age of 17. She has since contributed to newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*. She reminded us that: “It has been said that a pretty face is a passport. But it is not. It’s a visa – and it runs out fast.”

Scientific progress is accelerating improvements in medicine. There are now new molecules that enable mice to age slower, and stay faster and healthier for longer. Soon, it seems, these will be available for human consumption. (Who knows at what price!?)

Researchers are confident that soon there will be methods of slowing down brain ageing and even perhaps eliminating dementia. Our bodies are not like machines. They are capable of self-repair. Young bodies fight diseases easier.

I now try to keep tabs on my eyes, having an annual eye test (yes, I have incipient cataracts coming on); my teeth – twice-daily brushing, with a daily use of *TePe brushes*. I have lost two teeth (molars) which do not create problems with chewing so have not had them replaced.

I enjoy my six-monthly check-ups and I know that my hearing is fading. In a loud, crowded restaurant, I find it harder to follow a conversation across a wide table. I see my loss of hair, acquisition of wrinkles and saggy bits – on elbows and the rest – as ‘long-service’ medals for my years of life on this planet.

If you need a hip operation, make sure the surgeon does it from the front. Were he or she to go from the back, too much muscle gets damaged, with post-op problems.

I do not waste the weakness/evil in my heart. I use vanity and pride and desire to be able to help God for as long as possible to keep on keeping on with my exercises. Given that I have now celebrated my 85th birthday and spent nine months in my mother’s womb - I do 86 press-ups on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays and 86 full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays. (You can find a video of my early morning exercises at www.fathervlad.com.)

I force myself to travel on foot, rather than take short bus rides, and I always walk up and down Tube escalators and up to four flights of stairs in a hospital. Though I admit, I do have balance problems – it’s good to hold on to solid things in the bathroom. I also have flexibility difficulties. Not easy, when dressing, to pull my left leg up high enough to push it through my underpants.

If, as you age, you find you need help, do not get depressed. You have become the catalyst for the generosity of others; helping them express and develop their generosity.

I am grateful to God for treating my health so benignly. Apart from sciatica down both legs, first the right in 1960, which stayed around until I left Opus Dei in 1982, and then the left in 2018; and two kidney stones - both on the left - the first in 1987, the second in 1997, I have had good health. I even managed to avoid Covid.

So far, I have not had to use what many people consider takes away dignity and grace: a colostomy bag. However, dear reader, if you or someone you know has to use one, remember that the Queen Mother (1900–2002) had one and, in public, was always graceful.

Arthritis. Thanks to my Goddaughter Kate, who gave me a copper bracelet. This, plus the turmeric, omega 3, and glucosamine sulphate, which I take after breakfast on top of my 75mg aspirin, has staved off the worst effects. Now, my right hand (which’ at its worst’ was too painful for me to shake hands!) is fine and the left, just a wee bit swollen and weak.

Having researched its effects, and aware of the ethics of big pharma, I refuse to take statins.

I eat wisely. I take the five-a-day seriously.

To keep my memory in shape and reduce the risk of another kidney stone, I drink plenty of fluids; whenever possible, chilled water.

I embrace, not just unhappily accept, alterations to our culture: with its crash helmets for motorbike riders, seat belts in cars, decimalisation, and, recently, the increasing areas of 20mph speed limits. *C'est la vie*. Pointless to get nostalgic about the 'good old days'. There is nothing more ageing than becoming an office curmudgeon who rolls his or her eyes at any change.

To help me walk upright, I keep my glasses on and look through not above them. I pick my feet up, and refuse to drag them. Heels last longer!

I watch my weight. I have my own minimum of the 'double 2-3' diet: two out of three days, just two out of three meals. Cutting out lunch and, of course, nibbles between meals.

I now sleep at least eight hours a night.

I wear well-fitting shoes. When young, I was lucky enough to have my parents and nanny buy shoes that were wide enough never to cripple my feet.

My prostate is not perfect. At night and early mornings, the flow is a trickle. I try to look after it by eliminating red and processed meat, high-fat dairy and saturated fats. Alcohol before I go to bed numbs my twitchy-tickling sciatica toes so I can fall asleep without delay.

6.2 Intellectual

Humour keeps you young. "The sound of laughter is the most civilised music in the world," stated Peter Ustinov.

Thanks to my Boy Scout jamborees, etched into my memory are the words: "Smile, boys, that's the style. What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile,"

They were added to the mix that is my philosophy of life.

"Many a true word is spoken in jest" is a sound English proverb. "I don't operate rationally. I think just like a woman," joked James Dyson, inventor, after 5,126 rejected prototypes of the Dyson vacuum cleaner, and then the bladeless fan. Maybe, he was seriously serious.

To reduce my brain ageing and, I hope, the risk of dementia, I stay curious. I keep thinking and writing to stay mentally healthier for longer. To stay as young as possible, I avoid 'thinking old'. My philosophy resonates with *Robert Louis Stevenson's*: "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant", and *Eleanor Roosevelt's*: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

After over 86 years on this planet, I remain an optimist. I am in fine company. Churchill said: "I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else."

Thanks to my prayer life and living the beatitudes, I have avoided depression, which is caused not by a shortage of serotonin in the brain (that is a symptom rather than a cause), but by grief, often sub-conscious grief, caused by childhood (trauma, or loss of nature's beauty, love, status, control, finance, fitness, looks, values and hope).

Within our heart, our personality, there is a hole that only God can fill. No amount of materialism, hedonism, fame and glory can fill that void.

Last Sunday, the Orders of Service started each beatitude with "Happy". I never use that. It smells of a pub's 'happy hour'. Translators are traitors! The Greek word is *makarios*, not even blessed, it's more like "Oh the bliss of those who...".

1. "Oh the bliss of those who are the poor in spirit, people who recognise their own spiritual poverty, their need for God for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven as they open their hearts through prayer to God.
2. "Oh the bliss of those who are those who mourn, people who repent and mourn for their sins, for they will be comforted as they enjoy forgiveness.
3. "Oh the bliss of those who are the meek, who want to own nothing, inherit everything there in art galleries and nature.
4. "Oh the bliss of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be united with God, for they will be satisfied.
5. "Oh the bliss of those who are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Action-reaction. Give, and gifts will be yours.
6. "Oh the bliss of those who are the pure in heart, free from evil in words, thoughts and deeds, for they will see God.
7. "Oh the bliss of those who are the peacemakers, the bringers of shalom, a joyful peace, for they will be called the children of God.
8. "Oh the bliss of those who are persecuted because of righteousness, as Jesus himself, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
9. "Oh the bliss you have when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Dare to be different. Easier as you get older.

I accept, even try to embrace, change in our culture's vocabulary. For your entertainment, here's some examples of politically correct words

Homosexual	gay
Stupid	intellectually impaired/unschooled
Dustbin Man	sanitation engineer
Poor	economically marginalised
Immigrant	newcomer
Right-wing protest	riot
Left-wing riot	protest
Global warming	climate change
Broken home	dysfunctional family

Caretaker	site engineer
Slum area	economically deprived area
Foreign food	ethnic cuisine
Tramp	homeless person
Preferential treatment	affirmative action
Racist	someone who disagrees with the far left
Husband	partner
Wife	partner
Lying	economical with the truth
Wanted criminal	person of interest
Actress	actor
Manageress	manager
Spinster	bachelorette
White lie	lie
Lie	alternative truth.
A manhole cover	maintenance hole cover
Plastic surgery	Cosmetic surgery

Can't use the n word – which in the 40s was a colour used in my sister's school.

German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), due to his perception that Down's syndrome children (named after British doctor John Langdon Down, who fully described the syndrome in 1866) shared facial similarities with the Mongolian populations, called such children Mongols. Now, the only acceptable words are 'Down's Syndrome'.

Alive in touch with the divine most of the time, I have avoided ageing by worrying only about the little I can control. For the rest? "Que sera, sera; whatever will be will be, the future's not ours to see." *Omnia in bonum* (OIB) "all will be well – when in love with God." (Romans 8, 28)

Here are three examples:

1. Early one Sunday morning, driving northwards at Hendon, the car in front of me stalled as the lights turned green. I groaned. However, thank God. As I approached the traffic light at the top of the hill and my lights were green, a car shot across from right to left. Had I not been stalled down below, it would have hit me, on my driving-seat side.
2. A friend was held up by heavy traffic and thus arrived at the Twin Towers *after* the planes had crashed on September 11th 2001. Had he been on time, his time would almost certainly have come.
3. Something similar with another friend, this time in Australia. Due to a number of causes, he arrived late to get on the light plane that was due to take him to his up-country destination. Later that day, he learned that the plane had crashed.

A recent reminder of OIB.

On June 20th 2022, unable to cross the Heston Road due to passing cars, I just missed the 120 bus. Instant "shucks". Then, aware of OIB, I quickly calmed. A couple with their young boy walked up to the bus stop. After a short pause, the man thanked and praised

me for the blue and yellow ribbons pinned to my lapel. “We are from Ukraine.” He had been in London for a few years. His wife and child had arrived two days ago. We carried on a staccato conversation – their English was not too good – until the bus came. After we all shook hands, I stayed downstairs. They went upstairs. Had I not missed the first bus, I would not have had that conversation, and then on the Tube platform, I’d been able to answer the question raised by an Irish couple: “How do we get to Paddington?”

So, whenever I am held up, I shrug and stay calm.

I am determined to eschew grumpiness; an all-too-common phenomenon, down the ages, with the aged.

“We live in a decaying age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They frequently inhabit taverns and have no self-control.” Words inscribed on a 6,000-year-old Egyptian tomb.

Then there is: “I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words [...] When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint.” These are words ascribed to Hesiod, a Greek poet generally thought to have been active between 750bce and 650bce, around the same time as Homer.

And, in the same vein: “The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.” This quote is commonly attributed to Socrates (a Greek philosopher from Athens who is credited as the founder of Western philosophy and among the first moral philosophers of the ethical tradition of thought. He died in 399bce). However, there appears to be no conclusive evidence that he actually said it. The quote may have come from Plato’s Republic Book 4, where Socrates is quoted saying the following regarding things that he thinks have been neglected: “I mean such things as these: when the young are to be silent before their elders; how they are to show respect to them by standing and making them sit; what honour is due to parents; what garments or shoes are to be worn; the mode of dressing the hair; deportment and manners in general. You would agree with me? Yes.”

The Greek philosopher Plato (429?–347bce) studied under Socrates. Plato complained about the youth of the day too: “What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?”

Then, quite a few hundred years later, in 1274ce, Peter the Hermit joined the chorus: “The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint [...] As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress.”

To keep the theme going closer to our age, in the 1790 book *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove Family*, Reverend Enos Hitchcock wrote: “The free access which many young people have to romances, novels, and plays has poisoned the mind and corrupted the morals of many a promising youth; and prevented others from improving their minds in

useful knowledge. Parents take care to feed their children with wholesome diet; and yet how unconcerned about the provision for the mind, whether they are furnished with salutary food, or with trash, chaff, or poison?"

And, on it goes. In 1904, psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall published *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, in which he warned that it was a dangerous time, particularly for young folk. "Never has youth been exposed to such dangers of both perversion and arrest as in our own land and day. Increasing urban life with its temptations, prematurities, sedentary occupations, and passive stimuli just when an active life is most needed, early emancipation and a lessening sense for both duty and discipline, the haste to know and do all befitting man's estate before its time, the mad rush for sudden wealth and the reckless fashions set by its gilded youth—all these lack some of the regulatives they still have in older lands with more conservative conditions."

Of course, I did not carry guns or sold drugs, nor did I kill people. I had home training. All too many of these young people do not. When young, we did not tattoo and pierce our bodies. We were taught respect, which a majority of younger people don't have. However, I prefer to concentrate on the positive rather than be dragged down by the negative.

If the world is like a chessboard, of course there are black squares, but I have decided to concentrate on the white ones. Given my condition as I write this, it has been a wise choice, I believe.

I compel myself to stay curious. To keep my brain in best possible shape, I coerce myself to write my fortnightly piece for *The Universe Catholic Weekly* and books, such as this.

I also had a spot from 2023 to 2024? broadcasting on Radio Maria, every Friday at 4pm.

Having seen babies born (and how they now look aged slightly less than me), I know that people, as society and technology, change. I try never to judge a book by the cover of its earlier editions.

To stay in step with reality, I know I have needed a constant *metanoia* – a repentance, a change of opinion – about so much.

When discussing the past, bear in mind that an increasing section of your life is history for an increasing number of folks.

In spite of St Augustine of Hippo's take on what he called Original Sin (Genesis 3, 1–7), and maybe because I've not had to suffer in a Russian or Chinese Gulag (or a Japanese prisoner of war camp), I see humans as good though weak. More like a clean plastic bag than a rotten leather case. Neither can carry safely more than three bottles of wine.

6.3 The Emotional

Thanks to my priesthood, with its weddings, baptisms, instructions, mentoring and care, I am socially outstandingly connected – some 200 names were on the list of people I invited to me 80th birthday celebrations. A few are real friends, many are allies-in-life and some are colleagues. All enrich my life and help me stay young at heart, and thus across the PIES of life.

To have friends, it is vital to be a friend, and that includes family: keeping in touch with them, being there for them.

“I call you friends” (John 15, 15) is for me the open door to the Kingdom of God. Living as a part of God’s family keeps me young at heart.

To avoid, or at least minimise, the risks of social isolation and loneliness, I encourage you to make (and keep) friends, so that when you don’t need them, they are there for you. To sustain friends, you need the enlightened self-interest of commitment, time and effort. For me, long-range friends are the best there is – after health and hope – in life.

Regarding friendship – after health and hope, the most precious gift in life – I subscribe to both Aristotle and Cicero. While Aristotle leaves room for the idea that relationships based on advantage or pleasure alone can give rise to friendships, he believes such relationships have a smaller claim to be called friendships than those based partly or wholly on virtue. “Those who wish good things to their friends for the sake of the latter are friends most of all, because they do so because of their friends themselves, not coincidentally.”

Friendships that are based partly or wholly on virtue are desirable not only because they are associated with a high degree of mutual benefit, but also because they are associated with companionship, dependability, and trust. More important still, to be in such a friendship and to seek out the good of one’s friend is to exercise reason and virtue, which is the distinctive function of human beings, and which amounts to happiness.

Cicero admonishes us that, even though we have something valuable to gain from true friendship (advice, companionship, support in difficult times) it isn’t transactional. A real friend never keeps score since the reward of friendship is friendship itself. To have a cohort of friends, be, and act, like a friend. Stay in touch. I have a perpetual diary of birthdays.

I stay in touch with younger people: Godchildren, families I have married and whose children I have baptised, or prepared for their first holy communion, as well as past pupils and parishioners. To stay young, take time with the young. It’s worthwhile. (My pro bono, excellent dentist is a lovely woman whose parents I married, whom I baptised, whose wedding I celebrated and then baptised her children.)

With age, the death of others becomes an increasingly common companion. Friends as well as allies-in-life, colleagues and acquaintances die, and attendance at their funerals accelerates, until the few who remain – and who are still mobile – will come to mine. Grief is the price of love; a cost worth paying. A friend is someone who is an extension of yourself and thus his or her loss hurts, generating a void.

Though I have always loved classical music, perhaps due to my early wartime years and my relationship with my dad and until, in 1982, I left Opus Dei, I considered emotions as a nuisance, like little children distracting a serious conversation among adults – the intellect, memory, imagination and will. Now I realise their value. Thank God.

6.4 The Spiritual

Seeing death, my birth into divine eternity, as a friend gives my heart buoyancy. To see what I mean by that word ‘heart’, take a look at my book *Life Squared*.

Alive in what Yeshua referred to as the Kingdom of God, though I know God is 'Majesty', my life is marinated in hope (see Chapter 1) and I see Father God as a dad, the Son as *Yeshua* and the Holy Spirit as, the feminine, *Ruach*. A bit like HM Queen Elizabeth 2 was 'Your Majesty and Mummy' to Prince Charles. This keeps me young at heart.

As I see the 'original' sin as evidence of stupidity, a lack of enlightenment, so I keep in touch with The Word (*Sophia*, wisdom) that is Yeshua. Christ, as the Vatican 2 Council (SC, 7) reminded us, is present at mass and thus in life, not only in the priest, the Sacrament and the Word, but in people, the congregation. As you will find in my book *Life Squared*, watching people has taught me so much about God.

To age gracefully, always find a purpose, a role, in life. Many a time I have prayed Bartimeus's "*Domine ut videam*: Lord, that I may see" what you want me to do, where I ought to be. (If you are interested what this has meant, take a look at my CV on my website.)

My grace before John Studzinski's 65th birthday lunch sums up the salient points of my ethics.

"Beloved God, I thank you for the most precious gifts you have given me: my existence, health, friends, roles in life and hope. May I never take these for granted, for gratitude is a life-enhancing virtue. I thank you for today and all those who have made it possible for me to be here. I thank you for the food and drink. As we enjoy it, may we come closer to each other and thus closer to you.

And may I never forget people less fortunate than me – who will be hungry today.

I ask this through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen. Bon appetite."

As I was walking out, I passed Gordon Brown (the UK Prime Minister from June 27th 2007 to May 11th 2010) still sitting down. He grabbed me by my arm and said: "Thank you so much for mentioning hope. Thank you."

Life has taught me how psychosomatic accidents tend to occur when I am not at peace inside.

As I have no children, the imagined future is less of a concern than it must be for parents and grandparents. However, though I do not subscribe to the perennial attack by the oldies on their youngsters, I am glad that I am old and will be spared the inevitable effects of global warming. I will not have to witness the shortages of water in some areas and the migrations and political unrest created by swathes of the earth becoming uninhabitable. I will not have to witness (albeit, if the West is lucky, at a long distance) the effects of China vying with the United States for hegemony in what we call the Far East.

Then there is The Church. Will its leadership, with the political and economic unrest, bring cultures back from materialism, hedonism and denial of life after death. Will it bring countries to life at peaceful joy with God? I hope and pray that, as societies progress, they will learn the art of maturing gracefully.

As I am a man of God, not a man of the Church, the follies of ecclesial administrations are a pain but not lethal to my faith. For me, the Church is a vehicle, at times in need of servicing and occasionally serious repair.

I now more readily admit mistakes, such as snapping at those who, as they and I age, annoy me for any number of reasons.

Always discover a fresh role in life. When one door closes, through redundancy or the decisions of your bosses, knock a hole in the wall and build a new one. Your identity needs to be defined by more than your job. I have developed a wide portfolio of identity generators.

There is my priesthood, my writing, my friends and allies-in-life, my role as carer of a ninety-year-old.

When, recently, I was asked by a long-term friend: “Are you lonely, Vlad?” I honestly replied: “No. I am not a consummate extrovert. I need my time alone with God.”

My radical identity? I am a son of God.

Life has taught me a ninth Beatitude. “Blessed are those who know how to laugh at themselves, for they will never cease to be amused.”

Role? Do what I can, given the parameters of possibility, to help heal the world or even better, enable the Kingdom of God to thrive.

We are what we ingest, across the PIES. So, take care with your reading and viewing.

Viktor Frankl (1905–97), whose logotherapy theories were heavily influenced by his personal experiences of suffering and loss in a Nazi concentration camp, discovered what Jesus Christ taught us in his notion of the Kingdom of God; that human nature needs hope and is motivated by the search for a life purpose. Viktor Frankl knew that without a purpose, people die inside.

I know I always have the power to decide, to choose, my own unique response, my own unique attitude, to any provocation or any life situation.

I have learnt how all too many foolish people I have met buy things they don't really want, with money they don't really have, to impress people they don't really like!

To reward you, dear reader, for staying on this far, I will share: ‘Vlad’s seven steps to joy in the Kingdom of God.’

1. Pray to see possibilities. 2. Select. 3. Commit. 4. Work. 5. Endure. 6. Learn as things change. 7. Choose anew.

The secret of happiness? Living by giving; helping God to make the world a better place, here and now, where I can.

All is a gift, a grace, a loan to be handed back when we leave space-time.

Prayer – staying consciously in touch with God – helps sustain hope and forgiveness. Both of these slow down ageing across the PIES.

Holding a grudge can have a toxic effect on your body. It can raise blood pressure and increase the risk of a stroke or heart attack. It can impair the functioning of the immune system and increase stress hormones.

Forgiveness – when it is authentic and thus like God’s for me – wishes well and offers help to the guilty.

Tattoos and piercing – for me a sign of uncultured barbarism – have, when I see them on women, an ethically beneficent effect. They anaesthetise any libido that might, having seen the female form at a distance, have been lurking in my heart.

Maturity – relaxing in the way I am, with no need to prove anything – enhances the joy of living.

Use TAPS to maximise the gifts we have been given.

Thank God. Gratitude releases benign hormones in your body.

Ask – and accept the needs we have.

Praise – take time to admire the beauty (natures and social/relational) around us.

Say sorry – see the past as a rehearsal for the present, and delight in God’s merciful forgiveness.

Virtues craft character, shape our personality. Alive in the kingdom of God, I dare to be different– indeed delight in being so – with values and thus virtues, the world without God does not have.

My role in life is to become the best version of myself, not in competition with anyone else but me. Striving to improve my PB keeps me challenged and alive in hope.

I am wary of sunburn yet stay in touch with the sun to reduce the risk of D vitamin deficiency. I try to look after my appearance. Good for morale to shave, shower, keep back of hair short, and keep clothes clean.

I walk as much as I can. I remember, and teach, the mantra: ‘use it or lose it’.

I am alive in the Kingdom of God, with the values taught by Jesus Christ with his words and lifestyle, with God like the Prodigal father (Luke 15, 11–32), and I try to live the virtues that reflect my relationships with God therein.

Life is beguiling.

Love for oneself. I love, respect and appreciate myself so I can treat others as I treat myself. (Leviticus 19, 18)

Good to have a broad portfolio of interests and support agencies: people, hobbies, sports, charities and cohorts of similar-minded people, so that when a few cease to exist, there are enough to keep you afloat and joyful.

Let us rejoice and be glad that we are living Godwards for, as long as we become *capax Dei*, capable of life with God, death is birth into divine eternity.

To end on an encouraging note that gives me hope.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12, 24) Jesus bar Yosef, having given his life for us, demonstrated this to be a fac

In my book "Life Squared" you will read that in the services 'squared' means that everything is sorted. An officer, before his convoy moves on, asking his sergeant: "All fuelled up and ready to go?" receives the reply, "Yes Sir, all squared."

Becoming - moving forward - is the journey on which everything I have is a gift from God. For this I am immensely grateful. Hence, I placed the universal gratitude symbol with its two main parts: a simple spiral centre and three circular dots on the lower exterior of the spiral. A third part on the bottom of the spiral resembles a hook, a Makau, which has significance in Hawaiian cultures. Regarded as a symbol for safe passage over water, the Makau, or fishhook, brings good fortune and strength to those who wear it.



Cover is blue; a colour symbolising depth, stability, wisdom, faith, and heaven.