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From adversity to altruism and beyond a pastoral theology of resilience

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From adversity to altruism and beyond:
a pastoral theology of resilience

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Thesis submitted for the
Doctorate in Theology and Ministry

King's College London

Abstract

The focus of this research is the experience of being strengthened in adversity, that is, the process of resilience. The context is Christian pastoral care with the research addressing questions of how Christian pastors can help others develop resilience and can be strengthened in pastoral ministry themselves.

The multidisciplinary psychosocial science research into resilience is the first dialogue partner. Themes of struggle, the self, and relationships emerge as key components of the process of resilience, which is also characterized by a progression from adversity to altruism.

These themes from resilience literature are brought into conversation with the biblical tradition of the desert where the landscape and metaphor of the desert point to three movements of a resilience process: embracing the desert, the encounter with the self and God and altruism expressed in pastoral responsibility.

Christian texts emerge from the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries: the *Alphabetical Sayings* attend to the need to embrace the adversity of the desert while the *Institutes* and *Conferences* of John Cassian provide a programme whereby the ascetical struggle involves encountering the self and God and is lived out by altruism and the responsibility of being an elder.

The Christian theologian and pastor, Rowan Williams, addresses the themes of struggle, self, and relationships in such a way as to meet the challenges made to Christian theology because of the traditional focus on obedience, humility and self-denial. By a process of creating space in relationships the mature Christian acts altruistically.

The widely used myth and model of the wounded healer reveals how the pastoral relationship itself goes beyond altruism by enabling healing and growth not only for those in adversity, but also for the pastor. By drawing on the research as a whole I propose a more sustainable model for pastoral ministry: the resilient pastor.

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I was privileged to be able to take a sabbatical and am grateful to The Makhad Trust for a retreat in the Egyptian desert in February 2010 and the opportunity to study at the International Research Centre of the Resilience Project linked to the University of Salzburg in February and March 2010.

This research has been inspired by those many Christians, friends, parishioners, colleagues and students, whose adversity I have witnessed and whose struggles I have shared, and whose lives of faith, hope and love have shaped and strengthened me as a person, as a Christian disciple and as a priest. I express my deepest gratitude to my husband Thomas who has been a source of strength for many years and who, along with our four children, enables me to face the struggles of life by love, singing and humour.

Chapter 1

Strengthening in adversity: motivation and approach

As I have reflected on my personal experience as a priest in the Church of England, I have seen that my own formation and growth as a pastor have been shaped by three periods of my life where I have had questions about how faith, or indeed whether faith, helps people in adversity.

When I was ten years old, my mother was diagnosed with cancer with which she struggled for several years before recovering and going on to live for many more decades. It was at this time that my call to be a pastor was forged as I saw what my mother went through, found a new depth of faith, and witnessed the pastoral care offered by the church. My mother's experience, typically, was of battling with cancer, of a fight to survive and of treatments as harsh as the disease itself. The prayers for her recovery offered and promised by other people meant a great deal to her as did cards, visits and practical help. My mother was devastated when a friend crossed over to the other side of the street when she saw her, because, as she said later, she did not know what to say. When she met ministers in the hospital or when they visited at home she would comment on whether they prayed with her since she was less interested in expensive flowers and in need of someone with whom she could both express her fears and be helped to take them to God in faith. That said, she found the ironing taken away and returned by a devout Christian friend of more use than the biblical commentaries that the same friend brought round for her sustenance. It was very clear to me that for my mother to win this struggle and come through, she needed to believe that her life was worth it, and she needed others to show appropriate support for her, emotional, practical and spiritual.

In this first phase of formation as a Christian and as a pastor I had believed that Christian faith should make a difference to facing and enduring adversity and discovered that it hadn't done so, or not as I had expected it would. I had seen that honest acknowledgement and sharing of the struggle were a more significant component of spiritual support than conveying propositional truth. Supportive relationships, I could see, helped my mother, and enabled her to carry on in her darkest times.

Pastoral work as a curate was the second period of pastoral formation in my life and a baptism by fire for me, since my first couple of years of ordained ministry included the full range of traumatic pastoral situations within the congregation. These situations included suicide, stillbirth, death by accident and cancer. I began to develop an interest in pastoral ministry around death, dying and bereavement. I expected that by being ordained, I should have answers, be able to provide for people experiencing adversity, be able to do some good and believed that prayer would somehow help, and failing that, love would. It seemed that other people had similar expectations as to what I should be able to provide for them. Those who did not profess Christian faith seemed to think that because I had faith I would not be too affected by such things as personal bereavement.

My role meant that I saw the intimacies of physical pain and death, heard the screams, witnessed the tears, and yet had to hold myself together, observe confidentiality, and could often feel very alone at the funeral tea. I was not the one bereaved was I? And yet I still felt grief. As a new pastor, I experienced being overwhelmed by witnessing such suffering and also found that suffering resonating with me so that I felt pain that somehow was – and yet wasn't – mine. I realized I had 'stuff' and pastoring people in adversity gave my pain an outlet as well as swamping and draining me.

In the congregation I found people who were full of faith, people who had experienced, been broken by and then strengthened through, suffering. They were people who were able to express their despair, anxiety, fear and vulnerability in ways that certainly gave me a language of suffering and of faith within it. The prayer groups and meditations led by such Christians had a quality of honesty and not traditional piety. I also, of course, encountered those for whom faith seemed to be packaged or held in such a way that they told me that God provided them with instant peace and trust. There were some for whom the fact that they were churchgoers did not lead them to call on the Church or its pastoral resources to help them when adversity struck because – either by expectation or experience – they didn't believe it would help.

I was challenged to consider whether what I had been taught as a Christian, and what I was preaching and teaching then, prepared people to be resilient in the face of adversity or inhibited their ability to come through well. Was the usual perspective conveyed at Christmas and Easter, for example, an invitation to accept God's will and trust him passively, exemplified by Mary's obedience and Jesus' silence when accused and his acceptance of death? Were the words of the blessing about the peace of God that passes all understanding¹ received as a burden on people experiencing difficulty because they thought they should feel calm rather than struggle? Such perspectives did not ring true with the visceral faith of those around me, honestly struggling and full of faith and life, even in the face of death.

In this second period of pastoral formation, I saw that Christian faith and community – where there was honest acknowledgment of the struggle and

¹ 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' is the preface to the blessing of The Communion Service in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and is designated as the ordinary or default blessing in the prayer book published in 2000, *Common Worship*, though with 'passes' rather than 'passeth' (Church of England, 1662 p278 ; Church of England, 2000 p183).

supportive relationships – did form people who were resilient. They suffered and came through, wiser, more loving, more real. The suffering was real, however, and the cost to me was profound.

My third period of experience and reflection on pastoring those who might well be strengthened by their adversity is in teaching pastoral care dimensions of Practical Theology to those training for ministry. Here, amongst the variety of models of ministry and pastoral care the model of the ‘wounded healer’ has a significant place. In teaching pastoral care I see that this model appeals to those in particular who have experienced adversity as something that has brought them to faith. It appeals less to those who believe that they are called to provide comfort and healing, for whom proclaiming God’s Word takes priority. In overseeing pastoral placements in prisons, hospitals and hospices I see students encounter similar issues to those I did as a new pastor – the overwhelming scale and nature of human suffering that prevents a quick ‘Jesus is the answer’ approach to pastoral care and requires a strategy and understanding of what can help. I observe that witnessing other people’s pain resonates with their own personal history. As it comes to the surface, they need to make sense of it and grow in faith through it.

My experience as a pastor and as a theological educator leads me to seek a pastoral theology of resilience which gives a theological understanding of being strengthened in adversity, revisits the model of the wounded healer and provides strategies and resources for the pastor which not only work, but take account of the person of the pastor as well as those to whom they pastor.

Research Questions

This research focuses on resilience, that is, on the processes involved in being strengthened through adversity, by asking two questions:

1. How can Christians, but particularly pastors, help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened?

In pastoral ministry the significant factors that I have observed in those who emerge strengthened by their experience adversity are attitudes to struggle and to the self, and the nature of the relationships people form, not least pastoral relationships.

2. How can pastors be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care?

The need to cope and be strong, to be resilient in order to be effective is something I have experienced as being necessary to carry out my work as a pastor and public minister. As a theological educator I am aware of the limitations of the wounded healer motif used to help pastors form and understand the way in which their personal history interplays with their role and so I seek to review it in the light of this research.

Thus this research seeks to provide a pastoral theology of resilience which pastors can draw on to enable resilience in others and for themselves in order to be resilient pastors.

Approach: a pastoral theology

These research questions, arising as they do out of the experience of pastoral ministry, fall into the theological discipline of *Practical* or *Pastoral Theology*. In the UK the differences between *Practical* and *Pastoral Theology* are mostly

disregarded and the terms are used interchangeably, with both concerned to relate practice to the Christian theological tradition. *Practical theology* emerged as a term in the German Protestant tradition as part of the academic curriculum in the late eighteenth century with *pastoral care* as one of the strands, the others being worship, preaching, Christian education and church government. In the United States, those who describe themselves as *practical* theologians, such as Don Browning (Browning, 1991), have been more traditionally academic and scholarly, establishing theoretical theological and ethical frameworks for understanding issues and situations within and beyond the Christian community. Others, like Charles Gerkin (Gerkin, 1984), who have described themselves as *pastoral* theologians, have focused on the issues arising from the practical Christian pastoral care of individuals and groups. Some have seen pastoral as emphasising love and care rather than a coldly methodological approach implied by the word practical (Bennet, 2008 p283)

Woodward and Pattison provide a working definition which points to the reality of the way in which Christian faith and practice meet new contexts and can seek to explore and respond to them in a way that changes both the practice of the faith and the situation: 'Pastoral/practical theology is a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming' (Pattison, 2000 p217; Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p7).

A starting point for *practical* or *pastoral theology* is a concern, be it theoretical or practical. Its practicality lies in the account taken of the realities of the contemporary human condition as well as in the outcomes which are focused on altering, deepening and even correcting Christian theology and practice. For example, domestic violence has been one of the concerns addressed by pastoral

theologians in recent years and the Church of England's report on domestic abuse has recognized that there 'is a failure not only in practice but also in the assumptions and beliefs which inform practice' that have not been congruent with the Christian gospel and so teaching 'has often contained elements which have distorted or denied that life giving truth'. Thus the report contains a section on harmful theology which draws attention to misguided and distorted versions of Christian belief that have contributed to the problem of domestic abuse (Archbishops' Council, 2006 p2, 17–22).

Interpretation and analysis of current social and political realities are required in order for practice to be transformed so that it reflects gospel values. *Practical or pastoral theology* is theological because it takes insights and resources from the Christian tradition including the Bible, theology and liturgy and reflects theologically so that everything is subjected to analytical critique. This is an activity which practical theologians have in more recent years emphasized as one which should involve the whole Church in a variety of settings, rather than be limited as it once was to the application of theology to the practical training of ministers (Ballard and Pritchard, 1996 p66; Ballard, 2008 pp285–6; Browning, 1991 p19; Graham, 2005 p2; Lyall, 2001 p35; Swinton, 2006 p10; Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p8, 12).

There are particular concerns which arise in the *pastoral care* strand of *practical theology*. *Pastoral care* itself is generally defined in relationship to Clebsch and Jaekle's historical perspective of pastoral care which consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns. Critique of this definition centres around it being a clerical activity focused on solving problems and an individualistic one rather than the activity of the whole community. Pattison

offers a definition as a corrective: 'pastoral care as in that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God.' He concludes, however, that it is probably useful to consider critically a wide variety of definitions (Clebsch, 1983 p4; Pattison, 2000 pp12–13, 196).

Practical or *Pastoral Theology* seeks to draw on many aspects of human and theological knowledge. Quite how to integrate all these strands has been the subject of discussion and has led to *Practical* and *Pastoral* Theologians putting forward a variety of methodological models. There is considerable disagreement about the approaches and methods of *Pastoral* or *Practical Theology* with the tension surrounding the relative importance given to theology, contemporary experience and non-theological disciplines. In part this is because inductive methods are used with conclusions not drawn deductively from authoritative principles or texts, including the Bible.

Critique of methods of theological reflection generally focuses on the weakness in the use of traditional sources, particularly the Bible, so that analysis of local contexts and socio-economic factors emerges as more accomplished than engagement with it or with Christian history and doctrine (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005 p7; Pattison, 2000 p203; Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p76). There has been 'widespread attachment to the idea that 'story' is the Bible's principal means of communicating effectively today' and the limits of it begin to appear 'in the recognition that image, symbol, poetry' can also communicate effectively pastoral practice (Hunter, 2006 p5). As one of the most pervasive aspects of all literature is imagery and figures of speech, Frances Young commends Wisdom sayings or Proverbs and images that have potentially universal resonance (Young, 2006 p32).

Practical theologians have identified a variety of models of theological reflection by which human experience can take its place and the critique of Christian practices and teaching come into conversation not only with the traditional disciplines of theology, but in order to effect change. The most well-known model of theological reflection is the pastoral cycle, which attempts to overcome the rationalist distinction between theory and practice and enable theology to use the human or social sciences in an integrated way, so that it reflects on Christian theology and Christian practice and leads to action, or praxis. The *pastoral cycle* or *praxis model* comes out of the Marxist tradition, and the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire and it employs a hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to Christian theology and practice.² The best known example of the use of this methodology is drawn from Liberation Theology and the base communities of Latin America where the Bible and the sacraments became an inspiration for and a means to a critical understanding of the social and political situation. Graham puts forward seven methods of theological reflection including the pastoral cycle or praxis model and models which draw on the interior life: 'living human document'; personal story: constructive narrative theology; canonical narrative theology; corporate theological reflection; correlation and local theologies (Graham et al, 2005).

The Correlation Model

The correlation or analogical or dialogical model sets up a conversation and is well-suited as an approach to the pastoral encounter and to this research (Hurding, 1998 p169). Correlation seeks to honour and balance the heritage of the gospel and the contemporary situation by creating a developing dialectic made up of conversation partners who bring a range of resources. David Tracy

² Paulo Freire (1921–1997) proposed a philosophy of education, drawing on Marxism, which recognised that education is a political process. He distinguished between oppressor and oppressed and required the oppressed to be their own example in the struggle for redemption and the oppressors to re-examine themselves (Freire, 1996).

contributed an understanding of the 'analogical imagination' to the method for it is by analogy, he says, that we understand each other and in conversation both partners are changed.³ Correlation can tend towards the dialectical with the possibility of theological understanding glimpsed in secular thought or the apologetic which will use prevailing thought forms to indicate how Christianity fulfils or completes questions (Graham, 2005 p139).

Three variations of the correlation model have emerged: the method of correlation, the revised method of correlation, and the revised praxis method of correlation. Paul Tillich expounded the first, interested in entering into dialogue with those arts and sciences that articulate the deepest questions with which the contemporary world is struggling. The method was criticized for being one-sided, whereby the arts and sciences raise the questions for theology to answer. David Tracy developed a two way approach 'of correlating the principal questions and answers of each source' which became a revised correlational method which was further modified by Don Browning to turn it into a 'Fundamental Practical Theology', 'the most inclusive and central theological enterprise' (Tracy, 1975 p46; Browning, 1991 pp46-7). These revised methods of correlation emphasize the mutual nature of conversation so that theology listens to other disciplines and learns from them. Criticism has focused, however, on the method being preoccupied with questions of cognitive meaning, privileging dialogue within the academic community and not attending to the alleviation of human suffering (Graham et al, 2005 p139; Hurding, 1998 p168; Osmer, 2008 p165).

Pattison proposes the term and method of *critical conversation* which is the approach most suited to this research. Conversation as a model has many

³ The importance of role of the imagination has been identified and explored in theological reflection and ministerial formation. See Tomlinson, 2001 p4

strengths, Pattison argues, such as the way in which conversation lies at the centre of human and pastoral encounters and works with the hiddenness of human personality thus pointing to the need to express theology in terms of story, myth, metaphor, image and symbol. Conversations take into account more than the propositional, rational and logical; they do not necessarily proceed in a straightforward direction or at the same level. A willingness to attend, listen and learn is presupposed as is the expectation of transformation. The conversation is three-way: between one's own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions; the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition; and the contemporary situation that is being examined. Conversations evolve, function at different levels, allow for starting points to be identified, Pattison says, and partners show a willingness to listen so that each participant is changed, and ends up seeing themselves and others from a new angle (Pattison, 2000 pp230–4; Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p139).

The limitations of a critical conversational approach focus on superficiality. How can asking questions be reflective of the eternally valid answers provided by theology? Won't a conversation with many partners lack depth and lead to a superficial analysis? There are strengths in a variety of voices speaking into complex human situations and so not providing quick and glib answers, but this will however mean a limited validity and relevance which can emerge from the critical conversation of theological reflection. It should also be noted that the conversation and choice of partners may reveal more about an individual and their perspective than it does about a particular human situation or the Christian theological tradition (Woodward and Pattison, 2000 p143).

This research emerges out of the experience of ministering to those in adversity. The crisis in practice has come where Christians and new pastors in particular,

find that peace and comfort are not brought to people in adversity in the ways that the practice and teaching of the faith has prepared them to expect and they can be overwhelmed by the impact of the suffering. Don Browning argues that when a religious community hits crisis in its practices it then begins reflecting and asking questions about its meaningful or theory laden practices. It is then that the community must re-examine the sacred texts and events that constitute the source of the norms and ideals that guide its practices. Browning acknowledges that any present practice is already theory laden (Browning, 1991 p4–7).⁴ Thus the crisis in practice which gives rise to this research is already embedded in the practice and tradition of Christians and their expectations of pastoral care. It has emerged now, in part, because of the trend in society which encourages people to think for themselves and not take what is said by authority figures at face value. Clergy have become more aware of inadequacies in pastoral care and teaching and are confronted personally by suffering and direct questions about where God is. Clergy, as Osmer notes, have lost status, but gained access to the everyday experiences and problems of people, who no longer hide their personal issues and questions behind their ‘best Christian face’ (Osmer, 2008 p19).

The discipline of *Practical or Pastoral Theology* is the place to answer the questions of how Christians – particularly pastors – can help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened and how pastors can be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care. The research questions arise from the theory-laden practice of pastoral care where a re-evaluation of theology related to being strengthened in adversity and caring for those experiencing adversity has become necessary for new understanding to emerge and effect change in teaching and in the practice of pastoral care. The approach most

⁴ Browning draws on Norwood Russell Hanson who coined the term ‘theory laden observation’ (Hanson, 1958) and the hermeneutical process proposed by Hans Georg Gadamer who proposed a practice to theory and back to practice model (Gadamer, 1989).

suitable to answering the research questions is that described by Pattison where conversation partners enter into critical dialogue. Already so far I have described the ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions of the experiences which have given rise to the research questions. As the research unfolds, other conversation partners will build a pastoral theology of resilience from the perspective of the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation of enabling resilience and good pastoral care.

Conversation partners

It is not unreasonable to expect that the literature of pastoral care has already addressed the area of being strengthened in adversity as Christians and as pastors and will provide guidance with regard to the direction of the research. Pastoral care, however, is no longer at the cutting-edge of *Practical Theology* as it was in the 1980s. This is related to an emphasis on mission, leadership and management in church life has come to the fore so that pastoral care has 'returned to the personal, the private, the passive, the introverted, and the individually pathological' (Pattison, 2008 p8).

The direction of the literature of *Pastoral* or *Practical Theology*, including that of pastoral care, and the criticisms of it guide the choice of conversation partners for this research. In particular, it engages with the Bible through story, but predominantly through metaphor and draws on the pithy sayings of the desert elders. A significant criticism of pastoral care literature has been the priority given to pastoral skills, such as counselling and listening skills, rather than drawing on the resources of the Christian tradition. Thomas Oden's, for example, or Andrew Purves' work aims to recover the historical wisdom of religious pastoral care, since pastoral care is so swamped with contemporary concerns, theories and techniques that it has forgotten its heritage (Billings, 2000; Oden, 1983; Pattison, 2000 p7, 206; Purves, 2001).

The discussion relating to what qualities and skills pastors should have has moved on in recent years to the development of an understanding and practice of pastoral supervision (Leach, 2006; Leach, 2010; Ward, 2005). The discussions address the nature of the pastoral relationship as well as the learning relationship between a pastor and a supervisor, important not only in the training of ministers but throughout ministry as an aspect of theological reflection. Ward develops a model of supervision which focuses on the quality of the relationship, rejecting metaphors associated with the term oversight for their lack of recognition of involvement, the hierarchical connotation denoting the work of those in authority and to recognize the costly, though potentially mutually enriching nature of the relationship. The importance of friendship has come to prominence. This relates to the degree of personal involvement or detachment appropriate in pastoral care, arising from an individual pastor's response to suffering (Boyd, 2000 p84, 87) and it is commended as a central vision for pastoral care for all Christians as well as in mission (Horder, 2008 p293). Questions too are raised as to whether the methods drawn from counselling or those of spiritual direction might be most appropriate in the supervision of ministers (Leach, 2006 p45). Attention to the dynamics of the pastoral relationship are also addressed by the theme of presence. Presence has persisted in the literature of pastoral care and emphasizes the importance of the pastor and the way in which they relate, including listening and attention and provides a crossover with spiritual direction (Patton, 2005 ch 2; Hurding, 1998 p290). This research addresses the debate and concerns which relate to the place of counselling skills and pastoral supervision in pastoral care by its attention to a reinterpretation of the model of the wounded healer as well as drawing on the relationship of desert elder to disciple.

The conversation partners for this research have been chosen to answer the research questions and draw insight from the human sciences, the Biblical,

spiritual and theological tradition as well as include the reflections of pastoral theologians. The partners are: resilience literature, the desert experience in the Bible, texts of the desert Christians, the theology of Rowan Williams, and the literature of the myth and pastoral care model of the wounded healer.

The multidisciplinary psychosocial science research into resilience explores contemporary research on the human experience of being strengthened in adversity and quite naturally forms the first conversation partner. Pastoral literature has not engaged with the concept of resilience or the body of literature devoted to it. Resilience literature is wide in scope identifying many factors as contributing to the resilience of individuals, families and communities. Factors which can be influenced by the work of the pastor and emerge from the literature focus on struggle, the self and relationships. These three factors are essential to building resilience and present challenges to Christian theology as well as to the practice of pastoral care. I have discovered that resilience literature identifies a process of resilience which begins in adversity and leads to altruism, and in doing so sheds light on the life stories and experience of pastors.

The use of resilience literature answers challenges made for pastoral care not to focus on 'crisis and pathology,' but instead to direct its attention to 'working distinctly with people in normal circumstances of their everyday lives and communities to maximize their well-being' (Pattison, 2000 p199). The empirical studies address prevention and appropriate intervention as essential outcomes of the research into those who have come through trauma well. The breadth of the research over time and a variety of contexts, including areas once considered taboo such as child abuse and domestic violence, enables a wider application of the findings and goes some way to respond to the challenge for pastoral care to expand its scope and to start with the views and experience of

the non-professionals who 'must become the subjects not the objects of care' (Pattison, 2000 pp194–5, 200).

Pattison argues that the 'challenge for practical theology is to rediscover itself as a confessional discipline that has a deep practical concern for actual human well-being while remaining intellectually critical, competent and credible' as well as 'help people orient themselves to the contemporary world within rich, meaningful stories and narratives, such as those that emanate from the Christian tradition' (Pattison, 2000 px). This research makes some small contribution to meeting that challenge not only by the use of the empirical studies of resilience literature but by the choice of the other conversation partners. The biblical and historical narratives of the desert brought together with the findings of research into resilience give a necessary vision for pastors of how people may be strengthened in adversity and grow in faith and ministry resourced by metaphor, story and image.⁵ Having drawn from resilience literature the themes of struggle, self and relationships and observed the direction of growth from adversity to that of altruism, I turned to the Bible as an essential conversation partner. The theme of the desert emerged as one which resonated with the experience of struggle and of strengthening and out of which comes a ministry of pastoral leadership. It has already been noted that practical or pastoral theology is criticized for its lack of real engagement with the biblical texts.⁶ This research comes closest to the 'imagist/suggestive approach' in using the desert motif by its selecting of 'particular themes or images from the Bible in order to uncover or illuminate the nature of pastoral care,' (Pattison, 2000 p122).

⁵ See the following on the use of metaphor, story and image: Gerkin, 1991; Campbell, 1986; Wright, 1980 ch 1; Pattison, 2000 pp14, 220

⁶ In the British scene see Cooling, 2007; Ballard, 2005; Oliver, 2006

Engagement with the Christian tradition begins with the desert experience in the Bible as the second conversation partner, with the desert as landscape and metaphor, representing adversity and the strengthening that comes through it. The narratives of Hagar and Moses reveal the desert to be a place of adversity, where facing struggle enables an encounter with oneself and God and involves pastoral formation. The texts from the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries show how these Christians used adversity for the purpose of growth.

Myths and metaphors of the Bible, often marginalized in pastoral theology, show the way to 'some newness of life and freshness of perception through the non-propositional' which 'can be worth a thousand arguments because it enters into the pre-conscious, what might be called the soul' (Pattison, 2000 pp220–1). Using the desert as a motif appeals to the religious, symbolising dimension of people and goes some way to enabling pastoral theology to be transformational. The motif echoes with other pastoral, spiritual and ministerial literature. Its appeal in contemporary thought is therefore wide enough for it to resonate with human experience and also to point people towards the Bible and Christian history. Beldon Lane, for example, explores dying and bereavement against the backdrop of fierce landscapes in a book which addresses pastoral care and spirituality (Lane, 1998). Henri Nouwen uses the motif of desert to explore contemporary ministry as does Christopher Moody in using the motif of wilderness (Nouwen, 1981; Moody, 1992).

It is important for *Pastoral Theology* to engage with the Bible in dialogue. To do so answers the challenge that pastoral theology undervalues the Bible. It also provides an important way to engage pastors and ordinands for whom rooting Christian practice in the Bible is primary, and draws on the insights of the human sciences and Christian theology, past and present by engagement with the desert motif. By exploring contemporary scholarship of the desert narratives

of Moses and Hagar, traditional interpretations of the narratives are revealed and can be challenged. This echoes the challenges of resilience literature to pastoral care, particularly around the themes of obedience and autonomy. It also challenges the priority of liberation theology and affirms the place of endurance which seeks survival by struggle and quality of life.

The motif and narratives of the desert explored in this research provide a vision for enabling people to be resilient. This is apt in the current climate of pastoral care offered towards many who are not Christians, for example, at the pastoral offices of weddings and funerals as well as in sector ministries such as hospital and prison chaplaincies (Pattison, 2000 p15). The motif is evocative of adversity and, once explored, takes someone suffering on a path to being strengthened by the experience. This can be so for those who espouse no religious faith, as well as people of non-Christian faiths where narratives resonate because the desert is a place of adversity and encounter which enables growth. This research uses Old Testament narratives shared by Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and builds on them by recourse to texts of the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries as well as to more recent Christian writing on desert spirituality to provide a Christian vision. Desert is a universal motif that can be used by lay pastors as well as clergy with the Hagar narrative in particular providing a resource for women. These aspects are important in a climate where pastoral care, particularly in the United States but also in Britain, continues to critique and gain distance from its therapeutic and counselling paradigm and honours the informal care, undertaken mostly by women, that makes up much of Christian pastoral care (Pattison, 2000 pp194, 196).

Conversation with the world of the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries through the *Alphabetical Sayings* alongside the themes of struggle, self and relationships brings the desert motif and landscape into dialogue with

Christian theology and pastoral practice. The *Institutes and Conferences* of John Cassian provides a monastic understanding and practice of the place of adversity in Christian life by outlining a programme of growth which can begin in adversity and lead to as well as beyond altruism and pastoral responsibility.

Cassian's programme for growth promotes virtues such as obedience and humility which on the face of it are challenged by resilience literature as undermining people's ability to be strengthened in adversity. His emphasis on discipline has emerged as a theme in pastoral care literature with Pattison warning pastors to be clear that calls for discipline and self-control do lead to growth and self-development and are not used as a tool of social control. Pattison, however, welcomes the revival of interest in discipline as a corrective to counselling techniques, though he suggests faithfulness is substituted for obedience in the discussion of it (Pattison, 2000 ch4, 72, 79, 210).

Thus a conversation partner is needed in order to reinterpret something of the desert tradition for contemporary Christian theology. A resilience reading of the theology of Rowan Williams provides a conversation with contemporary Christian theology as it addresses the themes of self, struggle and relationships in a way faithful to the tradition and yet appropriate to contemporary human experience and concerns. His use of the metaphors of speech and space resonate with the experience of the desert as landscape and metaphor.

Having focused primarily on the first research question of how Christians can help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened, a conversation with contemporary psychological as well as Christian understandings of the myth and model of the wounded healer addresses how pastors can be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care. While the ancient myths describe a journey from adversity to altruism in the healer, pastoral care literature focuses

on the model of the wounded healer in a positive way. The contemporary psychological literature, however, issues warnings of the danger of unhealed wounding. This raises the importance of self-awareness and a commitment to growth in the pastor because a disregarding of their own woundedness and history of adversity undermines the ministry of pastoral care. As resilience literature attests, there is a process of strengthening which begins in adversity and is expressed in altruism.

In drawing together these conversation partners I will propose a pastoral theology of resilience. Practitioners already have some kind of working theology which functions as an implicit theology and as such may not be an articulate or conscious pastoral theology (Pattison, 2000 p222). To weave a pastoral theology of resilience enables the pastor to examine, critique and change – personally and in the practice of ministry – so that they and those with whom they work develop resilience. The conclusions of the research address the transformation that dialogue makes to these conversation partners and concludes with identification of the limits of this research and its implications.

Chapter 2

Resilience: From adversity to altruism through attention to struggle, self and relationships

Resilience literature as a conversation partner

An obvious starting point for exploring the question of how to help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened is the empirical research in resilience. Research into resilience literature is research into the study of why and how people have coped with and come through adversity strengthened. Resilience stands in the tradition of positive psychology, from the perspective that psychology itself is not just the study of pathology, weakness and damage, but is also the study of strength and virtue, affirming the possibility of coming through adversity well. The recognition by resilience literature of the importance of the spiritual and religious facilitates the possibility of mutuality in conversing.

An introduction to resilience literature

Resilience is defined as the capacity to bounce back. In physics the term resilience is used to refer to a material's quality to resist deformation or destruction and indeed to be strengthened by pressure or heating. The physical definition has obvious metaphorical parallels when considering the capacity of human beings to bounce back or come through crisis, difficulty or trauma. Furthermore the observation that difficulty can somehow strengthen human beings also draws from its analogy with physical resilience since a certain type of pressure, such as stretching or heating has a 'steeling' affect on metal.

In psychology resilience is the positive capacity developed by people who are open and motivated to change in the face of adversity and represents a shift from overemphasising pathology to recognising the strengths in human

character. The resilient take up the struggle of dealing with the circumstances of their lives in such a way as to be strengthened personally by their experience. Resilient people are those who (in three 'C's) have Coped with adversity, been Constant in resisting destruction and been able to Construct a new sense of themselves and their lives (Seligman, 2000 p8, O'Leary, 1998 p426).

The concept of resilience was developed in the 1970s in social scientific research to discover what factors enabled some human beings to survive and even flourish against seemingly impossible odds. The early research came out of the observation that there were children from difficult backgrounds who thrived rather than showed signs of trauma expected of them. Research into resilience thus did not begin as a theoretical enterprise, but as one rooted in human experience. Rather than looking at the risk factors that led to psychosocial problems, the studies focused on identifying the strengths of individuals who had unexpectedly overcome the difficulties of their past. The foundational research project of resilience was by Emmy Werner, begun in 1955, who first described as resilient 72 of 200 at-risk children of her study of a total of 700 children in Kauai, Hawaii. These children, despite factors such as having mentally ill or alcoholic parents, did not exhibit the destructive behaviours that the majority of teenagers in those circumstances did. Werner and Smith reported the longitudinal findings of the community after studying its children for thirty years and identified many differences that favoured the resilient group. These included better parenting, being a more appealing child, better cognitive test scores and better self-perception (Werner, 1982; Werner, 1992).

The concept of resilience goes beyond a collection of traits and points to resilience being a process that builds over time, described as an ongoing and developing fund of energy and skill that can be used in current struggles (Garmezy 1994 in Saleebey, 1996 p298). It 'captures the active process of self

righting' (Higgins, 1994 p1) emphasising that people do more than merely get through difficult emotional experiences, to include the skills, abilities, knowledge, and insight that accumulate over time as people struggle to surmount adversity. Resilience is a 'process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity, in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors' and has now replaced the 'overly optimistic language of invulnerability' (Kitano, 2005 p200; Richardson, 2002 p308).

Since the definition of resilience extends beyond recovery or bouncing back to encompass growth or adaptation through disruption the research provides something of an umbrella for many if not most psychological and educational theories and it has become a popular concept (see Clarke, 2010). Thus the literature is multidisciplinary with at least five interrelated groups of resiliency models being drawn from psychosocial science: genetic, personality, cognitive, developmental and human relationships. These all make contributions and together they address the three resilience domains of the physical, the psychosocial and the spiritual (Richardson 2002 p309, 313; Titus 2002 p6). In addition, resilience is used as a concept outside psychosocial science and is being applied to systems such as families and schools as well as to individuals, but also to the multilevel dynamics in systems at behavioural and cellular levels including such dynamics as gene-environment interaction, social interactions, and person-media interactions. The impact of major disasters has shown dramatically that human life is interdependent on the resilience of many other systems including ecosystems, computer, emergency, health care and communication systems so that there is much to learn about human resilience in many other fields (Masten, 2007 p924, 927; Ripley, 2008).

Findings of resilience literature

The first wave of the study of resilience began with the identification of the characteristics of survivors, particularly young people, living in high-risk situations. The research of that period lists and describes the internal and external resilient qualities that help people cope and bounce back in high risk situations, rather than succumb to destructive behaviour. Michael Rutter, for example, studied youth in inner city London and on the Isle of Wight. He found that a quarter of the children were resilient even though they might have experienced many risk factors. Key qualities he identified were an easy temperament, being female, having a positive school climate, self-mastery, self-efficacy, planning skills and a warm, close, personal relationship with an adult. Poverty and substance abuse were listed as major risk factors while intelligence, positive coping strategies, internal locus of control, and a meaningful relationship were deemed protective for individuals (Rutter, 1979, 1985).

The shortlist of the characteristics of the resilient, gained from research in different forms and situations and including an identification of characteristics of child, family, relationships or the environment have been remarkably stable over time. The shortlist includes traits to do with health, cognitive ability, secure relationships, self-regulation and direction, motivation and positive outlook on life, spiritual and/or religious systems of belief and meaning, as well as family, peer, school and cultural systems. The resilient children grew up to be adults who possessed 'greater social maturity, nurturance, empathy, sense of responsibility, and independence' (Kitano, 2005 pp201, 202; Masten, 2007 p922, p926; Osofsky, 2000).

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion that arose from these studies was the ordinariness of resilience itself. The realization that lots of children are resilient overturned many of the negative assumptions and deficit models about children growing up under the threat of disadvantage and adversity. Masten has coined the phrase 'ordinary magic' to describe the processes under which we can see resilience. This is in keeping with the positive rather than pathological framework in which resilience studies operates and points to the greatest threats to well being, being those which compromise the natural protective systems of a human being. The threats which jeopardize the protective systems underlying adaptive processes include brain development and cognition, caregiver/child relationships, regulation of emotion and behaviour, and the motivation for learning and engaging in the environment. One significant finding of studies has been the evidence that despite being disadvantaged in early years a surprising number of children do recover and develop healthily both cognitively and physically. This has been shown from children who have been adopted from institutions characterized by extreme deprivation, such as in Romania, where catch up by the age of four was described as spectacular (Rutter, 1998 p474). Thus the goals of resilience education now incorporate the promotion of competence as well as the prevention or amelioration of symptoms and problems and although adversity during childhood does impact more greatly on a person than in later life, we have become much more open to the possibility of change in the direction of recovery and healing with appropriate intervention (Masten, 2001 p234; Masten, 2007 p925).

Two major approaches of resilience research sought to discover and explain how people become resilient. The first can be described as variable focused, the second as person focused research.

Variable-focused research uses multivariate statistics to test for linkages amongst measures of the degree of risk or adversity, outcome and potential qualities of an individual or environment that may function to compensate for or protect the individual from the negative consequences of risk or adversity. The downside of the approach is that it can fail to capture patterns in the lives of real people. Studies on the farm crisis in the Mid West of the United States of America, using variable-focused research, was able to show the indirect pathway whereby the effects of the economic crisis in adolescents were mediated by effects on the mood and interaction of parents that undermined the effectiveness of parenting behaviour (Masten, 2001 p230).

Person-focused approaches focus on whole individuals. They compare people who have different profiles across time on sets of criteria to ascertain what differentiates resilient children from other groups of children, such as the study by Werner and Smith. The approach is well suited to searching for common and uncommon patterns in lives through time that result from multiple processes and constraints on development. The most complex person-oriented models compare healthy with maladaptive pathways in lives, through time, to give special attention to the turning points in people's lives. Much of the discussion in resilience has drawn on these case studies and has revealed that opportunities and choices at crucial times in people's lives play an important role in the lives of resilient individuals. The resilient take action that has positive consequences for their lives such as finding mentors, entering the military, finding a new or deeper faith, marrying healthy partners, and leaving a deviant group (Masten, 2001 pp229–233).

Resilience themes for a pastoral theology of resilience

Three themes most obviously emerge from resilience literature as potential building blocks for a pastoral theology of resilience: *struggle*, *self* and

relationships. No one can develop resiliency without engaging in the struggle with adversity. That strengthening is gained by struggle, rather than perhaps by passivity or acquiescence to fate or God, is important to explore for a pastoral theology of resilience. The significance of the sense of self in resilience literature encompassing self-awareness, self-esteem, agency, an inner locus of control, an inner life and self-discipline needs to be explored for pastoral theology as does the importance of relationships.

These three themes – struggle, self and relationships – emerge naturally from the multidisciplinary body of resilience literature. Polk, for example, in defining four patterns of resilience from the literature focused on individual resilience, pointed first to the dispositional pattern which includes a sense of autonomy, self-reliance and basic self-worth, the second – relational pattern – focuses on relationships, the third – situational pattern – which addresses the links between a person and a stressful situation including the person’s ability to solve problems and evaluate situations and responses and take action, and to the fourth – philosophical pattern – which refers to a person’s world view including beliefs that promote resilience such as the belief that positive meaning can be found in all experiences, that self-development is important and that life is purposeful (Polk, 1997).

Pastoral ministry can rarely change the environmental or health factors contributing to adversity. Factors which relate to a person’s sense of self, however, such as their self-worth and motivation can be influenced by both pastoral practice and preaching and teaching. The pastoral relationship is one relationship that might be of support to someone in adversity and the wider relationships that can be forged in a Christian community. A conversation between pastoral care and resilience literature is new. Both share the aim of

seeking to help to strengthen those in adversity and the research around these three themes is significant in contributing to pastoral care in a Christian context.

An example of resilience: Victor Frankl

The classic work on resilience: *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Victor Frankl exemplifies the themes of struggle, self and relationships that an individual has developed and which are most pertinent in resourcing a pastoral theology of resilience.

Frankl described the struggle to stay alive and to retain what it meant to be human in Auschwitz during the Second World War. Frankl describes the need to take up the struggle and to resist seeing oneself as less than human. To understand oneself as having worth and choice, and to be resourced by an inner life that can imagine a future builds resilience. Frankl's experiences describe the importance of self-perception, motivation, choice and relationships in being able to cope, resist destruction and come through the experience not only alive, but strengthened.

Frankl's primary objective was sheer physical survival enabled by inner motivation. At the beginning he struck out of his mind the whole of his former life in order to accept the situation. There were, of course many physical struggles associated with the pain and hardship of camp life, but what Frankl points to is a connection between body and spirit where the inner life protects the physical life. He describes those in a concentration camp with a rich intellectual life as surviving better than would be expected from their physical condition, because they could retreat to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom (Frankl, 2004 p47). Religious belief was part of this inner life and expressed in improvised services and prayers in the corner of a hut. Once

motivation to survive was gone, however, and a prisoner had given up faith in the strength to carry on, it seldom returned and death quickly ensued (Frankl, 2004 p22).

At first, camp life involved the emotional pain of longing for home, and the distress of watching death and beatings. Later Frankl observed the distancing and protective blunting of feelings that enabled prisoners to cope along with a sense of apathy and regression to a more primitive form of life focused on thinking about food – not just because of the need for sustenance but to know that the subhuman existence would cease (Frankl, 2004 p43). After liberation, grasping freedom and feeling emotion was a process to be relearned in order to belong to the world again (Frankl, 2004 p95).

Self-perception also enabled survival. Frankl describes suffering as completely filling the human mind and soul and diminishing the sense of self – whether the suffering be large or small (Frankl, 2004 p55). Struggling and winning against the image of the self reduced to animal life, treated as an object to be exterminated and of no value was thus difficult. It was vital though, not to lose the sense of being an individual with a mind, with inner freedom and personal value (Frankl, 2004 p60).

For Frankl, survival was made possible by finding meaning and being aware that such meaning was part of his inner life and ability to choose how to approach the circumstances of his life: 'The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action' (Frankl, 2004 p74). His ability to be resilient was located in the inner choice to view his incarceration as a trial and was fuelled by an inner life which was fed by the vision of love. It was the exercise of spiritual freedom in the inner decision to choose his attitude to the camp guards which gave meaning and purpose to him, turning the camp into an

inner trial rather than a place to vegetate. Having an aim in life and a sense of the future were vital. A prisoner was doomed once he lost his faith in the future (Frankl, 2004 p82). Frankl imagined giving lectures on the psychology of the concentration camp. Frankl describes prisoners in a concentration camp in general as motivated to keep alive by the thought of family waiting at home and by a desire to save their friends. Frankl was motivated to stay alive by an image of his wife:

'Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understand how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way – an honourable way – in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment' (Frankl, 2004 p49).

Despite not knowing whether she was alive or dead, it was in contemplation of the beloved that Frankl describes Love as finding its deepest meaning in the inner life. Frankl replaced the forced imprisonment and the absence of relationships of love, respect and kindness that characterized life in a concentration camp, with his own response involving inner change, choice and growth helped by drawing on a loving relationship in his inner life. Suffering, for Frankl, is a destiny to be borne, something that life expects of a person, something with meaning, the unique opportunity lying in the way the burden is borne (Frankl, 2004 p86).

Frankl's account of his experience of surviving a concentration camp well, highlight the significance of the three resilience themes of self, struggle and relationships. The motivation to survive demanded the struggle to resist destructive relationships and self-perceptions. An inner life resourced by the

experiences of loving relationships and self-perceptions of worth, which could contemplate a future, enabled the strength needed to survive.

Resilience, spirituality and religion

Resilience research makes room for a consideration of the role of religion and faith and gives attention to the spiritual and the theological.⁷ This is possible because of the recognition that resiliency goes beyond a simple scrutiny of external behaviour and circumstances and involves motivation and self-perception, for example, which are shaped by religion and spirituality for good or ill. Titus describes spiritual resilience as concerning the ethical, religious and spiritual dimensions of human resilience. It is 'the capacity, when faced with hardship and difficulty to cope actively using religious resources, to resist the destruction of one's spiritual competencies, and to construct something positive in line with larger theological goals' (Titus 2002 p28). Studies exploring spiritual resilience have included the spirituality of people which is expressed and experienced in traditional religious practice but not necessarily so. Spirituality encompasses interpersonal and societal interactions, relationship to self, ability to go beyond the limits of self-interest, one's own experience, and horizon of meaning, in the research and also includes an openness to spirit, understood variously as God, the divine, energy, source of life, mystery and what is beyond understanding (Clarke, 2002 p24). A study into the spiritual resilience of those

⁷ Research has asked what and where is the energy source or motivation to reintegrate resiliently. Richardson describes resilience as 'the motivational force within everyone that drives them to pursue wisdom, self actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength' (Richardson, 2002 p313). He postulates that a source for actuating resilience comes from one's own ecosystem suggesting the energy at the subatomic level of life where matter and energy are equivalent, the flow of energy termed 'chi' by Taoism and the influence of the belief in God or creative force. He also postulates that resilience is a capacity in every soul, the whole integrated being of an individual with one's transpersonal nature or human spirit as the primary guiding force of the system (Richardson, 2002 p315).

who live with lifelong disability, for example, discovered that struggle revolved around reversing the shame that family or society placed on the person with a life long disability and which compromised their sense of full humanity. It is the sense of being fully human that was foundational to the spirituality of people with a lifelong disability and key elements of the pattern of spirituality were trust, agency and purpose (see Clarke, 2002).

Theology has also used the concept of resilience to enrich its own understanding of the human person, though not by that name. The use of the concept of resilience has its roots in classical theology with St Thomas Aquinas reinterpreting Aristotle's classical virtues in such a way that, as Craig Titus argues, they provide a Christian concept of resilience in the form of the virtue of fortitude. Aquinas presents virtue as the foundation for Christian moral theology and sees a person's ultimate goal as complete flourishing or happiness, with flourishing as the primary goal of their moral acts. In Aquinas' scheme of moral and intellectual virtues, fortitude is the cardinal virtue for the irascible appetite, and a moral virtue. It may be translated as strength, vigour or courage. The associated virtues of fortitude are magnanimity, magnificence, patience and perseverance which bring balance and focus to human action. Its two acts are initiative taking and endurance, with initiative taking underlying magnanimity and magnificence and endurance lying behind patience and perseverance. Fortitude is the virtue which helps us manage our fear and daring as a capacity to resist degradation and as a principle to act. It is the mean between fear and daring. The vices associated with it are presumption – biting off more than you can chew, and pusillanimity, small souledness, or biting off less (see *Summa Theologica* II-II 123–140; Titus 2006 pp143–187).

Titus shows that the psychosocial science insights into resilience can be compared with Aquinas's virtue theory in that they both address not only the

reality of difficulty but the resourcefulness needed to overcome it. The virtue of fortitude, Titus argues reveals what studies in resilience also show us, that it is an acquired strength which demands that we act creatively in new situations which endanger and cause us fear, such as using strategies of self-efficacy and confidence. The processes of fortitude can be understood only in the context of deeper goals, loves and moral norms; its direction is towards growth and completion drawing on internal and external collaboration and support (Titus 2006 p186).

The life of Victor Frankl gives a vivid example of the way in which resilience can be developed and the use of the concept by moral theology linking it to Aquinas on fortitude provide a experiential and a theological strand to begin to explore the themes of struggle, self and relationships.

Struggle

Resilience literature presents us with the findings that struggle hurts but is central to what it means to change and grow in the course of ordinary human life. To struggle involves using energy to get free of restriction or meet difficulty or opposition, energy which reveals signs of life. Struggle is necessary and it enables resilience. Where a person seeks to grow, struggle needs to be sought. Struggle is a religious theme, characterising many of the lives of biblical characters and saints and in the contemporary context can have political, community and individual dimensions. Struggle as it emerges in resilience literature and then considered in the context of pastoral care points to the centrality and vitality of struggle rather than a passive peace.

Resilience is the term that Flach uses to describe the psychological and biological strengths required to successfully master change (Flach, 1997 pxi). As a psychiatrist, he became convinced that struggle is necessary for change and

for growth in human life. Flach describes ordinary human maturing as not easy, indeed through the life cycle there are bifurcation points such as puberty or retirement which are often accompanied by emotional pain. Struggle arises because of the emotional pain and the loss of control which are associated with disruption in human life and they are experienced in both the body and the mind. To deny the pain or to medicate too quickly, Flach argues, prevents the person from enacting the necessary change needed in order to grow. After years of clinical practice Flach came to see that personal struggle and falling apart are signs of strength which enable a person to integrate their experiences and to change attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Flach suggested that resilient qualities are attained through a law of disruption and reintegration, since times of change and disruption in human life are characterized by the demand to struggle, to adapt and overcome the difficulty presenting itself (Flach, 1997 ch 2). Richardson developed a linear model of resiliency to help in counselling and education which points to the centrality of struggle in the process of change. He uses the term 'biopsychospiritual homeostasis' to describe the point in time when a person has adapted physically, mentally and spirituality to a set of circumstances be they good or bad, but to do more than recover and be strengthened, he states that 'disruption is required to access the components of innate resilience because biopsychosocial homeostasis makes no demands for improvement or growth' (Richardson, 2002 p310–312).

If struggle is embraced and understood by a person it is easier for them to build resilience. By showing the model to clients in therapy Richardson found that people can choose the outcomes of disruptions and know that struggle will be a part of growth. When change is desired in those motivated to personal growth, Richardson recommends activities involving struggle. Enriching planned disruptions are suggested by Richardson as a solution to stagnation so that

people can seek to find meaning and purpose in disruption (Richardson, 2002 pp310–312, 319).

Struggle is an ongoing dynamic in the lives of the resilient. Although the abuse has ended survivors of childhood abuse, for example, report struggling with depression, guilt, low self-worth, patterns of people pleasing and feeling overly responsible for others, difficulty of trusting and challenges with establishing intimate relationships. The inner life of a typical survivor is a battleground, Wolin observes, where the forces of discouragement and the forces of determination constantly clash. For many, determination wins out. Overcoming negative conditioning from childhood such as a sense of shame or blame is one aspect of the struggle. Higgins in a chapter on struggling well describes the voices from the past as sirens which stir deepest longing, but are growth retardants if pursued (Wolin, 1993 p6; Higgins, 1994 ch 7; Valentine, 1993 p223).

Self

The theme of self has within it many strands: change, self-esteem, autonomy, self-awareness, self-image, motivation, agency, autonomy or choice, the inner life, resourcing, and self-control and discipline. These aspects of the theme of self as it emerges in the literature on resilience are interwoven. To be resilient, a person must be able to change, and to adapt to new circumstances. Change requires motivation and the ability to sustain the demands that the change makes of self-esteem and self-image. Change begins with self-awareness, of the difficulty being faced and the emotional pain of its impact. Good enough self-esteem is vital in order to be motivated to come through and control and empowerment enables resilience to be built. Self-control or discipline, as well as a rich inner life, helps a person to make choices and set a new direction. Factors related to the theme of self which I shall focus on from the wealth of material on

the self are change and openness, self-esteem and control and the resourced self.⁸

Resilient people are those who are self-aware enough to know that change is necessary and are open to it. Lifton's concept of the Protean self emphasizes the need to change in order to be resilient and he outlines what helps to bring it about. Using the motif of Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms, he describes the Protean self, a self of many possibilities, which is able to tap human resiliency and flourish in the face of the dangers and confusions that can lead to the fragmentation of the self. The Protean self is characterized by 'radical fluidity, functional wisdom and a quest for minimal form' (Lifton, 1993 p4). The quest for form rather than fragmentation has something of a survivor mentality, characterized by anxiety, guilt at surviving, psychic numbing, which though useful in the face of danger, is a problem in subsequent living with distrust of help offered and a struggle for meaning continuing (Lifton, 1993 pp81-2). A survivor can either shut down or open out. The Protean or resilient self is the open way and it involves vulnerability to painful feelings. As resilience builds such feelings will be felt and expressed authentically, intimate bonds with people will be formed and tough mindedness and moral commitment engaged with. Though they may have experienced much pain and trauma during and after childhood, resilient people have been able to transmute that trauma into various expressions of insight, compassion and innovation (Lifton, 1993 p7). The resilient indeed continue to be motivated to change – to heal and grow personally as well as seeking change in their communities by social and political activity. They hold themselves accountable for their own recovery and are motivated for something more (Higgins, 1994 p131).

⁸ For literature on the concept of the self broader than that of resilience literature see Taylor, Charles 1992; Seigel, Jerrold. 2005; Sorabji, Richard, 2008

Self-aware enough to recognize that change is necessary in the face of adversity and be open to it, the resilient are those who have a good enough sense of self to be motivated to take up the struggle and the ability to do so. Self-esteem and control are key factors in building resilience. The innate or gut belief that survivors of abuse have that they were and are valuable and worth something is a strand that comes through the literature. The significant resiliency themes include the ability to find emotional support, self-regard or the ability to think well of oneself, spirituality and inner directed locus of control (Valentine, 1993 p216, 220). Higgins, who chose forty survivors of childhood abuse to interview who now 'loved well' found that the resilient become anchored within an unshakeable conviction that they deserve love, that good love exists and they can find it (Higgins, 1994 p88). Flach argues that the endurance of hope and the regulation of self-esteem are the two most important resilience traits (Flach, 1997 p26). Good enough self-esteem gives a person motivation to take up the struggle to survive, that is to cope and to be constant in the face of destructive forces and then to reconstruct one's self-image and life.

The resilient come through and reject the version of self often described as victimhood, by continuing to revise their sense of self. Constructing and deconstructing a view of themselves as victim is regarded by the resilient as a keystone of their recovery – once you were a victim with no control over your life, but now you are a survivor with solid control. To be healed, Higgins writes, you must first see that you were terribly hurt and fully recognize the extent of the damage. You need to get furious and outraged about your maltreatment in order to place responsibility where it belongs and stop internalizing the rage and guilt that form the nearly inescapable legacy of abuse. You gradually learn (and trust) that you can become appropriately confrontational. Most of the adult growth of the resilient who were victims of

childhood abuse revolves around issues of self-esteem, that of allowing themselves the same compassion that they extend to others (Higgins, 1994 p276, 289, see also Wolin, 1993). This sense of being a survivor rather than a victim, of being in control of one's life is borne out by research into motivation in the form of self-determination theory. This has revealed that motivation and mental health are promoted when the psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness are fulfilled. Without these, motivation and well being decline. Motivation concerns energy, direction and persistence and when choice, acknowledgement of feelings and opportunities for self-direction are present it increases. To be motivated a person needs choice, but Schartz argues that freedom, autonomy and self-determination can be experienced as a tyranny resulting in an increase in people being dissatisfied with their lives and in depression (Schwartz, 2000 p79; Ryan, 2000 pp70–1, 76). For those who have suffered childhood abuse the struggle to become a survivor rather than a victim is hard-won and self-sufficiency and self-reliance, once virtues born of necessity, are later often overdetermined and outdated so that healthy interdependence becomes the goal (Higgins, 1994 p335).

There have been numerous studies which have emphasized the importance of perceptions of the self and of agency and control in survivors of trauma, as we have seen in the experience of Victor Frankl. Loss of control is a painful aspect of adversity and recovery involves regaining self-determination. For survivors of childhood abuse, recognising personal power or internal locus of control might be expressed by the ability to take steps such as leaving home, setting limits, listening to their inner voice, making decisions and taking responsibility for themselves. Such steps have enabled the abuse to stop and to overcome their traumatic experiences (Beaudoin, 2005 p32; Valentine, 1993 p221). In therapy, enabling clients to understand and trust the resiliency process empowers a client with an important sense of control in his or her life (Richardson, 2002

p311–12). Control, agency and purpose were also significant to those living with life long disability. Personal agency grew in the reciprocal relationship between advocacy for oneself and for others and could give rise to community with success a means of further empowerment (Clarke, 2002 p33).

Openness to change, self-esteem and control are supported by a resourced self. A resilient self is one fuelled by a creative inner life and vision, as we have seen in the experience of Victor Frankl where the motivation to survive took priority, but was easily lost if an inner life, or faith in the future was lost. A vision of his personal future and the contemplation of love sustained Frankl. Higgins found that for the resilient, overcoming was sustained by faith and vision characterized as 'faith in surmounting' and 'faith in relationships' so that in many respects humane relationships are their faith (Higgins, 1994 p179).

Resilience literature reveals the importance that religious faith can have in enabling someone to overcome difficulty by giving them faith to hold onto life and find meaning and purpose, as well as by providing a supportive network of people (Valentine, 1993 p220). Prayer and meditation can be an integrating and creative process. Flach encourages prayer for those for whom it is an option and sees faith, in the form of a belief in personal destiny, as the most vital ingredient of resilience (Flach, 1997 pp257–9; Storr, 1988 pxiv). A resourced self draws on positive perceptions of the self, a vision of a different and better life which may be fuelled by religious faith or by books and the imagination and by activities that support resilience. These activities enable a person to re-evaluate, consider and redirect their lives. They include a change of environment such as going on holiday, simmering by deferring judgement and broadening the quantity of possible solutions to a problem, and being alone. Storr points to solitude, particularly, as facilitating changes of attitude and argues that it is as

therapeutic as emotional support in some circumstances, such as in bereavement (Flach, 1997 p165; Storr, 1988 pp29, 31).

One way in which the self is resourced is through self-discipline. Though it is an unpopular concept in a materialist world propelled by consumerism and expectant of instant gratification, self-control or self-discipline is critical in resilience and can be learned by practice (Flach, 1997 p34). Self-control is defined as the self's ability to alter its states and responses. Baumeister and Exline argue that self-control has long been understood as the moral capacity to resist temptation, fulfil obligations, and perform morally commendable actions despite hardship. Since self-control is central to most forms of virtuous behaviour it can be regarded as the primary or master virtue. Studies of self-control suggest that it operates like a muscle: weaker after an exertion, replenishing with rest, and slowly becoming stronger with repeated exercise. It is strengthened by gradual practice, and by social support (Baumeister, 2000 p29, pp36–40). For those in adversity, self-discipline during times of trauma can enable physical escape or psychological protection. After trauma self-discipline helps to deal with anger and hurt, setting boundaries in relationships and the rebuilding of life, such as survivors of childhood trauma making an ongoing, deliberate choice to manage their anger and hurt.

Relationships

The kind of relationships that people have is hugely significant in the study of resilience. For many of the resilient, abusive relationships in earlier life have been the causes of adversity. Relationships, however, are a major factor in enabling people to build resilience and as we have seen it is love and faith in relationships that often provide the vision to overcome (Frankl, 2004 p49; Higgins, 1994 p179).

Relationships during the period of difficulty are vital for overcoming. Resilient children are the ones who are adept at recruiting people as surrogates by their skill, appeal and determination, mostly from unofficial relationships outside the family. These frequently fleeting attachment figures ignited the capacity of the children to love and provided loci of hope. They gave the children a sense that they were deeply special and important. In adolescents, resiliency is encouraged by a wider network of relationships. The relationships that helped the resilient as adolescents were those which provided an evaluative and reflective framework where they could begin to understand how and why their homes were different, explore their own disillusionments and pain and where autonomy and competence were promoted (Higgins, 1994 p67; see also Wolin, 1993). Other relationships are also of great importance to resilient children, such as relationships with peers in childhood, with siblings and friends and even animals. These relationships offered solace and mutuality and allowed these children the opportunity to be helped themselves and to help others. Helping others also allowed caregiving nourishment to be felt by the young helper, albeit vicariously (Higgins, 1994 p109).

In reconstructing a new life those who are resilient see healthy relationships as vital. The quality of relationship which supports children in traumatic situations is that of Carl Roger's 'unconditional positive regard'.⁹ Surrogates were those who encouraged the resilient to let their talents unfold and conveyed not only warmth and respect, but their own effectiveness as human beings who also overcome hardship gracefully. One important quality that surrogates had was avoiding placing the resilient in untenable loyalty conflicts (Higgins, 1994 p114–124).

⁹ Carl Rogers (1902–1987), an American psychologist, developed a humanist approach to psychology, known as the person-centred approach, a way of understanding personality and relationships widely used in therapy and counselling.

Resilient adults seek relationships with people who avoid either a self-sacrificial or self-referential imbalance in their ties, forming relationships with overall reciprocity, respecting personal boundaries and avoiding inappropriate dependence. As adults the resilient are dedicated to creating depth of contact in all human relationships, recognising the restorative power of human bonds and that creating irreplaceable attachments is fundamentally humanising (Higgins, 1994 p202). For those with lifelong disability this included a trust in which independence was respected and being able to ask for help regarded as important in such a way that mutual caring was both a source and an outcome of trust (Clarke, 2002 pp31–32).

The negotiating of right relationships is a struggle but the spiritual integrity of the resilient depends on limit setting. Part of the process of rebuilding a sense of self involves receiving respect and praise from others. It also involves minimising contact with those who diminish you. Setting limits, truthfulness and resistance to harm in relationships, for example with abusive families of origin, enables personal growth and not to do so is a growth retardant. The resilient gradually learn to set limits and trust that they can become appropriately confrontational, not repeating family patterns of the past nor colluding in them. Authenticity, confrontation and development were linked in Higgins' study so that pivotal stands for selfhood have generally benefited the whole family system, prompted new phases in their own growth and altered the trajectory of their own development (Higgins, 1994 p285–7; Flach, 1997 ch 12, 13).

From adversity to altruism

In considering the ways in which the lives of the resilient are shaped by their struggle, their sense of self and their relationships, I noticed a process had emerged, of growth that began in adversity and continued as resilience was

being expressed in altruism. The direction of growth for the resilient includes moral connotations and carries with it assumptions about what it means to live well and give well. Living well includes loving well, considering one's life to be worthwhile and making a contribution. Higgins' research of how forty resilient adults have overcome a cruel past, focused on the ability of the resilient to 'love well' as the characteristic quality most important in defining resilience (Higgins, 1994 pxiii).¹⁰ Research into spiritual resilience in those who live well with lifelong disability used Higgins' Loving Well Scale as well as Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale and a Scale of Life Satisfaction specifically developed for the study in order that the participants met criteria of 'living well.' The category of living well included having established a reputation for making an important contribution to their field of endeavour, having sustained a satisfying personal relationship for a period of at least five years and reporting that they enjoy their life and consider it to be worthwhile (Clarke, 2002 pp25–6).¹¹

As well as living well, the resilient give well and are involved in altruistic activity, such as mentoring and working in the caring professions. The majority of Higgins's subjects (85%) were involved in social and political activism and over half of them worked as therapists, though there was no obvious reason to suggest that her subjects should be any more involved in the helping professions than anyone else (Higgins, 1994 p228). Clarke and Cardman also

¹⁰ Higgins defines loving well as the ability to 1. establish and maintain relationships marked by a high degree of reciprocity and concern for other as well as self; 2. develop and actively participate in relationships that can withstand (or even thrive on) conflict, disappointment, frequent anger, and frustration when the needs of either person in the relationship are not met; 3. relate to others in a way that, in general, does not sacrifice the accuracy and empathy with which they perceive other people, that is they make generally successful attempts to recognise the needs and characteristics of others and differentiate those needs from their own (Higgins, 1994 pxiii).

¹¹ The Scale of Life Satisfaction is a four-point, five-item, self-report scale; Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1989) is a widely used self report measure resulting in an overall measure of self-esteem and Higgins' Loving Well Scale (1994) determines length of marriage or committed relationship and presence of mutually satisfying and reciprocated friendships of at least three year's duration.

found that a significant number of respondents were engaged in various kinds of activism which was a means of further empowerment and came out of a desire to share knowledge, skills and strategies (Clarke, 2002 p33).

A reading of the literature points to some of the ways in which the transformation can come about that is related to the struggle to grow and heal, the sense of self and relationships with others. Resilient individuals journey from adversity to altruism, through a process which involves a new understanding of themselves. This enables them to develop empathy and then, by participation in altruistic activity, to direct their energies towards healing.

Therapy of various kinds is an important aspect of healing for many of the resilient as is evidenced by the number of psychiatrists and therapists involved in writing on resilience as well as many of the resilient reporting how therapy has helped them. Therapy has enabled growth and healing in the resilient by the example of the person of the therapist, the nature of the relationship and the ability to gain a new perspective on themselves. Healing emerges partly from just sitting there with someone who can be seen in non-verbal ways as comfortable with themselves, who has a sense of self-worth, cares for others, and isn't focused on him or herself. The one-to-one relationship of unconditional positive regard and trust can enable a survivor to rebuild trust in other human relationships by addressing the trauma of the past and seeking to heal and grow (Flach, 1997; Wolin, 1993; Higgins, 1994 pp327, p333).

The process of healing involves a commitment to altruism which comes from a sense of self and an ability to empathize. Empathy is defined by Lifton as a quality of the resilient which involves decentring, a stepping back from one's own involvements sufficiently to enter into the mind of another. To decentre, he says, a person needs to previously have been centred; a fragmented self is

uncentred and struggling to keep itself together. The resilient give because they care, not out of martyred self-sacrifice, but because they have developed a healthy view of themselves (Lifton, 1993 p205–6; Higgins, 1994 p228).

The resilient involve themselves in altruistic activity because of their empathy and compassion and they report that healing for themselves is found through helping. Higgins describes the resilient as appearing ‘to be healing their wounds within the company of suffering others’ and as those who ‘have the strength to reach out’. Altruism has a transformative power offering a better alternative to self-absorption or self-sacrifice for the resilient. Altruism is the anchor of ongoing health as well as providing an intense pleasure and a sense of spiritual satisfaction. Altruism, or morality, goes beyond the healing of an injured self. Morality, the last of Wolin’s seven characteristics of resiliency, he describes as going beyond healing the self to improving the world (Higgins, 1994 p227–8, 236, 296, 337; Woiln, 1993).¹²

Altruistic living has a regenerating power that enables healing. The resilient are those who have learned to transform anger, avoiding the destructive polar extremes of depressive self-attack or sociopath vengeance against others, and transmute their trauma into various expressions of insight, compassion and innovation. Richardson states that ‘resilient reintegration requires increased energy to grow, and the source of the energy, according to resiliency theory, is a spiritual source or innate resilience.’ The need to focus energy on healing the self means that forgiveness is not cited as being important in the process. On the contrary, forgiveness can hold back healing because it concentrates energy on the perpetrator of abuse and derails healing, whereas understanding of the circumstances and the perpetrator can aid reframing and allow the survivor to

¹² The other six resiliencies are Insight, Independence, Relationships, Initiative, Humour, Creativity.

move towards healing. Higgins describes the pull to forgive, like other pulls away from healing and growth as 'sirens' (Higgins, 1994 p252–254, 306, 344; Lifton, 1993 p7; Richardson, 2002 p313; Wolin, 1993 p184, 187–8).

Higgins describes four common dynamics of healing: the first is 'giving what you did not get' and learning to get nurturance by assuming the role of giver in important relationships. 'Getting through giving' is the second inner dynamic involving correcting the past in a symbolic way. Being able to help others renews faith that healing does exist and they can be part of offering it. 'Mourning what will never be' is a dynamic integral to healing as well as being able to express 'gratitude for what one got' (Higgins, 1994 p234–250). These dynamics relate to the ability of the self to be aware of what has happened, feel pain, express gratitude, and have one's faith resourced and expressed in action.

Important Christian virtues particularly those of forgiveness and humility are addressed by resilience literature but from a different and challenging perspective. Healing emerges through altruism and through understanding themselves and their abusers, but not necessarily by forgiving them, as we have seen. Humility, seen as deliberately cultivating a sense of unworthiness is not a quality desirable for the resilient who often struggle with a sense of unworthiness, shame and guilt. Resilient individuals are rather characterized by their ability to rebuild self-esteem after the knocks of adversity. Studies in humility as a virtue, however, have brought an understanding of the quality which resonates with the experience of the resilient. Tangney has shown humility to be a rich multifaceted construct. It involves: an accurate assessment of one's abilities and achievements, the ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations, openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice, a keeping of one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective, a relatively low self-focus, a 'forgetting of the

self,' while recognising that one is but one part of the larger universe and an appreciation of value of things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world (Tangney, 2000 p73–4). The concept of humility is enriched, rather than diminished by religious understandings, she argues, because the religious perspective describes one's place in the world in relation to God, so that one can be smart, but not all-knowing, and have personal power, but not omnipotence. Templeton describes arrogance as the opposite of humility because it is a belief that one is wiser and better than others, which promotes separation rather than community, and thus one cannot learn from others (Templeton, 1998 p162–3). There is a connection between humility and compassion which resonates with the observations already made about empathy. Humility viewed positively leads to compassion because of the self-forgetfulness, rather than a self-focus that can come with false humility. Thus humility is not a devaluation of oneself but an increase in the valuation of others (Tangney, 2000 p73).

Resilience as a theological challenge

There are particular criticisms of Christianity given in resilience literature which come from the experience of those who have suffered in childhood, though there is also the sense that Christian faith also gave grounding in human decency, integrity and character. Higgins reports criticisms as including aspirations to infinite self-sacrifice and unreflective compliance, unfounded accusations and guilt-engendering admonitions, the tenet of original sin, and the perception of sex as sin. Though compassionate clergy quietly sheltered those suffering, many others felt betrayed by particular church officials who knew the gravity of their troubles and yet failed to challenge – some even condoned – their abusive home lives or preached general beliefs that amplified their parents' harshness. Several subjects in her study said that organized religious teachings simply did not help enough with their unliveable home lives

(Higgins, 1994 p192–8). These criticisms need to be met with appropriate interpretations of Christian understandings of concepts around obedience, self-denial, self-sacrifice, sin and guilt and the body.

There are challenges to Christian theology and practice which arise around the themes of struggle, self and relationships. Struggle is central to growth and change and the building of resilience. Care needs to be taken that Christian theology and practice takes account of pain and struggle, but do not glory in them. Christian culture which proposes and expects that the better, or more devout Christian, should always be at peace, always feel full of trust in God and never desperate needs to be challenged. An understanding of the place of obedience and trust needs to be addressed so that the vitality of struggle is not undermined and passivity encouraged.

The emphasis on self in resilience literature challenges a generalized doctrine of human nature and sin which might well promote a sense of unworthiness, punishment and shame which undermines the sense of self necessary for coping with adversity. This will include a nuanced view of the virtue of humility. Theological traditions which express a static view of the human person or emphasize tradition to the extent of resisting change will be challenged by the emphasis on the need to be open to change in resilience literature. Christian theology is challenged by resilience literature to give an account of human nature that does not emphasize sin to the extent of seeing little good in human nature and thus little capacity for strength and decision-making ability. Christian theology is challenged to emphasize the creativity and resourcefulness of human beings made in the image of God rather than

emphasising sin with potentially related themes of glorifying suffering, passivity and victimhood.¹³

The self needs to be resourced and disciplined to build resilience. This challenges Christian pastors to present the Christian vision of the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven in such a way as to resource people and to promote self-discipline, recognising that spiritual practices such as giving something up for Lent is a planned disruption to life that promotes growth and prepares people to face adversity.

Much has been written on the need for appropriate relationships in churches, such as pastoral relationships and the boundaries important to observe, or the documents regarding the safeguarding of children (see House of Bishops, 2010). Resilience literature provides a challenge for Christians to nurture resilience by being available to be recruited by those in adversity as well as seeking to protect the vulnerable.

The need for people to withdraw from relationships which oppress them is clear in resilience literature. This has implications for theology and pastoral care relating to divorce and domestic violence as well as what is taught about power, gender and family life. Great care needs to be taken with regard to teaching about forgiveness.

Pastoral relationships, in order to support resilience, need to be ones which can contain and support the process involved in personal change with its fluidity and emotional extremes. This will involve commitment to be alongside those in

¹³ Such a shift to emphasising more positive doctrines, for example the doctrine of creation, is already being recommended for the purposes of mission with the younger generations who are prone to celebrate life, relationships and community and to avoid redemptionitis: 'an overemphasis on the death of Jesus to the exclusion of the doctrines of creation and eschatology' (Savage, 2006 p128, 134).

adversity with patience and without judgement. The importance of agency and choice challenges the pastor to listen rather than impose or prescribe, to seek opportunities for someone in adversity to exercise choice or agency in ways unrelated to their illness or difficult situation.

There is a theological challenge to Christian spirituality and pastoral care regarding trust. Resilience literature points to difficulties those who have experienced adversity have with moving from a necessary self-reliance to trust. Christian faith has trust in God at its heart. How to convey an understanding of God who relates to human beings in love and can be trusted and also to enable such trust must go far beyond a simple recommendation to trust God.

Summary

In order to be strengthened in adversity, three themes from resilience literature are significant: struggle, self and relationships. The themes form the foundation for addressing the research question of how pastoral care can help people be strengthened in adversity. The literature identifies the need to embrace struggle and withstand the emotional pain that goes with it. To be resilient a person will have a sense of themselves as having worth, control and an inner life resourced by a vision of a future which is better and different. Self-awareness and discipline go with the self-esteem necessary to face and come through adversity. Relationships with those who support and guide help, not least by fuelling the vision of a different way of life, because they have come through.

Resilience literature provides profound challenges to Christian theology and the emphases in pastoral care that can flow from theological concepts. In the conversation partners that follow these challenges will be explored and met.

Chapter 3

The Desert: Landscape and Metaphor for the resilience process

The desert as a conversation partner

In turning to the Bible, a vital conversation partner in pastoral theology, the portrayal of the desert experience provides a rich partner with whom to converse. The desert is the landscape for much of the narratives of Old and New Testaments. The desert as a landscape provides conditions which necessitate struggle, self-awareness, discipline and inner resourcing. Its physicality supports a process of resilience not only in biblical times but in the experiences of the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries. Many of them sought the landscape of the desert in order to grow but it was the desert metaphor that bought the literary fame. The desert as a metaphor resonates at many levels and with a variety of experiences of adversity.

Contemporary desert spirituality uses the metaphor of the desert to refer to a wide range of experiences of adversity and commends seeking strengthening through them by attending to the wisdom of the desert Christians expressed through texts of the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁴ I will argue that the metaphor structures the desert experience into three parts of the resilience process: embracing the desert; encountering and strengthening; and altruism and pastoral responsibility.

The desert in the Bible

In the biblical tradition the desert stands as a physical place of adversity where God is encountered and where God provides both physically and spiritually. It is often adversity that causes someone to be in the desert, an adversity mirrored by trying to survive in the desert, or some sense of radical change to be faced

¹⁴ For example see Chryssavgis 2008 p3

that drives a person there. Thus the desert is a place not only of adversity, but a refuge where one can go to seek transformation.

The terms wilderness and desert are interchangeable when translated from the biblical languages into English since they are translations of several different words. The Hebrew words refer to different types of landscape not all of which are uncultivated or uninhabited, but include pasture lands (1 Sam 17:28), refer to large defined areas such as the Arabian and Sinai deserts (Genesis 14:6) as well as barren areas. Desert refers to desolation and ruin of waste places (Psalm 102:6), to dry land (Psalm 78:17) or a vain or empty place (1 Samuel 12:21). In the New Testament the desert or wilderness is described as a deserted or lonely place (Mark 1:35, 6:31–2). Not only is there a varied geographical description of desert or wilderness, but there is a figurative use too, such as when the desert is described as a stormy and desolate sea in ‘The Oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea’ (Isaiah 21:1). Difficult though the terrain may be, God’s power extends to the wilderness (Psalm 107:35) and for the prophets, such as Elijah, it is a place of theophany (1 Kings 19:4). The theological development of wilderness is rich and no simple distinction can be made between it being positive or negative. In the wilderness wanderings from Exodus to Numbers God provides guidance in the form of a pillar of cloud and of fire (Exodus 13:21–22) as well as food and drink (Exodus 16:4). Hardships are seen positively as divine discipline (Deuteronomy 8:3–5).¹⁵ Many biblical narratives portray the desert as a refuge for individuals or whole communities to escape to in order to reassess their situation and set a new direction. For Hagar, Moses, the newly freed Israelite slaves and Elijah, physical danger and threat preceded their arrival in the desert, and the desert affords them protection and an experience of God who provides materially and spiritually.

¹⁵ see Buttrick, 1962 ‘wilderness’, ‘desert’; Freedman, 1992 ‘wilderness’, ‘wanderings’

In the New Testament, neither John the Baptist nor Jesus go to the desert because of adversity, though that is what they encounter there and they emerge changed. John goes to the desert to live, undergoing the hardship of surviving and shaping his vision of a way of living pertinent to the age. Its message was one of repentance or radical change, which he preached to the people, drawing on the image of a voice crying in the wilderness from Isaiah so that his desert life drew on the desert spirituality of the prophets (Isaiah 40:3). Louth describes John the Baptist as a model for all Christians because 'John incorporates the desert, not just in lifestyle, but in his very being he becomes the vehicle for God's purposes, the messenger, the forerunner, the one who points to Christ (Louth, 2003 p37). Jesus is driven to the desert by the Holy Spirit after the experience of hearing God's voice affirming him at his baptism. After forty days and forty nights of fasting and temptation he emerges to begin his ministry. For Jesus, the desert was a place of physical and spiritual difficulty. Here wild animals lurked and Jesus was tempted by the devil and helped by angels. It was a place of adversity and strengthening which heralded change in his own life as well as in the lives of others (Mark 1:12-13). For both Jesus and John the desert was a place they entered alone, experiencing self-discovery through solitariness and suffering, yet it became a place of community, for out of the desert they both turned to building a community (Jasper, 2004 p15).

The desert is a place of struggle that provides an encounter with the self and relating to God which leads to an inner strengthening and then re-engagement with others. This is the case in the narratives of Hagar and Moses which also contribute to an understanding of the role of adversity in the development of altruism and pastoral responsibility.

Desert narrative: Hagar

Hagar, a slave girl, is described as Egyptian in Genesis and so had probably been acquired by Abraham's household there. Her name, however, has a Semitic origin which may mean 'flight' and perhaps anticipates her later actions (Amos, 2004 p91; Wenham, 1994 p6). Hagar was the handmaid of Sarah, Abraham's wife who, though her husband had been promised a son, remained infertile. Although the infertility of Sarah is the central issue in the narratives in Genesis they read as a Hagar story (Brueggemann, 1982 p151).

Genesis contains two narratives about Hagar (16:4–15 and 21:9–21). Both fall into two parts. In the first part of each scene Sarah, Abraham's wife and Hagar's mistress, directs her husband Abraham to courses of action in an attempt to secure her with a son and heir. These actions result in adversity for Hagar. The second part of each scene finds Hagar in the desert or wilderness and depicts an encounter with God. For Hagar, the plot of the first story is circular, moving from bondage to flight to bondage, while the action of the second is linear, proceeding from bondage to expulsion to homelessness (Trible, 1984 p10). In the first scene, the desert or wilderness is a hospitable but a fleeting place, whereas in the second it is hostile and a place she must remain (Trible, 1984 p25, Trible, 2006 p49). Hagar's story is steeped in adversity. The desert is a part of this reality and the place of self-assessment, change and strengthening.

In the first scene, Sarah gives Hagar to her husband, to secure her as a surrogate mother in accordance with the customs of the time (Rad, 1961 p186). On becoming pregnant, Hagar, in a narrative full of images of sight, looked down on her mistress and Sarah then oppresses and humiliates her. The words used of Sarah's treatment of Hagar are words used later to describe the way in which the Egyptians treat the Israelite slaves (Amos, 2004 p14). The pregnant Hagar flees to the wilderness, to Shur, not far from the Egyptian northeast boundary,

to a place of refuge from adversity that is also a route on the way to her home (Rad, 1961 p187, Wenham, 1994 p9). Here Hagar encounters a man, described as an angel of the Lord who is none other than God in human form (Rad, 1961 p188). Such an appearance in Genesis comes nearly always to bring good news and salvation and tends to appear at moments of dire personal crisis, such as when Abraham is just about to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:11). For Hagar this angel comes with a harsh order and a divine promise. He acknowledges her as a person by using her name, but by describing her as Sarah's maid reaffirms her social status (Trible, 1984 p15). Hagar honestly admits to fleeing from her mistress and she is told not only to return but to submit, a word with the same root as humiliate and oppress, and the one used of Sarah's previous abuse of Hagar. She is promised a son. Ishmael means 'God hears.' God has heard Hagar, and shown he cares, but he does not liberate her from oppression.

Despite the mixed message of promise and suffering, Hagar's response to her encounter with God strengthens her to obey and return. She responds to God by being the only person in the biblical tradition to give a new name to God, El-Roi, 'the one who sees me'. She also names the well in the wilderness, Beer-lahay-roi, 'the well of the living one who sees me' to mark the place where she has encountered God who sees her suffering and yet requires her to return to it with a promise of a future. It is in her moment of greatest distress that Hagar discovers God's concern for her and strengthened in spirit, she returns to Abraham and bears a son (Wenham, 1994 p12).

In the second narrative involving Hagar, Ishmael is 'playing' with Isaac. This might be laughing with, indeed 'isaacing' with Isaac (for his name means laughing), or mocking him. Sarah fearing that the eldest son Ishmael will take all or some of her son's privileges and inheritance, schemes to rid herself of him and his mother, by driving them out, as Pharaoh was later to do when the

Egyptian first born children had been slain (Amos, 2004 p117). Abraham, reluctant to banish his son, but understanding it to be God's will, gets up early to say goodbye and provides mother and teenage son with bread and a skin of water.

Suffering divorce, banishment and the prospect of death, Hagar wanders in a wilderness that is not a place of refuge or exodus, but of exile, since it does not border her homeland, and unlike Shur, Beersheba does not provide water (Trible, 1984 p24). 'Wandering' implies that they are lost and when Hagar sits down by herself the connotations are of isolation, uncertainty, lack or loss of direction, loneliness and parting (Wenham, 1994 p85; Trible, 1984 p23). Desperate and not being able to bear to see her child die she raises her voice and weeps, but she does not actually cry out to God. Unlike Moses Ishmael does not see God in the bush under which he lies. Hagar is not heard by God but God does respond to Ishmael's cries not by appearing as a physical presence but as a voice from heaven. Hagar hears the promise that her descendants will be a great nation and that she has a role to play. She who was under Sarah's hand (Genesis 16:6,9) must now grasp Ishmael's hand. The earlier angel had predicted that Ishmael's hand would be against all, but that is not to include Hagar (Amos, 2004 p120). Hagar then sees the well which symbolizes the provision of God for them. The renewed faith in God brought about by this encounter which includes the promise that God's protecting hand will be over her son, leads to renewed purpose and action. Hagar shoulders the responsibility of parenthood, shown by arranging a marriage for Ishmael. They make their home in the wilderness and its territory provides work and Hagar's actions provide Ishmael with a future (Trible, 2006 p50).

A resilience reading of the life of Hagar as depicted in Genesis shows the desert or wilderness to be a place of refuge from adversity and a place of exile and

adversity where a home must be made. The desert is the place where she finds direction and sets priorities for the future. In both cases it is a place of strengthening through Hagar acknowledging the grim circumstances of her life and encountering the divine who provides physically and spiritually. There is the struggle with adversity which causes her to flee to the desert and the adversity of struggling to survive when she gets there.

Hagar has been depicted in different ways by the religious traditions that revere her. Once honoured for her obedience and suffering she has come to be an inspiration for those in adversity seeking to cope by embracing the struggle by faith in a God who will strengthen them though not necessarily liberate.

In Christian theology the stories of Sarah and Hagar has been interpreted allegorically by St Paul with Sarah representing promise and freedom and Hagar law and slavery (Galatians 4:21–31). The theme of obedience is prevalent in interpretations of the narratives. Sarah is revered for her obedience: women who submit to their husbands in doing so become her daughters (1 Peter 3:1–6). Luther commends Hagar for returning home to obey Sarah, having been changed by her encounter with the divine messenger from her haughtiness and ingratitude. He exonerates Abraham for sacrificing conjugal and paternal love in order to obey and love God alone (Trible and Russell, 2006 p15–17). Calvin too commends Hagar for her obedience to the divine messenger who corrects her faults of servile temper and indomitable ferocity and describes her praying with words of self-reproach when she called upon God (Trible and Russell, 2006 p19). Hagar has been compared to Mary by Christian commentators, obediently accepting God's word and thereby bringing blessing to descendants too many to count (Wenham, 1994 p13).

Obedience has been the quality for which Hagar has been revered in the Judeo-Christian tradition, her obedience to God in returning to her life of slavery and oppression. For the post Christian feminist theologian Phyllis Trible, the narratives about Hagar are one of her studies in texts of terror, because Hagar does not receive liberation from God, but is ordered to return to oppression and so becomes the suffering servant, the precursor of Israel's plight under Pharaoh (Trible, 1984 p13). For Trible, Hagar is a fleeting yet haunting figure in scripture, her life depicting oppression in three familiar forms of nationality, class and sex and so she becomes a symbol of the oppressed, most especially of all sorts of rejected women who find their stories in hers. Though she is the first person to whom an angel visits, the first to receive an annunciation and the only one to name God, she experiences exodus without liberation, revelation without salvation, wilderness without covenant, wandering without land, promise without fulfilment and unmerited exile without return (Trible, 1984 p27-8).

Hagar's life emphasizes an important aspect of resilience: that strengthening in adversity does not necessarily result in liberation from adversity. For Trible this is horrifying. For other strands of Christian theology, along with the Hagar tradition in Islam, it is initiative, agency, fortitude and faith, rather than obedience that are the qualities which bring strengthening. These are the qualities that cohere with the findings of resilience literature and they emerge from readings of the narrative from perspectives where adversity is experienced, due to a lack of power and social location. To look at the narrative here through Islamic eyes recognizes that this desert narrative is known by, and so can be referred to, by a wide range of people whom pastors come across in settings such as hospitals and prisons.

For many generations African American Christians have drawn on the life of Hagar to identify models of faith, courage, and hope as a promise that God participates in the human struggle for freedom. Hagar's predicament involved slavery, poverty, ethnicity, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, domestic violence, homelessness, single parenting and radical encounters with God and has resonated with the experience of black American women. Delores Williams argues that the biblical appropriation involving Hagar expands the community's knowledge of God's activity in the world shifting the dominance of faith in the Liberator God to an acknowledgement of God involved in the daily survival and quality-of-life struggle of black American women, since Hagar was not liberated but received new vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before (Williams, 2006 p177).

Hagar, of course, has an important place in Islam. Though the Qur'an does not mention Hagar by name, in the Hadith, Islam reveres Hagar as a woman of true faith, a messenger appointed by the one true God, buried at the Ka'bah in Mecca. Hagar is depicted as walking between two mountains in the wilderness with the angel Gabriel appearing to her on the seventh occasion (Trible and Russell, 2006 pp9–10). Hagar emerges from the traditions as a 'woman of exceptional faith, love, fortitude, resolution, and strength of character,' who 'does not see herself as a victim', but 'is a victor who, with the help of God and her own initiative, is able to transform a wilderness into the cradle of a new world dedicated to the fulfilment of God's purpose on earth' (Hassan, 2006 p155). The Muslim theologian Hibba Abugideiri points to Hagar's life as providing moral lessons, real experiences and a model of leadership relevant to contemporary Muslim women. This they can have by drawing on the tool of Hagar's and their own empowerment which is spiritual access to the divine. Hagar effected real change by *taqwa*, faith, but not simply faith in God, but what the *taqwa* of Muslim women can inspire them to accomplish – a re-establishing

of female agency. Hagar exemplifies the notion of active *taqwa*. God intervened to nourish Hagar because of her efforts to find help on her own, for activism and self-initiation are integral aspects of *taqwa*, not simply passive faith in God. Her struggles in the wilderness when left to fend for herself by Abraham was characterized by her constancy and God consciousness which, aided by her encounter with the archangel Gabriel transformed initial panic and fear into relief and acceptance of the divine plan. Abraham's prayer for her safety was answered (Qur'an 14: 37), but not without Hagar's suffering. Hagar struggles as a divinely appointed messenger, who like all the messengers of Islam endured many trials during her mission, but for her it resulted in the birth of an entire civilization (Haddad, 2001 p81–86).

Hagar's strengthening takes the form of self-encounter and divine encounter. At the end of her tether, Hagar encounters herself, her situation and God. God hears her, names her, notices her suffering, provides for her and strengthens her to be able to obey the command to return to her adversity knowing that although there will still be humiliation, there is also promise. The encounter with God causes Hagar to recognize her own worth and through the promise, be strengthened by a vision of a different kind of future including a son who is free and whose line will continue. Returning to adversity requires the ability to withstand emotional pain and exercise self-discipline so that Hagar might provide a safe place to deliver and bring up her child. Living in the desert when Ishmael is grown also results in altruism or care for others, in the form of Hagar caring for her son, providing him with a wife and being the mother of a nation.

Hagar's strengthening can be expressed in the 3Cs that resilience literature points to. It has physical aspects of being provided with water meaning that the necessary *Coping* can be achieved. Promise and being named enables her to restrict the destructiveness of her situation and be *Constant*. She *Constructs* her

new sense of self in order to go forward. Although Hagar returns to the adversity which will also be a place of safety for her and her unborn child and in doing so obeys, she is not passive in this encounter, but an agent. The relationships that she needs are not easy, but necessary. The life of Hagar read through the lens of resilience literature reveals that it is not any virtue of obedience that is the source of her strength, nor her lack of liberation something which diminishes that strength, but as contemporary African American Christian and Muslim women have found, it is her courage to withstand difficulty and her encounter with God that she finds strength for herself to meet her circumstances.

Desert narrative: Moses

The desert or wilderness features prominently in the life of Moses, most especially the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The wilderness, however, in the early narrative of Exodus features as the place to which Moses flees. The desert is the place where he makes a new life, encounters God and receives a call to give himself to the task of liberating others. Just as the biblical narrative points to Hagar's experience as a precursor of that of the Israelite slaves, so too does Moses' experience. That Moses has 'been there' and come through gives him the credibility to take up pastoral leadership.

Moses journeys from adversity to altruism gaining maturity and wisdom along the way, which enables him to gain the trust of the people. His first attempt at helping his enslaved fellow Israelites lacks the moral undergirding required to be described as altruistic. His identity was bound up with the slavery of his people which caused him to act but he lacked the long term vision, moral sense and altruism that characterizes the resilient (Childs, 1974 p32; Fretheim, 1991 p42, Janzen, 1997 p23). When he tried to intervene in a dispute between two slaves his authority was rejected because of their fear that he would kill again

(Exodus 2:14). To his chagrin, Moses discovered that his helping had made him an enemy and not an ally of his people and so he had to flee to the desert (Childs, 1974 p45). Moses flees and, having helped women who were being harassed by shepherds, water their flocks at the well, he receives the hospitality of the priest of Midian.¹⁶ The adversity of rejection and flight developed Moses' sense of empathy and justice. In the text three types of injustice are experienced in three incidents in quick succession: the slave is beaten to death by the Egyptian master, the neighbour is wronged by his Hebrew kinsman, and the male nomads deprive the women of their ability to get water. Moses' sense of justice develops to transcend boundaries of nationality, gender and kinship (Fretheim, 1991 p45).

The journey from adversity to altruism is enabled by Moses' ability to struggle, relate to others and develop his sense of self. The adversity which led Moses to the desert shaped Moses' moral sense and his experience of the desert enabled him to prepare to take up pastoral leadership. This was because he had shared in suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, had managed to survive in the adversity of the desert and returned both to witnessing the slavery of his people and later the desert, strengthened. The early passages of Exodus have an overarching theme of the preparation of the deliverer for his task, which involved him identifying with his people under oppression and finding a home in an alien land. Moses becomes one of them by virtue of his own experience (Fretheim, 1991 p42, Wenham, 1987 p21).

Relationships enabled Moses to survive the adversity of the desert and to grow into someone who could be strengthened by adversity in an altruistic direction. Moses was shown considerable hospitality by strangers, facilitated by Moses'

¹⁶ The geographical location of Midian is very vague, for Midianites are described as nomads in the Old Testament (Wenham, 1987 p20).

protection of the women he met at the well. Moses became a shepherd, married Jethro's daughter Zipporah and became a father. The name of his son, Gershom, indicates that Moses still remembers that he is a 'sojourner in a foreign land', belonging to another people in another land, but he had found a home away from home (Childs, 1974 p32; Janzen, 1997 p25).

The desert enabled Moses to find a sense of self and reassess his life. The flight to a desolate desert, far from the marks and the patterns of activity that had identified Moses in Egypt was what he needed to reassess his identity and connections. The result of his reassessment, alone in the wilderness was an encounter with God who directed him to a life of altruism and pastoral oversight. Moses noticed a common desert bush on fire and decided to go and look more closely. Moses' encounter with God came in the midst of his everyday activity as a shepherd where he was presumably conscious of nothing more than his flock. He had driven his sheep well into the wilderness, beyond the customary routes of Midianite territory and found himself on a mountain in the wilderness named Horeb, 'wasteland' which became the place of revelation (Childs, 1974 p72; Fretheim, 1991 p53; Janzen, 1997 pp24, 28; Wenham, 1987 p30).

Encountering himself and his situation in the desert, the support of others and time alone led Moses to an encounter with God (Exodus 3:1–12). The call was one he obeyed, but the encounter was not a one where Moses was passive. God's presence was hospitable, respecting of autonomy and reassuring. Moses finds himself in a presence that invites him to be at home and at the same time claims his profound respect. Having experienced being an alien in a foreign land he finds himself a guest of God (Janzen, 1997 p28–9). Though Moses was afraid to look at God and hid his face he is anything but deferential. Disagreement, argument, and even challenge play an important role in the

encounter. God does not demand a self-effacing Moses. God reveals himself not simply at the divine initiative, but in interaction with a questioning human party. Simple deference or passivity in the presence of God would close down the possibilities. In Moses there is genuine modesty, fear of the unknown, reproach of the people, excuse making and questions not worthy of a prophet. Each of these is handled by God with the utmost seriousness, the objection examined and met with a divine promise (Exodus 3:13–4:31). God places the divine word and will into the hands of another for him to do with what he will. That is for God a risky venture, fraught with negative possibilities (Childs, 1974 pp72–3; Fretheim, 1991 pp52–3, 56). Moses is to return to Egypt where his compatriots are slaves and to lead them to liberation.

The narrative of these first three chapters of the book of Exodus reveals Moses growing towards altruism through developing empathy and a sense of justice, from his experiences of adversity. The struggle with the memories of what he had done and the life he had lost was made productive by time alone in the desert as well as supported by others, and this lead to a reassessment of his life and an encounter with God.

In the narratives concerning Hagar and the early experience of Moses in the desert we see that strengthening in adversity comes from an experience of desert which enables each to face their circumstances and themselves and encounter God, not passively but in a way which brings out their personhood and results in an altruistic task. This is not a path to personal liberation, but a return to adversity and a call to work for the good of others by hope in a future promised by a God in whom they trust.

The Desert as a landscape

Much of the biblical narrative is set in the desert. Desert, however, is more than just the geographical location. The landscape shapes the human person by forcing attentiveness to the external conditions and inner psychological and spiritual state in order to survive. This struggle to survive enables a person to set priorities, focus energy and in doing so be strengthened.

Desert is landscape which receives less than ten inches of rain a year so that except in extreme instances there is varied and numerous animal and plant life. Rainfall of between ten and twenty inches indicates a grass or steppe region, semi arid, which in the dry season has a desert-like appearance, but in the rainy season has luxurious vegetation. Rather than monotony, nearly all deserts contain striking contrasts of relief which include mountains and the gentle slopes that characterize the landscape. The desert exerts a strong and abiding influence on the habits and customs of peoples and the spirit and life of nations (Dodge, 1902 p412).¹⁷

There are those who flee to the desert, those who find themselves there unexpectedly and those who seek it. In each case the desert is experienced to be a great teacher. The model for desert Christians, St Anthony, explicitly cited the desert as teacher when he was asked how he could live so far away from books: 'My book is the nature of created things, whenever I want to read the word of God it is always there for me,' he said, for it was the landscape of the desert that formed and defined his spirituality and being (Jasper, 2004 p26).

There are classic writings on the experience of the desert landscape and the way in which it shapes human perspective, psychologically and spiritually. One is

¹⁷ See Dodge, 1902, for geographical features of the desert and Smith, 1915 for description of Bedouin life.

Wind, Sand and Stars by Antoine St-Exupery who landed in the Libyan desert in 1935. He describes what it took to survive in the desert: being meticulously observant, stubbornly indifferent to the panic and despair and being rescued by Bedouin, factors which express the significance of struggle, self and relationships for surviving (Saint-Exupery, 2000). A spiritual classic is Carlo Caretto's *Letters from the Desert* where a life characterized by living in the solitude and the sparseness of the desert forms a spirituality of love and contemplation. Beldon Lane who has integrated his experience of the solace of fierce landscapes with his experience of his mother's dying, emphasizes the importance of the experience of harsh terrain especially at times of adversity and healing. He argues that works on desert spirituality, such as the historical reading by Derwas Chitty or the pastoral reading by Henri Nouwen have not attended to the realities of the geography (Lane, 1998 p18).

The study of spiritual traditions in relation to their particular geographies, spiritual or psycho-geography, is quite a recent phenomenon, urged by Philip Sheldrake and exemplified in his study of Celtic spirituality and place (Sheldrake, 1991 p94–6; Sheldrake, 1995). Peter Brown describes monasticism in Syria and Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries as assuming different forms because of variations in the desert terrain they occupied in Egypt where there was 'true desert,' with a rainfall of only 1.1 inches a year. Sheer survival in such a hostile environment required structure, conformity, and adherence to routine. By contrast, in the rugged, mountainous terrain of Syria, which was milder and less demanding than the Egyptian desert, the ascetic life would be characterized by greater individuality, freedom and the embrace of wildness, since less energy had to be absorbed in the onerous task of staying alive (Brown, 1982 p109–12, Brown, 1971 p96–112). Other writers have explored the way in which the harsh terrain of desert shapes the spirituality of communities, especially with its affect upon healing. One of these is Kathleen Norris, who describes the

spiritual geography of Dakota, reading spirituality and small town culture from a desert landscape (Norris, 1993).¹⁸

The landscape of the desert, and the kind of life that is possible there, provides its own resilience process. The landscape does not change, but the human being does as he or she determines the priorities needed for physical and psychological survival and well being. The learning is a struggle that emerges from within, shaped by physical factors.

The desert as a metaphor

The desert is a physical place where much of the biblical narrative is played out and a landscape which enables human beings to move beyond adversity to inner strengthening, but most human beings will not spend time in desert terrain. Their experiences of adversity, however, are analogous to finding oneself in the desert. Desert or wilderness functions as a rich metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson have shown that metaphors are not just a characteristic of language, but are pervasive in everyday life, shaping thought and action (Lakoff, 2003 p3). Metaphors are rooted in experience and using them means we can pick out parts of our experience and treat them as distinct entities enabling us to refer to them, categorize them and in doing so, reason about them (Lakoff, 2003 p25). Key to the use of metaphors is the way in which they enable us to partially structure one experience in terms of another in order to make our experience coherent. Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness (Lakoff,

¹⁸ My own experience of the desert landscape came when I went on an eight day retreat to the Sinai Peninsula with the Makhad Trust in 2010. Hosted by the Bedouin and sleeping without shelter the retreat included three days and nights where I was solitary and fasting.

2003 p83, 193).¹⁹ The Bible itself already uses desert or wilderness as a metaphor. Thus, understanding metaphor is an essential tool for working with biblical texts and using metaphors to express theology along with story and myth, image and symbol is important so that implicit theology can become explicit and able to be critiqued and changed. The use of metaphor in theological reflection often brings fresh and surprising insight which can be life shaping and is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience (Nash, 2009 p60, 69; Lakoff, 2003 p231).

The resonances of desert are widely understood metaphorically. In his interdisciplinary meditation on the religious and theological meanings of the image, idea and language of the desert, Jasper describes the desert as 'simultaneously an interior space of the mind, an exterior place where pilgrims, adventurers and travellers can visit and dwell and an intertextual space produced by cross references among cultural creations dealing with the desert as archetype or icon of the imagination' (Jasper, 2004 xii). Not constrained by any one religious tradition the desert speaks a universal language, Jasper argues. It has become 'a text' with the Bible and the desert Christians who followed St Anthony providing a blueprint for reading it (Jasper, 2004 xvi). There are many modern spiritual writers who have used the desert as a metaphor of being strengthened in adversity, drawing on the wisdom of the desert Christians. The strength of the desert metaphor is such that it can be used to describe people who have never lived in the desert, but attribute their motivation and strengthening to God, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, described as a desert Christian because of his experience of adversity and resilience (Jasper, 2004 p8). The metaphor is also used in secular disciplines to describe the way in which human beings can be strengthened by adversity to go on to live fulfilled

¹⁹ See Lakoff and Johnson for a discussion of the coherent structuring of experience by use of *experiential gestalts* (Lakoff, 2003 p77–86).

lives. Wolin comments that 'in more than two decades as a therapist and family researcher, I have seen that many survivors are like desert flowers that grow healthy and strong in an emotional wasteland. In barren and angry terrain they find nourishment, and frequently their will to prevail becomes the foundation for a decent, caring, and productive adult life' (Wolin, 1993 p6).

The three movements of the resilience process in the desert metaphor

The metaphor of desert structures the experience of adversity into three movements of a resilience process. These are: embracing desert by acknowledging one's situation and the need to change; encountering the self and being strengthened; and developing altruism and pastoral responsibility.

The first movement of embracing the desert is reflected in the landscape and the human response to it. The landscape of the desert makes it a metaphor for a new and difficult experience in life where one is alone in a place where demons lurk and the only creative choice is to embrace the struggle. The differentiation between desert landscape and that of any other resonates with the experience of change that adversity brings and the need to embrace it. The myth of the desert is one of the most abiding creations of antiquity, says Brown, because of the clear ecological frontier. Once there, it is a place of wandering, a place to be crossed, a place to enter into and a place of meeting (Brown, 1988 p216; Jasper, 2004 xviii). When adversity strikes – be it a terminal illness or bereavement – people experience crossing into new terrain, a different space where new ways of living will be essential for survival.

The desert stands for any place of abandonment and aloneness. It is used metaphorically and psychologically, for any place of solitude, simplicity and emptiness. Anyone who has experienced some aspect of deserted-ness, loneliness, brokenness, breakdown or break-up – whether emotionally,

physically or socially – will be able to make the necessary connections to the desert. Desert in English gives this sense of a deserted place, but the desert is not a neutral space. The Greek for desert, *eremos* means abandoned and it is the term from which we derive the word ‘hermit’, a person alone in the desert. The experience of desert involves the experience of abandonment to the place where the demons breed and where God is absent (Chryssavgis, 2003 pp3, 33; Lane, 1998 p20).

Faced with a new terrain alone and, with inner and outer difficulties to cope with the choice that leads to survival is that of embracing the desert. To go through the desert experience involuntarily can be both overwhelming and crushing, but to undergo it voluntarily can prove both constructive and liberating. The desert must be embraced since pursuing addictions or attachments will delay the utter loneliness and the inner fearfulness of the desert experience (Chryssavgis, 2003 p36).

Embracing the desert is acknowledging the need to survive brought about by the physical and psychological vulnerability of being alone in a barren landscape, be it a real or metaphorical. There is nowhere to hide nor any room for lying or deceit in the desert of adversity if one is to survive and the self is reflected by the desert landscape so that one has to face up to it. Remaining open to the threat that such vulnerability poses, is vital, for certain truths can be learned, it seems, only as one is sufficiently emptied, frightened, or confused and this takes one to the second movement of the resilience process of the metaphor (Chryssavgis, 2003 p34; Lane, 1998 p19).

Encountering the self and God so as to be strengthened comes from recognising that one’s vulnerable self can be an experience of integration and growing in wholeness. The desert encounter is of ‘the self with itself, the self with the other

self and the self with the unknowable Transcendent Other', since the desert is a primordial place in discourse and experience where humans are renewed and transformed (Jasper, 2004 xiii–xiv). Many people seek an experience of adversity through desert spirituality as necessary in order for human beings to cross the abyss that separates them from themselves (Merton, 1961 p11). For those who choose the desert in order to grow in holiness the aim is expressed as seeking to be stripped of self, be purged by its relentless deprivation of everything once considered important, and to experience a purging that demands a deep sense of relinquishment (Lane, 1998 p6). Contemporary writers on spirituality and desert Christianity directly address the desert as a metaphor of the place where you come through transformed, finding strength having encountered God (Louth, 2003 p2; Nouwen, 1981 p20). This aspect of the desert experience does not lend itself to description in the same way that the experience of adversity does. Louth aligns desert with other symbols of profound negation such as the tomb, hell and night, all of which are 'capable of transformation by the power of God' (Louth, 2003 p41). The metaphor of the desert has had a significant and continuous role in the history of Christian mysticism with Western mystics using the metaphor of the desert to describe the impossible, that is, God and their encounter with God (McGinn, 1994 p156).

The third movement of the desert metaphor I am arguing in this research, is that of altruistic living and pastoral responsibility. It is hinted at in resilience literature and present in the biblical desert narratives. We will find it described in the texts of the desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries particularly in the relationship between elder and disciple and its dynamics explored in the pastoral care of the wounded healer.

The themes of the desert as metaphor are well-known in pastoral literature: Nouwen, for example, describes three movements of reaching out to the

innermost self, to fellow human beings and to God. They are movements from loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality and illusion to prayer (Nouwen, 1980 p38). These themes however are not expressed as a process of strengthening for a pastor or one who seeks pastoral care, an understanding which is gained by conversation with resilience literature.

The metaphor of desert in Egyptian monasticism

In the fourth century thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people fled to the Egyptian desert and later to the desert south of Palestine so that Athanasius could claim by 357 in *The Life of Anthony* that 'the desert had been made into a city' (Athanasius, 1980 p43, paragraph 14). It was the widespread success of Athanasius' work, in particular, because it drew on the powerful metaphor of desert, that encouraged the movement to the desert (Goehring, 1993 p282). By the year 400 nearly five thousand monks were said to be settled in Nitria alone and many thousands were scattered up and down the length of the Nile and even in the bleak, waterless mountains of the Red Sea. By the mid-fourth century Egyptian Christianity had earned international fame with the writings and example of the desert Christians influencing monastic life for centuries, both in the Greek East and in the Latin West and continuing to remain popular in contemporary spirituality (Brown, 1988 p215; Driver, 2002 p21; Harmless, 2004 p17; Louth, 2003 p1).

The ascetic life in the desert, it was generally accepted, became a kind of substitute for martyrdom, replacing the expectation of martyrdom, since being prepared to die as a martyr for Christ had become outdated (Chryssavgis p17; Williams, 1990 p94). However, more recent scholarship points to a much less clear picture. One of the reasons for flights to the desert was that it provided a demanding Christian witness. As the Emperor and the Roman Empire had become Christian it was no longer a risk to be a Christian. Christianity became a

respectable way of life and with new relationships being forged with the authorities, complacency was in danger of setting in. Social and political conformity became the norm for Christians who began to feel at home in the world. The desert provided a shelter from the distractions of daily life and provided the only place where demons could be confronted with a fixed mind and clarity of purpose in a place of stability and tranquillity (Driver, 2002 p21; Elm, 1994 p383; Louth, 2003 p45).

There is also evidence, however, that many fled to the desert in order to avoid persecution, making the desert a refuge from, as well as a place of, adversity (Goehring, 1999 p16) and that the ascetic life was lived out in many places other than the desert itself. Though the history of Christian monasticism has tended to point to Egyptian monasticism having two forms, evidence increasingly points to the diversity of ascetic paths available in early Christian Egypt and suggests that interaction across such paths was more common than previously thought (Goehring, 1999 p198). The first form, the anchoritic or hermit life was isolated and austere in the area of Lower Egypt, after the model of St Anthony the Great, with men and women leaving human society and seeking wisdom of an amma or abba. Another form, the cenobitic or communal type of monasticism of Upper Egypt consisted of communities who prayed and worked together. The federation of monasteries, for example, founded and led by Pachomius saw the ideal of the monk as a brother who lives in community with the sense of mutual support and responsibility as key. These ascetics did not live in isolation from the community, however, for kinship, property, the deployment of labour and exchange of goods along with links with the church provided emotional connections as well as economic dependence (Rousseau, 1985 p119, 173; Goehring, 1999 p26).

There were, however, also urban monks or apotaktikoi (those who renounce) who functioned in a wide variety of circumstances and played an active role in villages and towns. Urban monks retained ties with churches and some had important roles in neighbouring towns. The sources reveal their presence within towns and villages and indeed *The Life of Anthony* shows him in the full range of ascetic roles: close to his native village, at the tombs, in the fortress, and then in the desert. The anchoretic and cenobitic monks, as well as the apotaktikoi, were all engaged in economic activity such as hiring themselves out at harvest, and weaving baskets and groups (Driver, 2002 p23, 30; Goehring, 1993 p286; Goehring, 1999 p51). Organized ascetic communities also emerged for women, some of which involved women leaving their families and some which were a transformed family which became an ascetic household and accepted nonrelated members (Elm, 1994 p374).

Thus the popular understanding that Egyptian monasticism consisted of Anthony the Great going into the desert to lead the life of a hermit where thousands flocked to him, living as hermits and in communities, is a myth. Goehring argues that before the literature of ascetic practice could appear the movement had to develop historically to the point where it supplied the basic metaphor on which the myth of the desert could be built. Christians had renounced family, sex, or property, business and so on within the home, the village and the city, but it was only when ascetic practice began to express renunciation spatially, that is by living in the desert, that the literature emerged and established the desert hermit as the literary icon of early Egyptian monasticism. The concepts of withdrawal (*anachoresis*) and renunciation (*apotaxis*) interacted with the metaphorical use of the desert, as opposed to the city, in such a way as to import a distinct spatial dimension to them. The power of the desert myth, he argues, is such that though the statistics may indicate that asceticism was not originally and predominately a desert phenomenon, people

are moved by it and the metaphor's strength lies in the way in which it divides the city from the desert without grey zones or suburbs. The city is falsehood, the product of human achievement and a locus of human habitation and the desert is truth, a place where ascetics forge their identity as citizens of heaven (Goehring, 1993 pp281–5).

This reading of the desert metaphor as that which drew people to the desert itself and to the practices and wisdom which came from it emphasizes the spatial nature of the desert landscape as differentiated from other landscapes and providing the adverse conditions necessary for withdrawal and renunciation. The draw of the desert as landscape and metaphor is an expression of the first movement of the desert metaphor. The texts emerging from the desert and explored in the next chapter draw us further into the resilience process by affirming each of the three movements of the metaphor.

Summary

That the resilience process involves a journey from adversity to altruism through attention to struggle, self and relationships is affirmed by the biblical tradition. In attending to the question of how pastoral care can strengthen people in adversity, the Hagar narrative draws attention to the reality of the need for inner strengthening in chronic situations of adversity. The Moses narrative recognizes the importance of having 'been there' recognized by those who would accept pastoral ministry. Both narratives show clearly the experience of God revealed – for Hagar in extreme adversity and for Moses in a time of quiet. Personal affirmation and direction are part of the encounter, but in a way which respects autonomy, does not require passive obedience and opens up a vision of a future which includes responsibility for the welfare of others. Biblical scholarship and commentary itself has begun to include the experiences of those traditionally not given a voice and the emphasis has

shifted from obedience to autonomy. This shift indicates that Christian theology has already begun to respond to the criticisms from resilience literature of the impact of religious belief on the ability of people to be strengthened in adversity.

Through the experience of the desert as a landscape and a metaphor, in the past and today, the three aspects of the resilience process are revealed. Metaphors enable us to structure our experience so that we can make sense of them. The metaphor of the desert provides a structure for the experience of adversity, of encounter with oneself and with God and of strengthening in the direction of altruism.

Early Egyptian monasticism has been commonly understood to have been founded by Anthony the Great as a desert movement. Although the scholarship does not support such a view it is the strength of the desert metaphor which played a role in increasing vocations to desert monasticism and securing the image of the desert in Christian spirituality.

As we have seen, the metaphor's most vivid and common use is that of describing adversity, particularly the way in which adversity marks a distinctive boundary to be crossed, different from what has gone before. The experience of strengthening in the desert is a natural extension of the metaphor and though it is difficult to describe the attempt to do so is a recurring preoccupation of Christian spirituality. The third movement of the metaphor: altruism and pastoral responsibility as a means of healing and growth are as yet unexplored, apart from in this research.

Chapter 4

Beyond Altruism: Desert Christians and a programme for growth

Conversation with the practices and wisdom of the Desert Christians

The metaphor of the desert has been influential in Christian spirituality from the very beginning of monasticism with the biblical tradition, the landscape and the metaphor combining to provide a resilience process which addresses the role of struggle, the self and relationships in the journey from adversity to altruism.

The practices and wisdom that emerged from the desert Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries affirm the ways in which the experience of the desert can enable people to be strengthened with the three movements of the desert metaphor being addressed. This chapter draws on *The Alphabetical Sayings* to provide insight into embracing the desert, in particular, and then to the *Institutes* and the *Conferences* of John Cassian to address the second and third movements of the metaphor, those of encountering the self and God and altruism and pastoral responsibility. Indeed Cassian's programme for human growth, through the call to the monastic life, goes beyond altruism and pastoral responsibility by providing a theological vision to resource the inner life, and to bring healing.

The emphases in the monastic tradition as revealed in these early texts, read against the findings of resilience literature, provide important readjustments to some common assumptions about the desert tradition – the struggle with the adversity of asceticism and self-discipline we find provides for growth and healing, not a self-denial which crushes the human spirit. The self, we find, is not to be passively obedient and humble and thus vulnerable to abuse, rather there is an emphasis on guarding and resourcing an inner life. Flight from

relationships that are destructive is commended, but not a shunning of all relationships. Indeed the relationship with the elder is vital for a strengthening in adversity to enable trust, rather than a destructive self reliance.

The Alphabetical Sayings

Two of the three major sources of anchorite Egyptian monasticism – *The Life of Anthony* and the *History of the Monks of Egypt* – were produced by outsiders who observed the ascetic tradition of the desert. The different collections of anecdotes about early Christian ascetics called *Alphabetical Sayings*, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or *Sayings of the Fathers* come from within it and are therefore particularly appropriate to study in order to gain a sense of the practices of desert Christianity. The collections were undoubtedly one of the most widespread texts in late antiquity and in the Middle Ages both in East and West having been edited and copied during the earliest stages of the monastic movements and soon translated and spread widely. The *Sayings* were collected from monastic leaders active from the 330s to the 460s though the text probably comes from the late fifth or early sixth century (Ronnegard, 2010 p1; Harmless, 2004 pp19). Monks turned to them as well as to *The Life of Anthony* for the stories and teaching to help make sense of their experiences of temptation, anxiety and sadness (Brakke, 2006 p241). Described as ‘the last and one of the greatest products of the Wisdom Literature of the ancient near East’ the *Sayings* are records of practical advice given by desert elders –127 abbas and 3 ammas – with 1,202 sayings in all coming out of a long life of experience in monastic and ascetic discipline in the desert (Brown, 1993 p82). Some claim that the sayings are the most primitive of authentic evidence we have of the practices, teachings, lives and personalities of the desert mothers and fathers of the fourth and early fifth centuries. Most scholars, however, argue that though some material may go back to that time and be a relatively faithful transmission of their sayings,

some may be later constructs whereby the tradition could legitimate its ideals (Ronnegard, 2010 p12; Goehring, 1999 p197).

The Desert Christians were sought out by many pilgrims who brought back stories which then shaped the spirituality of those to whom they returned. The landscape and the metaphor played a significant role in how the tradition emerged. Travel writers demarcated and recast the desert as the biblical land where Paradise was restored and gospel miracles could find their full realisation (Frank, 2000 p76). Since the desert Christians lived on the geographical and social edge of society they became valued as mediators. Peter Brown has shown how the holy man of late antiquity functioned on the edges of society, serving as mediator of conflict in Greco Roman world where classical institutions had all been seriously eroded. High taxation, economic insecurity, and friction among local farmers led people increasingly to look to the desert monk for the kind of even-handed guidance which was only possible from one wholly disengaged from the world. The very act of radical disengagement or *anachoresis* put the monk or nun in a place of being 'dead' to human motivation and rankle, and able to offer insights with a clarity found nowhere else (Brown, 1982 p130–52; Lane, 1998 p163).

The *Sayings* represent a type of ascetic formation built around an anchorite guide-disciple relationship which, since no comparable collection exists from asceticism, Goehring concludes indicates that the desert location itself gave impetus to that particular type of ascetic formation built around the spoken and eventually written words of the guides, exemplified by use of the phrase 'Give me a word.' The desert, however, was considered to produce healers rather than teachers or thinkers. The *Sayings* are not always consistent with one another and they always need to be read within the context in which they were

given – the life-giving relationship between an elder and a disciple (Goehring, 1993 p294; Chryssavgis p15, 76; Ward 1975, Foreword).

Since the early desert Christians did not consider themselves to be teachers *The Sayings* do not provide a systematic programme for growth in holiness or for resilience. In reading *The Sayings* through the eyes of struggle, self and relationships their practical advice and implicit theology support the emphases presented by resilience literature providing an outworking of the first movement of embracing the desert in the metaphor. The advice to flee, sit, guard the inner life and to practice asceticism indicate the initial movement of embracing the desert, which may well be a place of refuge as well as one of adversity.

Struggle

In addressing struggle as a theme I shall focus on the themes of growth and demons leaving the self-discipline of asceticism to the section on self. The theme of growth through conflict enjoyed great prominence in the early monastic world, with the purpose of the monastic life as providing a stable geographical and psychological local where the important battles could be fought (Williams, 1990 p96). Struggle was the motif for both the red martyrs who died and the white martyrs who died to self, with the image of the athlete engaged in competitive struggle to gain self-mastery in order to fight the enemies of Christ being inspirational (Louth, 2003 p47–8). Highly motivated Christians, they were ‘fighters, not escapees, pilgrims, not tourists’ (Williams, 2003 p9).

Struggle was sought because it was considered to be a spur to growth, and necessary for salvation. It was often described in the language of temptation: Amma Theodora encouraged disciples to seek adversity by saying: ‘Let us strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before

the winter storms cannot bear fruit, so it is with us; this present age is a storm and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven' (Theodora 2). St Anthony said: 'Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.' He even added, 'Without temptation no one can be saved' (Anthony 5).

Where life became easy for the desert Christians more adversity was sought not for its own sake but in order to grow in faith and maturity which would bring an inner peace: 'Abba Poemen also said that Abba Isidore, the priest of Scetis, spoke to the people one day saying, "Brothers, is it not in order to endure affliction that we have come to this place? But now there is no affliction for us here. So I am getting my sheepskin ready to go where there is some affliction and there I shall find peace"' (Poemen 44).

The battle for the monks and nuns was with demons and struggle involved both the body – with the monk or nun following the self-discipline of asceticism – and with the mind. Demons and angels, invisible seducers or helpers, were a pervasive presence in the world of the desert Christians. The demon was a fearsome enemy that could appear as a wild animal or even an angel. Understood psychoanalytically, they can be understood as products of repression, projection and persistent anxieties so that the appearance of demons enabled monks to represent the 'other' and so to renounce aspects of themselves (Brakke, 2006 p7).

In the writings of the desert, demons and *logosmoi* were used almost synonymously, indicating a metaphorical use of the term. *Logosmoi* are destructive trains of thought: strings of considerations that invaded the heart, occluding, dividing and destroying any chance of single hearted devotion to or

search for God (Louth, 2003 p50). Piety and firm resolve arose into consciousness because of the soul's willingness to cooperate with angelic guides. Consenting to evil thoughts implied a decision to collaborate with demons so a train of thought could rarely be seen as neutral. Collaboration with evil trains of thought was a giving oneself over (on more levels of the self than the conscious person) to the powers of numbness lurking in the universe (Brown, 1988 p166–7). 'Abba Anoub asked Abba Poemen about the impure thoughts which the heart of man brings forth and about vain desires. Abba Poemen said to him, "Is the axe any use without someone to cut with it? (Is.10.15) If you do not make use of these thoughts, they will be ineffectual too"' (Poemen 15).

The Sayings reveal the importance of struggle and its need for growth and salvation. Struggle takes place in the body and mind. The struggle with negative conditioning attested to by resilience literature and the image of sirens used by Higgins, is not unlike that of demons and logosmoi, whose lure has to be resisted in order not to be drawn back into destructive patterns of behaving and relating.

Self

Themes pertinent to the self which emerge as advice to disciples surround putting energy into growth that will involve radical change. It means fleeing, sitting and guarding, directing energy within, after which strengthening and growth can occur through asceticism.

Thomas Merton describes the salvation sought by those who fled to the desert as a becoming of their true selves, unfettered by the constraints of social conformity, the aim being to have 'a clear unobstructed vision of the true state of affairs, an intuitive grasp of one's own inner reality as anchored, or rather

lost, in God through Christ,' the fruit of which is *quies*, or rest (Merton, 1961 p8). The monk was to return to his spiritual essence of becoming a truly integrated personality, a 'single one' (Brakke, 2006 p6). To encounter the self involved fleeing from others to focus on growth: 'Abba Isaiah questioned Abba Macarius saying, "Give me a word." The old man said to him, "Flee from men," Abba Isaiah said to him, "What does it mean to flee from men?" The old man said, "It means to sit in your cell and weep for your sins"' (Macarius the Great 27). Flight could be taken on in stages, or as the circumstances of their lives permitted it. For Abba Arsenius 'having withdrawn to the solitary life he made the same prayer again and heard a voice saying to him, "Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the source of sinlessness" ' (Arsenius 2).

Though entering the desert meant fleeing from a previous life, it did not mean running away from the self but facing the self (Ryrie, 2011 p120). The desert was both a refuge and a place of adversity where the monk or nun encountered themselves. This encounter with the self involved staying put, attending to the self and enduring emotional pain: 'A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything"' (Moses 6). Amma Syncletia recommended that people did not constantly move around and instead attended to whatever had brought them to the desert to work on: 'If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another' (Syncletia 6).

Guarding the inner life is an important feature of desert spirituality. A focus on anything else but one's own salvation can deplete the energy needed for growth: 'Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart,' said

Abba Poemen (Poemen 80). This precludes directing attention towards others by comparing yourself with them or seeking to correct them: 'A brother who shared a lodging with other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, "What should I do?" The old man replied, "Keep silence and do not compare yourself with others" (Bessarion 10). Abba Macarius said, "If you reprove someone, you yourself get carried away by anger and you are satisfying your own passion; do not lose yourself, therefore, in order to save another" ' (Macarius the Great 17). Non judgement is a strategy for guarding and healing. Abba Poemen said that Abba Paphnutius used to say, 'During the whole lifetime of the old men, I used to go to see them twice a month, although it was a distance of 12 miles. I told them each of my thoughts and they never answered me anything but this, "Wherever you go, do not judge yourself and you will be at peace"' (Paphnutius 3).

Refusing to compare oneself with others and not judging enables energy to be directed towards growth. The *Sayings* are not theological treatises and rarely mention prayer. The life of the ascetic, however, was sustained by resourcing the inner life through regulating thoughts and actions. Desert Christians sought to maintain a constant sense of the divine presence in a meditative state which was nourished by prayer, manual labour, fasting and psalmody. Egyptian monasticism practised a continuous psalmody, interspersed with prayer and sustained for extended periods of time in an effort to maintain a state of meditation (McKinnon, 1994 p506–7). Ascetic practices helped guard the inner life for 'fasting assists mental alertness and prayer acts as an integrating process' (Storr, 1988 pxiv): 'A brother asked Abba Tithoes, "How should I guard my heart?" The old man said to him, "How can we guard our hearts when our mouths and stomachs are open?" ' (Tithoes 3).

The desert Christians exercised self-discipline by ascetical practices which at first restored the body to health and then kept the body in such a state as to enable the disciple to work on the inner person. Self-control via ascetical practices was to lead to self-awareness: 'Someone asked Abba Agathon, "Which is better, bodily asceticism or interior vigilance?" The old man replied, "Man is like a tree, bodily asceticism is the foliage, the interior vigilance the fruit. According to that which is written 'Every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire.' [Matthew 3:10] It is clear that all our care should be directed towards the fruit, that is to say, guard the spirit, but it needs the protection and the embellishment of the foliage, which is bodily asceticism" ' (Agathon 8). Contemporary understandings of fasting recognize that the practice enables a person to focus within and rather than trying to escape the body it encourages a person to inhabit their body. Fasting encourages a person to really hear, and respond, to the self, by consciously working with the fears raised by fasting by examining their roots (Buhner, 2003 p15, 50, 55).

The self-discipline of asceticism did not indicate neglecting or torturing the self. St Anthony having been alone and an ascetic for twenty years emerged in glowing health (Athanasius, 1980 p42 paragraph 14). St Anthony allowed for relaxation and warned of the dangers of too strict a regime: 'A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren the old man said to him, "Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it." So he did. The old man then said, "Shoot another,'" and he did so. Then the old man said, "Shoot yet again," and the hunter replied "If I bend my bow so much I will break it." Then the old man said to him, "It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs." When he

heard his words the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened' (Anthony 13).

Silence and solitude are also recommended ascetical practices which direct energy within. Refraining from speech enables the monk or nun to attend to the inner self. It was said of Abba Agathon that for three years he lived with a stone in his mouth, until he had learnt to keep silence (Agathon 15) and 'The victory over all the afflictions that befall you, is, to keep silence' (Poemen 37). For St Anthony the hardest work in self-knowledge was done alone (Stewart, 1990 p28). Abba Moses said, 'The man who flees and lives in solitude is like a bunch of grapes ripened by the sun, but he who remains amongst is like an unripe grape' (Moses 7).

The focus on asceticism to modern ears can sound like a life at odds with building resilience. *The Sayings*, however, promote a life which enables a person to flee to the desert and from previous ways of living, sit with what is painful and guard what is life-giving in a way that demands self-discipline. The purpose was not personal growth, of course, but God and the way to God was love. Charity, Ward argues, was the pivot of all monastic endeavour and the test of their way of life as the sayings about desert hospitality attest. The ascetical practices were only a means of loving God. The desert Christians went without sleep because they were watching for God; they did not speak because they were listening to God; they fasted because they were fed by the word of God (Ward, 1975 foreword).

Radical change was a key feature – from the outside in. The desert 'was not a private therapeutic place but a place for conversion' for they believed that their own salvation through a life of inner transformation was connected to the

salvation of the world (Nouwen, 1981 p26–8). The desert Christians held the belief that ‘change occurs through silence not war, that inaction may be the most powerful source of action and that productivity may be measured by obscurity even invisibility’ (Chryssavgis, 2003 pxvii, 18–19). The experience of vulnerability and transformation were radical: Abba Alonius said, ‘If I had not destroyed myself completely, I should not have been able to rebuild and shape myself again’ (Alonius 2). Louth observes that outgoing activity is not necessarily loving, but depends on the motive, for a person can only go out in love from an inwardness that is capable of stillness, of attention, or hearing and perceiving the other’s need (Louth, 2003 p57).

Relationships

Desert Christians fled the world and the relationships that went with living in the world. Fleeing from the world and for the most part from family, can give the sense that for the desert Christians, relationships were to be shunned. However, the variety of lives that we now know ascetics of the time led – at home and in towns – as well as in the desert reveals a metaphorical dimension to flight. The desert Christians provide a model of healthy relating shown in the advice to flee from relationships as well as the nature of the relationship between the elder and the disciple.

As we have seen, *The Sayings* recognize the destructive possibilities in human relationships and so the need to flee. They also recognize the need to attend to authentic relationships for well being: ‘Restrain yourself from affection towards many people, for fear lest your spirit be distracted, so that your interior peace may not be disturbed’ (Evagrius 2). Relationships were valued in the desert. Indeed, ‘Our life and our death is with our neighbour. If we win our brother, we win God. If we cause our brother to stumble, we have sinned against Christ’ (Anthony 9). Though he or she fled to the desert, the disciple did not enter the

desert alone and could not grow towards perfection alone (Louth, 2003 p59; Ryrie, 2011, p137; Stewart, 1990 p30).

Relationships with other people were necessary not least because of the difficulties of surviving in the desert and thus there was need of others. As Brown has shown, rather than being formed by the unceasing vigilance of his mind alone, as had been the case in pagan circles, the monk's life was determined by the rhythms of the body and the concrete social relations that reflected continued economic dependence on the settled world for food. These as well as the day to day collaboration with fellow ascetics in shared rhythms of labour and mutual exhortation in the monasteries slowly changed his personality (Brown, 1988 p237).

The disciple in the desert always had a relationship with an elder, due in part to the fundamentally oral nature of the desert communities and because it was an enterprise not to be undertaken alone since the beginner did not possess the discernment necessary to assess his progress (Driver, 2002 p38). Jean-Claude Guy has identified three principal features of the monastic education in the Egyptian desert. These are the need for an elder in the formation of the beginner, for an apprenticeship based on experience and for the exposure of one's thoughts to the elder. The basis of the teaching relationship was absolute obedience owed by the disciple to the elder. The instruction was highly personal with advice varying according to the needs of the disciple. The disciple had to have complete trust and the elder had to use the gift of spiritual discernment to adapt his advice to the needs and capacities of the disciple (see Guy, 1974). The practice of manifesting one's thoughts to the elder was necessary because the disciple could only gradually learn to discern his own thoughts so that self-direction indicated self-deception and a temptation to self-reliance. It was not the verdict of the elder but the experience of opening the

heart which could break the illusion of self-sufficiency and was an indication of growth in humility which is seeing the self as God sees (Stewart, 1990 p30–32, Driver, 2002 p65): A brother asked Abba Poemen, ‘Why should I not be free to do without manifesting my thoughts to the old men?’ The old man replied, ‘Abba John the Dwarf said, “The enemy rejoices over nothing so much as over those who do not manifest their thoughts” ‘ (Poemen 101).

The monks were confident enough in God’s mercy, working through the elder, to turn the soul inside out without cleaning it all up beforehand. Bringing thoughts into the arena of truth prevented them from having a chance to lodge themselves into a chamber of the inner self and grow twisted and perverse. Demons were shown to have only illusory power which manifesting thoughts exposed. The abba or amma, who provided a role model of living the desert way and required the disciple to follow this way. When asked for ‘a word’ it was not a theological explanation, counselling, nor a conversation in which one could argue a point that was asked for. The word was part of a relationship, crafted and individually tailored to give life to the disciple and obedience was demanded. A monk or nun had only one abba, and did not continually discuss his or her spiritual state. Non judgement and humility characterized the relationship in both directions, not inviting a soft love, but a relating with discernment for oneself and for them (Stewart, 1990 p26).

The Sayings do not provide a programme or recommend a process of strengthening and growth, but do reveal the way in which adversity in the desert drives the disciple inward in order to enable encounter with the self and with God, through the practice of fleeing, sitting, guarding and asceticism. This embrace of the desert resonates with the self-awareness and motivation needed for resilience building when adversity strikes, and the role of the inner life, self-discipline and seeking healthy and supportive relationships.

John Cassian

John Cassian 'carried forward, developed, interpreted and transposed the ways of the desert' in the *Institutes* and *Conferences* in order to convey the wisdom of the desert to monks in Gaul forming new communities (Ryrie, 2011, p170). His writings provide a model of resilient growth and living emerging from life in the desert, but applied to Cassian's own context and with the Christian vision made explicit. Thus he uses the desert as a metaphor for the way in which the monastic life enables growth. As such they provide a breadth and depth beyond the immediacy of the *Alphabetical Sayings*. Cassian's programme focuses on what this research describes as the second and third movements of the desert experience, that of the encounter with oneself and God, and living altruistically. His psychological astuteness and ability to describe the inner dynamics and direction of the journey of growth in love provide a valuable contribution to the desert metaphor as a resilience process.

John Cassian (360–435) left his native land of Romanicia in his twenties or thirties and, with his friend Germanus, joined a monastery in Bethlehem and visited Egypt twice in order to acquaint himself with the riches of Egyptian monasticism (c.385–399/400). They travelled to Palestine, and entered a monastic community near the cave of the Nativity. Having become dissatisfied with the monks of the region (particularly with their legalism and lack of zeal), they travelled a great deal in Lower Egypt and the Delta and eventually settled at Nitria (according to Cassian's itinerary), gaining the knowledge, insight and experience he was later to use in founding two monasteries in Marseille in Southern Gaul. From Egypt Cassian and Germanus went to Constantinople. John Chrysostom ordained Cassian to the diaconate shortly after the year 400. Cassian went to Rome and was ordained to the priesthood by Pope Innocent I, arriving in Marseille not later than 426. Cassian wrote three treatises: *The*

Institutes (419), *The Conferences* (427), and a Christological work entitled *On the Incarnation of Christ* (by 431), against Nestorius (Driver, 2002 pp12–14).

The work of John Cassian has had a profound affect on the shaping of Christian theology and spirituality. His influence on Western monasticism, and hence by extension on Western civilisation, has been formidable. Important scholarly discoveries of the 20th century have uncovered his carefully concealed dependence on his unnamed master, Evagrius Ponticus, and on their common inspiration, Origen. Cassian resembles his mentors Origen and Evagrius in being denied liturgical and devotional recognition as a saint of the Western Church due to his role in the monastic response to Augustine on grace. Though he is widely read, respected for his psychological realism and his teaching on higher forms of contemplation and prayer, in the minds of some he has remained doctrinally suspect. Modern scholarship, particularly that of Casiday, has sought to re-read Cassian without deferring to the categories of outdated polemics and exonerate him from the accusation of heresy (Casiday, 2007 pp1, 5; Driver, 2002 p11; Stewart, 1998 pp3, 21).²⁰

Space does not allow for a comprehensive presentation of Cassian's theology. It is the attention Cassian gives to the themes of struggle, self and relationships as well as his understanding of the journey of the monk from adversity to altruism and beyond that will provide a focus for this study. Cassian provides a theological resource in which to understand the impact of adversity in the lives of Christians as well as a practical programme so that they may be strengthened, to grow in holiness with the expectation of benefit for themselves

²⁰ Owen Chadwick concluded that on the subject of human dependence on grace Cassian 'still aligned himself with Augustine' and had devised a system that was ethical rather than metaphysical (Chadwick, 1950 p126, 116, 120). Far from being a heretic, Stewart says, Cassian believed that human beings retain some vestige of their creative goodness and can learn to walk again as God intended, teaching the necessity of grace, a grace pervading a creation still rich in possibility (Stewart, 1998 p22, 78).

and for the world. Cassian points beyond altruism to encompass healing and a world without adversity.

For Cassian, the themes of struggle, a resourced and disciplined self and relationships are vital to the process of growth, as they are in the life stories of the resilient. As in resilience literature and in *The Sayings*, we find that struggle must be engaged with in order to focus energy on a single goal – initially of survival – and that the locus of struggle is the inner person where vice is resisted. Cassian provides a vision of what he describes as *purity of heart* to resource an inner life which is also realistic. His model for the relationship between elder and disciple reveals the qualities required for pastoral responsibility. Beyond altruism, Cassian’s vision is of the future where love and peace are complete, personal struggle ceases and since altruism is no longer necessary, the pastor cannot find his or her identity there.

Struggle

Struggle is a key theme in Cassian as an inescapable part of human life and essential for growth. Cassian’s downplaying of miracles and displays of power in his descriptions of desert elders points to his belief that there are no shortcuts via miracles to growth in love (Cassian, 1997 15.II.1–2). Cassian provides three accounts of the way in which adversity motivates growth related to vocation or God’s call. One relates to the beginning of the monastic journey where a person can be called by God through adversity; the second where adversity comes upon a person and the third where adversity is sought via asceticism in order that the struggle will produce growth.

Adversity is the third of the three ways in which a person can be called to God and to growth. In Conference Three, *On the Three Renunciations*, Cassian identifies the three calls. The first is from God directly, such as the call of

Abraham who is told to flee his homeland and family and that of St Anthony who hears the gospel injunction to give all he had to the poor. The second is where one is called through being moved by the teaching and example of others and the third is being called out of need. Being compelled by trials to take up the monastic life, Cassian reports, seems inferior or lukewarm, but it must be voluntary and although it is a shaky start there are those who have had better beginnings and become tepid (Cassian, 1997 3.V.3). Cassian follows his discussion of the three calls with that of the three renunciations which must be pursued with zeal by those seeking the purity of heart that leads to perfection. This is the first movement in the desert metaphor of embracing the desert. These renunciations are: renouncing wealth and the resources of the world; renouncing vice and the affections of soul and body; and calling our mind away from everything that is present and visible and contemplating only what is to come and desiring those things which are invisible (Cassian, 1997 3.VI.3). To respond to a monastic call demands motivation to survive and grow. The contemplation of the invisible calls to mind Frankl's contemplation of the face of the beloved.

When beset by trials, Cassian describes adversity as that which promotes strengthening by the way in which one responds to the adversity. In Conference Six, *On the Slaughter of Some Holy Persons*, Cassian explores trials that come upon a person and the response of someone who is holy. The 'Constancy' which he describes is a means to as well as an expression of the resilience developed by an individual. Good, bad and indifferent experiences come to us and some people will be prone to depression or elation because of them. Cassian recommends knowing what is really good (virtue) and what is really bad (what separates us from God, sin), and thus recognising that most things (such as wealth, power, bodily strength, health, beauty, life, death, poverty, bodily sickness and insults) are indifferent and can go in either direction depending on

the desire and will of the user (Cassian, 1997 6.III.1–2). To explain this, Cassian uses the image of an ambidextrous person, who makes equal use of good and bad experiences and maintains an inner equilibrium. A holy person will always have the right hand of spiritual achievements and the left hand of being involved in the turmoil of trials such as sadness, acedia, irrational mournfulness, the seething emotions of wrath and pride (Cassian, 1997 6.X.1–2).²¹

In Conference Eighteen, *On Kinds of Monks*, Cassian describes patience, the virtue required along with endurance in the face of suffering, as being strengthened at the very moment that it believes itself to be troubled and broken by adversity, and it is sharpened at the very moment that it thinks itself to be blunted (Cassian, 1997 18.XIII.2). There is no place for victory without the adversity of a struggle. Indeed strength is perfected in weakness, he declares quoting St Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9) but not in leisure or pleasure (Cassian, 1997 18.XIII.4–5). Using the image of the bride from Songs of Songs he depicts the left hand of trials as under her head and the right of protection as embracing and holding her (Cassian, 1997 6.X.9). Trials are only beneficial to the extent to which they discipline us for a time, instruct us and make us patient. There are trials that beset human beings at the hands of others and Cassian explores this describing the ability to be holy as dependent on the inner life and strength of the individual. Rains, torments and tempests come on the house built on rock as well as on the house built on sand, but the former suffers no damage and the latter collapses. Cassian uses this parable of Jesus (Matthew 7:2–27) to show that when someone who has suffered mistreatment is inflamed with the fire of anger, it must not be believed that his bitterness at the abuse inflicted on him is

²¹ Space does not permit an exploration of the vice of acedia, traditionally described as sloth, which is a lack of struggle, or motivation especially with regard to self-awareness and care. See Cassian, 2000 10.II–III, VI; Crislip, 2005; Jamison, 2008 p49–64; Lake, 2000 p134; Jehl in Newhauser, 2005 pp455–76; Norris, 2008; Solomon, 2002

the cause of his sin, but rather that it is the manifestation of a hidden weakness. It is not being struck that causes the collapse, but the fact that the house was built on sand (Cassian, 1997 18.XIII.3). The acceptance of weakness and sin as part of human life enables Cassian to observe that it is someone who is weaker, for whatever reason, who will collapse under trials rather than someone who should be blamed. In Conference Twenty-Three, *On Sinfulness*, Cassian describes the interior struggle as one where a person growing in holiness becomes more aware of the inescapable sinfulness of the human condition.

Struggle brings growth in the form of pursuing virtue and struggling against vice. The overarching metaphor for struggle is an image of the athlete drawn from St Paul in whom Cassian grounds much of his theology, particularly his goal orientation and asceticism (1 Corinthians 9:26–7, Philemon 3:13–14; Harmless 2004 p385). The last eight of the twelve books of *The Institutes*, the full title of which is *The Institutes of the Cenobites, and the Remedies for the Eight Principal Vices*, as well as Conference Five, are devoted to a consideration of the eight vices.

It was Evagrius' *logismoi* which were transmitted to the West by Cassian as the series of eight vices. It was in the work of Pope Gregory the Great (d604) that they became the seven capital vices, which were later described in the penitential theology of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215/16) as seven deadly sins.²² For Gregory, having absorbed Augustine's thought, it was the insolent will defying authority that was the essence of sin and so what began as thoughts or demons came to be understood as sins (Newhauser, 2005 ppx,xiv).²³

²² Gregory eliminated vainglory and acedia because of their respective similarities to pride and sadness and he added envy. The seven heavenly virtues with which to counteract them are the cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude and the theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

²³ See Bloomfield, 1952 for the comprehensive guide in modern scholarship and Newhauser, 2005 for a more recent re-examination.

Cassian examined the inner workings of human nature and the hidden places of the soul in his exploration of vices with an understanding of sin as desire unchecked by discretion and happening involuntarily so that vice is not sin, but a state of mind and heart (Ryrie, 2011 p166). This did not mean the monk lost his identity as a combatant but instead increasingly became an introspective penitent in need of an elder to discern the evil thoughts lodged in the hiding places and caves of the heart (Brakke, 2006 p246). Each book of the *Institutes* introduces a vice as a struggle or a conflict: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory and pride with the remedies for uprooting them. The order of battle for Cassian is from the most carnal of the vices to the most spiritual with gluttony taking first place and pride last, described as the most spiritual, an inwardly nourished vice. The spirit of fornication, discussed in book six, is a struggle on the two fronts of body and mind and is overcome by fasting and persevering prayer.

The fifth book of the *Institutes* is devoted to the spirit of gluttony, which is the first vice, and the remedy for it is fasting. Food was the preoccupation of monastic life (Cassian, 1997 p432). Any Egyptian of the fourth century had no doubt that the population of the land lived in perpetual fear of starvation and for the monk it was the struggle for food that tied him to his body, and food in the form of bread, tied him to human society. The need for food, earned by hard work meant that the monk was tied to the shared weaknesses of starving humanity (Brown, 1988 p218–9). A resilience reading of the practice of fasting in Cassian reveals that it is in line with the findings that self-discipline is important as is self-awareness. Fasting has been recognized in the great spiritual traditions as increasing sensitivity to the non material world, promoting mental alertness, enhancing personal experience of the sacredness of the self and the universe and helping the person fasting to regain orientation and purpose and renew energy levels (Buhner, 2003 p2; see Scrivner, 2007). In

Cassian the practice of fasting enables resilience to be built because it demands self-discipline. The discipline is not to be harsh, however, relaxation from it is needed. The purpose of fasting is love and restoration of physical humanity, and so the pattern and amount of food eaten needs to take into consideration, the strength of an individual's body, the importance of celebration and the needs of hospitality.

Rather than fasting to denigrate the body Brown has argued that the inspiration of the myth of Paradise with a restored physical humanity was what motivated the ascetics so that they worked towards the eventual glorious transformation of their bodies on the day of Resurrection. The widely held belief that greed was the first sin of Adam and Eve, coupled with the social implications of greed in the face of the reality of starvation meant that fasting for Lent and fasting heroically by living in the desert was to relive Adam's first temptation and to overcome. The ascetics of late antiquity viewed the body as an 'autarkic' system where the body could run on its own heat in a self-sustaining system with little nourishment needed, as Adam and Eve's had before the Fall. Unnecessary food showed itself in appetite, anger and sexual urge and so the ascetic had to remake his body slowly, as shown when St Anthony emerged from the fort. Deep serenity was seen as a physical by product of a spiritual state. Hard physical work, sleepless nights and fasting especially in young monks were part of what Brown describes as a 'Cold Turkey Treatment' by which excessive dependence on food and sexual urges were reduced (Brown, 1988 pp221-4).

Gluttony is the first vice and fasting is the foundational ascetical practice, for as Cassian comments, you can never be confident of a person's ability to struggle against stronger adversaries if you see him overcome by smaller and weaker ones in a less strenuous conflict (Cassian, 2000 5.XI.1). The monk, like an athlete or soldier, is able to take on further and more difficult contests having been

strengthened by successive triumphs and he will need to since the enemy will arise once he has subjected and conquered the flesh (Cassian, 2000 5.XIX.1). To conquer gluttony by fasting stands a monk in good stead to conquer harmful foods of the mind such as anger, envy or vainglory (Cassian, 2000 5.XXI.2). Cassian explores the vice of gluttony describing it as having three forms. The three types of gluttony are anticipating food before the time of the meal, rejoicing only in filling the belly and being delighted by more refined and delicate foods (Cassian, 2000 5.XXII.1).

In his discussion of gluttony Cassian begins by declaring that there can be no uniform rule for fasting because not all bodies have the same strength and so the virtue of fasting, unlike other virtues, is not achieved by firmness of mind alone, but depends on what the body is capable of. To approach food with restraint and to keep a modest and reasonable daily fast is much more beneficial than harsh and lengthy fasts, because occasional fasts can destroy steadfastness of mind and because when the body is weak it can emasculate the efficacy of prayer (Cassian, 2000 5.IX). In Conference Two, *On discretion*, fasting is used as an example of where discretion is needed as a regulatory principle to ensure a narrow path, rather than the tendency to extremes. The extreme of fasting, like the extreme of overeating, can deceive or overcome a person (Cassian, 1997 2.XVI.1). Conflict, Cassian says, is beneficial to maintain equilibrium of body and soul, since 'the proper equilibrium which results from the struggle opens up the healthy and temperate path of virtue' but it does compel the practice of discretion (Cassian, 1997 4.XII.5).

Fasting is only a means towards the end of love. In Conference Twenty One, *On Pentecost* Cassian explains that fasting is not an absolute good (Cassian, 1997 21.XIV.7). It can be relaxed and should be at times of physical frailty, when visited by others and at times of celebration. To hold a continual fast is not

devout, but confused and irrational (Cassian, 1997 21.XIV.3–4). Hospitality comes above fasting as a virtue since fasting is voluntary whereas love is a command (Cassian, 2000 5.XXIV, Cassian, 1997 Conf 24. IXX.1).

Self and purity of heart

Although doubt is cast on Cassian's historicity, the true subject of his account of the Egyptian desert is his inner self and in his writing he 'faithfully represented his interior growth and transformation' (Driver, 2002 p6). Cassian's programme for growth is, of course, set in the context of Christian faith and theology with God as the source and end of all things. The programme for growth begins with the desire to respond to a call to seek the kingdom of God by pursuing *purity of heart*. The response to the call as we have seen involves renunciation of the world, beginning with the outer person, where the struggle to discipline the body provides the means to focus on the inner self where vice is overcome and virtue is to be forged. Having embraced the desert struggle, oneself and God can be encountered through seeking purity of heart.

Cassian provides not only the vision for a future in God, but a realistic goal to be getting on with while struggling with living in the world. The distinction he makes is between the *end* and the *goal* of monastic life in order that the monk does not lose heart, but be encouraged to progress. The first of the Conferences – that of Abba Moses – is entitled 'On the goal and end of the monk'. In it, Cassian distinguishes between the ultimate and eternal end of the monastic profession, which is the kingdom of God or heaven, and the goal, which is *purity of heart*. A monk needs a closer target to aim at than heaven which is too far away. Cassian uses images to explain the difference between an end and a goal. A farmer who pursues a good harvest as an end does so by working towards the goal of clearing a field; a businessman who pursues wealth as an

end also needs to consider the means by which he will make money (Cassian, 1997 3.IV.2).

The concept of *purity of heart* in Cassian is not a fixed one and can also be described as holiness, perfection, contemplation, spiritual knowledge and love. Cassian roots his understanding of purity of heart in the Beatitudes where the pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). *Purity of heart* consists of the three aspects of ascetical purification, love and the experience of liberation from sin and tranquillity of heart (Stewart, 1998 p43). Although to gain *purity of heart* all manner of ascetical practices are undertaken such as fasting and keeping vigil, reading and meditating on scripture, they are not ends in themselves (Cassian, 1997 1.II.3). They are for the purpose of love. The experience of deep inner peace due to having crucified all wrongful desires and then having no anxiety of being disturbed by bad thoughts that lead to vice, is the ideal of monastic perfection. For the resilient too, to struggle body and soul, to be liberated from sin, so that one can form loving relationships, free of anxiety and gain inner peace is a goal, though there is no concept of perfection.

Since *purity of heart* is the near and earthly goal that the monk must pursue, Cassian recommends that it must be pursued by the most direct route (Cassian, 1997 1.IV.4). Here Cassian recommends what writers on resilience observe – energy must be put into the call to love, and as a priority. Whatever directs the monk to the goal is to be pursued with all his strength and whatever deters the monk is to be avoided as dangerous and harmful (Cassian, 1997 1.V.3). In fact whatever disturbs the purity and tranquillity of the mind, however useful and necessary it may appear to be must be avoided as harmful (Cassian, 1997 3.VII.4). For Cassian the call of the monk to perfection, to freedom and love through the struggle of self-discipline must come above everything else. This is

particularly so because *purity of heart* is progressive and includes the possibility of diminishment or loss (Cassian, 1997 4.IV.1).

The Benedictine theologian, Columba Stewart describes Cassian as both a visionary and a pragmatist in that his eschatological orientation seeks to enable people to look beyond the mundane tasks and preoccupations of the present life and so prepare them for citizenship of heaven and yet acknowledge the fragmented pressures of the present life (Stewart, 1998 p40). Such acknowledgement of fragmentation is shown by the sense in Cassian (and indeed in his predecessors) that purity is not a trait of the untested where a pristine state must be protected from corruption. It is a trait of human beings who are fully alive despite and because of the scars inevitably left by this life (Stewart, 1998 p42). Stewart argues that all the experiential descriptions of perfection in Cassian suggest a focusing of fragmented energies on what is truly important (Stewart, 1998 p46).

Cassian was optimistic regarding anthropology which is what led him to contribute to the discussion about grace and free will and is why he can set the goal of *purity of heart* as reasonable to ask a monk to pursue. He describes the soul when cleansed from sin and recovering its natural blessing of purity, as a feather with an airy lightness that can be lifted by a breath (Cassian, 2000 9.IV.1–2). In his discussion of the vices in *The Institutes* he is, however, much more pessimistic in tone regarding the ability of human beings to attain virtue. Cassian is a Christian theologian, of course, and integral to his vision for and process of human growth is the grace of God, without which no one can grow, be healed or saved. Grace, he states, assists human effort, protects from

unknown dangers and can overcome our resistance to God (Cassian, 2000 12.XVIII).²⁴

Cassian highlights the danger of confusing ascetical means (and thus human effort) with their theological end, which is achievable only with the constant help of God. He was very much aware that one of the great monastic dangers is focusing too intently on structures and practices, losing sight of both dependence on God and the obligations of charity toward others. In claiming that what he says is based on the experience of monastic elders, their experience of deeds, actions and the power of the Holy Spirit, he states that the experience reveals that a person's own effort will never be sufficient to lay hold of purity and integrity, but needs the compassion and help of God (Cassian, 2000 12.XIII, 12.XV.1).

The image of God that Cassian uses to describe God's involvement in human life is that of a good and careful nurse who carries the baby in her bosom for a long while, supports the young child in order to teach him to walk, catches him as he wavers, picks him up as well as prevents him from falling, but when he is strengthened by adolescence and manhood lays on him burdens and hardships to exercise, rather than oppress him. God carries us in the bosom of his grace,

²⁴ Debates in the early church over grace, free will, and asceticism began in the 420s and continued sporadically for a century until the Council of Orange in 529. The debates were between Augustine of Hippo who fiercely resisted the very positive anthropology of the British monk Pelagius. Pelagius was formally condemned at the Council of Carthage in 418 and then arguments shifted to Augustine's hard line anti-Pelagian doctrines and their relationship to traditional theological anthropology. The problem was particularly acute for monks, whose anthropology, essentially Eastern Christian in inspiration, was more open to natural possibility than Augustine's. Cassian and other monks thought that Augustine's denial of any *initium fidei* (initiative of faith) to human beings and his doctrine of predestination effectively excluded human responsibility from the process of salvation. This made little sense in a monastic context where the interplay of ascetical discipline, prayer and the support of other human beings created the context for growth toward Christian perfectionism. See Conference Thirteen *On Divine Protection*.

helps us as we struggle, hearing our call and not abandoning us and snatching us from danger unbeknown to us (Cassian, 1997 13. XIV.9).

Relationships

Relationships with other Christians and, in particular a trusting and obedient relationship with an elder is vital to growth as *The Sayings* attest. The discipline of asceticism is simply the means to the end of obtaining virtue, particularly that of love, and becoming resilient, that is being strengthened through adversity to love.

As in *The Sayings*, so for Cassian, relationships are the context for human growth, including one's relationship to God. Indeed one of Cassian's difficulties is trying to convey in a written text the desert experience which is so heavily based on supervision, discernment and discourse amongst one's fellows. He attempts this in his writing by encouraging a form of interaction between reader and text that in some ways corresponds to the interaction between the disciple and the elder (Driver, 2002 p6). Relating, however, does not preclude the need for solitude in Cassian. Cassian at first seems to show the solitary life to be superior to the communal but a closer reading of his work indicates that he uses anchorite as a metaphor so that it does not mean a retreat into the desert, but rather a withdrawal into one's true and inner self (Driver, 2002 p101). Harsh words are reserved for those who flee human company to seek perfection when the truth is that they cannot cope with human company: 'Sometimes, when we have been overcome by pride or impatience and are unwilling to correct our unseemly and undisciplined behaviour, we complain that we are in need of solitude, as if we would find the virtue of patience in a place where no one would bother us, and we excuse our negligence and the causes of our agitation by saying that they stem not from our own impatience but from our brother's faults. But, as long as we attribute our own wrongdoing

to other people, we shall never be able to get near to patience and perfection' (Cassian, 2000 8.XVI; Driver, 2002 p94).

Though the struggle is in the inner person the avoidance of the vices and the cultivation of the virtues requires careful relating and reflection on relating between monks. All the vices have implications for relating to other people, from the social implications of gluttony to the destructiveness of fornication or pride in relationships. Conference Eighteen, for example, addresses the control of envy. Conference Sixteen, *On Friendship*, provides a model of authentic relating though it is a discussion of anger that takes up most of the Conference. Cassian declares that there are many kinds of friendship and companionship which bind people together in love, but an indissoluble relationship is based on friends sharing the same desire for perfection and virtue and who seek to avoid anger.

Cassian affirms the importance of the relationship with an elder but also recognizes in Conference Two, *On Discretion*, that not all elders deserve to be trusted. In this he presupposes freedom of choice, while recognising that a disciple had to be sure that the urge to leave arose from a genuine risk of harm rather than the assertion of free will (Gould, 1993 pp73–4). The single virtue that stands out particularly in the fourth book of *The Institutes* is that of obedience to the elder. It features stories of a monk watering a dry stick, throwing away a jar of precious oil and even a father tossing his son into the Nile – all for the sake of obedience to a command of an elder (Cassian, 2000 4.XXIV). These stories dealing with what seems to be blind obedience raise concerns about the possibility of unhealthy and oppressive relating. Obedience and humility are communal virtues, of course, necessary for life in a community and so they came to be given more emphasis (Driver, 2002 p21). The point of obedience, however, was the submission of one's own will, so that that will could become

totally open to God. Brown has argued that it was through dependence on a desert elder that a monk learned to understand his own heart and open his heart to others (Brown, 1988 p228). Cassian describes the monks of Egypt as taught never through a hurtful shame to hide any of their wanton thoughts in their hearts but to reveal them to their elder as soon as they surface, nor to judge them in accordance to their own discretion but to that of the elder's discretion (Cassian, 2000 4.IX). Thus the elder is shown to be trusted to be gentler with a monk than he might be with himself. Indeed Cassian states that everything should be revealed to the elders without embarrassment and from them one may confidently receive both healing for one's wounds and examples for one's way of life (Cassian, 1997 2.XIII.12).

Humility and obedience in relating to the elder were an aspect of trust in the elder's ability to discern and then to assist in growth by encouragement (Louth, 2003 p59). Humility in relationship to others is the source of inner peace, patience and tranquillity. If they proceed from humility they will not need of external protection because they come from within (Cassian, 1997 18.XIII.1). Cassian has a thorough description of humility which he says once acquired leads to an ability to love naturally and without difficulty, rather than act because of the fear of punishment (see Cassian, 2000 4.XXXIX.2-3 for his ten-step guide).

Cassian's model of relationships for Christian living includes the altruistic activities of almsgiving, hospitality and mentoring as an elder, and as such express the third movement of the desert metaphor. The monk had to labour for food, of which he took little, in common and in solidarity with everyone else in frequently famine stricken Egypt, but also because of fasting. Giving the proceeds of work done to charity was part of the monastic way of life. Work, as

well as the need for food maintained the monk's acute dependence on others for survival and a reminder of social ties (Brown, 1988 p218, 227).

Cassian insists that hospitality comes above personal ascetical goals, so that should someone visit a meal must be prepared and eaten with the visitor despite the host having been in a period of fasting (Cassian, 1997 1.XX.4–5, XXIV.13, Cassian, 2000 10.II.4). Altruism in the form of hospitality – that is eating with a visitor and giving them attention – comes above the ascetical practice of fasting, for the purpose of fasting is to gain virtue, shown most clearly in love. As Williams has commented 'the superior, the sick brother, the guest, the pauper are, for the monk, Christ's face turned towards him, claiming and drawing: the face he must learn to reflect' (Williams, 1990 p106). Almsgiving and hospitality, both of which relate to fasting, enable the development of empathy and a decentring of the self.

The Journey from adversity to altruism

As we have seen in resilience literature in the process of growth through adversity altruism emerges. Cassian attends to descriptions of the way healing can be found through helping others. Cassian explores this in a passage on the forgiveness of sins in Conference Twenty, *On repentance and reparation*. Cassian speaks of the fruits of repentance that can expiate sins. The burden of sin can be lifted by a loving disposition, he says, as well as healing found for wounds by the fruit of almsgiving. Changing of behaviour, integral to repentance as a concept, might include helping the downtrodden and defending the poor. Tears enable sins to be forgiven, as well as confession of them. There are many life giving opportunities for mercy so that no one desiring salvation should be broken by despair that he cannot fast, for example, for you can certainly be cleansed by correcting your behaviour (Cassian, 1997 20.VIII.1–6). This description of lifting burdens, healing and tears can find echoes in Higgins's

exploration of the dynamics of healing. Careful interpretation, however, of where sin lies is vital – a discussion of which space here does not allow.

Altruistic activity can take the form of becoming an abba or an amma. This is the natural outcome of the way of life promoted by Cassian, which uses adversity for the purposes of altruism. Mentoring – as an elder – is a key component of Cassian’s model of growth, both for those being guided as well as for the one who responds to the call to be an elder. It is a form of altruistic activity requiring empathy, compassion and discernment. The wise monk is sought out to guide others. Such a ministry of teaching and counsel often becomes part of the vocation even of solitaries. We see this in the life of Anthony, famous as a solitary, but described as often involved with monks and even politics (Athanasius, 1980 p89 paragraph 81). Cassian commends Abba John, in Conference Nineteen, for returning to teach at the cenobium after twenty years of solitude. The desert elder was a witness and encourager who gave very little or no advice. Not a controller, the work of the elder was to assist a person in the opening up themselves to others and to God. The qualities required were of availability and patience, not direction, but being present to or accompanying another person. Desert elders recognized themselves in their disciples who were troubled and they acted out of their experience that compassion in solidarity was the only way forward. Elders were sometimes called healers who were more of a witness or a midwife than an omniscient, self-assured professional. The qualification was the experience of seeing themselves as sinners and accepting that it was only God’s mercy could bring hope and forgiveness, and their own hard work. They were to invite, encourage, be an example themselves and wait (see Guy, 1974; Stewart, 1990 p27, 33, 36; Gould, 1993 pp73–4; Driver, 2002 pp34–5).

Discernment is the key quality of an elder. It is required in order to judge how much adversity will strengthen, rather than crush a person. Cassian prescribes just enough adversity to bring about self-awareness. Discernment, discretion or wisdom is the quality of an elder and is a gift of God's grace sought by the monk with utter attentiveness to self (Cassian, 1997 2.I.4) and obtained by humility (Cassian, 1997 2.X.1). The guidance and counsel of discernment based on knowledge and understanding, are necessary for a person to build an interior dwelling and without it they are like a city broken down and without walls (Cassian, 1997 2.IV.2). In the role of elder we see Cassian recognising not only the place, but also the limits, of adversity in producing growth and the importance of love and wisdom in those who relate to those experiencing adversity.

Beyond altruism

In John Cassian we find a model for human growth which can be born out of adversity and is strengthened by adversity, as long as discretion is brought to bear in seeking adversity for the purposes of growth. This planned growth encompasses altruism as shown in almsgiving, hospitality and mentoring, but goes beyond it. For Cassian, it is not altruism that is the transformative power, but the grace of God. Altruism cannot save the individual nor can it save the world; such salvation is done by what God has done in Christ. Cassian's theology explores the third movement of resilience where a person finds healing through a pastoral relationship.

For Cassian, the human effort made towards the healing of the self by asceticism and of the world by altruism are insufficient to achieve their purpose and will come to an end. Both works of asceticism and of service are provisional though they are essential in the present life. Practical work bears many fruits

but because of such variety in expression it cannot compare to the single focus of contemplation (Cassian, 1997 1.VIII.3).

The process of resilience described in resilience literature ends with the resilient being altruistic people, ones who show compassion, humility and wisdom, but continue to struggle within themselves, for one can never fully heal one's hurts (Higgins, 1994 p245). For Cassian, the practical life will cease after death so that works of mercy though necessary now, he argues, are not essential to human nature and there will be a time beyond them. For Cassian, service of others or ministry, as well as the struggle of asceticism, will end but love or contemplation in purity of heart will remain (Cassian, 1997 1.X.5). Not only does Cassian's model then, take us beyond what the resilience process describes in studies of the resilient, it has implications for those involved in altruistic activity and experiencing healing through it. Implications include a challenge to self-understanding of those in the caring professions both in terms of their own identity of and practice, since altruistic or pastoral work is but a means to an end.

Summary

Christian texts that have emerged from the desert tradition affirm the three movements of the desert metaphor as a resilience process. *The Sayings* particularly address the need to embrace the desert by flight, staying, and guarding. Cassian sets out a programme in which adversity can be the catalyst for the radical change demanded by a monastic call and then be the means by which the inner person can struggle against vice and develop virtue. Cassian's vision of the Kingdom of God and concept of purity of heart enable the monk to encounter themselves and God. Relationships with fellow disciples as well as a trusted elder provide the means for growth. The altruistic activities of almsgiving, hospitality and becoming an elder are an expression of the third

movement of the desert metaphor. Healing and peace, however, are not found in one's identity as an elder or pastor. By a focus on the vision of the contemplation of God, who is love, and declaring works of asceticism and altruism or ministry, as provisional, Cassian challenges Christians not to seek their identity in helping others and the resilient to look beyond altruism as the source of healing.

Chapter 5

Speech and Space: Rowan Williams and resilient believing

Rowan Williams as a conversation partner

Rowan Williams, academic theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury, has been a prolific theological author for over three decades. His writings are various, partly explained by the fact that so much that he has written is occasional and commissioned for a specific audience for a specific event.²⁵ The variety of the writings are an asset for the purposes of this research because they can reveal common ground between early Christian and contemporary theologies of resilience: Williams writes in dialogue with the monastic tradition of the desert, psychotherapy and contemporary understandings of self which he has been able to address not only in academic and professional circles but in the context of spirituality and action. Such a conversation partner is necessary to draw on the richness of the Christian tradition of desert experience and literature of the past and present a coherent contemporary theology of struggle, self and relationships which can contribute to a pastoral theology of resilience.

Williams's contribution to a pastoral theology of resilience is addressing the second and third aspects of the desert metaphor of encounter and strengthening and then altruism and pastoral responsibility. He does this by his exploration of the themes of struggle, self and relationships which are interwoven in his theology as well as by reinterpreting the monastic tradition in his portrayal of the necessity of embodied humanity for salvation. Williams attends to the process of struggling to grow as one which culminates in altruism by pointing to the importance of attention, hesitation and contemplation. He outlines a

²⁵ Of passing interest to this research is that Williams was also asked to write the introduction and profile of the theologian Frances Young in a book entitled *Wilderness* (Sugirtharajah, 2005) and an essay on *Bonhoeffer and the Poets* in a book of essays for the Scottish Bishop Alistair Haggart entitled *Travelling with Resilience* (Templeton, 2002).

means of being strengthened in adversity which is not only personal, but which contributes to the formation of community and society.

Williams often uses the language of speech which can be read as a theme which describes the process of self-awareness and formation beginning with God summoning in creation, the self being formed by conversation and vocation as call. This echoes the language of finding one's voice as part of the process of self-awareness, especially when one has been silenced, as well as that of the 'voice crying in the wilderness' as an summons change and growth, to 'prepare the way of the Lord' (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3). Williams uses the language of space to describe the dynamics of growth. This resonates with the importance of spatial differentiation in the desert metaphor.

Struggle

Struggle as a means of growth is a prominent theme in Rowan Williams's theology. The struggle is not with God. The struggle is with oneself in order to become self-aware and to grow, to deepen and to love. In addressing what Rowan Williams says about the understanding of the place of struggle in strengthening and growth I will focus on three aspects: his reinterpretation of the monastic struggle for contemporary Christians; the struggle and frustrations which heighten self-consciousness particularly in a therapeutic relationship; and the deepening of pain and struggle through trust and obedience which brings a new capacity for love after the pattern of Christ and Christian mystics such as St John of the Cross.

Williams has written on monasticism as an academic theologian and reinterpreted the tradition more popularly for Christian audiences, such as in the lectures he gave in 2001 for the World Community for Christian Meditation

published as *Silence and Honey Cakes*.²⁶ In itself the monastic profession does not achieve anything, Williams argues, but to provide a stable geographical and psychological setting where the important battles may be fought. Growth comes through conflict and to acknowledge such is realistic and a warning against complacency and a static, self-oriented spiritual life, but Williams recognizes the problematic element in describing the Christian life as a battle. An emphasis on effort and vigilance can seem neurotic and lay itself open to a spirituality of the super ego. It is the profound acceptance of failure in so many of the desert Christians that means Williams points to primitive monasticism as being on the side of grace.

The struggle for human beings is with 'the insoluble problem of myself' and it is the 'painful confrontation of inner confusion, the painstaking making space for each other before God' that needs to be addressed. Williams interprets staying in the cell as fundamentally staying in touch with the reality of 'who I am as a limited creature, as someone who is not in control of everything whether inner or outer, as an unfinished being in the hands of the maker.' Sitting in one's cell requires a self-discipline which reveals an understanding that love is not a matter of entitlement – a room of one's own. Instead Williams frames love best for post-modern eyes as 'a room with no view' (Perl, 2005 p356; SHC 2003 p67–8, p86).

The struggle with the self and the death of false images of the self feels like hell most of the time. The monastic tradition uses strong language and the concepts

²⁶ For Williams on struggle I will draw from the following works by him with abbreviations as follows:

WK 1979. *The Wound of Knowledge*. Darton, Longman and Todd.

LI 2000. *Lost icons: reflections on cultural bereavement*. Harrisburg, Pa. ; London, Morehouse

SHC 2003. *Silence and honey cakes: the wisdom of the desert*. Oxford, Lion.

TG 1983. *The Truce of God*. London, Fount.

TT 2007. *Tokens of trust: an introduction to Christian belief*. Norwich, Canterbury.

of dying to self and self-denial need to be understood carefully. Williams describes dying to the self as putting on hold and letting go of one's own perspective for the sake of another, because it is in solidarity with one's neighbour that life is found. Being 'dead to your neighbour' means freeing your neighbour from your judgements and your fantasies and instead loving here and now the person truly present to us in a way that has nothing to do with self aggrandising longings (WK 1989 p8). Attention to one's own turmoil – with the self-awareness and self-worth that is integral to it – is necessary for loving others. Inattention to one's own struggle can block someone else's relation with Christ if one fails to respond to the needs of someone else or is harsh and quick to judge and prescribe.

Self-denial is not a virtue to pursue for its own sake, nor for a competition with others, but a device to aid attentiveness to the self and others. Williams points to the need to hold being strenuous and relaxed in tension, with strenuousness the effort to keep before our eyes the truth of our condition and being relaxed as the knowledge of a mercy that cannot ever be exhausted. It is the varying attitudes of the desert monks and nuns to physical self-denial which points to the fact that different people need different disciplines to keep them attentive (SHC 2003 p37).

The struggle with the self is not only the remit of monastic life. The struggles and frustrations which heighten self-consciousness in ordinary life lead to growth. It is the experience of frustrated desire which Williams identifies as a moment of growth belonging to the essence of development itself. When we experience that there is a gap between desire and reality, what we are and what we want, and we do not just react, we are consolidating the self. When there is a moment of self-questioning and a refusal to evade pain and shock we can bring about soul by the process of attending to the moment, and responding rather

than reacting. Williams describes holding on to the difficulty as the beginning of authentic religious practice. Frustrated desire is part of ordinary living, but it can also be planned. Planned frustration is found in therapy and asceticism. Williams describes the classical disciplines of asceticism such as fasting, the contemplative refusal of images as well as the challenge to hopes for sexual gratification as disciplines that can to some extent discover what frustrates unexamined desire (LI 2000 pp145–9, 155).

In therapy, opportunities for frustration can occur in the experience of the analytical relationship. When ‘transference’ occurs the analyst is seen by the client as refusing to ratify or reveal the answer to his or her desire. The client can then perhaps begin to understand what a self is and what it isn’t. The self is what is coming to birth in the process of experiencing frustrated desire. An analyst must resist the seductive pressure to become necessary and be persistently aware of his or her own frustrated desire in not meeting the desire of the client. The presence of another person enables the self to mature and be truthful, where the analyst is not meeting needs or providing answers to otherness, to God (LI, 2000 p153).²⁷

The deepening of pain and struggle through trust and obedience is a further aspect of Williams’ exploration of the place of struggle in growth. This deepening is after the pattern of Christ crucified. Christ’s example, as Williams describes it, is not a journey towards a kind of peace which is passive. Williams warns against seeking a kind of peace which means not acting or not having to choose or involve one’s self for that is really longing for an infantile condition where nothing happens. The peace that Jesus creates between God and the world is not a tepid coexistence or non-interference. Being drawn into Christ’s

²⁷ Williams draws on Chris Oakley, ‘Otherwise than Integrity’, in Robin Cooper, Joseph Friedman and others, *Thresholds between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis. Papers from the Philadelphia Association* (London, 1989), pp120–45

peace means entering into his space and so bearing, as he did, the tensions of knowing the full force of hope and grief (TG 1983 pp34, 49, 52, 77).

Williams points to Jesus' obedience in the circumstances of his earthly life, in temptation and fear, as what opens the long closed door between God and human hearts. The obedience of Jesus, he says, is the attitude of alert attention, the giving up of his life moment by moment to his Father, not in bland passivity, but taken, seen, probed and responded to. Jesus sees the Father, sees directly, unwaveringly even in terror and death and his trust in the father is manifest alike in authority and vulnerability, dependence as well as humility, responsiveness and receptivity (TG 1983 p76; TT 2007 p65).

This journey is one that each human being must make. Each must 'obey Christ, surrender to the pattern of his sacrificial torment and death – not in some kind of constructed self-immolation, but in response to the trials encountered simply in living as a believer, living in the insecurities of faith, the conviction of things not seen'. The growth is brought about by deepening pain which involves anguish, darkness and stripping and by obedient acceptance of God's will. Without trust and obedience we would not make the journey. We go to Christ beyond 'the settled and the ordered, to the place where Jesus died in his night, his desert' (WK 1979 p11).

This process is continuous for Christians for whom growth in conflict is a constant experience, for 'in the middle of the fire we are healed and restored, though never taken out of it' (WK 1979 p182). The experience of pain being deepened enables a person to identify with others experiencing pain and struggling and so develop empathy. In suffering, the believer's self-protection and isolation are broken: the heart is broken so as to make space for others and for compassion. This new capacity for love displaces the ego which enables

space for others (WK 1979 p12–13). Believers are called to exercise freedom, to create their lives in the arena of moral struggle, temptation and uncertainty, and this is a vocation requiring trust and courage and a readiness to confront the wilderness that lies ahead (WK 1979 p59).

Williams writes about the experience of St John of the Cross who accepts the fact that there is a draining and crucifying conflict at the centre of Christian living and he refuses to countenance any joy or celebration which has not faced this conflict and endured it. Williams points to St John of the Cross, among others such as Martin Luther who, among the great writers of the Christian past, see the test of integrity as whether a man or woman has lived in the central darkness of the possible event, whether they have known why it is that God is killed by his creatures and their religion, and how God himself breaks and reshapes all religious language as he acts through vulnerability, failure and contradiction (WK 1979 p180).

In discussing the spirituality of St John of the Cross, Williams discusses the experience of the dark night of the soul. This involves an acute sense of rejection, humiliation and worthlessness, a sort of dissolution of the sense of self, which St John claims is the necessary prelude to union with God and the final siege of self-defence and self-reliance. Williams points out that this is not a technique of self-abasement but the felt consequences of developing closeness with God. It is difficult, he says, to separate the knowledge given in the experience of the night from the intense emotional accompaniments of self-loathing, fear and confusion, the sense of abandonment by God, of condemnation to hell. Tyler describes John's theology as beginning with 'a wound, the sense that somehow God has left us, a sense of dissatisfaction or failure' which lies at the heart of human life. John of the Cross is popular, he says because the wound, also referred to by Henri Nouwen, represents the deep

feeling and painful spiritual wound which is at the heart of the contemporary world (Tyler, 2010 p41; Nouwen, 1979). Though St John describes the experience as rare, Williams suggests it is more common and its character is something central to the enterprise of faith itself. Alienation and dread are produced by all kinds of experiences, he comments, by the frustrations and humiliations of daily life, all of which are intrinsic to this experience of a sense of the lack of God and being aware of one's own wretchedness. The experience serves as a preparation for the authentic union of the self with God, which involves direct and joyful experience God, reciprocal love and a fresh sense of the world as God's world (WK 1979 p177–9).

The Self formed in relationship to God: creatureliness

For Williams a fundamental aspect of the self is that of creatureliness. In the fourth Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture of 1989 (OBC pp63–78), entitled *On Being Creatures* Williams addressed the doctrine of creation exploring its implications for human identity. In pointing to God as creator and as love, he discusses how our identities are forged as creatures who are in need of agency as well as exploring the questions of dependence and trust in our relationship to God. Growth of the self comes through the experience of humility and the practice of contemplation.²⁸

²⁸ For Williams' theology of self I will draw from the following works by him with abbreviations as follows:

- WK 1979. *The Wound of Knowledge*. Darton, Longman and Todd.
TG 1983. *The Truce of God*. London, Fount.
CID 1989. *Christianity and the ideal of detachment*, Clinical Theology Association.
OBT 2000. *On Being Creatures* in *On Christian Theology*: pp63–78.
LI 2000. *Lost icons: reflections on cultural bereavement*. Harrisburg, Pa. ; London, Morehouse.
BG 2002. *The Body's Grace* in Rogers, E. F. (ed) *Theology and Sexuality*. Oxford, Blackwell
SHC 2003. *Silence and honey cakes: the wisdom of the desert*. Oxford, Lion.
TH 2007. *A theology of health for today* in Baxter J. (ed), *Wounds that Heal: Theology, Imagination and Health*. London, SPCK.
TT 2007. *Tokens of trust: an introduction to Christian belief*. Norwich, Canterbury.

The doctrine of creation is a statement that everything depends on the action of God: human beings are creatures, and there is absolute difference between the creator and the world. Creation is utterance and overflow of divine life as self-love and self-gift, for God desires us and to be here is to be of God because God wants it so. Our humanity is not functional to any purpose of God, for God is without need and so there is a possibility of freedom and security for the self. Humanity does not need to struggle against God for its welfare and interests. Human beings however are averse to their own creatureliness and are strongly attracted to the 'illusion of omnipotence' or least of being an individual, self-regulating system. Dependence is inevitable for a human being, but so is the need to be an agent who is not confined by dependence. Williams describes the forming of human identity in the metaphor of language: God summons in creation, and human beings form through conversation. The conversation begins at birth and is one where we receive before we give and give only as a response to receiving. It is as givers that we are agents and need to know that we exist for another 'in relation, conversation, mutual recognition' not as a self-regulating individual (OBC p71). Such dependence on others as we form our identity is risky because we may fall victim to exploitation by those who seek to shore up their identities over and against us. Thus the choice is to fearfully negotiate our identity or trust in our capacity to give. Williams recommends trust in God for 'with God alone, I am dealing with what does not need to construct or negotiate an identity, what is free to be itself without the process of struggle' (OBC p72).²⁹

The decision to trust in God, to have faith, begins in the experience of alienation from self, of adversity and self-awareness. As creatures we must grow into what we are and there is always the possibility of failing to grow as we should. A true coming to oneself involves humility, a recognition of total poverty and

²⁹ See OBC, pp68-78; BG, p311-12; LI, 161-2

an accepting of limit and death. As creatures growth and fullness come by contemplation. Creation is there because of the limitless capacity of God for contemplation, for allowing the other to be. Contemplation for human beings means taking the risk of trusting God and in gratitude and in silence waiting on God without clear prediction or security. Contemplation is demanding, involving a stripping and letting the self be clothed in Christ, moulded by what is other. The contemplation of God 'is among other things the struggle to become the kind of person who can without fear be open to divine activity' (OBC 2000 p75).³⁰

When human beings contemplate God they do so as embodied spirits. Williams reinterprets the monastic tradition for contemporary life by describing the body as simply the place where we know we shall meet God. The inner life, he says, is not capable of transforming itself for it is 'only the body that saves the soul' (SHC 2003 p94). Staying in the cell then is a pledging of the body and a pledging to the body for it is the place, the furnace, where the Son of God walks (SHC 2003 p98). Prayer and contemplation enable human beings to learn to attend to their bodies and be conscious of how they inform the desire and openness of prayer. Williams points to the Eastern Christian with techniques of observing the rhythms of one's own body, breathing and heartbeat, as part of becoming aware of material creatureliness, not to control it, but to come to terms with our lives and our memories and be at peace with ourselves. For Williams salvation is in no sense a flight to God from what is human, but is the realising of God's likeness and so the sharing of his life in what is human. That God has acted and spoken directly in the material of a human life in Christ, he says, 'encourages me to be faithful to the body that I am – a body that can be hurt, a body that is always living in the middle of limitations. It encourages me to accept unavoidable frustration in this material and accident prone existence

³⁰ LI 2000 p78; WK 1979 p151; TT 2007 pp66, 156; TG 1983 pp42–44

without anger' (SHC 2003 p93). To see the proper goal of spirituality as the overcoming of human nature is highly problematic, Williams argues. Human growth is becoming more yourself and thus the Church should be faithful to its basic task of telling people that willingness to be who they are, and to begin to change only from the point of that recognition, is fundamental in the encounter with God. The desert, Williams declares, is a place where you go 'so as to become more particular than ever'.³¹

The self formed in relationship to others: the soul

The text of *Lost Icons* Williams describes as an essay about the erosions of selfhood in North Atlantic modernity. It is here that he develops his idea of selfhood as emerging soul formed in relation to others and as one tells the story of one's life.

For Williams, use of the term soul presupposes relationships as the ground that gives the self room to exist. In the first place, God, as agent, addresses or summons the self as an act, not of need but of gift. The soul is not an immaterial individual substance but an integrity one struggles to bring into existence over time. Indeed, 'for Williams the self is a morally problematic fiction' and 'he does not deny interiority – believing that it emerges from the hard task of human engagement – but he does suggest that a rhetoric of interiority has had serious moral and cultural consequences' (Sheldrake, 2003 p19). For soul to emerge, more than an inner life is needed because a well-developed inner life could seek invulnerability rather than being answerable to the perceptions of others. The self forms in conversation and soul emerges in telling the story of one's life and is shaped by every retelling. In telling the story of one's life a person realizes they are not in control of their own story: it does not belong

³¹ SHC 2003 p95–6; TH 2007 p12; CID 1989 p11; OBC 2000 pp 69, 76; WK 1979 p30; TG Williams, 1983 p44–5

exclusively to them since actions have effects and meanings we did not foresee or intend. Such a realisation brings with it the acknowledgement that we are incomplete and to become one's real self means being involved in the continuing and risky process of relating. A person seeks for home and the search ends when it reaches God, who is not a place of comfortable self-sufficiency, but an arena of unending new discovery, reappraisal and fresh vision. A self that can be called a soul exists in the expectation of God's grace, which is possible when a person knows that they are loved, significant and wanted, for then they can let go of their defences and trust God.

Awareness of the story of one's life and the ways in which it has been shaped by others reveals feelings of remorse, honour, shame as well as injury. Remorse is a prominent theme in Williams' understanding of how soul is formed in relationship to others. Remorse involves thinking and imagining one's identity and the ways in which one has become part of the self-representation of others, both individuals and groups. It is the recognition of a loss already experienced by oneself and another. This recognition involves a loss of control and power and is part of the realisation that a person forms – not as the result of a neutral and natural process – but as the deposit of choices, accidents and risks. We cannot love ourselves truthfully or absolve ourselves without the love and investment of others.

Fullness of life is a collaborative process and 'there is nothing good for one that is not good for both, nothing bad for one that is not bad for both' (TT 2007 p109). One can resist growing or forming as a soul by seeking a static and defended sense of self closed to the perceptions of others. Therapy, Williams argues, can be used as a tool of denial and a way of neutralising the perspectives of others by retreating into an enclosed frame of reference where the story of victimisation becomes a total explanation or justification for all of

the contours of a biography. Williams argues that therapy should not serve the purpose of creating or restoring a sense of solitary peace with oneself. As injuries from formative years are brought to light healing will require challenging the person responsible to accept the effects of their actions or habits of the past. What is due to the victim is, in fact, to be part of the conversation and so to have the freedom to share in the definition of who and what they are. A silenced self is a sign of another's guilt and oppression - a situation where people don't talk to each other but describe other people's experience in their own language. This type of conversation takes time and is always an unfinished task with misstatement and misrecognition common from both sides. The traditional religious concept of repentance Williams describes as intimately bound up with the hope of change and particularly changed relationships. Forgiveness seeks to create new solidarity but is not to be confused with leniency or making light of an outrage – thus its achievement matters less than the indication of hope and the need for the lost connection seeking forgiveness represents.³²

Relationships

As is already clear, for Williams the self is formed in relationship. Finding one's own life is a task that cannot be undertaken without the neighbour, for life itself is what we find in solidarity (SHC 2003 p32). Relationships are what Christ's healing ministry restored in order to form the body of Christ, the Church. The process of salvation is flesh becoming body, just as we have noted that self becomes soul. It is not only therapeutic relationships that enable self-awareness and growth, but also the experience of being in love. Williams explores the dynamics of human relating with listening, attention and the freedom given as characteristic of healthy relationships. He also stresses the need for Christians to

³² LI 2000 pp104–5, 110–11, p113–7, 130, 145 pp175–80, 182; TG 1983 pp36, 85; TT 2007 p153; BG 2002 p311

resist what is oppressive. Pastoral relationships require mutual growth with attention to human experience and the life of Christ.³³

Williams draws on St Paul's use of the term 'flesh' as describing human life without relationships, and as such is empty, untenanted life, where there is no spark to relate (TH 2007 p4).³⁴ Flesh is that system of destructive reactions and instincts that keeps us prisoner to sin, with the flesh used in a meaningless, a destructive or an isolating way putting a ceiling on our growth towards God. God's grace makes flesh inhabited by spirit so that it becomes a language, a system, a means of connection. Human stories told as love stories or through the arts reveal how flesh is inhabited with meaning. Inhabiting the world involves self-knowledge, art and science, labours for justice, and healing, for a world in which there is no hunger and thirst for justice would be a world of flesh (TH 2007 p3–11).

³³ For Williams on relationships I will draw from the following works by him with abbreviations as follows:

- WK 1979. *The Wound of Knowledge*. Darton, Longman and Todd
TG 1983. *The Truce of God*. London, Fount.
CID 1989. *Christianity and the ideal of detachment*, Clinical Theology Association.
IRC 2000. 'Incarnation and the Renewal of Community,' *On Christian Theology* Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishers, p225–238.
LI 2000. *Lost Icons: reflections on cultural bereavement*. Harrisburg, Pa. ; London, Morehouse.
BG 2002. 'The Body's Grace' in Rogers, E. F. (ed) *Theology and Sexuality*. Oxford, Blackwell.
WD 2002 *Writing in the dust: reflections on 11th September and its aftermath*. London, Hodder & Stoughton.
SHC 2003. *Silence and honey cakes: the wisdom of the desert*. Oxford, Lion.
CPT 2004. *The Christian priest today*. Lecture at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford.
www.archbishopofcanterbury.org
CS 2005. 'The care of souls' in *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 11: 4–5.
TH 2007. 'A theology of Health for today,' Baxter J. (ed), *Wounds that Heal: Theology, Imagination and Health*. London, SPCK.
TT 2007. *Tokens of trust: an introduction to Christian belief*. Norwich, Canterbury Press.

³⁴ Williams is consistent with current biblical scholarship where flesh as understood by St Paul, not as intrinsically bad or especially dangerous but only becoming bad when human beings build their lives on it and so draw away from God. Humanity is not essentially determined by bodily nature, but by relationship to God. Salvation does not lie in a retreat from corporeality to the spiritual (Kittel, 1971 p135).

The idea of the world becoming inhabited draws on the image Jesus used of an untenanted or uninhabited space into which flow the forces of destruction (Matthew 12:43–45; TH 2007 p3). Jesus' healing, Williams describes as restoring of relation and inclusion in the community. It is the bridging of a gulf between spirit and empty or alienated flesh. People who healed or exorcized by Christ, come to be places inhabited by love, by thanksgiving, by peace and by the sense of absolution. Acts of healing free the person to express what they are made and called to be, which is members of a community that lives in gratitude and in praise; members of a community in which flesh gives voice to spirit and, in so doing, creates further networks of healing, integrating relation. (Mark 1:40–2:12; TH Williams, 2007 p6–7).

So, just as the self becomes soul, so the flesh becomes body, a community, including the community of the body of Christ, the Church. Each person is formed by and forms the communities of which they are a part. Community allows for many styles of life, but people do not become a random collection of eccentrics because of the stress upon obedience and attending to others, in the monastic community and where the two essentials of Christian life, love and humility are lived out and so community can flourish (WK 1979 p100–1). Christian commitment refuses any freezing of relationships, for penitence implies active change. Peace, health and reconciliation are all images, Williams writes, that Christians are perennially tempted to see in passive, naturalistic or static ways and all of them can represent refusals of the world (TG 1983 p58).

Being in love is one example of the way in which flesh is inhabited and how relationships bring this about. Being in love is the experience of two people where each is accepted, given time and room, and treated not as an object of desire alone but as a focus for attention and fascination. Both partners in love long to find a way of expressing and discovering truth about themselves,

because they have been given a kind of promise. The promise is a promise of someone being shown to themselves in ways that couldn't otherwise have been realized. We discover ourselves by a twofold process of listening to the other partner and searching for words to describe the reality of the self we cannot see but are now assured is there (LI 2000 pp155–6).

Listening, attentiveness and allowing people the freedom to be themselves is what enables flesh to be inhabited. Attention and love go hand-in-hand in any community, though in contemporary society the skills of being present for and in another have been lost and what remains is mistrust and violence. The Christian community, however, has the task of teaching us to so order our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy (LI 2000 p175; BG 2002 p312).

Relationships are not always healthy, however. Being in love intensifies one's sense of self as well as confronts one with someone else and the balance needs to be healthy. If it is towards egotism, there may come a point where a person wants to mould or control the interests of the other. If the balance is towards self-denial, a person may no longer see themselves as solid and complex. If someone's worth is wholly bound up with the other, they will be terrified of losing themselves if they lose the other and so can efface their own agenda and allow themselves to be invaded or exploited (LI 2000 156–7).

Christian witness may well involve resistance to forms of human community, including the family, for any human group whose policy or programme it is to pursue its interest at the direct cost of others has no claim on the Christian's loyalty in itself. Williams is clear that the Church does not either affirm or deny the family in the abstract but is authorized to ask the question of any human association whether it is making it more or less difficult for people to grow into

a maturity in which they are free to give to one another and nourish one another: free enough to know they have the capacity to be involved in recreating persons. Where forms of human belonging are manifestly at odds with the kingdom resistance may be the most important Christian service, such as that of Bonhoeffer's in the Third Reich (IRC 2000 p231–7).

The forging of right relationships is important in the pastoral context. The qualities necessary in a pastor are self-awareness and mutuality. They are to be humble rather than superior, and have an understanding both of the human condition and its potential in Christ. Superiority in the pastor damages both people in the pastoral relationship. No one is entitled to judge so 'to assume that you have arrived at a settled spiritual maturity which entitles you to prescribe confidently at a distance for another's sickness.' That is 'in fact to leave them without the therapy they need for their souls; it is to cut them off from God, to leave them in their spiritual slavery – while reinforcing your own slavery' (SHC 2003 p31). Pastors need to have 'been there' and be self-aware. Priests need familiarity with the face of humanity, Williams writes, as well as fidelity in prayer, a habit of gratitude and a level of detachment, not from human suffering or human delight, but from dependence on human achievement. What plausibility is there in the words of someone who seems to see less in the world than others, whose understanding of the murkiness of human motivation and the frequency of human failure is smaller than that of the average believer? We cannot uncover the face of Christ in people unless we have had that real attention to human faces in all their diversity – but also the habit of familiarity with the face of Christ (CPT 2004 p7).

In writing on the care of souls Williams describes the importance of listening to another, picking up the rhythms of another's communication and being able to step back from interpretations that reflect the desire of the interpreter, for it to

avoid the oldest trap in the therapeutic book saying, 'I will tell you what you really mean'. He suggests that the aim of a therapeutic relationship is not a state of utter mutual transparency where everything is plain but a cooperation in growth where what is developed is a stronger sense of one's own elusiveness and resourcefulness and an increasing familiarity with God, the always elusive and always present-already (CS 2005 p4–5).

From adversity to altruism

Williams attends to the dynamics of developing altruism and pastoral responsibility. Speech is a central metaphor for Williams in his exploration of the relationship of human creatures to God. God summons them into being and they are then formed in conversation with others. When it comes to the development of altruism, compassion and love, space is the central metaphor as Williams explores the Christian virtue of detachment and the need for breathing spaces and hesitation in order to respond to others and create the possibility of change. Williams's theology addresses the process of journeying from the experience of adversity to altruism. I will focus firstly on his interpretation of the monastic virtue of detachment.³⁵

It may seem surprising that a theologian who emphasizes relationships so strongly would promote the monastic virtue of detachment. Williams does so

³⁵ For this section I will draw on Williams's works:

WK 1979. *The Wound of Knowledge*. Darton, Longman and Todd

TG 1983. *The Truce of God*. London, Fount.

CID 1989. *Christianity and the ideal of detachment*, Clinical Theology Association.

BG 2002. 'The Body's Grace,' in Rogers, E. F. (ed) *Theology and Sexuality*. Oxford, Blackwell.

WD 2002 *Writing in the dust: reflections on 11th September and its aftermath*. London, Hodder & Stoughton.

TH 2007. 'A theology of Health for today,' Baxter J. (ed), *Wounds that Heal: Theology, Imagination and Health*. London, SPCK.

TT 2007. *Tokens of trust: an introduction to Christian belief*. Norwich, Canterbury.

WD 2002 *Writing in the dust: reflections on 11th September and its aftermath*. London, Hodder & Stoughton.

however by seeing it not as a strategy of disengagement but the condition for serious involvement. Williams explores the ideal of detachment, not as loss, distance and isolation or a withdrawal from ordinary feeling or obligation, but as a kind of passion that liberates instead of enslaving.

Detachment gives space and balance in relating to situations and to people. Detachment is neither being defended against the suffering of the world nor helplessly submerged in it. It is a kind of compassion that is not simply a visceral feeling of solidarity but an awareness of another's suffering as other. This means that not every tragedy becomes one's own personal tragedy so that the focus of concern remains essentially on oneself. Detachment does not mean avoiding feeling, but feeling fully in a way that is not merely trust and interest in our own feelings. Without detachment people become tyrants or slaves. An inability to come to terms with mortality brings people to rule by force, overriding and negating others or alternatively being crushed by this force from others. Detachment enables people to be fully aware and attentive to reality, aware of tensions and the collision of concerns. To be detached means to be open to the possibility of engagement and action which is not uncritical, fearful or tentative but conscious of the risks it takes. Detachment as a Christian ideal means trusting in God with a trust that does not seek control over the future. It means surrendering the struggle to master the world and a dispossession that involves being open to God retrieved (CID 1989 pp3–13).

The development of the virtue of detachment enables compassion and altruistic engagement with the world, a working for understanding, for justice and against violence. The process of such growth happens by attending to a breathing space or moment of hesitation. The empty space resources a person or community to be self-aware, to develop empathy and to choose to act so that things may be different.

A space is necessary for any kind of seeing, for understanding, for letting go and for healing in the face of experience that is too dense to absorb. The concept of space has a long tradition in Christian spirituality and Williams draws on this tradition: 'there is the awful void created by the torture and death of Jesus as well as the habit of the fourth century desert monastics of responding to a question by waiting, often for long minutes or hours or days, by keeping silence, so that the word, if uttered at all, might actually mean something and touch the life of the one who first put the question' (Burton-Christie, 2004 pviii–ix).

A breathing space or an empty space where we live in the presence of the void is an image Williams uses in reflecting on responses to 11th September 2001 and its aftermath. He takes the image from the account of a woman accused of adultery where Jesus at first makes no reply but writes with his finger on the dust. His hesitation, Williams says, gives people time to see themselves differently because he refuses to make the sense they want him to. Such holding the moment for a little longer, Williams writes, can be long enough for some of our demons to walk away (WD 2002 epilogue).

The emptiness of the breathing space resources us because where there is some space between our feelings and choices it encourages the development of empathy. This gives us an ability to put our immediate feelings on hold, to resist the longing to re-establish control and to consider our desires and responses. Trauma can offer a breathing space which offers us a door into the suffering of countless other innocents, often a suffering that is more or less routine for them in their less regularly protected environments (WD 2002 pp11, 24–5, 63). A breathing space enables the possibility of change by providing an opportunity to respond and to give room to the perspective of others rather than cling harder to our threatened identity or fear that we are powerless. Such

a response requires courage and imagination not to be passive and not be the victim, but equally not to avoid passivity by simply reproducing what's been done to you (WD 2002 pp11, 24–5, 27–8, p63–4).

Breathing spaces present the possibility of choice. God is encountered as a human person creates his or her life in choosing for or against self-gratifying instinct, for or against power and violence, for or against communion, for or against obedience to the creator. The significant elements of a human life, Williams says, are in these moments of precariousness, of the sense of possibility of freedom (WK 1979 p32). This space for breathing is analogous to the desert experience where direction and priorities can be set in a landscape differentiated from any other and which provides the place to go within the self and to emerge changed.

The virtue of detachment popularized by Williams' description of breathing spaces describes the perspective of a mature Christian who has experienced adversity, been strengthened by it and is able to feel and to act altruistically. Such acts of compassion bring healing and lead pastoral responsibility. Williams describes the heart of saintliness as returning to the lost, the excluded, the failed or destroyed after the pattern of Jesus, who having experienced suffering can only claim authority by returning to help those who continue to suffer. Williams points to the great theological myth of the Descent into Hell where God's presence in the world in Jesus is seen as his journey into the furthest deserts of despair and alienation. He shows his inexhaustible mercy for all by identifying even with the lost. In some elusive and paradoxical way, this myth speaks of one human destiny, realized in and through Jesus. He comes to his new and risen life, his universal kingship, by searching out all the forgotten and failed members of his family. Only in this way can he claim authority in heaven and on earth (TG 1983 p33).

Summary

Rowan Williams presents a contemporary Christian theology resonant with the findings of resilience literature and drawing on the biblical and theological tradition. His understanding of the self formed in relationship to other people – with struggle and risk leading to honesty about the human condition as dependent and limited by space and time, but free – created by a God who does not need us to forge identity, but creates as pure gift and as love. Williams uses and interprets the traditional concepts of Christian teaching such as dependence, obedience, humility, detachment, self-denial and dying to self. Aware of their misuse, Williams explores them in such a way that openness to relationships, and affirmation of the body is not undermined. His vision of the mature Christian life means that the pastor will be continually open to the growth that draws him or her to the cross and resurrection by being shaped and shaping others, practising contemplation and developing a detachment that enables compassion, is open to hurt, pain, risk as well as political action. Williams' presentation of the dynamics of strengthening through adversity provides the understanding required for resilient believing.

Chapter 6

From the wounded healer to the resilient pastor

The wounded healer as a conversation partner

The third aspect of the metaphor of the desert – altruism and pastoral responsibility – is addressed by the myths and model of the wounded healer. These explore the relationship between the personal history of adversity in a pastor and their pastoral ministry, and thus the dynamics of healing in a pastoral relationship. In this chapter these dynamics are explored for the ways in which they address the questions of how Christians can help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened and how pastors can form and grow so as to cope and be strengthened as they exercise their ministry. This builds on what we have seen so far in the narratives of Hagar and Moses whose pastoral responsibility was born out of adversity and in Moses' case, having 'been there' gave him the credentials to lead the people. The themes within the myths and model of the wounded healer echo the qualities of the monastic elders, the abbas or ammas, described as healers rather than teachers for whom humility and discernment are key qualities. That relationship is characterized by obedience, humility and trust. Williams recognizes, within those virtues, the importance of autonomy and response in relating, as well as the need to deepen pain after the pattern of Christ, be continually open to growth, and recognize that superiority enslaves both pastor and those for whom he or she cares.

The wounded healer as a pastoral care model of ministry – though not the myth itself – has been made popular for Christians by Henri Nouwen (Nouwen, 1979). The model is commonly used in the teaching of pastoral care to teach that wounds, or experiences of adversity, in the life of the pastor need to be acknowledged and can be a resource for healing others and for the pastor. Nash and Nash in their study of metaphors of ministry and priesthood 'both resonate

with the idea of wounded healer who is working towards becoming more whole' and list the similar metaphors of 'Wounded companion', 'pain bearer' and 'Wilderness person' in teaching ministerial formation to enable students to reflect on what they identify with and why (Nash, 2009 pp62–64). The 'wounded healer' is also used to refer to Christ, though this is rarely explained and is rather used as an inspirational summary (see Lake, 2000 p135).

The model of the wounded healer, however, has weaknesses. These I will explore and in doing so strengthen the model by incorporating the contribution of resilience literature and desert experience, so that it becomes a model of the Resilient Pastor, proposed here as a reinterpretation of the wounded healer.

The myths of the wounded healer in Greek thought

The origins of the wounded healer myths are considered to be far more ancient than the Greek myths of Asclepius and Chiron, going back over one hundred thousand years to the universal shamanic stories of Palaeolithic times, where stories are told of tribal priest-physicians, the original wounded healers, whose ability to heal others were seen as being directly linked to their having journeyed in depth into their own selves. Anthropological studies of primitive cultures reveal that before becoming a shaman an individual must undergo a period of intense distress and illness, a wounding of a physical or emotional nature which plucks them out of everyday life, pulling them inwards and downwards to the centre of themselves. Only by weathering such a crisis can the prospective shaman gain the power to cure others. In ancient Greece this was taken further so that doctors were considered to be able to heal precisely because of their own illnesses (Sussman, 1992 p30–1; Kearney, 1996 p170).

It is the myth of Chiron, more than that of Asclepius which explores the dynamics of strengthening and healing through adversity.³⁶ Chiron was born a centaur, with a human head and torso and the body of a horse, because he was conceived when his father, one of the gods, disguised in the form of a horse, raped a mortal nymph. He was, consequently immortal. Having been abandoned and rejected at birth, he was adopted by the sun god Apollo, who reared him and taught him all he knew. Chiron became a wise and respected teacher, renowned for his shrewd intelligence and many skills. He was mentor to some of Greece's greatest heroes, including Hercules. Chiron was civilized and cultured, but centaurs were renowned for their tendency to become violent after drinking wine. One day, at a wedding banquet, fighting broke out between an unruly group of drunk centaurs and the rest of the guests. Hercules, who was among the guests, fired a poisoned arrow at the centaurs to stop the rioting, but Chiron happened to be standing in their midst and the arrow struck him in the knee. As Chiron was immortal, a poisoned arrow could not kill him but instead it inflicted an agonising and unhealable wound. For the first half of Chiron's life his experience was of success and acclaim among the kings and heroes of Greece. In the second part he fled to the mountains to tend his wound and began a desperate search for release from his suffering. While he could not find his own cure, he became wise in the use of all forms of healing herbs and showed compassion to the suffering of others. The blind and the lame and those in pain came to him and he welcomed them and brought them comfort. They called him the wounded healer for he could not heal himself. One day Hercules brought news that if Chiron were willingly to sacrifice his immortality on behalf of Prometheus, who was being punished for mocking the gods, he could

³⁶ Asclepius was the son of the sun god, Apollo and the human woman Coronis. He was wounded before his birth because Apollo had instigated the shooting of Coronis while she was pregnant because she had been unfaithful. While Coronis was on the funeral pyre Apollo tore his son from her womb and gave him to Chiron to raise and mentor. He became a healer. (Robinson, 1986 p34-5; Graves, 1990 vol 1 p173-5).

be freed of his suffering. Chiron agreed to this, died and descended to the underworld. For nine days and nine nights he remained in the darkness of death. Then Zeus, recognising the generosity of the sacrifice, took pity on Chiron and restored his immortality, raising him to the heavens as a constellation of stars (Kearney, 1996 p42–3; Graves, 1990 vol 2 p113).

These myths resonate with findings of resilience literature about the way in which people are strengthened through adversity. The experience of adversity, combined with an inner life, described in the myths as the journey within, strengthens a person in such a way that they are drawn to helping others. We see this in the narratives of Hagar and Moses. In the Chiron myth we see healing bound up with relationships with others: it is in the invitation of another, and for the sake of others that Chiron makes the decision to offer himself as a sacrifice which brings about healing for himself and other people. The Desert Christians are revered as healers rather than teachers and we see Chiron begin as a mentor and teacher and become a wise healer. Complete healing for Chiron comes with the decision to let go, but as in Cassian's theology, this is beyond altruism and beyond the confines of this life. Themes of struggle, self and relationships are prominent. The journey from adversity to altruism explores growth further so that the emphasis is on the healing and involves further adversity, a willingness to undergo further pain or self-sacrifice.

The model of the wounded healer in pastoral care

Henri Nouwen is almost synonymous with the phrase wounded healer in Christian circles. He wrote his book *The Wounded Healer* for those ministering in a contemporary society, in a dislocated world with a rootless generation. Nouwen argues that the minister must be articulator of the inner events of his or her own life, must exhibit a compassion which avoids the distance of pity

and the exclusivity of sympathy and be contemplative – to break the vicious cycle of immediate needs asking for immediate satisfaction. Christian leadership, he writes, must exhibit not only faith and hope, but personal concern: ‘Who can take away suffering without entering it? The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there’ (Nouwen, 1979 p72).

In the last chapter entitled ‘Ministry by a lonely minister’ Nouwen explores the image of the wounded healer. Nouwen drew his inspiration from the image of the rabbinical story of a man at the city gates who rather than unbinding all his wounds at the same time like the others sitting begging at the gate, unbound only one at a time and then bound it up again, saying to himself, ‘Perhaps I shall be needed; if so, I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment.’ What Nouwen drew from the story was the faithful tending of one’s own woundedness, which he described as the wounded minister, and the willingness to move to the aid of other people and to make the fruits of woundedness available to others which he described as the healing minister (Nouwen, 1979 p81–2). The wounds that Nouwen identifies are those of personal loneliness – which he describes as a gift and sweet pain which must be guarded as a source for human understanding, and professional loneliness – due to the minister’s desire to provide meaning that is not always welcomed in Churches which he describes as ‘little more than parlours for those who feel comfortable with the old life’ (Nouwen, 1979 p85).

Nouwen holds that all human beings are wounded to a greater or lesser extent. The process of facilitating the healing of another is thus made possible because any pastor has been there, to some extent has suffered, and can heal others because they have come through, developed empathy and formed the ability to heal by the way in which they relate to others. The minister heals by seeing his

or her own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all people share. By not running away from the pains of others but touching them with compassion and healing new strength is brought so that 'the paradox indeed is the beginning of healing is in the solidarity with the pain' (Nouwen, 1976 p38; Nouwen, 1979 p88).

Healing takes place through hospitality for Nouwen. This is because the host feels at home in his house and so is able to create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor, paying attention to the guest, and practicing meditation and contemplation. Nouwen uses the image of desert hospitality: 'Like the Semitic nomad we live in a desert with many lonely travellers who are looking for a moment of peace, for a fresh drink and for a sign of encouragement so that they can continue their mysterious search for freedom' (Nouwen, 1979 p89). The healer creates a kind of hospitality that requires an empty space where the guest can find his or her own soul, for wholeness cannot be given from one to another. Rather the loneliness can be understood, faced and accepted as part of the human condition (Nouwen, 1979 p92).

Nouwen's use of wounded healer reveals the aspects of self-awareness and attention to growth necessary for resilience and encouraged by the Desert Christians, described by him as faithful tending, which leads to compassion. The quality of the pastoral relationship that he describes as hospitality draws on the qualities of a detachment which creates space and yet is fully involved as the desert tradition and Williams outline. Adversity and pain, part of human life and pastoral ministry, are what bring empathy. What is starkly different in Nouwen's account of the pastor as a wounded healer, the myth of Chiron and the stories of the resilient is that in the latter two those in adversity struggle to survive so that there is no choice about acknowledging their wounds and seeking health. Nouwen however is encouraging pastors to recognize that their

own sense of woundedness, professional and personal and common to all humanity, can be a resource in their pastoral ministry.

Other writers on pastoral theology have taken up the wounded healer model to explore the role of the pastor. Campbell uses three images of caring in his search to rediscover a Christian understanding of pastoral care based on personal integrity without which, he says, ecclesiastical role or counselling techniques are of no use. The images are that of the shepherd, wise folly and the wounded healer. Campbell, like Nouwen, emphasizes the need for self-awareness in the pastor. For Campbell the person of integrity is 'first and foremost a critic of self, of tendencies to self-deception and escape from reality, of desire for a false inner security in place of the confrontation with truth which integrity demands (Campbell, 1986 p12). Pastoral care is grounded in mutuality, not expertise, so that in finding some courage, hope and transcendence in the midst of life a pastor can help another find that same wholeness (Campbell, 1986 p15). The wounded healer heals, he says, 'because he or she is able to convey, as much by presence as by the words used, both an awareness and a transcendence of loss'. Loss, he describes of all human experiences, as the 'most pervasive and potentially the most crippling' (Campbell, 1986 p42). Wounded healers heal because they, 'to some degree at least, have entered the depths of their own experiences of loss and in those depths found hope again' (Campbell, 1986 p43).

Pastoral care, for Campbell, is derived from vulnerability which he explores by using the language of wounds. Responding to the wounds, to vulnerability in others forms community and a channel of communication from one isolated individual to another, with blood becoming the seal of reconciliation (Campbell, 1986 p41). Without drawing on the Greek myths, Campbell uses the woundedness of Jesus to undergird the wounded healer model. He describes

the wounded healer as an image of care central to the Christian understanding of the significance of Jesus' death (Campbell, 1986 p37). Jesus' wounds are 'the expressions of his openness to our suffering' and such 'wounded love has a healing power because it is enfleshed love, entering into human weakness, feeling our pain standing beside us in our dereliction' (Campbell, 1986 p38). Campbell points to Christ's humility (Phil 2:8), the image of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:5) and the ransom of the Son of Man (Matthew 20:28) as ways of healing because it is in this utter weakness that the power of God is found, in the depths of human degradation and cruelty, in deepest darkness we find the flame of love, in the intertwining of suffering and strength (Campbell, 1986 p37-8).

These pastoral theologians describe the experience of adversity and coming through it as key to helping others. They emphasize the motif of the wounded healer to encourage pastors to recognize their own life story and the way in which it impacts of their ministry – particularly the experience of suffering. It is this experience, drawn upon, they recognize, which develops empathy and the ability to facilitate healing.

My observation of the emphasis on the use of the wounded healer motif is that it emphasizes woundedness rather than healing. Campbell and Nouwen both recognize the danger. Once a pastor is self-aware enough to recognize their own woundedness they need to attend to their wounds so that they may be of service to others, otherwise they cause damage. Campbell reminds us that wounds do not restore health. They lead to healing 'only when they have been uncovered and dealt with; otherwise they are festering sores which destroy our health and the health of those with whom we deal' (Campbell, 1986 p41). Nouwen warns of a spiritual exhibitionism where the minister tells others that he or she has the same problems and is of no help, since open wounds stink

rather than heal (Nouwen, 1979 p88). Once pastors have recognized the adversity of their personal history they may not get any further.

Another danger for pastors – related to the emphasis on woundedness – is colluding with others who will not recognize the adversity, or, to put it another way, will not embrace the desert. This is an issue because of the naiveté of religious faith which can be used as a defence against the harsh realities of life. The pretence at invulnerability in churches and the denial of the raw vulnerabilities of life, Campbell declares, drain the churches of compassion and can tolerate only those who can conceal their ill health (Campbell, 1986 p45–6). Campbell and Nouwen thus recognize that ministry is a very confronting service because as Nouwen puts it, ‘it does not allow people to live with the illusions of immortality and wholeness, but reminds others that they are mortal and broken but also that with the recognition of this condition, liberation starts.’ The pastor helps others by a steadfast refusal to collude in their wish to avoid the reality of loss and the terror this can bring, since ‘pastoral care does not remove pain: it deepens it... to a level where it can be shared’ (Nouwen, 1979 pp92–3; Campbell, 1986 pp43–4).

So a pastor can pretend they have never suffered personally and also collude with Christian communities who would also prefer to pretend they are invulnerable. A pastor can also recognize and exhibit woundedness, causing damage in pastoral relationships. The experience of woundedness, once acknowledged, can be overwhelming – as my own experience and the research question of how pastors can be strengthened recognizes. To compare the cost of pastoral care for the pastor, as Campbell does, to the experience of Jesus, whose physical wounds were from torture and psychological wounds from personal betrayal that led to execution wounds, is very stark. This points to something of the strength of the impact that pastors can experience in caring for those in

adversity. The pastoral theologian, Stephen Pattison, describes himself as a priest who set out to rescue the world's victims and 'could not grasp that in hoping to help others I was really trying to minister to my own oppressed self'. Psychotherapy enabled him to recognize childhood trauma and almost inadvertently to discover resurrection. Surrendering the old self, however, and discovering a more authentic and emotional self with will and desires located in the self he describes as hard, since it feels like losing identity, like desolation and death – so much so that the dangerous, difficult and unpredictable process of coming to life, is one which he often wishes he had not begun (Pattison, 2007 p167, 169). Eugene Peterson recognizes these dynamics. Of his 'five stones for pastoral work', two are Pain-Sharing and Nay-Saying reminiscent of cost and confrontation in pastoral ministry, respectively (Peterson, 1992). The development of the practice of pastoral supervision may well better enable the formation of pastors in a way that develops resilience by recognition that 'at the beginning of the learning process the student is likely to be dependent on supervision, then to fluctuate between overconfidence and feeling overwhelmed, before supervision becomes more of a shared experience' (Leach, 2006 p41).

The issue of woundedness in the past and its relationship to pastoral ministry is opened up by these pastoral theologians but not fully explored so as to be balanced with the healing aspect of the wounded healer motif. In this pastoral model, as opposed to the Greek myth, we do not find people flocking to the pastor as they did to Asclepius and Chiron, and coming away healed. The model does not provide a strong sense of healer, or an understanding of the dynamics of healing or strengthening in adversity. The model also tends towards putting the pastor in a superior position as wounded healer, who 'gains power' by acknowledging weakness, as Campbell puts it (Campbell, 1986

p41). There is little sense or exploration of mutuality in relating, or how pain is shared so that love can enter.

The wounded healer in palliative care

Michael Kearney, a consultant in palliative medicine, explored the nature of soul pain and healing in those close to death using a theory and technique of inner care using image work and drawing on the myth of the wounded healer in a way that is independent of, but not antagonist to religious doctrine (Kearney, 1996 p179). Kearney uses the myth of Chiron which he sees as an ancient reworking of shamanic initiation of the Palaeolithic era at the dawning of human consciousness. Kearney uses the myth to describe the importance of a person in adversity, indeed dying, struggling and then trusting a process which is in fact strengthening. Multidisciplinary work in palliative care has taken up the concept of resilience affirming the importance of self-esteem, relationships and struggle and encompassing spiritual care, work with families, carers, rehabilitation and bereavement (see Munroe, 2007). The process of strengthening in facing a terminal illness is intimately related to the sense of self and helped by relationships with other human beings. One such relationship can be with a wounded healer. In his use of the Chiron myth, Kearney explores the dynamics of the doctor or healer's relationship with the patient. He recognizes the importance of the healer's wounds and explores how they bring about healing. Kearney's contribution affirms the themes of struggle, self and relationships as key components in the journey from adversity to altruism and beyond, to a healing through death. He affirms the importance of the personal history of the pastor and the need to be steadfast in the face of pain, as a witness to the pain of others and one's own pain. In a way that echoes the relationship of the desert elder, humility and mutuality are significant for a healing relationship as is the development of trust that enables someone to embark on a painful journey within.

Kearney describes Western medicine as comparable to the time in Chiron's life where he struggled to find a cure for his mortal wound and in doing so healed many others. This heroic stance or struggle underpins the medical model of healing with diagnosis, treatment and cure. This works well until one is faced with insoluble problems where simply trying harder to find a cure will not work and an emotional pain is engendered, characterized by feelings of frustration, powerless and fear of what the future might hold (Kearney, 1996 pp44–5). Kearney uses the Chiron myth to chart the process of healing in five parts: the wounding, the struggle, the choice, the descent and the return.

When Chiron accepts the invitation to free Prometheus by descending to the underworld there is a paradigm shift from the heroic stance to the way of descent and it is this which is the gateway to healing. Both the heroic stance of struggle and the way of descent are essential in the process of dying, with struggle dominating the earliest stages where the wound may not be mortal and cure may be found. The struggle also helps to create the emotional conditions that facilitate the shift so that all know the struggle has achieved everything that it can and to continue to struggle is damaging, futile and adding to pain and suffering. Struggle brings the person struggling more fully into themselves and slows them down so that they become acquainted with suffering and weary of it, so more ready to descend (Kearney, 1996 pp46–7, 159). The adversity can open up access to some hitherto hidden inner resources and trigger a growth process (Munroe, 2007 p117).

Enabling this shift to happen is the focus of healing for Kearney. Struggle prepares for this descent into the depths of oneself. Chiron's choice to surrender immortality is the choice of the patient and the carer to let go of the illusion of omnipotence. They cannot cure the wound by continuing to struggle but the struggle to cure by those who care can forge trust and enable the shift to take

place, not because of some special intervention but spontaneously (Kearney, 1996 p50–1). When a dying person enters the descent into depth he or she is experienced in a very different way despite external circumstances not having changed. Kearney describes a patient becoming a wounded healer so that instead of ‘feeling impotent, and failure, guilty, panicky and drained, I now came away feeling enriched as though I was learning something very important from him’ (Kearney, 1996 p53). This is an indication of the fifth stage of return.

Struggle is affirmed in this reading of the Chiron myth as enabling cure and later the conditions from which trust and journey within the depths of the self take place. Kearney describes how the pastor can experience both the wounds and the healing in the pastoral relationship. This means that a pastor can feel the pain of another and can also facilitate and experience healing. Carers, doctors and pastors can experience both the soul pain of the wounded person and the return, where the shift and descent has taken place. Kearney describes the total pain of someone facing death as having social, emotional and spiritual, as well as physical components. Soul, for Kearney is associated with depth, death and the imagination and soul pain is a symptom of the ego’s total identification with the surface mind and its resistance to descent into depth. Soul pain can be recognized by the feelings and behaviour patterns it awakens in carers. Confronted by an insoluble problem, carers find that the ‘pain which we cannot control triggers our own ego survival reactions’ so that ‘we do, we do even and when we do not succeed, we go on doing.’ The solution to soul pain is to point inwards and downwards to the roots of our humanity because reconnection with depth is required (Kearney, 1996 p62). For many people, physical, emotional and social care is enough for them to commit themselves to their inner descent. For others specific intervention such as image work, dream, art, music, reminiscence or biography therapy, bodywork, including massage and certain forms of meditation are helpful (Kearney, 1996 p64).

Healing comes about within the relating and requires mutuality and humility reminiscent both of the relationship with the desert elder and the therapeutic relationships described by Williams. Kearney describes the relationship of patient and client shifting to a wounded healer relationship as they become present to each other as human beings standing on the edge of the known and searching together for a path forward. Here, who is wounded and who is healer is less much clear. Indeed, both in searching for healing and in reaching out to another we become wounded healers to ourselves as well as to others. Recognising this dynamic is vital for unless we do we will either mistakenly continue to believe that we as carers always have the answers to other people's problems, or, as patients continue searching in never-ending circles for that someone or something 'out there' who will at last take all our pain away. The tragedy in this is that we may never pause long enough to realize that the way to the healing we desire is, in fact, seeking us out, and always as close to us as we are to ourselves. The moment we wait for, which some call grace, is not so much a matter of finding the deep centre as being found by it (Kearney, 1996 p108, 146, 175).

Kearney's exploration of the Chiron myth makes a significant contribution to furthering the Christian reading of the myths and model of the wounded healer. He does so specifically in relationship to dying, of course, which is a significant component of pastoral work and takes the pastor beyond the scope of resilience literature. The most significant contribution he makes is in addressing the healing aspect of the wounded healer. He does this by emphasising the mutuality of the wounded healer relationship. The pastor experiences the pain of person in adversity, and if self-aware, can use this as a trigger to facilitating healing in the other and in doing so also experience healing. This description takes us further than that of the pastoral care model. Both the pastoral care model and the palliative care model point to the need for

steadfastness in the face of the lure to provide easy answers for people. Kearney acknowledges the pull to *do*, rather than sit with another in the face of death, but it is the refusal to *do* which shows the direction needed for healing. Nouwen and Campbell describe the need for an inward and downward shift by speaking of contemplation, meditation and integrity. Kearney goes further in identifying that when this shift to descend takes place, in pastor as well as patient, it travels deeper than vulnerability and acknowledgment of weakness, to a depth where healing and grace seek us out for healing. This takes place when both pastor and patient are motivated to seek healing for themselves and able to reach out in compassion. Choice is important in Kearney's process of healing. Letting go into the depths requires trust in the self and in others which is often facilitated by someone who has shared the struggle to find a cure. The journey cannot be brought about by a passive or blind obedience, but can be enabled by a relationship of mutuality and trust.

Kearney's description of healing reveals where a development of Campbell's use of the death and woundedness of Christ as wounded healer might go. Campbell addresses the Wounding, the Struggle and the Choice of Kearney's five parts of the process of healing, through the narratives of Gethsemane and the crucifixion (Campbell, 1982, pp41–2). Descent and return might be explored with reference to Christ's descent into hell and God's initiative in raising him to new life, as indeed Williams does (Williams, 1983 p33).

The wounded healer in Jungian psychology

In Jungian psychology wounded healer is recognized as an archetype, an image or predisposition to behave and conceptualize the world in certain ways, partly inherited and partly arising from the circumstances of our upbringing. Carl Jung used the archetype of the wounded healer, deriving it from the ancient Greek legend of Asclepius, to explore dimensions of counter transference, the

impact of unconscious processes in a therapeutic relationship on the therapist. Here we need to recognize the dynamics of the wounded healer relationship detailed by Jung and as well as its dangers. In psychological literature, following Jung, it is the dangers inherent in the wounded healer which are emphasized so that the model is treated with suspicion, if not rejected.

Significant dynamics of relating, in general, and in therapeutic relationships are described by psychotherapy and counselling using the concepts of transference and counter transference. Transference is an unconscious phenomenon where the client projects attitudes, feelings, and desires, originally linked with early significant persons, onto the therapist who represents these figures in the client's current life. One can use the term more generally to label any feelings that the client expresses toward the therapist, a pastor or anyone else. Therapists and others involved in the helping professions have transference reactions in response. Counter-transference is a therapist's or pastor's counter-reaction to transference. It is what gets stimulated in the therapist in response to what the client is experiencing and can be described as intuition about what the client is feeling. It is the therapist's or the pastor's personal experiences, in particular, that are activated, especially if they are similar, and they can range from curiosity to being overwhelmed. When a pastor experiences personal pain as they exercise their pastoral ministry, such as in the way that Kearney describes feeling the soul pain of a dying person, the pain is described in psychological terms as counter-transference. The counter-transference dynamic needs to be understood by the pastor in order that growth and healing – indeed strengthening – can come about in the relationship. Here the wounded healer is a relationship rather than a person, undermining an emphasis on the pastor as superior and in control and yet pointing to why pastors might feel the need to be so.

Jung was one of the first analysts to stress the importance of the therapeutic potential of counter transference observing that 'only the wounded doctor can heal, whether that doctor be a physician or a priest' (Jung, 1951 p116). Jung described the way in which a therapist's wounds may be activated in certain situations, especially if the patient's wounds are similar to those of the therapist. Jung felt that this type of depth psychology can be potentially dangerous, because the analyst is vulnerable to being infected by his patient's wounds, or having his or her wounds reopened. The two dangers for the wounded healer to watch out for are 'inflation and death,' that is a defended superiority or being overwhelmed by pain. The dangers can be avoided by 'realising that the personal involvement and healing processes are archetypically based [which] can help deflate the over-zealous or overwhelmed analyst.' Within the 'School of the wounded healer' – that is those who draw on the archetype in the discussion of counter transference from a Jungian perspective – it is humility and mutuality in the analyst which counteract the dangers of an inflated ego or being overwhelmed by pain. Craig describes how people in the helping professions have a particular fascination with this 'bipolar archetype' which is a danger 'if the sickness side of it is left entirely with the patient'. To avoid this 'the analyst must be aware of his shadow side, and internalize his own 'wounded' pole, and realize like the Greek physician only the divine healer can help... the human doctor can merely facilitate its appearance.' The development of the inner healer in the patient comes by the activation of woundedness in the analyst and 'the analyst must show him the way', by experiencing the archetype and its personal ramifications for himself (Grosbeck, 1975 p130–2; Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971 pp 85, 96).

A Jungian understanding of counter transference affirms the experience of costliness to the pastor describes in pastoral care literature. Such costliness, however, is beyond the development of empathy brought about by adversity in

general. There is a fundamental difference in degree and quality in counter transference wounds, with empathy being typically more 'easy going'. Counter transference wounds often seem different from empathy in terms of 'feeling tone, specificity and depth' and though they may provide the basis for empathy, the empathetic state is less 'hooked' and more transient. (Sedgwick, 1994 p109). A Jungian understanding of the way in which the wounded healer archetype works in relationships affirms the need for mutuality and humility in order for the pastor to facilitate healing for others, and to do so by leading the way. It echoes Williams' description of what is good for one being good for all for either healing comes for both in the pastoral relationship or for neither party.

Clergy as wounded healers

It is, however, the dangers of the wounded healer relationship that are prevalent in the literature of counselling and psychotherapy, echoing Jung's warnings, and describing instead unhealed wounders.³⁷ The concept of the wounded healer, with rare exceptions, is defined in pejorative terms (Bryant, 2006 p10). This is because studies designed to explore the motivation of psychotherapists, in particular, have concluded that many have entered the field to heal their own wounds and have often been ineffective or even harmful in their interactions with their patients (Sussman, 1992 p242). Numerous studies have explored the fact that practitioners in the helping professions report a much higher incidence of troubled backgrounds than other people, concluding that 'the helping professions, notably psychotherapy and the ministry, appear to attract more than their fair share of the emotionally unstable' (Maeder, 1989 p37, see also Sussman, 1992 p242).

³⁷ The popularity of the television series 'House' which stars Hugh Laurie as a brilliant but wounded diagnostician indicates the resonance of the wounded healer as an archetype but also its negative connotations (see Hockley, 2011).

This research has established the fact that people report healing through helping others, though that has not been the conscious motivation for altruistic activity. To work in the helping professions and yet remain unhealed creates damaging relationships. Patients must feel secure to be able to be vulnerable and so they need to be able to sense that the therapist is free from major psychopathology or the need to use their patients as objects for their own needs (Sussman, 1992 p12).

It is possible to use pastoral ministry, just like other caring work, as a means of avoiding the need to deal with problems and the means to gain authority and power to compensate for weakness and vulnerability. Where this happens the professional can become divorced from the emotions that have brought pain, and become cold. Maeder identifies the clergy as providing conspicuous and instructive examples of those who encapsulate their wounds in this way and develop a martyr complex where they believe that their self-denial serves a greater good, whereas in fact it is a self-directed keeping of the status quo where the wound does not cause pain, and is not susceptible to healing. Features of dysfunction he identifies include problems involving interpersonal relationships and questions of self-esteem. Giving too much, but not knowing how to take leads to finally running out of spiritual and nervous energy so that what remains is underlying resentment. Pastoral encounters offer opportunities for living vicariously by the asymmetrical intimacy desired by those unwilling to take the painful risks incurred in normal human relationships (Maeder, 1989 p77-9, 88).

Such a description reveals that a lack of willingness to struggle, to grow or to embrace the desert, plays itself out in the sense of self and relationships of

pastors. The adversity of the past and present is not able to strengthen a person.³⁸

Some support for a healthy wounded healer has come from Means, who reported that 'properly dealt with, these wounds offer a foundation of shared life experience connecting us with our clients' (Means, 2002 p41). In a book which explores the overlaps between religion and psychiatry, Robinson identifies the need for clergy to see themselves not only as helpers, but also as persons who need to be helped and ones who enter a healing encounter with openness to receive as well as an awareness of their brokenness and mortality. She draws on the linkages between the Suffering Servant of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the wounded healer as revealing how, in coping with one's own suffering and remaining fully aware of ones own vulnerabilities, clergy can become pilgrims with others on the path to healing. Robinson also points to the humility that is created in the healer or priest by supervising the process of healing a whole person rather than just curing a disease, a humility born from acknowledging oneself as an intermediary between the person and God. She recommends the need for healers who are ministers to bring their work within a divine framework, where God is implied or introduced as a third party, cohering with the maxim of Jung: 'Invited, even not invited, God is present' (Robinson, 1986 pp37, 47-8, 59, 63).

³⁸ The research points to the evidence of acedia amongst the clergy, described by Cassian – the lack of self care which causes either sleep at noon day or an addiction to pastoral visiting that avoids encounter with the self or God.

The Resilient Pastor

The pastoral care model of the wounded healer is unbalanced in emphasising woundedness to the detriment of healing and the person of the pastor to the detriment of the wounded healer relationship. The model seeks to explore the connection between the woundedness of the pastor and the way in which this can serve the development of empathy, good pastoral care and healing, but it does not go far enough. The insights that Kearney brings from palliative care and those of Jungian psychology provide an understanding of the nature of the pastoral relationship which address these imbalances. They provide insights into motivation for pastoral ministry, the dynamics of healing through helping, the experience of being overwhelmed by pain that pastors can feel and the importance of mutuality and humility for healing to occur. Thus much light is thrown on the research question of how pastors can be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care.

A model of pastoral care using the resilient pastor, however can offer pastoral theology a model which not only builds positively on the wounded healer model used in teaching pastoral care, but uses the insights of resilience literature and the desert experience in this thesis, providing pastors with a renewed understanding of the dynamics of the wounded healer model.

Although there are studies which have focused on the negative aspects of wounded healers, resilience literature, of course, abounds with studies of those which have come through their experience of early wounds and hurts and made them meaningful and the source for altruistic activity.

In the study *Wounded healers: Resilient Psychotherapists* Mary Bryant brings together themes of resilience and the wounded healer model, affirming the connectedness of the journey taken by the resilient from adversity to altruism.

Bryant's work also affirms the usefulness of the model of the wounded healer for the resilient to reflect on the relationships which can contribute to their healing. Bryant interviewed ten psychotherapists who agreed with her suppositions that: the concept of a wounded healer is a valid one and that all human beings are wounded to a greater or lesser extent, and also considered themselves to be resilient, wounded healers and effective psychotherapists. Keen to contribute to the paucity of research on the positive aspects and strengths of psychotherapists from dysfunctional families of origin, Bryant looked at the evolution of resilience, positive mental health and social interest in the psychotherapists in order to explore the relationship between childhood experience and current therapeutic effectiveness and the validity of the concept of the wounded healer (Bryant, 2006 p7). All her participants agreed that it is not woundedness, but its denial that led to impairment. They all disagreed that a wounded healer was necessarily an impaired practitioner, but that adequate self-assessment, boundary keeping and limit setting were vital along with care and education otherwise it was a short distance to becoming an impaired practitioner. All aspired to the ancient wounded healer archetype, the woundedness being described as that which enables the practitioner to heal (Bryant, 2006 p102-3). The wound was described as a gift, a gift of understanding and connection which enables the healing of others (Bryant, 2006 p106). Bryant describes the practitioners as resilient, wounded healers whose life stories revealed the development or evolution towards resilience, accompanied by resilience traits such as courage, compassion on their families of origin, creativity, and with most honouring of the spiritual in some way (Bryant, 2006 p104-6).

Conclusions

Resilience literature contributes to a reinterpretation of the pastoral care model of the wounded healer as resilient pastor by bringing to the fore the themes of

struggle, self and relationships. The struggle to be self-aware, to continue to grow and to withstand emotional pain are essential for the pastor. Self-awareness enables a pastor to discern soul pain and facilitate healing. Self-discipline is required to maintain appropriate boundaries and an inner life developed which recognizes that there is a divine healer at work. The pastoral relationship of mutuality strengthens both of those involved.

The metaphor of the desert, enriched by the biblical and early Christian traditions of desert experience reminds the resilient pastor of their own need to embrace the desert. Such embracing of the desert brings an encounter with the self and with God. A pastoral ministry of serving others reflects the desert experience where pastoral responsibility and leadership emerge because others recognize the credentials of someone who has suffered and come through with hope and compassion. The practices and wisdom of the desert Christians highlight the importance of humility, discernment and trust confirmed by the psychological understanding of the wounded healer relationship. Where in the Greek myth of Chiron people flock to be healed and in the archetype of the wounded healer relationship, healing takes place, the wounded healer motif in Christian ministry can, in the model of the resilient pastor, find completion in a strengthening and healing by God for this life and beyond, for the pastor and those who are cared for.

Chapter 7

Conclusions: a pastoral theology of resilience

A pastoral theology of resilience

This research is rooted in my experience of formation as a pastor from observing the dynamics of strengthening during my mother's illness when I was a child, through exercising a ministry of pastoral care as a priest, to having responsibility for the education and supervision of new pastors. The research questions – of how Christians, but particularly pastors, can help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened, and how pastors can be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care – arise from this experience.

I have taken the approach of critical conversation, in order to draw on the resources of the psychosocial science of resilience and the riches of the Biblical and Christian tradition of the desert. These have led to the second stage of engagement with the theology of Rowan Williams and with the way in which the myth of the wounded healer is used in secular pastoral practice and therapy as well as Christian pastoral care. A pastoral theology of resilience has emerged: an integrated theological foundation which outlines the process and dynamics of strengthening in adversity and thus provides pastors and others with story and metaphor from the Christian tradition informed by psychosocial science to enable good practice in pastoral care.

In resilience literature the themes identified as key to strengthening in adversity have been the importance of struggle in growth; an open, resourced and disciplined self; and the need for relationships. In addition to these themes, I have observed a journey from adversity to altruism that can be seen in the lives of those who had come through difficulty well, a journey in which healing takes

place through altruistic activity. Resilience literature presented challenges to Christianity in the form of the emphasis on obedience, humility, passivity, self-denial and self-sacrifice which can inhibit the building of resilience. Issues for the resilient, to which Christian theology and pastoral practice can make a contribution, include self-reliance and difficulties with trusting others, as well as the continual struggle with self-esteem and depression to gain peace – for autonomy and self-determination, as research attests can be experienced as tyranny.

In turning to the Bible, it was the narratives, landscape and metaphor of the desert which resonated with experience of adversity. The narratives of Hagar and Moses affirmed the three themes that emerged in resilience literature, as well as enabling the narratives to reveal the journey from adversity to altruism and also pastoral responsibility. Reading the metaphor of the desert in conversation with resilience literature has enabled the discovery of three movements in the desert experience. Desert is acknowledged as an important biblical and spiritual theme in pastoral and spiritual literature, but adversity and strengthening are emphasized, along with the experience of being solitary, without recognising the movement towards a strengthening which leads to altruism and pastoral responsibility. Thus desert is described as ‘tracts of wilderness in which the individual or group is tested to the limit and, through God’s grace and power, emerges chastened, refined and obedient’ and the desert spirituality described as a ‘desert ethos of the solitary abba’ (Hurding, 1998 pp287–8). A re-engagement with the contemporary scholarship on the historical texts of the desert, reveal that desert is used as the metaphor to inspire an embracing of adversity through the vocation to a life of asceticism which was lived out in many contexts. Along with Williams’ reinterpretation of the tradition, contemporary life and spirituality, this readjustment of our understanding of the monastic life of the desert provides a fresh perspective on

issues that were problematic, such as the place of relationships and being solitary for growth, as well as Christian understandings of the body and self-denial.

I argue that the metaphor of the desert structures the experience of being strengthened in adversity in three movements: embracing the desert; the encounter with the self and God so as to strengthen; and the expression of altruism through which healing takes place, bringing with it pastoral responsibility. There is a broad emphasis in each movement on the resilience themes: struggle, self and relationships respectively.

The first movement of the desert metaphor – that of embracing the desert – is affirmed by resilience literature. Engaging with struggle, being motivated and open to change and growth are necessary to come through adversity and be strengthened. The ability to acknowledge and withstand emotional pain is necessary. Embracing the desert is what Hagar, Moses and the early desert Christians did by fleeing and they found the desert to be both a refuge and a place of adversity. The importance of attending to relationships, as well as being solitary, comes through both in resilience literature and in the monastic tradition.

The second movement of the desert metaphor – encountering the self and being strengthened by God – is a natural progression from finding oneself in the desert and being prepared to engage with it. Survival in a desert landscape requires attention to the self involving believing oneself to have a future and facing up to the realities of the circumstances. Encounters with God in the desert, as seen through the narratives of Hagar and Moses involve affirmation and autonomy, promise and call. They involve a continuing struggle, not release or liberation, and this requires perseverance and self-discipline.

Self-discipline is a prominent theme in the monastic life, as expressed through asceticism. As John Cassian explains, these practices, like the landscape of the desert, drive a person inward so that they give attention to themselves and can fight against the thought patterns that lead to vice and sin. Guarding the inner life, by staying in the cell, being resourced by prayer and Scripture, in order to fight demons, and to weep, is a priority for holiness. Christian theology, as presented by Cassian and Williams, provides a vision for the future: the kingdom of God on earth, and life with God beyond death. As he reinterprets the monastic tradition for contemporary Christians, Rowan Williams, makes it clear that self-denial is letting go of one's own perspective and creating space for another, not self-abasement. He points to the importance of autonomy for human beings as creatures, rejects passivity and calls for a deepening of pain after the pattern Christ for growth. That said, human dependence on God and obedience remain significant, but with voice coming before silence and trust before obedience.

The first two movements of the desert metaphor, as I have described it, in conversation with resilience literature, and the partners from the Christian tradition, address the first research question of how Christians, but particularly pastors, can help people experiencing adversity to be strengthened. A pastoral theology of resilience has implications for teaching the faith, and for the care of those in adversity. The struggle to survive, and for a better quality of life needs to be honoured and encouraged so that people can embrace the desert of adversity and begin the journey of being strengthened through it. Passivity and self-abasement need to be discouraged and affirmation and autonomy brought to the fore to enable people to have the motivation to struggle and the self-esteem and vision of the future necessary for survival and strengthening. The emphasis on self-awareness means that remorse is recognized, sin can be acknowledged and better relating lived out. Resilience is built by healthy,

supportive and mutual relationships. Careful consideration needs to be given in teaching, preaching and one-to-one advice so that people can discern when to embrace the desert and flee – when in difficult or abusive relationships, or embrace the desert and endure – working towards a better quality of life. Subtlety is required in teaching about humility, self-denial and self-sacrifice, for these are virtues that are to be expressed from a position of knowing oneself to be significant and desired by God, and able to make space for another. Obedience is not a submission to a command, but a conscious placing of trust in God or a guide, who can enable the difficult journey of deepening pain in order to heal and free someone from the tyranny of an oppressive autonomy. All this needs to be in the context of encouraging a faith that is open to growth, aware of the riskiness of human relating and resourced by the Christian vision.

The concept of resilience provides a new and positive impetus to the theology and practice of pastoral care. In conversation with the metaphor of the desert, the reality of adversity, the possibility of strengthening and of coming through to live and love well are outlined and undergirded with rich imagery so as to provide a process of resilience, inclusive of body and spirit.

The third movement of the desert metaphor – altruism and pastoral responsibility, addresses the second research question of how pastors can be strengthened as they exercise a ministry of pastoral care. Resilience literature hints at a journey from adversity to altruism and begins to explore the dynamics of how healing can be found through helping others. The narratives of Hagar and Moses point to adversity bringing about empathy and leading to pastoral responsibility. The Moses narrative outlines the importance of having been through the desert experience in order to lead others through it. Altruism is an important aspect of the monastic life, shown by fasting, hospitality, almsgiving and particularly by the relationship between the elder and disciple.

These elders are described as healers rather than teachers and their authority comes from their experience of the struggle to grow in holiness and their humility. They show the way for the disciple to grow, they listen to the manifestation of thoughts and discern what is best for the disciple. The disciple must be humble enough to learn and must obey the elder. This is part of a commitment to growth, which the human being not faced with the need to survive will resist. Obedience then becomes an aspect of trust, of embracing the desert and a response to wisdom and love. The process of healing in this third movement, and in this Christian context, is one that will at some point be beyond death. The Hagar narrative highlights the significance of endurance and quality of life in living with adversity from a new perspective of having been strengthened.

The psychological literature around the myth and model of the wounded healer provides a conversation partner with which to explore the dynamics of healing and growth in a pastoral relationship, enriched by Williams' theology. Here we find an explanation how a pastor who is aware of their own woundedness and has come through adversity can, in a relationship of mutuality create the space for another to find healing. By practising detachment and yet also being involved the pastor enters into a wounded healer relationship, where both are healed. The relationship is demanding for the pastor and requires discernment. When a pastor affirms the importance of struggling with the purpose of finding a cure or solution, it is possible to gain trust from someone and so help them to let go when it is a shift from struggle to letting go that is necessary. Embracing that desert will drive the person inward so that an inner shift can take place in the depths of themselves – the place where God may be found. Such a shift means trusting in those who care and a letting go of the self. Where a person is dying, this denotes an acceptance of what is happening and healing will not be cure, but death. Thus the language of trust, which might be described as

obedience to the advice of the pastor, of letting go, and even of surrender has its place. Such language, however, is not a substitute for struggle, an open, resourced and disciplined self or working towards appropriate relationships – rather it is the result of these.

The wounded healer myth and model provides an explanation of why people might be drawn to pastoral ministry and why that ministry can be personally costly to the pastor. This has implications for the formation of pastors, ordained and lay, primarily that they be guided or supervised by others who have ‘been there’, not just that they may learn to reflect theologically, but that they may understand the dynamics of healing in their own lives. This research affirms the importance of humility and mutuality for the pastor in order to avoid the inflation or superiority which makes someone an unhealed wounder. Exploration of the myth and models of the wounded healer reveal its unbalanced use in the literature of pastoral care. The model of the resilient pastor provides a new image, which can address the formation of the pastor forged in adversity and able to bring about healing.

The answer to the two research questions are thus the same. The means by which the pastor is strengthened in adversity are the same means by which the pastor can enable others to be strengthened. By embracing the desert, encountering the self and being strengthened by God, healing will emerge through altruism and the pastoral credentials for pastoral ministry become apparent.

Limitations and application

Criticisms of a critical correlational approach include that it can be, too academic, does not alleviate suffering and superficial. These partners – such as resilience literature, and the literature of pastoral care and psychology – are

rooted in human experience, rather than being academically theoretical, with their focus directly related to making a positive difference to human well being. This piece of theological reflection draws on a number of sources which inevitably limits the depth of engagement. However, engaging with the scholarship for each partner has revealed resonance and connections between them, for example, the place of autonomy not only in resilience literature, but also in the Biblical scholarship on the Hagar and Moses narratives and in Williams' theology. The conversation partners reveal my own interests and inspirations, but this is not a limitation, since they are not obscure but rather well known aspects of the Christian tradition. There are areas, however, which have not been given as much attention as could have been, such as the relationship between grace and human effort discussed by Cassian and the implications of his writings for the identity of the pastor.

The research questions are broad, arising and as they do out of the common human experience of being strengthened in adversity and thus the application of this research can be broadly applied. Resilience literature is wide in scope, recent enough to be applicable, broadly cross cultural and intergenerational and it recognizes the voice of the marginalized as the theological sources have been brought into conversation with this body of empirical research.

The question of how relevant and applicable extremes can be to the pastoral care of ordinary people is important to ask; that is the extremes of adversity addressed by resilience literature, and the extreme of asceticism lived out by the monastic tradition. Sacred literature and tradition thrives on the applicability of vivid vision and imagery in different contexts. The image of the desert monk inspired people to take up the ascetic life while living in towns, as well as inspiring the monks of Gaul who read Cassian's work. It can still inspire and with a conversation with resilience literature, focus can be brought on the

priorities that human beings find necessary when faced with the need for radical change.

The thematic and metaphorical approach, using resilience and its broad scope, as well as a key Biblical theme, enables wider application to the ministry of pastoral care, preaching and teaching than would have been the case with a specific pastoral concern or narrow theological base. In particular, the use of a Biblical metaphor, which is also prevalent in other faith traditions, I hope will resource evangelical Christians, chaplains and those conducting funerals for congregations unfamiliar with Christian theology to find a way in resourcing those in adversity so that they might be strengthened by Christian pastoral ministry, and by the grace of God. Indeed, the use of metaphor and popular concepts in this research – desert and resilience – but also easily understood themes of struggle, self and relationships, along with wounded healer, speech and space and links to biblical narratives provided a rich resource for ordinary people in adversity, to provide resonance with their situation, and a path to enable strengthening. The emphasis on strengthening in resilience – rather than healing in wounded healer – makes the application of this research to pastors and situations more accessible.

The use of a metaphor with three movements, which makes explicit a vocational journey for the pastor, can enable a self-awareness and critique with regard to the practice of pastoral ministry, and one which does not leave the pastor in woundedness, but explains a process and commends a discipline, which will strengthen both the pastor and his or her ministry. It also provides a challenge that those in the pastor's care should actually find strength, hope and healing. By making explicit the processes of resilience the metaphor can challenge the theological assumptions of what is going on for the pastor and in the pastoral relationship, and so promote reflection and better practice.

Conversation is a mutual enterprise where each conversation partner is changed by the encounter: it is to be a critical conversation. The challenges to Christianity from resilience literature on factors which prevent people from acknowledging the difficult situations of their lives and seeking liberation – such as the virtues of obedience, humility and self-denial – have been addressed in this research but have not gone away. They still need to be taken seriously and the details worked out in specific contexts.

The contribution that Christian theology can make to resilience literature relates to issues of self-reliance and trust experienced by the resilient. Williams outlines the nature of dependence and trust, characteristic of being human, and the riskiness of relating to others. The particular vision that Christian theology provides to enable resilience, centres on a God who creates as self-gift and love, a God who can be trusted, and in whose presence, in silence and contemplation, we can find healing. Such a contribution will be effective, wherever Christians live it out in word and action.

There are obvious wider implications for the conversation between pastoral theology and resilience literature. A major area of the work of the churches is supporting people at particular turning points in their lives, particularly births, marriages and deaths, and resilience research affirms the importance of appropriate intervention at such changes in people's lives. We know that protection and nurturing are essential to resilience and this highlights the importance of good practice in conveying values and beliefs in churches as well as in promoting a Christian lifestyle practically in interactions and dynamics in congregations and groups. The importance of surrogate relationships for children and teenagers challenges the extremes of the current emphasis on protecting children from abusive relationships so that children and adults are discouraged from forming relationships at all. Churches may well provide safe

physical environments and people for troubled children and teenagers to recruit those who would enable them to be resilient.

Understanding of the place of altruism in healing and the way in which people are drawn towards helping others, and in doing so connect with their own pain, has implications for those with pastoral responsibility, in terms of the recruitment, training and supervision of pastoral assistants and well as the formation of pastors. It also opens the door to an evaluation of pastoral ministry. Are people strengthened and if so, from whom do they seek pastoral care and is it these people who need to be identified as pastors? My hope is that the vividness of the images and themes in this research may be of help in explaining the dynamics and dangers in the pastoral relationship.

Further research

The research into resilience is broad in scope and thus might be used in other aspects of theology and Christian practice. A natural next step from this research would be in the development of resilience for clergy in public roles, which could draw on the literature regarding identity, roles and stress and bring it into conversation with the processes of resilience. Issues of control and power would need to be a focus in ministerial relationships building on the importance of humility and mutuality in a healing relationship.

The desert motif lends itself to further research in order to broaden the focus of this research on the pastoral care of individuals, in the main, to that of the community of faith. Further work could encompass biblical scholarship on the biblical accounts of the experience of the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the wilderness as well as the scholarship on monastic communities in the desert.

An area of further research relates to the ways in which the theology, theory and practice of counselling and spiritual direction inform pastoral relationships, not only between the pastor and those for whom he or she cares, but also in supervision. The question has already been raised and is raised here (Leach, 2006 p45). I have deliberately drawn on the Bible, and the desert tradition in Christian theology, in response to the criticisms of emphasis on pastoral skills in pastoral care, but have ended up with outcomes not unlike those of Pastoral Counselling. Frank Lake undergirds Pastoral Counselling with a theology related to the four-sided Dynamic Cycle: the emphasis on the way into a life-giving relationship; raising being to well-being; the move from dependence to a grateful autonomy; and becoming a sustainer of others – these resonate with the findings of this research (Lake, 2000 pp133–4). Continuing work on a theology to undergird the relationships of the pastor will need to continue to develop. This research has drawn on the relationship between the desert and elder and disciple, with the dynamics of healing, discernment and authority. It has attempted, what I believe, is an overdue exploration and subtlety for the wounded healer model in order to hear warnings of psychotherapy, draw on the strength of the myth itself and so rebalance it to emphasize healing as much as woundedness. Billings believes that pastoral counselling has been boosted unwittingly by the influential concept of the pastor as the wounded healer (Billings, 2000 p137). The exploration of the pastor as wounded healer begun here could be further developed to draw much more on understandings of Jesus as the wounded healer.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the metaphor of the desert provides a process and vision to enable pastors to help Christians, as well as those of other and no faith, be strengthened in adversity. It is a metaphor which resonates with the findings of resilience literature as well as the biblical narrative and the richness

of the early monastic tradition. This study has revealed that out of the metaphor of the desert comes a three stage process which consists of embracing the desert, encountering oneself and in doing so finding strength and then finding healing and growth through altruistic activity. Beyond altruism the process of growth and strengthening leads to pastoral responsibility where having been wounded and strengthened, the pastor is able to guide others to healing. Attention to the importance of the struggle, an open, resourced and disciplined self and healthy relating is key to the process. From the conversation partners of this research the model of a Resilient Pastor brings fresh life to that of the wounded healer. The Resilient Pastor strengthened by pastoral ministry helps to strengthen others.

Appendix

Statement summarising the areas covered in the whole DThMin programme highlighting the links and particularly the way in which they fed into the thesis.

The Doctorate in Theology and Ministry falls into three parts: modules on *The Theology of Ministry* and modules on *The Role of the Minister* for which five assignments were submitted, a *Ministerial Focused Study* (MFS), and the *Research Based Thesis* (RBT). Each assignment was discreet, and yet it is possible to see the way in which work done for them has influenced the direction of the final thesis.

For the module on Systematic Theology I chose to focus on the resources that the Christology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers for the fostering of Christian faith today. Inspired by the work of Ellen Charry (Charry, 1997) I argued that doctrine, including Bonhoeffer's Christology, has an artegenic or virtue-shaping quality, shown by the way in which Bonhoeffer grounds Christology outside the academy in the worshipping community and in silence, emphasising Christ *pro me*. Thus, in being conformed to the crucified and risen Christ, a person can be a new human being before God. Charry sees study, prayer and service as three pillars of an integrated devotional life. These can be seen as aspects of Bonhoeffer's life, with his reflections on the story of Christ and the hidden-ness of God leading him to face complex decisions and be involved in ambiguous ethical actions. Considering the ways in which doctrine fosters faith and is an expression of faith in the life of one theologian and pastor, as well as more broadly, has been an important foundation of the whole program for me.

In engaging with the contextual or cultural theology model, I wrote on what the foundations of a cultural theology that addresses the mind/body/spirit market

of contemporary society might look like, with a particular focus on the popularity of yoga. I argued that the Church needs to understand the many meanings and uses of 'spirituality' and be able to use the language of spirituality to connect with what is of deepest value for people. This will involve recognising the sacralisation as well as the secularisation of our society. It will also involve acknowledging that subjective life spirituality is less present in traditional church than in society, but may find more of a place in emerging fresh expressions of church. The holistic focus of the assignment influenced my approach to resilience literature, which recognizes spirituality – though not necessarily religion – as an important dimension for developing maturity. The definitions of spirituality are varied and contested, but key components in contemporary usage relate to subjective experience and pragmatism. By focusing on the experiences of women priests and what works for them as they encounter the patriarchal culture of the Church, in the MFS, I reveal my expectation that understandings of Christian ministry must go beyond the theoretical. In the RBT, I have sought to discover what helps people to be strengthened in adversity and affirm those strands in the Christian tradition. Drawing on the monastic tradition has been influenced by this assignment because I sought a strand of Christian theology which would recognize the relationship between the body and spiritual growth.

For the education module, I addressed the question of how far collective worship in school, taken by local clergy, can be an expression of Christian worship and nurture. The underlying question of this assignment, which fed into the RBT, was what sort of worship, what sort of religion or spirituality, nurtures or strengthens human beings so that they can develop and mature. This assignment acknowledged the importance worship is now seen to have, alongside education, in forming Christians. There is a parallel here with the way in which the starting-point of the essay in Systematic Theology recognized

the increased importance of spirituality rather than doctrine. One significant conclusion of the assignment was that the clergy are not well resourced to prepare them to lead collective worship in schools, as opposed to corporate worship in church. This opened up the issue of how ministers are resourced theologically and spiritually which is taken up in both the MFS and RBT.

For the Biblical studies module I choose to focus on feminist criticism in Biblical studies and its value in the pastoral context. This included writing a sermon on a Biblical passage, and from a feminist perspective. The sermon consisted of a reading of the woman accused of adultery for Good Friday alongside the recent church report on domestic abuse (Archbishops' Council, 2006). Thus a central theme was of the silence of the Jesus – in his trial and death on Good Friday and also while he pondered his response when religious leaders brought a woman accused of adultery to him, a silence which led to action and her liberation. In addressing the methodology of feminist critique of the Bible, I identified the importance of honesty with regard to the different interpretations of the text, human experience and the transformation of the actual lives of human beings as key.

In the spirituality module I answered the question of whether the invitation to self-emptying after the example of Christ is one that inhibits the spiritual development of women. On the face of it, feminist and post-Christian theologians reject the clutch of themes around surrender and submission and see the emphasis on them as a reaction against the autonomy aspired to by the thinking of the Enlightenment. The assignment included an exploration of the faith development of women. Nicola Slee identifies alienation, awakening and relationality as significant patterns and processes (Slee, 2004). These included metaphors for alienation, such as wilderness and desert, struggle for authentic selfhood and the need to reclaim the self. Awakening involved a coming to

selfhood and recognition of the power of self while relationality meant being discriminating and seeking mutuality. Coakley in her work on *kenosis* pointed to the importance of the practice of silence.

The two assignments with their focus on feminist criticism and the experiences of women of faith led to the research project on the experiences of senior women clergy as compared with women in business. The MFS, *Wise as Serpents and Gentle as Doves: Senior Women Clergy effecting Change by Strategic Working and Resilient Selves* was an empirical research project using qualitative research methods in order to discover the experiences of senior women clergy working in predominantly male teams, and the strategies they used to effect change. I gathered data by semi structured interviews with eight of the 28 senior women clergy in the Church of England.

My aim in the MFS was to discover the strategies and resources that senior women clergy employed, and the resources they drew on. It was also influenced by my own role as a women priest in an all male staff team in an institute of theological education where half the students are women. The discovery of the use of metaphor in women's faith development, as well as the descriptions of alienation, fed into my choice of desert as the motif through which to explore adversity. The most important strategy identified by the women, I discovered, was to do with their sense of themselves. The concept of a positive sense of self, along with prayer, being realistic about the Church and developing resilience emerged.

There are obvious themes which emerged from the MFS, which feed directly into the RBT, most obviously the concept of resilience itself, as addressing both the difficulties that women clergy face and their ability to overcome them. I had discarded half of the data from the interviews for the MFS, data that addressed

the theological and spiritual resources the women drew on, and had anticipated directly bringing it into the RBT. In the end, that research did not make it into the RBT, though it rang true with the findings of resilience literature. The themes of struggle, self and relationships from resilience literature I can now read back into previous assignments so that the research into resilience affirms what I had already explored, with the monastic tradition and the theology of Rowan Williams building on them and bringing subtlety to the way in which struggle, self and relationships need to be addressed in the pastoral context.

The focus on pastors rather than women clergy emerged from what I saw to be a wide applicability of the resilience concept with regard to clergy. For example, the need to be open to personal change in new contexts, such as mission contexts relating to the mind/body/spirit market or leading worship in schools, and open also to theological change as the impact of doctrine is worked out pastorally with regard to the issue of domestic violence. To focus on pastors also related to my interest in the development of faith – for those experiencing adversity, as well as for new pastors – which was present in earlier assignments.

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