Reflections on Saint Faustina

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Jesuit spirituality and mysticism played a significant role in the life of Saint Mary Faustina Kowalska. For example, the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus influenced the Constitutions of her Congregation, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Not only was St. Ignatius of Loyola one of the patron saints of her Congregation but he also appeared to Faustina to inform her that his rule could be adapted to the new Congregation she was founding (§448). During a period of fervent prayer to Jesuit saints, she had a vision and “recognized many of them, whom [she] knew from their pictures” (§683). However, the Jesuits evidently asked too many questions, because her guardian angel appeared and told her to be silent (§683). While reading about the canonization of St. Andrew Bobola, S.J., she was “filled with a great longing that [her] Congregation, too, might have a saint. Jesus assured her that she was that saint” (§1650).

The Jesuits In Her Life

Faustina’s Diary mentions her Jesuit confessors and the Jesuit directors of her many eight day Ignatian retreats. Because unusual circumstances relieved her of regular duties, she was privileged to make Ignatius’s well known thirty day retreat and “received much light from God during this time” (§251). In the midst of one Ignatian retreat, Jesus himself informed her that “in this meditation, the priest is speaking particularly for you” (§381). On several occasions, Jesus assured her that he himself was directing the Ignatian retreat (§229,

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1 Divine Mercy in My Soul: The Diary of Sister M. Faustina Kowalska (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Marian Press, 1987.) Numbers in parentheses in the main text refer to the marginal numbers found in this volume.

2 Mention is made, for example, of Jesuit Fathers Andrasz, Dabrowski, Elter, Macewicz, Matzänger, Nitka, Plaza, Rzyczkowski, Wantuchowski, Wojnar, Wojton, and Zukowicz.

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295, 362). In fact, during one particularly difficult period in her life, "the Lord said that he would come every evening and give me the points for the next day's meditation" (§149). On another occasion, Christ commanded her to make a retreat, selected the days, and then directed it (§§1752-53).

Father Joseph Andrasz, S.J. — the confessor and retreat director who set her completely at peace "for the first time" (§ 141) — played an enormous role in her life, a role second only to that of Rev. Prof. Michael Sopocko. During confession, Father Andrasz advised her with such acute discernment that prayer afterwards led her to conclude: "Since then, I have placed no obstacle in the way of grace working in my soul" (§234). Andrasz was also editor of the Jesuit monthly, Messenger of the Sacred Heart, which did much to nourish her spirituality and mysticism. He heard her last confession. On 7 October 1938, Jesuit Father Wojton celebrated her funeral mass at the main altar of her Congregation's chapel in Lagiewniki, Cracow, while Jesuit Father Chabrowski said mass at the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus where the image of The Divine Mercy is presently found.

Specific Ignatian Influences

However, despite the Jesuit influences in Faustina's life, her Diary evinces surprisingly little that can be traced directly to traditional Ignatian sources. Mentioned, for example, are Ignatius's "particular examen" of conscience (§§1352-55) and a few traditional Ignatian meditations: the "principle and foundation" meditation on "the goal of man" (§1329), "the sin of the angels" (§1332), the "meditation on sin" (§1334), and the "meditation on death" (§1343). She also explicitly adverted to Ignatius's "third degree of humility," when she taught that one should not defend "oneself when reproached with something, but one should rejoice at the humiliation" (§270).³ In Faustina's prayer

³However, Faustina did not understand precisely what Ignatius taught concerning the third degree of humility. In his Spiritual Exercises, §167, Ignatius says that "whenever the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty would be equally served, in order to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord, I desire and choose . . . insults with Christ loaded with them . . . [and] to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ" (my emphasis). On more than one occasion, Ignatius did not accept insults and humiliations because he judged that God would not be "equally served."
for “the grace of never consciously and deliberately offending Him by even the smallest sin or imperfection” (§239), one might also hear echoes of Ignatius’s second degree of humility, that is, “that not for all creation, nor to save my life, would I consent to commit a venial sin.”⁴ And, like Ignatius,⁵ Faustina meditated “on the blessings of God” (§1705) and insisted that love consists of deeds and not words (§§392, 663). However, can one say for certain that she learned this from Ignatius’s famous “contemplation to obtain divine love?”⁶

The most important Jesuit contribution to Faustina’s spiritual and mystical life centers on the enormous role the Society of Jesus played in shaping and spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁷ Although Ignatius had no personal devotion to the Sacred Heart, some of his first companions did and Jesuits of later centuries became its most ardent advocates.⁸

Faustina’s dedication to divine mercy is a further shaping of devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart. “In the evening, when I was in my cell,” she wrote, “I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand was raised in the gesture of blessing, the other touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale. In silence, I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe but also with great joy. After a while Jesus said to me, ‘Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world’” (§47). One cannot understand Faustina’s life and her mission apart from this private revelation.

⁵ Spiritual Exercises, §230.
⁶ Spiritual Exercises, §233.
⁸ For an excellent summary of this devotion’s long tradition, see, Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J., Karl Rahner’s Spirituality of the Pierced Heart (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985) and Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J. (ed.), Spiritualities of the Heart (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).
Similarities with Saint Ignatius

Reading Faustina’s Diary for points of convergence between her and Ignatius, I was drawn to several facets of Faustina’s spirituality and mysticism. One could, of course, take these same aspects and find similarities between Faustina and other saints and mystics in the Christian tradition. On the other hand, I do not find the following comparisons between Faustina and Ignatius arbitrary or without merit.

Faustina taught that “virtue without prudence is not virtue at all. . . . Prudence consists in discretion, rational reflection and courageous resolution. The final decision is always up to us” (§1106). One hallmark of Ignatian spirituality is “discreet love.” In Ignatius’s rules for the discernment of spirits, he states that “it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul.” Ignatius taught that the gift of the discernment of spirits “is helped by man’s activity, especially his prudence and learning.” Even God-given revelations must be examined. “Every prudent man,” Ignatius wrote, “ought to be given arguments that would satisfy an understanding that is based on reason . . . .” He counseled in many of his letters to examine matters “in the light of reason.” A paean to discretion can be found in his profound letter to the Jesuits studying at Coimbra, Portugal.

Moreover, Ignatius says that “in all that concerns the spiritual life . . . progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests.” Ignatius would have also undoubtedly praised Faustina for the heroic self-denial, abnegation, and mortification manifested abundantly throughout her Diary (§§377, 462).

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9 Spiritual Exercises §315. For more examples, see my Ignatius Loyola the Mystic (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), especially the section on “intellectual and affective discernment,” pp. 163-65.
11 Ibid., p. 204.
12 Ibid., p. 265, for just one example.
13 Ibid., 121-30.
14 Spiritual Exercises, §189.
Faustina prayed to the Lord: "Since my youth I have always sought your will and, recognizing it, have always tried to carry it out" (§1504, my emphasis). She considered obedience the only virtue the devil could not feign (§981). One also finds in her Diary one of the most powerful descriptions in the Christian tradition of the crucifying effects of genuine obedience. "For two years now," she wrote, "I have been on the cross between heaven and earth ... I am bound by the vow of obedience and must obey the superior as God himself. And, on the other hand, God makes his will known to me directly, and so my inner torture is so great that no one will either understand or imagine these spiritual sufferings. It seems to me that it would be easier to give up my life than to go again and again through one hour of such pain ... [O]ne cannot describe what it is like to know God's will directly and at the same time to be perfectly obedient to the divine will as expressed indirectly through superiors. Thanks be to God that He has given me a director" (§981). Part of Faustina's dark nights revolved around her sacrificial obedience.15

Ignatius sought mystical experiences not for themselves but in order to learn, to have confirmed, and to accomplish God's will. His Spiritual Exercises embrace "every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul."16 The prayer, "May Christ our Lord help us all with his bountiful grace, so that we may know his holy will and perfectly fulfill it," ended most of his nearly seven thousand letters.

Although graced with a profound mystical life, Ignatius exhorted his men in another direction, that is, to find God in all things. He preferred the "mortified man" to the "man of prayer." For him, the mortified man finds God more easily in fifteen minutes of prayer than the unmortified in two hours. To be sure, Ignatius considered obedience the hallmark of the mortified man.

15 When one of the novices found Faustina in a strange state on the floor, she summoned the Directress. "As soon as she entered the cell she said, 'In the name of holy obedience get up from the ground.' Immediately some force raised me up from the ground and I stood up, close to the dear Mother Directress. With kindly words she began to explain to me that this was a trial sent to me by God..." (§24). This is another graphic example of Faustina's obedience.

16 Spiritual Exercises, §1, my emphasis.
When Faustina was only twenty four years old, she had an important vision of Christ. She wrote: "Jesus appeared suddenly at my side clad in a white garment with a golden girdle around His waist, and He said to me, 'I give you eternal love that your purity may be untarnished and as a sign that you will never be subject to temptations against purity' [sic]. Jesus took off His golden cincture and tied it around my waist. Since then I have never experienced any attacks against this virtue, either in my heart or in my mind. I later understood that this was one of the greatest graces which the Most Holy Virgin Mary had obtained for me, as for many years I had been asking this grace of Her. Since that time I have experienced an increasing devotion to the Mother of God" (§ 40).

When fourteen years old, Ignatius was sent to the royal court to receive the basic formation of a Spanish gentleman-courtier. Dueling, brawling, gambling, and womanizing became a part of his life. Years later, while recovering from a serious battle injury, Ignatius had a transforming vision of the Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus. "He felt so great a loathsomeness for all his past life, especially for the deeds of the flesh," Ignatius said, "that it seemed to him that all the images that had been previously imprinted on his mind were now erased." 17 "Thus from that hour," he said, "he never again consented, not even in the least matter, to the motions of the flesh. Because of this effect in him he concluded that this had been God's doing." 18

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18 Antonio T. De Nicolas (Powers of Imagining: Ignatius of Loyola. A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining Through the Collected Works of Ignatius of Loyola With a Translation of These Works, [New York: State University of New York Press, 1986], Autobiography, § 10, p. 251) translates this section as, "Thus from that hour ... he never had the slightest inclination to the things of the flesh." Tylenda's translation, however, is closer to the original Spanish, "... nunca más tuvo ni un mínimo consenso en cosa de carne ..." than de Nicolas'. Commentators are divided on the question of Ignatius' infused chastity. That is, was Ignatius spared all inclinations of the flesh or given only the grace never to consent to the least of these motions? The above suggests that God cauterized Ignatius' memory in such a way that temptations would never again arise from past memories. However, the Spanish text does not say that "he never had the slightest inclination to the least motions of the flesh." However, temptations to vainglory, not sexual urges, plagued this man of such self-mastery.
Thus, both Faustina and Ignatius received the gift of infused chastity. This grace confirmed the virginal life she had led. On the other hand, Ignatius received healing and transformation after years of womanizing. And whereas Faustina “never experienced any attacks” against purity thereafter, Ignatius “never again consented … to the motions of the flesh.” Faustina seems to have received a deeper gift of infused chastity.

Ignatius described one of the most important events in his life this way: “One time he [Ignatius] went, following his devotion, to a church a little more than a mile from Manresa, which I believe was called St. Paul’s. The road ran next to the [Cardoner] river. As he went along, occupied with his devotions, he sat down for a while with his face toward the river, which there ran deep. As he sat, the eyes of his understanding began to open; not that he saw a vision, but (he came) to understand and know many things, matters spiritual and those pertaining to faith and learning. This took place with such great clarity that everything appeared to him to be something new. And it happened to enlighten his understanding in such a manner that he thought of himself as if he were another man and that he had an intellect different from the one he had before. He cannot expound in detail what he then understood, for they were many things, but he can state that he received such a lucidity in understanding that during the course of his entire life — now having passed his 62nd year — if he were to gather all the help he received from God and everything he knew and add them together, he does not think they would add up to all that he received on that one occasion.”  

This architectonic experience transformed Ignatius into “another man” with a different intellect. Although not a vision, this incident of holistic enlightenment bestowed upon him the particular mystical horizon against which he would then understand all reality. His intellectual conversion became not only the “eyeglasses” through which he now participated in God’s wisdom but also the means through which he came to understand new things “pertaining to faith and learning.” He was not the first in the Christian mystical tradition to be graced with infused knowledge.

God also imparted to Faustina intellectual clarity and infused knowledge. Claiming that she rarely had apparitions, she also said: "But I more often commune with the Lord in a more profound manner. My senses sleep and, although not in a visible way, all things become more real and clearer to me than if I saw them with my eyes. My intellect learns more in one moment than during long years of thinking and meditation, both as regards the essence of God and as regards revealed truths, and also as regards the knowledge of my own misery" (§882). Thus, Ignatius's Cardoner experience was not only more holistic and architectonic than Faustina's, but also involved matters pertaining to "learning."

One scholar of mysticism has called Ignatius' Diary "one of the purest examples of direct reporting of mystical experiences in Christian history."20 Extraordinary trinitarian, Christocentric, eucharistic, and Marian mystical insights, experiences, and prayer permeate the Diary. It is the explicitly trinitarian dimension of Ignatius's spirituality and mysticism that I wish to underscore here.21

Although less markedly trinitarian than Ignatius's, Faustina's Diary contains several significant trinitarian entries. For example, she spoke of being touched by God, communing with the heavenly Father, and "drawn into the glowing center of love." Here, she "saw the joy of the Incarnate Word." Then she was immersed in the Divine Trinity ... Such tremendous love for the heavenly Father enveloped me that I call this day an uninterrupted ecstasy of love" (§1121). Her desire to drown in God's three-fold essence led to union with the Three Persons, to deeper knowledge of the Trinity, to being drawn into the "bosom of the Most Holy Trinity" and to being "immersed in the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (§§1129, 1304, 1439, 1670). God would sometimes enlighten her with respect to the Divine Essence. "He allowed me to understand His interior life" (§911), she wrote. She also saw spiritually "the Three Divine Persons, but Their Essence was One ... When I was united to One, I was equally united to the Second and to the Third" (§911). God espoused her through a purely

interior act which drew her into "the very burning center of God's love. I have come to understand His Trinitarian Quality and the absolute Oneness of His Being" ($1020). In one remarkable passage, Faustina testified that Christ's "Trinitarian Being" enveloped her entirely with such intimacy that her heart was married to his and she could "feel the faintest stir of His Heart and He, of mine" ($1056).

One of Ignatius's companions, Diego Laynez, said that Ignatius confided to him that "after having read the lives of many saints, unless indeed there had been in their lives more than had been written, he would not readily consent to exchange with them what he himself had known and tasted of God ... He was accustomed to say that he was coming to believe that no other man could be found in whom God had joined these two things together as in himself: on his part to have sinned so much, and on God's part to have granted so many graces."22 Despite Ignatius's modesty and terse speech, he claimed, in effect, to be one of the most graced saints in Christian history.

One finds something similar in Faustina's Diary. After a mystical ecstasy, she said: "When I came to myself, a profound peace was flooding my soul, and an extraordinary understanding of many things was communicated to my intellect, an understanding that had not been granted me previously ... I would not want to change places even with a seraph, as regards the interior knowledge of God which he himself has given me. The intimate knowledge I have of the Lord is such as no creature can comprehend, particularly, the depth of his mercy that envelops me" ($§1048-49).23 Yet another example of


23 In Angela of Foligno: Complete Works, trans. Paul Lachance, O.F.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 214, Angela says something comparable: "If I were given all the spiritual joys and all the divine consolations and delights which all the saints who have existed from the beginning of the world until now have said they have received from God; and even on top of this were added all the pleasures of the world, good and evil, and the latter were transformed into good and spiritual pleasures; and they lasted long enough for me to go all the way to their completion and thus led me to the unspeakable good of that manifestation of God which I experienced; nonetheless, even for all these benefits, I would not give up, change, nor trade even a moment, the twinkling of an eye, of the experience of this totally unspeakable good ... for this unspeakable good I experienced infinitely surpasses any I have previously spoken about."
Faustina's claim to a unique relationship with God is given in this *Diary* entry: "There is one mystery which unites me with the Lord, of which no one — not even angels — may know. And even if I wanted to tell of it, I would not know how to express it. And yet, I live by it and will by it for ever. This mystery distinguishes me from every other soul here on earth or in eternity" (§824).

**The Influence of Other Saints**

One finds in Faustina's writings not only the Ignatian influence but also that of other saints. For example, she prayed to and had dreams of Thérèse of Lisieux (§150) who assured Faustina that she would become a saint (§150). In Thérésian fashion, Faustina spoke of casting herself "as a little rosebud at Your feet, O Lord" (§§239, 1822), "doing even the smallest thing out of love" (§140), and of desiring to be a priest, a missionary, a preacher, and a martyr (§302). She also described herself as "little child" (§1824) and in another context said of herself: "I am very much like a Carmelite" (§798).

Like Thérèse of Lisieux, Faustina experienced mystically that prayer and sacrifice were her mission to the world and understood that even the most humble task done through pure love had more direct apostolic consequences than the sermons of missionaries. Like Thérèse, she knew how deeply even the smallest of her actions affected others and how one's personal holiness influences the entire Church (§1475).

When Faustina spoke of keeping company with Jesus in the "little cell" in her heart (§16), one is reminded of Elizabeth of the Trinity, from whom this image is probably taken. When Faustina is counseled to pray to Jesus "simply, as a friend or to a friend" (§1487), this echoes the teaching of Teresa of Avila. The language used to describe her dark nights is redolent with that used by John of the Cross.

Faustina had a vision of Christ crucified and of a "multitude of souls crucified like Him." Then she saw a second and third multitude. "The second multitude were not nailed to their crosses, but were firmly holding them in their hands." The third multitude, however, were "dragging their crosses behind them and were discontent" (§446).

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Marie of the Incarnation enjoyed a similar vision not long before her departure to Canada some two hundred and fifty years earlier. She relates that she saw a “building of extraordinary grandeur. All that I could see was that the building, instead of being constructed of stones, was fashioned of crucified bodies. Some had only their legs pierced; others were attached a little higher up. Some were crucified at the waist while others again had their whole body crucified. But it was only those who were entirely attached who bore it willingly.”

**Faustina’s Life of Prayer**

I now wish to turn to aspects of Faustina’s spirituality and mysticism which I found either striking or challenging — and sometimes both. The first to be examined is Faustina’s life of prayer. Her Diary reveals the normal life of prayer undertaken in many religious Orders. Numerous references to retreats, meditations, novenas, benediction, various litanies, stations of the cross, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, holy hours, the rosary, the chaplet of divine mercy, ejaculatory prayers, intercessory prayers, examinations of conscience, vocal prayers, prayers of indulgence for the souls in purgatory, and special prayers for certain people punctuate her Diary.

As one would expect, Faustina participated deeply in the Church’s liturgical year, especially through the Office and Mass. “Almost every feast of the Church” she wrote, “gives me a deeper knowledge of God and a special grace” ($481). Two salient entries in the Diary underscore the eucharistic dimension of her life of prayer. One entry states that obedience to her Directress’s command not to omit Holy Communion saved her during an especially difficult time ($105). In the other entry, she says that “one thing alone sustains me, and that is Holy Communion. From it I draw my strength; in it is all my comfort. I fear life on days when I do not receive Holy Communion. I fear my own self. Jesus concealed in the Host is everything to me ... I would not know how to give glory to God if I did not have the Eucharist in my heart” ($1037). And she did, indeed, rejoice in her eucharistic heart.

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Faustina considered prayer a weapon necessary for the Christian life of spiritual combat. Every person — no matter the state of his or her soul — must pray. "A soul which is pure and beautiful," she penned, "must pray, or else it will lose its beauty; a soul which is striving after this purity must pray, or else it will never attain it; a soul which is newly converted must pray, or else it will fall again; a sinful soul, plunged in sin, must pray so that it will rise again" ($146). So highly did she esteem prayer that she claimed every single grace "comes to the soul through prayer" ($146), an exaggeration Ignatius would certainly have contradicted.

**Mystical Prayer**

Like many of the great Christian mystics, Faustina often enjoyed ravishing prayer and even unceasing contemplation ($293). The very thought of contemplation plunged her more deeply into it and "each recollection of this grace caused [her] soul ever anew to lose itself in God" ($1416). Uttering Jesus' name sometimes caused deep recollection and even swooning ($862, 1246). On more than one occasion, Faustina experienced the power of Christ's fiery love transforming her into himself ($1140) and an interior fire enkindling her with love of God ($454, 470, 513). At times, God so penetrated her spirit that she seemed to be dying for Him ($471, 491, 587, 644, 913, 983, 994). Flashes of light in her soul profoundly transformed her prayer, making an hour seem like only minutes ($95, 205, 221, 432).

Faustina was also aware of a "strange fire" ($587) and a "strange silence" ($608) entering her soul. Her communion with God became utterly spiritual and her inner silence imperturbable ($1022). Brief bursts of total absorption in God and complete forgetfulness of self effected a seeming merger of the soul and God which brought lasting effects in their wake ($767). "Such prayer, though short," she wrote, "benefits the soul greatly, and whole hours of ordinary prayer do not give the soul that light which is given by a brief moment of this higher form of prayer" ($815) When the soul drowns in God in this way, it experiences the happiness of the blessed in heaven, rendering normal life seemingly unreal and dreamlike ($771, 947, 1262, 1500, 1523, 1538). She spoke of less intense forms of these bursts, moments "of the
grace of union with God, but imperfect, because exteriorly the senses are acting imperfectly too” ($891).

Prayer sometimes plunged her into an ecstasy of transformative love which lasted for days, yet did not interfere with her diurnal duties ($115, 121, 142). She wrote: “Nothing disturbs my union with the Lord, neither conversation with others nor any duties; even if I am to go about settling very important matters, this does not disturb me ... He, the Lord, penetrates my soul just as a ray from the sun penetrates clear glass. When I was enclosed in my mother’s womb, I was not so closely united with her as I am with my God” ($883). Reminiscent of St. Ignatius’s contemplation in action, Faustina was then able to “see God in everything” and to find God “everywhere,” even in “the most hidden things” ($148).

Faustina claimed that every moment of her life was filled with prayer, suffering, and work. “If not in one way, then in another, I glorify God” ($1545), she wrote. Christ had transformed her very being and life into prayer itself ($1545) He also moved her to write prayers and hymns ($1593), many of which possess extraordinary power and beauty.26

The Dark Nights

No saint has a romantic view of prayer. Those who have traversed the entire mystical path speak trenchantly of the great trials one must undergo. Faustina’s Diary speaks often of discouragement, dryness, spiritual torpor, boredom, temptations, and the fear of illusion. 27 Ill health, community backbiting, accusations of delusion, the snide remarks of and various harassments from those less dedicated to prayer, the deterioration of her body, and the final assaults of the spiritual dark night also tested her mettle. Yet, Jesus himself taught her to pray perseveringly — despite temptations, torments, and dryness — “because oftentimes the realization of God’s plans depends mainly on such prayer. If we do not persevere in such prayer, we frustrate what the Lord wanted to do through us or within us” ($872). She also made the astonishing claim that one must learn perseverance in prayer because “our salvation often depends on such difficult prayer” ($157).

27 Entry §147 is especially poignant.
There were many times in her life when her soul was "in such a state that it does not seem to understand human speech. Everything tires it, and nothing but ardent prayer will put it at ease" ($1387). She spoke, too, of prayer as her only comfort for much of her life ($860). And yet, only someone who had experienced profound intimacy with God could say so poignantly: "Having once tasted God, my soul could not live without Him. One hour spent at the foot of the altar in the greatest dryness of spirit is dearer to me than a hundred years of worldly pleasures" ($254). Only a great saint experienced in the ways of prayer would prefer "the great dryness of spirit" to the delights of worldly pleasures.

One finds a striking description of the dark night of the soul in Faustina's Diary. A series of powerful flashes greatly illuminated God's mercy and left her unable to pray as she did before. These blazes also illuminated her soul, which terrified her — even though her deeper faults remained hidden. However, when God's palpable presence disappeared, every fault seemed to raise its ugly head. A horrible coldness seized her soul, rendering her powerless to pray. Neither God nor any creature comforted her. However, both her craving for God and the sense of her own misery intensified. Her confessor could not understand her; community members often humiliated her and suspected her of illusion—even scornfully nicknaming her "dump" . . . because everyone dumps his pain into my heart" ($870). Then Satan began his real work.

Faustina claimed that God tested with such horrible temptations against faith, hope, and love only someone he had previously graced with many delights. Every attempt at prayer now seemed only to intensify God's wrath against her. The experience of God's utter rejection and of her own utter sinfulness became her daily fare. In what was certainly Satan's most painful assault on her soul, he claimed boldly that he now possessed her and cried out: "You have been rejected by God!" ($98). "This word, rejected," she exclaimed, "becomes a fire which penetrates every nerve to the marrow of the bone. It pierces right through her entire being. The ordeal reaches its climax. The

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28 See, for example, §§95-105, 321, 323, 1243, 1430, 1435.
29 The Diary is filled with incidents of demonic assaults. See, for example, §§411, 412, 418, 520, 540, 601, 713, 1338, 1405, 1464, 1465, 1497, 1583, 1715.
soul no longer looks for help anywhere. It shrinks into itself and loses sight of everything; it is as though it has accepted the torture of being abandoned ... This is the agony of the soul” (§98).

Faustina became like a dying person who loses contact with everything; even external temptations ceased. Any recollection of God produced even greater agony which, at one time, left her almost dead in her cell (§102). Paradoxically, she experienced herself both as in God’s hands and as rejected for all eternity. Two things saved her: God’s secret support and her superior’s command that she never abstain from holy communion (§105).

Approximately four years before Faustina’s death, a sudden illness gave her an acute premonition of her death. The “tasting of the sufferings of death” brought with it a “terrible suffocation” and a “strange fear” (§321). Although Faustina was acutely aware of death as the passage to eternal life, she still deemed it “dreadful.” Several months before her death, Faustina began to feel the disintegration of her lungs and the “complete decay” of her own corpse (§1428). She found it paradoxical that she was still able to walk and to work, even though she constantly felt her body decaying. To her, however, the concomitant pain proved that the paradox was no illusion (§1430). One of her fellow nuns even had to leave the room because of the intense corpse-like smell. “After she had gone,” Faustina wrote, “I understood that God had allowed her to sense this so that I would have no doubt, but that He was no less than miraculously keeping the knowledge of this suffering from the whole community” (§1430). She now consciously performed her every deed as one who faces death, offering her very self for the salvation of others. Still, she wrote, all this “is not so terrible when the soul is filled with God’s light, because in it faith, hope, love, and contrition are awakened ... For the salvation of even a single soul is worth the sacrifice of a lifetime” (§1435).

Victim Soul Mysticism

Faustina burned with a desire to “save souls” (§1645) and was ready to die for them (§§679, 842). God asked Faustina if she would willingly become a victim soul who saves others through prayer, suffering, and sacrifice. To the Trinity’s call to make reparation for the world’s sins and to be the vehicle of God’s mercy to hardened sinners (especially at
the hour of their death), she offered herself freely in total self oblation (§230). After the heroic acceptance of her vocation as a victim soul, she was plunged into God and felt herself "transconsecrated. My earthly body was the same, but my soul was different; God was now living in it with the totality of His delight. This is not a feeling, but a conscious reality that nothing can obscure" (§137).

Only if the bride resembles and joins her sacrifice to that of Christ crucified does she fulfill her vocation (§§250, 268). When Christ asked Faustina to be a host-sacrifice not in words but in deeds, Faustina freely consented and said: "My name is to be 'sacrifice'" (§§135-37, 190, 1826). As a white host before Christ, she asked that he consecrate her and that her transubstantiation be known only to him (§1564). Then, the "shell of her body" (§908) would hide the sacrificial host her soul had become for sinners. Christ rendered Faustina selfless in yet another way when he demanded: "Daughter, give Me your misery because it is your exclusive property" (§1318). From now on, she could claim absolutely nothing as her own — not even her misery.

Thus, Faustina willingly accepted the vocation to be a suffering-servant, or victim-soul. To her, suffering is the instrument by which one can measure the love in a soul (§774). Victim souls are not those who experience the cross as the setbacks encountered in great apostolic undertakings, but rather the ones who manifest God's hand even in life's apparent absurdities: natural failings, physical defects, sickness, suffering, old age, and death. More importantly, they have also grasped the redemptive value of suffering, that is, how even hidden, sacrificial love is apostolic. The victim-soul mystic is the prime example of the person who allows God alone to determine who and what one is.

Faustina claimed to "understand no other life but that of sacrifice" (§784) because Christ himself had requested that she be a perfect holocaust in the most hidden depths of her soul (§923). Through her total identification with Christ crucified, he would bless the world (§1061). Because Christ now lived a second passion in her heart (§§1364, 1598, 1663, 1680), her apostolate was to suffer redemptively for others. Thus, she would save more souls through her prayer and sacrifice than "a missionary through his teachings and sermons alone" (§1767). Not living for herself, she would live only for the Church and for the salvation of others (§§67, 895, 908, 1364, 1505).
She had grasped profoundly the Church’s understanding of the person’s social dimension, that is, of how everyone’s sanctity or sinfulness affects not only the entire Church, but also the entire world (§1475). She had plunged deeply into the mystery of the Communion of Saints, that is, “how closely the three stages of a soul’s life are bound together; that is to say, life on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven [the Communion of Saints]” (§594).

Faustina had a powerful vision of victim souls, that is, of those “pure and innocent souls upon whom God has exercised His justice; these souls are the victims who sustain the world and who fill up what is lacking in the Passion of Jesus. They are not many in number” (§604). Chosen for a higher form of holiness, these souls keep the very world in existence (§1434). She also called them “seraphic souls from whom God demands greater love that He does from others ... The soul which is specially marked by God will be distinguished everywhere, whether in heaven or in purgatory, or in hell” (§1556).

There is a heaven to which only these chosen souls have access (§592). But they suffer greater pain in purgatory because of the profundity of their knowledge and love of God; in hell, they will suffer more deeply because they know more nearly fully whom they have lost. If these chosen souls grow lax and cold, their convents and churches will be destroyed (§1702). And Faustina spoke cryptically of her own special union with Christ. “There is one mystery,” she wrote, “which unites me with the Lord, of which no one — not even angels may know. And even if I wanted to tell of it, I would not know how to express it. And yet, I live by it and will live by it for ever. This mystery distinguishes me from every other soul here on earth or in eternity” (§824).

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Victim Soul

When reading Faustina’s Diary many years ago, I thought immediately of the great Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and his views on suffering and prayer. Despite his emphases on action, on improving the world, on developing one’s own abilities, his writings rarely fail to underscore the necessity, place, meaning, and value of suffering — especially in the evolutionary enterprise. For example, he once wrote to his long time ill sister: “O Marguerite, my sister, while I, given soul
and body to the positive forces of the universe, was wandering over continents and oceans, my whole being passionately taken up in watching the intensification of all the world’s tints and shadows, you were lying motionless, stretched out on your bed of sickness, silently, deep within yourself, transforming into light the world’s most grievous shadows. In the eyes of the Creator, which of us, tell me, which of us will have had the better part?”

Thus, Teilhard appreciated the cosmic value of suffering as a way to “transform into light the world’s most grievous shadows.” Suffering not only heals and transforms the damage caused by sin but it is also an evolutionary energy which promotes the evolution of the world into the one body of Christ. By comprehending that suffering is ultimately redemptive, healing, and transformative not only for the individual and the Church but also for the world and the cosmos itself, Teilhard offers a contemporary way of understanding often denigrated mysticism of a victim soul.

In contrast to Faustina’s doloristic view, Teilhard resolutely refused to consider Christ’s cross “as a symbol of sadness, of limitation and repression.” It is actually the supreme symbol of progress, ascent, superhuman effort, and of this world’s transformation, attained only by a graced willingness to transcend what is most immediately tangible. To him, “Jesus on the Cross is both the symbol and the reality of the immense labor of the centuries which has, little by little, raised up the created spirit and brought it back to the depths of the divine milieu. He represents (and in a true sense, he is) creation, as, upheld by God. It reascends the slope of being, sometimes clinging to things for support, sometimes tearing itself away from them in order to pass beyond them, and always compensating, by physical suffering, for the setbacks caused by its moral downfalls.”

Teilhard was fond of a story by Robert Hugh Benson in which a visionary comes upon a “puny, praying figure” in an out-of-the-way chapel. He has a vision of the axis of the universe passing through

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32 Ibid., p. 104.
33 Ibid., pp. 133-34.
the nun, with all the elements of the cosmos reorganizing themselves around her. Because of this nun's contemplative faith, she was an energy center for the evolution process. For Teilhard, contemplative faith spearheads the evolutionary process. The "puny" nun's efficacious, transformative faith and desire for God is "an ascending force of the world ... concealed in a very intense form."34 It is an actual cosmic energy, giving life to or "sur-animating" the universe.

Neither Teilhard's sick sister, nor Jesus on the cross, nor Faustina seem to have acted upon the world in any significant way. However, Teilhard understood their suffering and prayer as a powerful "passive action"35 by which the cosmos is healed, redirected toward its goal, and transformed. For Teilhard, "the one who dares to believe reaches a sphere of created reality in which things, while retaining their habitual texture, seem to be made of a different substance ... at the same time everything becomes luminous, animated, permeated with love. Through the operation of faith Christ appears."36 Redemptive suffering and contemplative faith render the cosmos diaphanous. They disclose God's love that bathes it and the cosmic Christ it is slowly becoming.

Hierognosis

Faustina belongs to the gifted ranks of those in the Christian mystical tradition who could quickly discern the spiritual condition of others (§1277). For example, Christ said that he would sometimes reveal to her the perilous spiritual state of certain persons so that she could suffer for them (§1357). When she sensed that a person was not in the state of grace, she concomitantly experienced pain akin to that of Christ crucified (§§759, 1079, 1247). A number of times she discerned when someone was about to commit serious sin. She then begged for great sufferings which lasted until the person's spiritual crisis had passed (§§291, 1305, 1399, 1425). The knowledge of the sins committed

during Mardi Gras brought her great physical sufferings (§1619). Awareness of abortions inflicted her with "violent pains." "At times," she said, "the pain caused me to lose consciousness. Jesus had me realize that in this way I took part in his agony in the Garden, and that he himself allowed these sufferings in order to offer reparation to God for the souls murdered in the wombs of wicked mothers" (§1276). Her condition baffled doctors; medications brought no relief.

While traveling, Faustina sensed a great battle in the soul of one of her companions. Her prayer intensified the struggle even more. The woman finally asked a question which Faustina answered from "inner knowledge," which set the woman at peace. (§396). When asked to pray for a particular intention, she felt in her soul that the issue displeased God. She then informed the woman that she would pray for her, but not for the intention. The woman later returned to thank her for not having prayed for the intention and confessed surprise that Faustina had "penetrated her secret" (§958). When another sister confided that she wished to have a certain priest for a spiritual director, Faustina learned during prayer that "that soul would gain no spiritual profit from his direction" (§1423). When she failed to tell the nun, Jesus rebuked her for not revealing what she had learned in prayer (§1424).

In the Christian tradition, one also finds mystics who resonate instinctively with the holiness of others. For example, when St. Louis, the great king of France, visited Brother Aegidius, one of the disciples of St. Francis of Assisi, "immediately Aegidius knew through the spirit who it was. And stepping out of his cell, as if drunken, he came running to the gate, and both men fell into a wondrous embrace and, kneeling, gave each other kisses of great devotion, as if they had been friends from ancient times. When they had given each other the signs of fervent love, neither spoke a word to the other, but they parted, each one keeping silence in his own way ... Then the brothers complained to Brother Aegidius, saying, 'O Brother Aegidius, why did you not want to say anything to so great a king, who came from France in order to see you and to hear a good word from you?' Answered Aegidius, 'Dearest brothers, do not be surprised that he could say nothing to me, nor I to him; for the moment we embraced, the light of divine wisdom revealed his heart to me and mine to him. And standing in the eternal mirror we learned with complete comfort what he had
intended to say to me and I to him, without noises of the lips and the tongue, and better than if we had spoken with lips.”

Faustina also experienced such “spiritual kinship.” Often powerless to describe her ineffable union with God, nevertheless, when she met a person with this same grace, “the two understood each other extraordinarily well in regard to these matters, even though they speak but little with each other. A soul united with God in this way easily recognizes a similar soul, even if the latter has not revealed its interior life to it, but merely speaks in an ordinary way. It is a kind of spiritual kinship. Souls united with God in this way are few, fewer than we think” (§768).

Praying for the Dying and the Deceased

Perhaps no one has written so movingly about the need to pray for others — especially the dying and the deceased — than Faustina who spoke of her ineffable and intimate union with the dying (§§880, 935). Not only did she sense that someone needed her prayers but she also sensed when someone was praying for her (§1444). Occasionally, both Christ and her guardian angel instructed her to pray for a dying person in great need of prayer (§§820, 828, 834). Christ assured her that he showered special graces on those for whom she prayed (§599) and also instructed her to pray “as much as you can for the dying ... Be assured that the grace of eternal salvation for certain souls in their final moment depends upon your prayer” (§1777).

A member of Faustina’s Congregation appeared to her to reveal that she had died and was in need of prayers. Although Faustina prayed deeply for her, the Lord disclosed the following morning that “she was still suffering in purgatory” (§1382). The deceased nun complained that Faustina “still owed her prayers and that she was in need of them” (§1382) because she had prayed for only two of the customary three days.

A remarkable entry in the Diary speaks of the profound contact God gave her with the dying. She experienced “an inner communion

with the dying who asked for prayer when their agony begins” (§835). She wrote: “Today I was awakened suddenly at eleven o’clock at night and clearly felt the presence near me of some spirit who was asking me for prayer. Some force simply compelled me to pray. My vision is purely spiritual, by means of a sudden light that God grants me at that moment. I keep on praying until I feel peace in my soul, and not always for an equally long time … I have also discovered that if I feel constrained to pray for a longer time; that is to say, I experience interior unrest, the soul is undergoing a greater struggle and is going through a longer final agony” (§835). Faustina claimed, too, that she often both experienced this compulsion to pray for the dying and knew the exact time of a person’s death, even for those hundreds of miles away (§835). The profound truth that we fill up what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings (Col. 3:24), that the salvation of others depends not only upon Christ but upon us — and vice versa — needs special emphasis in the contemporary Catholic pastoral scene.

Unique in the Christian mystical tradition is Faustina’s evocative and provocative description of the conversion — through her intercession — of a hardened sinner at his dying hour. She wrote: “I often attend upon the dying and through entreaties obtain for them trust in God’s mercy, and I implore God for an abundance of divine grace, which is always victorious. God’s mercy sometimes touches the sinner at the last moment in a wondrous and mysterious way. Outwardly, it seems as if everything were lost, but it is not so. The soul, illuminated by a ray of God’s powerful final grace, turns to God in the last moment with such a power of love that, in an instant, it receives from God forgiveness of sin and punishment, while outwardly it shows no sign either of repentance or of contrition, because souls [at that stage] no longer react to external things. Oh, how beyond comprehension is God’s mercy! But — horror! — there are also souls who voluntarily and consciously reject and scorn this grace! Although a person is at the point of death, the merciful God gives the soul that interior vivid moment, so that if the soul is willing, it has the possibility of returning to God. But sometimes, the obduracy in souls is so great that consciously they choose hell; they [thus] make useless all the prayers that other souls offer to God for them and even the efforts of God Himself” (§1698).
The Church has long taught that one should pray for the grace of final perseverance. Some theologians have argued that one makes a total freedom-decision at death which sums up one's entire life and being for or against God. The question remains, however, if one can say definitively — on the basis of Faustina's private revelation — that anyone is in hell. The Church has canonized saints but has never taught definitively that anyone is in hell. Moreover, in matters of apparitions and private revelations, the Church teaches that "the Apostolic See has neither approved nor condemned such apparitions or revelations but merely permits to believe them — where they have support of credible witnesses and documents — with a purely human faith." Thus, a Catholic may believe in a private revelation which the Church permits. However, one does so not with divine, but with only human, faith. Ignatius of Loyola — a great mystic and a profound discerner of spirits — said that not only faith but also reason has a right to object to some revelations. The mystical doctor, St. John of the Cross, taught that rejecting even genuine visions and revelations brings a person no spiritual harm. Finally, while rejecting heretical apocatastasis (one knows that everyone will be saved), more than one

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39 For example, see Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death*, trans. Gregory Bainbridge (New York: Seabury Press, 1965). However, Karl Rahner (*Christianity at the Crossroads*, trans. V. Green [New York: Seabury Press, 1975], pp. 85-86) writes: "Unlike many theologians today (for example, Ladislaus Boros), we need not mystify death on the assumption that there is in every possible case at the precise moment of death a total decision on one's definitive destiny and the ultimate and definitive Yes or No to God. We can, however, assume that a normal dying can at least be a situation in which time is quietly taken from man and the silent infinity of God is offered, in which it becomes relatively easy for the person to turn the last deed of his life to his eternal salvation." Note that Rahner does not add, "or to his eternal damnation."


contemporary Catholic theologian has argued that one can hope that all people will be saved.  

**God's Wrath**

So centered on divine mercy are Faustina's spirituality and mysticism that she has been called the "apostle of divine mercy." Jesus ordered her to have a picture painted of the merciful Christ, to establish the first Sunday after Easter as the feast of divine mercy, to pray the chaplet of divine mercy using the rosary, to spread this devotion, and to found a religious congregation devoted to divine mercy. All this has come to pass with formal Church approval on 30 April 2000 when Pope Paul II canonized Faustina (the first saint of the millennium) and declared the first Sunday after Easter as the feast of divine mercy for the universal Church. It is also no coincidence that Pope John Paul II's 1980 encyclical, *On the Mercy of God (Dives in misericordia)*, was definitely influenced by Faustina's writings.

Therefore, it is not unexpected that Faustina spoke lovingly of Jesus' unchanging love and mercy. Anticipating her death, she prayed, "I know you are the merciful savior and you will not change towards me at the hour of my death. If at this time you are showing me so much special love ... I expect even more at the hour of my death. You, my Lord-God, cannot change. You are always the same" (§854). However, what is surprising is that she seemed to allow for a change in God the Father. For example, a sharp distinction between God's mercy and his "anger," "judgment," "justice," "wrath," and even "sword" plays a salient role in her *Diary*.  

Of course, Scripture itself frequently uses these terms with reference to God's manner of acting toward his people.  

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44 See, for example, §§77, 101, 299, 309, 320, 375, 383, 394, 430, 474, 476, 482, 484, 531, 570, 604, 611, 635, 644, 651, 686, 752, 811, 813, 818, 845, 848, 873, 926, 946, 987, 1007, 1035, 1036, 1160, 1226, 1251, 1436, 1516, 1526, 1533, 1541, 1588, 1722, 1728, 1739, 1747.  

Christian tradition would have it that the sin of Adam and Eve angered the Father, who then barred entry to the garden of Eden and closed the gates of heaven. Only blood sacrifice could placate this wrathful God. Because finite human beings offended the infinite Father, only a God-Man can make restitution for this debt. Thus, only the God-Man’s bloody sacrifice could stop a wrathful Father from dooming us all.

A magnificent fourteenth-century mural behind the altar of a small Catholic church in eastern Austria illustrates magnificently this spirituality of a wrathful God. The painting depicts an angry God the Father — with a raised sword in his right hand — poised to strike the earth a deadly blow. Jesus Christ stands at his side holding the Father’s arm to prevent the delivery of this blow. In front of the Father stands the Virgin Mary with her mantle extended to shield from the Father’s advance both the world and its people shown behind her. This painting seems to summarize the side of Faustina’s thinking that stresses God’s wrath.

The so-called “satisfaction theory” found in St. Anselm of Canterbury’s Why Did God Become Man? is often viewed as the classic expression of this view. In fact, however, Anselm never spoke of God’s wrath, but “only” of the necessity of a God-Man to restore order to the universe disrupted by sin. For Anselm, the cross was neither punishment nor vengeance but Christ’s giving up his life for his Father’s honor. But this understanding of “satisfaction” did not last. Beginning with Luther and Calvin, Protestants held, not that Christ did enough (satis-factio) to honor God, but that he suffered enough to meet God’s demand for our punishment. Perhaps because much the same idea that Christ died as our substitute in punishment for sin can be found in Catholic spirituality too, many Catholics have assumed incorrectly that the Church teaches this as a matter of dogma.

However, St. Faustina seems to view the “satisfaction” and “appeasing” of God’s wrath and justice as an essential part of Christ’s work of redemption — but not in a Calvinistic, retributive sense. In all probability, Frs. Sopocko and Rozycki — both solid Thomistic theologians — found nothing objectionable in St. Faustina’s Diary because her views on this matter correspond nicely to the Anselmian-Thomistic perspective. She understood clearly Christ’s willingness to die for sinners as the essence of his sacrifice that merited our redemption.
and that the physical sufferings and death were the external manifestations of his total loving obedience. As one Faustina scholar has noted, "this fits with the Anselmian-Thomistic view that it was the infinite value of the loving obedience of the divine Son incarnate unto death that merited our redemption. Through his extreme innocent suffering, Christ merited a superabundance of graces for us."\(^{46}\)

In a fascinating — but ultimately unsuccessful — attempt to shed theological light on Christ’s sacrifice and God’s wrath, James Alison focuses on three biblical episodes.\(^{47}\) In the first, God expels Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3). In the second, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, but then stays Abraham’s hand at the last minute, and provides a ram for sacrifice (Gen. 22). In the third, David hands over Saul’s seven sons to the Gibeonites to meet their demands for blood revenge (2 Sam. 21).

Alison argues that the New Testament dramatically reverses these three episodes. For example, John’s Gospel proclaims that “he came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). Hence, we expel God from our midst, and not vice versa. John’s Gospel also announces that God so loved the world that he gave us his only begotten Son (John 3:16). Therefore, Jesus’ Father is neither an Abraham whom God provided with a ram for sacrifice nor a David who handed over someone else’s sons to the Gibeonites to satisfy their wrath. The Father hands over his own Son to our wrath, thereby inverting the notion of sacrifice. We demand sacrifice and the Father sacrifices to us — not the other way around. Hence, the Father offers to wrathful human beings a sacrifice, namely, his only begotten Son who freely goes to his death.

However, Scripture, tradition, the magisterium, and the Church’s liturgy explicitly contradict Alison’s view of sacrifice. In the strict sense, sacrifice is possible only vis-à-vis God; it is impossible to sacrifice to anyone but God.\(^{48}\) Even the Oxford English Dictionary defines “sacrifice” this way, and it specifically defines Christ’s sacrifice as “the

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\(^{46}\) In notes graciously sent to me by Dr. Robert Stackpole.


\(^{48}\) For the following remarks, see: “Sacrifice,” by Otto Semmelroth in *Encyclopedia of Theology*, pp. 1488–95.
offering by Christ of Himself to the Father as a propitiatory victim in his voluntary immolation upon the cross; the Crucifixion in its sacrificial character."

Sacrifice is the supreme act of worship and adoration of God’s Lordship expressed by the total and free self-dedication of the person, total in extent and intensity. Because we have sinned against God’s holiness, sacrifice must have the character of expiation. Because we are helpless, sacrifice has an intercessory function. And because we experience divine help and especially a share in God’s very own life, sacrifice expresses thanksgiving. And St. Faustina’s *Diary* clearly understands Christ’s bloody sacrifice on the cross as one of loving obedience, expiation, propitiation, intercession, and thanksgiving. His entire life of perfect, loving obedience — even in the face of suffering and death — is a sacrificial offering of infinite value because of his immense charity, the dignity of his person, and his superabundant sufferings.

Scripture, however, does not limit Christ’s sacrifice solely to his violent death. Edward Schillebeeckx sees the entire life of Christ from conception to the ascension as redemptive. Karl Rahner goes even further. Christ, to Rahner, not only offers sacrifice; he *is* sacrifice incarnate. He writes: "the man Jesus exists in a unity of wills with the Father which permeates his whole reality totally and from the outset, in an ‘obedience’ from out of which he orients his whole human reality; he is someone who continually accepts himself from the Father and who in all the dimensions of his existence has always given himself over to the Father totally; in this surrender he is able to accomplish due to God what we are not able to accomplish; he is someone whose ‘basic constitution’ as the original unity of being and consciousness is to have his origins in God radically and completely, and to be given over to God radically and completely." It is in this sense, for Rahner,

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49 Michael Winter, in *The Atonement* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), wrongly eschews any notion of Christ’s sacrifice as “satisfaction,” and reduces it solely to his intercession for us. Despite Winter’s selective use of scripture, his key question is apposite: “what was the actual cause of the atonement?” (p.27).


that Christ is sacrifice itself, satisfaction itself, expiation itself, and redemption itself.

Thus, the Son’s being, his incarnation, conception, gestation, life, passion, death, descent into hell, resurrection, ascension, glorification, sending of the Spirit and sitting at the Father’s right hand all express his loving obedience as the supreme glorification of God in the world and in heaven.\(^{52}\) For its sake and in view of it, God forgives and loves sinners because he loves them in view of Christ.\(^{53}\) Therefore, one can and must speak of Christ’s earthly and heavenly sacrifice,\(^{54}\) to which the epistle to the Hebrews eloquently attests. And along with Pierre de Bérulle, one can affirm that Jesus Christ adores not only by function but “by state,” that we now have not only a God adored, but also a God adoring.\(^{55}\) With St. Faustina, too, we can pray: “Eternal Father, I offer you the body and blood, soul and divinity, of your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world” (§476, my emphasis).

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\(^{52}\) Karl Rahner, “Salvation,” *Encyclopedia of Theology*, pp. 1524-25 asks several questions which the Anselmian-Thomistic satisfaction theory does not answer. On p. 1524, for example, Rahner states: “In the satisfaction-theory the death of Christ is only the ultimately accidental mode of *any* moral action of the God-Man, having no essential connection with the essence of redemption. But that surely does not do justice either to the death of Christ as a saving event as Scripture sees it or to a genuine theology of death in general.” I would agree with Rahner, against Winter and others, who maintain that Christ’s death was not essential for our salvation. However, Rahner does not treat the violent nature of Christ’s death. The Fathers held that the Spirit is born in blood. “Was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” (Lk. 24:26)?

\(^{53}\) In line with the Greek fathers, Rahner underscores the *trinitarian* nature of our redemption. Moreover, because Rahner views sharing God’s life — divinization — as our salvation, he refuses to reduce soteriology to hamartology. God’s self communication both heals and divinizes the person.

\(^{54}\) Otto Semmelroth, “Sacrifice,” *op. cit.*, p. 1493 argues that the Christ’s passion and death exhibited no visible formal sacrificial action, that Jesus’ heart transformed what was really intended by his executioners, that there was no gift distinct from the offerer, and that there was no visible action by an official priest acting on the community’s behalf. Therefore “the notion of sacrifice can be applied only *analogously* to the death of Christ.” Karl Rahner, “Salvation,” *op. cit.*, p. 1524 maintains that issue of “how far Christ’s obedience and death must be regarded as a ritual sacrifice in the proper sense” is still an open question.

Alison also contends that if "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:15), then "what Jesus came to announce was a message about God and God's being entirely without violence, darkness, duplicity, ambivalence, or ambiguity."\textsuperscript{56} Because God is love and we know what love is from the sending of his Son (1 John 4:8-10), no wrathful Father stood behind Jesus' death, but a loving Father intent on getting us out of sinful and violent ways.

For Alison, moreover, neither St. Paul nor St. John understand the "wrath of God" as something found in God. Rather, it is "the condition of human involvement in the murderous lie ... The content of this wrath is ... purely human. God is described as handing us over to ourselves ... Wrath is the type of world into which Jesus was borne to death by sinful humans who could not receive the truth."\textsuperscript{57}

As disagreeable as St. Faustina's fluctuation between God's mercy and God's wrath is to some contemporary ears, she — not Alison — has the better view of God and the world created by divine wisdom itself. Divine mercy and love do not consist merely in a non-violent patience which forgives sinners. God's divine wisdom directly wills a good world, in no way wills sin but does permit it, and only indirectly wills the moral evil that is the consequence of sin "through his willing of a world order where unintelligible failures of occurrence as well as intelligible, positive occurrences can have concrete consequences. The consequences of the failure that is the evil of fault go by the name malum poenae, literally 'evil of punishment'\textsuperscript{58} or perhaps 'evil of penalty.'"\textsuperscript{59} One can and must speak of the rightful demands of divine justice which seeks the holy and good order of the universe in accordance with God's holiness and goodness. In Romans 1:18-3:19, for example, Paul speaks of the "wrath of God" as it is manifested in

\textsuperscript{56} Raising Abel, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 47, my emphasis.
the way moral evils regularly and devastatingly follow as the consequence of sin.

In short, "wrath" must be predicated of God metaphorically since there are no passions in God, but the metaphor is grounded by something in God: his justice. "Wrath of God" is an anthropomorphic way of expressing a holy and just God's condemnation and punishment of our sins. This metaphor refers to something that is in some sense both in God and in the world — and, in us. If St. Faustina seems to view wrath as something only in God, Alison is clearly wrong in depicting wrath as "purely human."

Dr. Robert Stackpole defines "wrath" as "God's attribute of justice insofar as he justly allows the self destructive effects of human sin to run their course for the impenitent, in this way rendering the sinner his due." Thus, divine wisdom created a world in which sin has consequences which redound on the sinner and those around him. For example, if a person jumps off a high building thinking that he can fly, he will soon experience the "wrath" of God's law of gravity. If a person assumes that he can live without love, work with very little sleep, and the like, he will soon experience the "wrath" of God's psychological laws. If a person sins and does not repent and/or do sufficient penance, he will experience God's wrath. In this sense, Christian mystics have observed that sin punishes itself in the sinner and in those people caught in its wake. How could our heavenly Father not want us to be free of our sins, healed, and transformed — perfect as he is perfect?

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60 Again, I thank Dr. Robert Stackpole for sending me his helpful notes.
61 Faustina may be aware of this because Christ told her: "And if they [unrepentant sinners] bring all My graces to naught, I begin to be angry with them, leaving them alone and giving them what they want" (§ 1728). I thank Dr. Robert Stackpole for calling my attention to this entry.
62 The remarks by Hans Küng on purgatory and God's wrath are apposite On p. 139 of Eternal Life?, trans. Edwin Quinn (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1991), he writes: "Purgatory is not a demi-hell but an element of the encounter with God: that is, the encounter of the unfinished person, still immature in his love, with the holy, infinite, loving God; an encounter which is profoundly humiliating, painful, and therefore purifying ... Purgatory is God himself in the wrath of his grace. Purgatory is the encounter with God in the sense that it judges and purifies, but also liberates and enlightens, heals and completes man."
The Greyfriar scholar, Thomas Weinandy, emphasizes that the sinner experiences God’s wrath because he has in fact become ungodly. The all holy, all good God can in no way tolerate unrepentant sin — its ungodliness. “If he did so, Weinandy writes, “he would become evil, for to sanction or even tolerate evil is to be evil.” In short, God’s wrath is the sinner’s experience of the consequences of attempting to contradict the structures of the world created by God. Weinandy’s brief summary statement is apposite: “The wrath of God is simply God’s approval of what sin itself rightfully demands.”

The teachings of St. John of the Cross on infused contemplation and the dark night of the spirit apply here. To John, the dark night of the spirit is God’s loving self-communication to the person, but experienced by a disordered, sinful, truncated person as a hellish process of purification, healing, and transformation. John insists that “there is nothing ... in the divine inflow which of itself can give pain.” Thus, there is no “wrath” in God in this sense. However, there is “wrath” in God in another sense because the person in the presence of an all holy, good God experiences mystical death and descent into hell due to “the soul’s weakness and imperfection at the time, its inadequate preparation, and the qualities it possesses contrary to the light.” In short, the “wrath” of the dark night of the spirit results from God’s purging, purifying, illuminating, and transforming presence and whatever is in the person’s nature contrary to and resisting this presence.

Thus, one should not understand Jesus’ free offer of himself on the cross as changing the mind of the wrathful Father. God is unchanging Love. As Rahner has said repeatedly, with respect to salvation all initiative comes from God. To Rahner, “it is precisely a God who loves the sinner originally and without reasons who is the cause of this reconciliation. Hence God is reconciled as one reconciled by himself,
and it is as reconciled in this way that he obviously wills on his own initiative one and the same grace which both establishes Christ and gives us the possibility of freely turning to God." Thus, the cross symbolizes both the Father's and Christ's love for humanity and Satan's and sinful humanity's vengeful hatred of God, others, and self. If the cross reveals God's great love for us — to the point of freely accepting a cruel death — it also reveals the depths of satanic and human sinfulness which murders the way, the truth, and the life.

The Wounds of Christ

An especially striking phrase in the "Soul of Christ" prayer — an ancient prayer dear to St. Ignatius — is, "within your wounds [Christ], hide me." When great sufferings threatened to diminish her offering of a pure will to God, Faustina promised that she would hide herself deep in the open wound of Christ's heart ($957). She prayed that the Father would "look upon the sacrifice of my heart, but through the wound in the Heart of Jesus" ($239). She beseached Jesus in this way: "O Wound of Mercy, Heart of Jesus, hide me in your depths as a drop of your own blood, and do not let me out forever!" ($1631). During prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, she greeted "the five wounds of Jesus, and at each salutation [feeling] a torrent of graces gushing into [her] soul" ($1337). On occasion, she worshipped Christ's five wounds ($988). In one of Faustina's visions, she "saw Jesus, nailed to the cross in such a way that when God wanted to look at the earth, he had to look through the wounds of Christ. And I understood that it was for the sake of Jesus that God blesses the earth" ($60). If one considers the crucified and risen Christ as the Father's gift to us, one might now see the Father through the wounds of his crucified and risen Son. One might also pray: "Eternal Father, I thank you for the body and blood, soul and divinity, of your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ which reveals, conquers, and transforms our sins and that of the whole world."

Because the following prayer by St. Faustina summarizes much of what was said above, it presents a good way to end this chapter: "O my Jesus, my Master ... I desire to fulfill your holy will; I desire the

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conversion of souls; I desire that your holy mercy be adored; I desire that the triumph of the Church be hastened; I desire the Feast of Mercy to be celebrated all over the world; I desire the sanctity of priests; I desire that there be a saint in our Congregation; I desire that our whole Congregation have a great spirit of zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls ... O my Jesus, I now embrace the whole world and ask your mercy for it” (§§1581-82).