DEALING WITH LOSS

Balthasar's Three Forms of Abandonment

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Follow my ways and I will lead you
To golden-haired suns,
Logos and music, blameless joys,
Innocent of questions
And beyond answers.

(Thomas Merton, 'Song: If You Seek …') [1]

IN *HOMO CREATUS EST*, Han Urs von Balthasar highlights three forms of abandonment in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises:

> The essay speaks of 'three forms' because it first deals with the abandonment of the Christian who is making the Exercises, then with the abandonment (readiness) of Mary, who is again and again called upon in the Exercises as the mediatrix of prayers, and finally with the abandonment of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of the Father.[2]

I would like to examine the value of these three forms of abandonment in accompanying the bereaved in order to deal with their grief and lead them to new life in the resurrection of Christ.

My purpose, however, is not to advocate the use of the Exercises explicitly, although this may be warranted in certain circumstances, but to suggest that the Ignatian method contains the ingredients necessary for the effective resolution of spiritual, intellectual or emotional issues raised by any significant loss, whether the result of death, separation or a life-altering decision.[3]

[1] *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 340.
[2] Werner Löser, 'The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Communio/Ignatius, 1991), 108.
[3] In my article 'Consolation of Mind and Heart: The Search for Meaning and Happiness', *The Way*, 49/4 (October 2010), I proposed the broader use of the Ignatian approach without necessarily referring to the Exercises or their terminology.

Abandonment and Indiferencia

Balthasar's use of the word 'abandonment' in fact aligns well with a wider tradition or spirituality of abandonment.[4] Suzanne Noffke OP writes in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*.

> Abandonment was more than mere obedience to God's already perceived will and more than patience or resignation, which still bore elements of fear or coercion. It was for some authors beyond even indifference in the Ignatian sense (Exx 23), for when one has fully embraced God's will in all things, indifference loses its reason for being.[5]

Even though Balthasar's sense of the word is in continuity with ancient monasticism and German mysticism, Werner Löser indicates that this movement is neither ascetical nor mystical, but *dramatic*:

> A dramatic theology understands the whole of reality as a great and serious drama that, thanks to God's action, culminates in the heavenly Jerusalem.[6]

Löser credits Ignatius for this perspective in Balthasar's extensive work, in particular in his landmark trilogy of *The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*. Henri de Lubac once described Balthasar as 'a fervent disciple' of Ignatius.[7] In Balthasar's usage 'abandonment' corresponds to a deep understanding of 'indifference in the Ignatian sense'—*indiferencia*. It is not a matter of intellectual indifference; nor does it arise from ambivalence or inauthenticity; nor is it passive detachment. It is the result of a decision based on obedience, to 'choose God's choice' for our life: 'Balthasar sees the core event of the Exercises in self-abandonment to God's call'.[8]

[4] The spirituality of abandonment is a current from many streams. In 'Treatise on Abandonment to Divine Providence', *The Way*, 46/2 (April 2007), Dominique Salin refers to Balthasar's admiration for the anonymous *L'abandon à la providence divine*. Among the spiritual writers in the tradition, he cites 'the *Gelassenheit* of the Rhineland mystics, Ignatian "indifference" [and] Francis of Sales' "abandonment"' (25).

[5] *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality,* edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993), 1.

[6] Werner Löser, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and Ignatius Loyola', *The Way*, 44/4 (October 2005), 117.

[7] Henri de Lubac, 'Un témoin du Christ dans l'Église: Hans Urs von Balthasar', quoted in Löser, 'The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar', 103. Löser had personal knowledge of the influence of Ignatius on Balthasar: 'Balthasar told me that he always used to let Ignatius lead him' ('Hans Urs von Balthasar and Ignatius Loyola', 115).

[8] Löser, 'The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar', 107.

Blessing Christ and Praying Virgin, ***by the Master of Flémalle***

Abandonment in the Exercises

This abandonment to God is a vital part of the very foundation of the Spiritual Exercises (Exx 23), which also serves to launch the First Week:

> For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it (Exx 26).

In the Second Week, two important references to spiritual poverty serve to remind us of abandonment to God as a quality of discipleship. Our calling, the calling of Christ's 'servants and friends', is patterned after Christ's own mission:

> [Christ] sends them on this expedition, recommending them to want to help all, by bringing them first to the highest spiritual poverty, and—if His Divine Majesty would be served and would want to chose them—no less to actual poverty (Exx 146).
>
> One Colloquy to Our Lady, that she may get me grace from Her Son and Lord that I may be received under his Standard, and first in the highest spiritual poverty, and—if His Divine Majesty would be served and would want to choose and receive me—not less in actual poverty (Exx 147).

Christ and his mother, who exemplify abandonment to God, are constant companions throughout the Exercises. In fact, Christ serves as guide for our spiritual journey: 'One has to imagine as to the supreme and true Captain, who is Christ our Lord' (Exx 143). His help is sought in frequent colloquies (ongoing conversations with the ever-present Spirit of Jesus). The role of the Blessed Virgin his Mother is no less engaging: she serves as intermediary between her Son and the pilgrim. Her name always appears first in the colloquies:

> … that she may get me grace from Her Son and Lord for three things: first, that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins, and hatred of them; second, that I may feel the disorder of my actions, so that, hating them, I may direct myself and put myself in order; third, to ask knowledge of the world, in order that, hating it, I may put away from me worldly and vain things (Exx 63).
>
> We are invited to imitate Mary as a means of imitating her Son (Exx 248).

Frequent invocations to Christ and the Blessed Virgin serve as reminders that abandonment to God is indispensible to the advancement of spiritual progress.

Balthasar's second form of abandonment is that of the Virgin Mary herself. Mary's courageous 'yes' to the will of God was key to her mission. Nothing short of the abandonment of her own will would have enabled her to endure the perilous journey that was to follow. By it, she consented to insecurity, and to being made fruitful in ways that she could not imagine, prepare for or control. Ultimately, Jesus would withdraw from his mother just as his father had withdrawn from him.

> The foremost example of creaturely participation in the Trinitarian life of self-giving love through Christ is the Blessed Virgin Mary …. [Her] participation in Christ's God-forsakenness manifests the perfection of the mystical 'dark night' …. Her union with God is essentially directed to self-abandonment and to abandonment by God.[9]

Finally, in Christ, self-abandonment takes two forms. The first is his repeated submission of his will to that of the Father to the point

[9] Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 274.

where the two are as one, most notably on the Mount of Olives. Nothing short of that total commitment would have given him the fortitude to endure the cruel passion, the betrayal of his friends, the silence of God and his agonizing death. The second is his total self-emptying or *kenosis*, as expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians.[10]

Holy Saturday

Perhaps Balthasar's most striking account of abandonment in his wider body of work is the 'hiatus' in *Mysterium Paschale*—the mystery of Holy Saturday, which bridges the anguish of aloneness on the Mount of Olives and on the cross, via the silence of the tomb to the triumph of the resurrection. So significant is this mystery to Balthasar that he writes of Holy Saturday, 'It is for the sake of this day that the Son became man'.[11]

Christ on the Mount of Olives, *by Dürer*

[10] Philippians 2:6–11.
[11] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated by Aidan Nichols (San Franciscio: Ignatius, 1990), 49.

> If without the Son no one can see the Father, nor anyone come to the Father, and if, without him, the Father is revealed to nobody, then when the Son, the Word of the Father is dead, then no one can see God, hear of him or attain him … he came … to triumph over principalities and powers: but this triumph is realised in the cry of God-forsakenness in the darkness.[12]

Christ's abandonment *to* God at Gethsemane collides with the experience of abandonment *by* God on the cross. Solidarity with humanity's own visceral experience of darkness could not be more dramatic and eternally binding. That is precisely what makes it liberating for us. The incarnation presents to us a Light that is not diminished by the darkness, even in the abyss; but its glory is fully revealed only in the resurrection.

In *The Christian and Anxiety*, Balthasar again places abandonment on the cross at the centre of the human experience.

> It is … the anguish that God (in human form) suffers on account of his world, which is in danger of being lost to him … so as to be able to suffer this anxiety and therein to demonstrate humanly and how concerned he is for the world's sake …. It is, in the proper and strict sense of the word, the absolute anxiety, which undergirds and surpasses every other anxiety.[13]

Despite the abysmal horror, however, hope survives. Balthasar reminds us of the words of the prophet Isaiah: 'They will be in anguish like a woman in labour' (Isaiah 13:8). Ultimately, this suffering is generative precisely because it is filled with meaning, albeit in the service of a purpose that overarches our finite understanding. The anguish of labour pains is consecrated to give life. This fruitfulness in abandonment to God is well illustrated in Balthasar's *Engagement with God*, which encapsulates his landmark *Theo-Drama* collection, pointing to the counter-intuitive relationship between darkness and joy.

So central is the theme of abandonment in Balthasar's work that Rowan Williams asks,

> What does it mean to identify, as the definitive embodiment of God in human history, someone who declares himself abandoned by God?

[12] von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 49.
[13] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 75.

> This is the question that motivates Hans Urs von Balthasar's entire theological vision.[14]

In effect what this means is that when John the Evangelist declares that God is love, he is making a statement about the ontological nature of love as a self-bestowing so total that it not only gives freely and is equally available to be loved, but does so without preconditions. God loves unconditionally because he *is* the truth and fullness of love. He desires to make it possible for us to receive and give love. Self-emptying becomes, therefore, key to the fulfilment of Creation and of Jesus' mission on earth.

Dealing with Loss

Abandonment to God creates the space necessary for receiving love that is healing, and in this truth the foundation is well established for its application to the experience of loss.

When my wife died, 23 years ago, I found myself seeking to exercise control over my life, certainly not to abandon myself to God. Yet, that instinct was countered by an intuition that 'if faith has any value, it must give meaning to this bitter experience'. Shortly afterwards, I completed the Spiritual Exercises and began to work on a system for grappling with the huge existential questions that arose in the aftermath of my wife's untimely death. It took years to synthesize all that I read and heard. It would take even longer to integrate these insights into all aspects of my life—a process that is still going on.

After attending a Lenten retreat that provided a Christian understanding of loss, I was invited to co-animate the session one year later. Since then, I have made many adjustments to my material and added modules from theological, spiritual and psychological domains.

I have accompanied people dealing with loss for almost twenty years now, using the paschal mystery as the paradigm for understanding and transcending their grief. The beginning of this practice also coincided with my study of christology in a reading course focused

[14] Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and the Trinity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 37.

Man of Sorrows, *by Memling*

on the work of Balthasar. In accompanying the bereaved, I have developed a framework that interprets theories from the field of thanatology (the study of death and dying) in the light of Christian principles, values and virtues. This is particularly helpful for people who tend to compartmentalise religious and secular life.

In dealing with different types of situations, I make a distinction between active loss and passive loss. I call active loss anything that is the necessary consequence of a decision chosen freely. There may be more hope here than in the case of passive loss, but the anguish may at times be as intense. For example, a decision to enter a religious community may be enveloped in joy, but still be marked by periods of restlessness with regard to celibacy. Passive loss is involuntary, for example separation from someone cherished because of death or divorce, or a significant change such as the loss of health or employment.

When I began to accompany the bereaved, therapists were uncomfortable with the subject of spirituality and tended to set it aside as idiosyncratic. Nevertheless well-established discoveries have been made about the role of religion and spirituality in such situations. There are known tasks in facing loss, including 'reaffirming sources of spiritual energy that can encourage faith and hope'.[15] Marcia Lattanzi-Licht points to a broad set of related spiritual needs: re-examining beliefs, reconciling life choices, exploring one's lifetime contribution, examining loving relationships, exploring beliefs about an

[15] Marcia Lattanzi-Licht, 'Religion, Spirituality, and Dying', in *Handbook of Thanatology*, edited by David Balk (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 11.

afterlife and discovering meaning.[16] The latter provides the greatest opportunity for spiritual development:

> The search for meaning, connection, or hope does not involve an end or completion point, but rather is a continuing process, a process that engages one's spirit.[17]

The Christian belief is that meaning comes from the Creator as expressed in Christ, and that the most meaningful connection is friendship with God. This is the source of our hope and, ultimately, our joy. It is precisely the possibility of helping others to discover this reality that draws me to accompany the bereaved. When a relationship of spiritual accompaniment is entered with a contemplative mind and compassionate heart, it is wonderful to behold the working of the Holy Spirit in a constant renewal of the Paschal Mystery.

The Stages of Grief

In addition to knowing something about types of grief, of which there are many,[18] it is helpful to gain further insight into its various stages. The systems proposed in psychology literature typically include *shock*, *disorganization* and *reorganization*. I would like to offer a synthesis that is based on pastoral observation and consideration of the Paschal Mystery, central to Christian faith.

When we meditate on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, we note four clearly discernible periods—the anguish that he suffered in the garden of Gethsemane during the night before he died; the agony of torture and death at Golgotha; the silent emptiness of time in the tomb; and his return to new life in the resurrection.

I suggest that Jesus' experiences at Gethsemane and Golgotha are part of a destructive phase that psychotherapists divide into two parts, shock and disorganization. I further suggest that the resurrection is a reconstruction that calls to mind the reorganization stage. Between the two, however, there is a mysterious hiatus.

[16] Lattanzi-Licht, 'Religion, Spirituality, and Dying', 12.
[17] Lattanzi-Licht, 'Religion, Spirituality, and Dying', 17.
[18] Authors vary in their use of categories, each with their particular symptoms and dynamic. Those proposed in the *Handbook of Thanatology* include acute grief, anticipatory grief, community grief, complicated grief, disenfranchised grief, normal grief, paternal grief, problematic grief, traumatic grief, uncomplicated grief.

This time of transition between the passivity of loss and active reconstruction is populated by lingering signs of decline mixed with emerging indications of progress. This passage serves two distinct purposes. First, it accords meaning to the long loneliness often observed by grievers between the periods in which they feel distressed and throw out beliefs and practices that no longer satisfy their needs, and the time when they can safely say that they have entered a new and stable period of life with the resumption of joyful activities. Second, it allows us to enter into the grace-filled mystery of Holy Saturday.

When we portray the stages of grief as an Easter triad, we are better able to apply the antidotes that can alleviate pain and facilitate healing. Against the initial devastation, Christianity proposes simple but mature faith; against the loneliness that follows, true hope; and to enable reconstruction, authentic love. Also, we are reminded of the mystical stages: purgation, which alludes to the active effort of eliminating inordinate attachments and distractions in order to be free to love and serve God with our entire being and to love our neighbour as ourselves; illumination, in which God uses this new availability to provide insights into God's nature and wisdom; and union, which is a mutual embrace of intimate friendship with God. These stages do not occur for once and for all. We have moments or periods of purgation, flashes of illumination and grace-filled times when God feels close enough to touch.

The antidotes that can alleviate pain and facilitate healing

These categories resonate well with the stages in the grieving process proposed by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, and particularly by Catherine Sanders. Sanders identifies *shock*, *awareness of loss*, *conservation/withdrawal*, *healing* and *renewal*.[19] Kenneth Doka subsequently added *fulfilment*.[20]

The paradigm that guides my work is summarised in the table below. It is informed by a number of psychological and spiritual influences.

[19] Catherine Sanders, *Surviving Grief ... and Learning to Live Again* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1992), 39.

[20] See Kenneth Doka, 'Fulfillment as Sanders' Sixth Phase of Bereavement: The Unfinished Work of Catherine Sanders', *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 52/2 (2006), 143–151.

	Destruction	**Transition**	**Reconstruction**
	Anguish	Loneliness	New Life
Prend[21]	Shock Disorganization	Reconstruction	Synthesis Transcendence
Kübler-Ross[22]	Denial/Bargaining Anger	Depression	Acceptance
Sanders/Doka	Shock Awareness of loss	Conservation/withdrawal Healing	Renewal Fulfilment
Relational phases	Abandonment	Isolation or solitude	Re-engagement
Christ as model	Gethsemane Golgotha	Holy Saturday	Resurrection
Spiritual growth model	Purgation	Illumination	Union
Theological virtues	Faith	Hope	Love
Ignatian Exercises	First Week	Second and Third Weeks	Fourth Week

Here, I would like to explore abandonment, isolation and solitude as a progressive movement from learning to know our self to becoming comfortable with our self, which is a necessary condition for new, life-giving relationships. In this process the feeling of abandonment by God is transformed into, and by, the experience of self-abandonment to God. This is made possible only by focusing on the concrete reality of God as love and source of all beatific blessing. The necessary insight is to understand God's sheer goodness as being the true object of our existential yearning. Whereas nothing that we achieve on our own can alleviate the pain of our separation from what we have lost, God's grace is sufficient.

Abandonment

A key factor in dealing with passive loss is the need to grapple with the feeling of being abandoned—including being abandoned by God—so that a transformation can occur from the first shock of loss to the vitality

[21] Ashley Davis Prend, *Transcending Loss: Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Grief and How to Make It Meaningful* (New York: Berkley, 1997).
[22] Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York, Oxford, Singapore and Sydney: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1969).

that is restored once we experience the grace to reinvest in what we value most. Feelings of having been abandoned are often linked to issues of self-esteem. People with low self-esteem almost inevitably suffer more from loss that those with high self-esteem. They have more difficulty in accepting their feelings, giving themselves time to process those that are frightening, and separating themselves from loved ones and situations that provided in the past at least the illusion of security and acceptance. People in this situation need help to face an often terrifying future, filled with uncertainty, sadness and doubt.

In the case of passive loss, abandonment is something that we suffer. We feel victimized by it. Eventually, we construct a defence against the pain of feeling abandoned by isolating ourselves. No one can hurt us now because we feel that we have regained control over our lives. This pre-emptive expression of aloneness feels good for a time because it seems constructive. Most often, however, it is a confused escape from unbearable realities, a continuation of disorganization. To a degree, this is a healthy response. We need time to regroup. Isolation provides space for an important transition to occur. But it cannot be permanent. Isolation that is induced by fear eventually leads to despair.

Isolation

Progressing through stages is a journey, and the four weeks of the Ignatian Exercises serve to remind us that development takes time. Though I have never used the Exercises literally to accompany the bereaved, as I explicitly draw on Christian references in group and individual work, my method is always faithful to the progressive steps that underpin them.

The spiritual journey includes the challenge of taming empty spaces, especially through the transitional phase in which loneliness is often present. There is to be found the ultimate encounter between the frightened ego and the hopeful self. There we stand alone with the Spirit as Jesus did in the desert after his baptism.[23] The temptations will be deeply personal and intense; our vulnerability acute. To come to the self-knowledge that is necessary to assume our true spiritual identity and experience the consolation that only our true mission can give, we need to be courageously authentic and transcend the limitations of our current experience.

[23] Matthew 4: 1–11; Mark 1: 12–13; Luke 4: 1–13.

The movement from transition to reconstruction is a matter of choice. It requires both wisdom and courage. Without a deliberate election in favour of God's vital call one can remain paralyzed or—worse yet—sink into despair. Hence the pivotal importance of hope, and the value of a spiritual director who enables sound choice via the pedagogy of the Exercises. Here the Ignatian approach can be particularly beneficial because of its focus on an appreciation of God's prior and unconditional love. The integrated self is then free to act authentically.

For the Exercises also remind us that progress is only possible in freedom: freedom from fear; freedom that is expressed as simplicity (self-abandonment) and gratitude (awareness of God's generosity). Our consolation, according to Balthasar, comes from knowing 'God's fullness in his intra-divine self-giving, manifested in Jesus Christ, in his Eucharist and in his Church'.[24]

> I should ponder God's deed for me. God's benefits for me personally are also his invitation and calling to a task in and with his world …. I should consider how much God our Lord had done for me, and how much he wants to give me out of what he possesses, and consequently how much the same Lord desires to give himself to me, and then think back on myself …. Here we hand ourselves over to God in indifference, and then receive our identity back again, in renewed form, as people whom God has 'disposed' and is continuing to dispose in ever new ways.[25]
>
> … to look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc.; as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc. Then to finish reflecting on myself. (Exx 237)

Freedom that is steeped in God's love restores trust, which is a necessary ingredient in reconstruction. Beginning with trust in God's benevolence, we can learn again to trust in others and in ourselves.

Solitude

As a result, abandonment to God can be expressed as serenity and experienced in periods, not of isolation or loneliness but of pregnant

[24] 'Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Ignatius Loyola', 122.
[25] 'Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Ignatius Loyola', 123.

solitude in which one hears spiritual music and sees poetry in ordinary things. For Thomas Merton, solitude was a unique environment in which to incubate perspective and unity, confidence and compassion—all necessary to emotional and spiritual growth. It is the place where we can let go of fantasies and come to understand the joy of drawing wisdom and courage from God, the inexhaustible source. In solitude, he prayed. This has become Thomas Merton's prayer for discernment of God's will:

> My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.[26]

In solitude we must confront the aloneness that is a part of the human condition. Much of our energy over the years has been used to divert our attention from that fact. Much of our pursuit of prestige, power and property has been unconsciously driven by a need to mask this reality. Many of our activities have been motivated by our fear of being alone. Yet, recognition and acceptance of the self standing separately from others—including God—is a necessary part of growth. Without a clear sense of our separation from others, we cannot live freely and fully. Without mature differentiation, we remain emotionally infantilised, bound by self-doubt and buffeted by the whims of others.

Solitude is especially necessary as the din of busy lives overwhelms us and distractions shift our attention away from the rich spiritual dynamic operating within us. It is not, and can never be, self-absorbing. Unlike isolation, it is open to the world but not controlled by it. The need for true solitude is complex and presents certain risks, but it is a basic human requirement. Solitude is fertile ground. Hope is its sunshine. Yet it is not a destination, but a place of healing on the way to our destination. Its purpose is to develop a renewed and healthier understanding of community.

[26] Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Boston, Ma: Shambhala, 1993), 89.

Solitude is not a withdrawal from ordinary life. It is not apart from, above or 'better than' ordinary life; on the contrary, solitude is the very ground of ordinary life. It is the ground of that simple, unpretentious, fully human activity by which we quietly earn our living and share our experiences with a few intimate friends. But we must learn to know and accept this ground of our being. To many people, although it is always there, it is unthinkable and unknown. Consequently, their life has no centre and no foundation. It is dispersed in pretence of 'togetherness' in which there is no real meaning. Only when our activity proceeds out of the ground in which we have consented to be dissolved does it have the divine fruitfulness of love and grace.[27]

Solitude is key to a healthy experience of abandonment to God. Healthy solitude is marked by a degree of peace. Restlessness in solitude, on the other hand, shows when action is needed. Solitude that is filled with God's love and truth is nourishing. It is essential but not sufficient. Ultimately love and truth must be incarnated. Spiritual energy, depleted by grief, must be drawn from its source in God and spread across a garden of fresh possibilities. Abandonment to God ultimately thrusts us forward into new and deeper relationships patterned after those in the Holy Trinity.

Ultimately love and truth must be incarnated

New Life

Whether in solitude or engagement with others, abandonment to God must be experienced as readiness. Self-awareness must be encouraged to increase, and resistance to God's life-giving call to diminish. The mission to which we are all called to abandon ourselves is in reality a path of deep inner healing, even as it fixes our eyes on others. It is precisely when they lifted their eyes from their own woes to the sight of Jesus' love and opened their ears to the meaning of revealed truth that the Emmaus disciples could feel how their hearts burned with new-found joy.[28]

Kübler-Ross reminds us that the work of bereavement is not complete until we have achieved acceptance. Rarely is this the fruit of theoretical understanding. Loss is almost always a mystery. 'Why' becomes a toxic question as the answers are never adequate. The renewal process assumes

[27] Thomas Merton, *Love and Living* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).
[28] See Luke 24: 13–32; also see the response of the apostles in Luke 24: 36 following.

that our old systems for finding meaning are incapable of carrying the grief of a loss that refuses to be placated by reason alone. Rather, a new system must encompass 'blameless joys, innocent of questions and beyond answers'.[29]

The most efficient path to acceptance and reconstruction through self-transcendence is Ignatian *indiferencia*, understood as abandonment in the sense that Balthasar elaborates. Again, this is not an attitude of resignation to forces too brutal to control but a courageous and confident decision to opt for freedom from fear and compulsive responses. It leads to God's gift of mature and true joy: 'Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you' (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

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[29] Merton, 'Song: If You Seek', 340.